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# **YVETTE GUILBERT**

## **STRUGGLES AND VICTORIES**

**BY**

**YVETTE GUILBERT**

**AND**

**HAROLD SIMPSON**

**ILLUSTRATED**

**MILLS & BOON, LIMITED**

**49 RUPERT STREET  
LONDON W.**



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A Dieu, d'abord.

Pour satisfaire ma  
foi, et ma conscience  
il me faut d'abord  
et avant toute chose  
remercier Dieu..

Ma destinée fut ton  
ouvrage — Mes luttes  
me furent utiles  
pour apprécier mieux  
mes victoires



YVETTE GUILBERT

Dieu se manifesta  
Sans toutes les  
formes, dans toutes  
les années de ma  
vie - et depuis  
ma naissance  
il me combla  
de nombreuses  
joies et de  
nombreuses peines  
en un mot  
il me permit  
de "Vivre" la vie

bellement, Dieu  
connaître toutes les  
nuances, toutes les  
phases, et combien  
je remercie Dieu de  
n'avoir point fait  
de moi, un être  
"exclusivement"  
heureux !

Combien je lui sais  
gré de m'avoir  
fait connaître le

Dieu se manifesta  
Sans toutes les  
formes, dans toutes  
les années de ma  
vie - et depuis  
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Il me combla  
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m'avoir point fait  
de moi, un être  
"exclusivement"  
heureux !

Combien je lui sais  
gré de m'avoir  
fait connaître le

Joût de la Douleur  
et celui des larmes,  
D'avoir permis que  
pendure les Tortures  
physiques du corps,  
celles du cœur, et  
d'avoir dépensé en moi  
la facilité, de pleurer  
sur les malheurs  
des autres, à force  
d'avoir du pleurer  
sur les miens

-Ce sont les luttes  
et les douleurs de  
ma vie, qui font  
l'ultra sensibilité  
de mon cœur et  
de mon cerveau.

· Ah comme j'ai  
tremblé ! D'inquiétude  
pour moi, pour  
Elles, pour Euse  
pour tous, pour  
toutes !

Quelle joie trouble  
inescrutable.. si  
forte, si étrange  
de sentir, qu'on  
a, dans sa Poitrine  
tous les cœurs de  
la terre !

Ceux qui ne  
recurent que "leur"  
Vie, ne peuvent  
se comprendre !  
Mais Ceux qui

comme moi ont  
intérieurement senti  
la joie et les douleurs  
"du prochain" s'y  
sont plongés, et  
baignés, ont dû  
reconnaître la  
Volonté d'un Dieu  
enferrmée dans  
leurs âmes... et  
cela créa en moi  
des minutes si



supérieurement  
belles, que ce n'est  
point seulement  
de "ma" Vie que  
je dois remercier  
Dieu, mais de  
toutes ces Vies  
vécues et partagées  
dans l'enthousiasme  
de l'amour du  
prochain —

Qui de fois dans  
mes élaus sensible  
n'a-tu pas crié :  
Merci ! merci ! mon  
Dieu de permettre  
qu'en moi, la  
laide "indifférence"  
n'habite pas !

Merci merci de  
permettre à mon  
cœur d'aller vers  
tous les cœurs,  
à ma pitié  
"être immense !

Merci: merci d'avoir  
comme "Ma misère"  
pouvoir savoir être  
tendre et pitoyable  
à la misère des  
autres — Merci  
d'avoir connu  
les jours sans pain  
et l'angoisse du  
lendemain ..

Merci d'avoir eu  
ces heures de  
désespoir & l'incapacité  
d'apaiser des yeux

J'ai tous refusé  
tout secours... !

Merci d'avoir mis  
sur mon chemin  
des égoïstes... des  
Cruels, et des ingrats !

Merci d'avoir fortifié  
ma volonté, et mon  
courage, et préservée  
comme je le fus  
par tant de  
mauvais exemples  
humains, d'avoir

consenti à m'en  
récompenser chaque  
fois que je rais  
en / triais avec  
raison et logique!

Merci de n'avoir  
pas exaucé toutes  
mes prières, car  
je rais en fi  
de folles.!!

Pardon d'avoir  
oublié de vous

et suivre les  
conseils d'un  
cœur ignorant,  
(celui de mon  
père...) mon  
extrême jeunesse  
fut et reste une  
excuse à ces toutes  
premières années  
de mon enfance  
d'où la foi  
fut exclue ..

Que de fois depuis  
J'ai compris le  
Crime l'ingratitude  
commis envers Vous

Vous qui avez  
permis Que mes  
Yeux voient la  
Lumière ! le soleil !  
la nature !!

Que mes oreilles  
ne soient pas

Sourdes aux  
bruits fabuleux  
de la vie !

Que la parole  
me soit facile  
que mes membres  
soient harmonieux  
enfin En' aucune  
infirmité ne  
l'acte de ma  
lume au monde



une calamité' !

- Comme j'aimais  
le travail, vous  
m'avez donné le  
courage, comme  
j'aimais les arts  
vous m'avez  
donné les possibilités  
d'en faire  
Tous mes efforts

D'ouvrière d'abord,  
et d'artiste ensuite  
furent souvent  
contraires, cabalés  
mais toujours, et  
cela grâce à vous  
j'aurais l'assurance  
d'arriver à mon  
but - Mes forces  
venant du ciel

et depuis surtout  
Suisse aus. j'en  
sens, plus par  
fortement la  
divine influence.

Je vous remercie,  
donc, o mon Dieu,  
plus sincèrement  
des luttres et de la  
misère que vous

avez mises sur mon  
chemin, que des  
joies et des succès  
de ma vie, car  
elles fortifiaient  
mon âme, élevèrent  
mon cœur, et  
facilitèrent mes  
vertus - Sans  
ces misères, je  
serais peut-être  
égoïste comme tous!

Il ne croit pas  
qu'on puisse se  
sentir. "Exceptionnelle  
sans le baptême  
de La Douleur,  
qui donne la  
volonté d'amour  
envers tous, et  
permet l'approche  
divine

Merci surtout, O mon  
Dieu, d'avoir permis  
qu'un "Compagnon"  
si longuement, si  
douloureusement  
cherché, se soit enfin  
présenté au tournant  
de mes chemins  
d'épreuves, et m'ait  
offert la belle et  
paisible coupe de  
son cœur pour

à boire : Le  
Bonheur !

Que ce jour-là  
fut magnifique  
et quels Cantiques  
mon cœur nous  
Chante depuis 13  
ans, O mon Dieu !  
Quelle union fut  
jamais plus parfaite  
quel mariage fut

Jamais plus  
miraculeux ?

Quelle récompense.  
Ce fut, pour un  
pauvre être tendre,  
sensible, et si  
martyrisé par la  
vie - Oui c'est à  
vous, Seigneur  
qu'il me fallait



à dresser ces lignes  
de souvenirs  
reconnaissants  
puisque mon Dieu  
mes luttas, et mes  
Victoires furent  
votre ouvrage !

---

Yvette Guilbert

## TO GOD FIRST OF ALL

I **FEEL** it my first duty, a duty I owe to my faith and to my conscience, to express my thanks to Almighty God for all His mercies. His Hands have shaped my destiny—the struggles I have endured have but served to make me the better appreciate my victories.

God has manifested Himself in many forms and at every crisis of my life. Since the day of my birth He has given me my full complement of joys and sorrows ; has permitted me to live my life to the full ; to experience all the varying vicissitudes of human existence. I can never thank Him enough for not letting my lot be one of exclusive happiness.

How grateful I am to Him for having allowed me to taste of grief ; to know the bitterness of tears, and permitted me to suffer the pangs of body and mind ; and for having instilled in me a readiness to weep for the sorrows of others, born of the tears I have wept for my own.

It is just my own struggles and griefs that have made me so sensitive of the woes of others. What mental agonies I have endured both for myself and for my fellow-creatures ; for all humanity, in fact ! How strange and fearful a joy it is to feel that one finds reflected in one's own breast the troubles of a whole world of aching hearts ! Those who have

simply lived and gone their way will not understand me. But those who have felt with such intensity, as I have done, the joys and sorrows of their "neighbour," and have steeped themselves therein, as it were, must surely have locked away in their hearts a knowledge of the goodness of God. It is this that has given me some of life's sweetest moments; so that it is not for my own life alone that I owe thanks to God, but for all those other lives that I have lived and shared in my love for my neighbour.

How many times have I not cried my thanks, oh God, to You, for keeping me free from a spirit of callous indifference, and for suffering my heart to go out to the hearts of others in pity and sympathy. Thanks that my own knowledge of unhappiness has made me tender-hearted, and sympathetic to the unhappiness of others! Thanks, too, for having known the meaning of hunger, and anxiety for the morrow; for the hours of despair, and for being allowed to realise the selfishness of those who refuse you all assistance. Thanks for letting me meet on my journey through life with the selfish, the cruel, and the ungrateful; for having strengthened my will and my courage, and for making me what I am in the midst of so much evil example; for having answered my prayers when I prayed aright. But thanks, too, for not having answered all my foolish ones.

And I crave pardon for having doubted You, and for having followed ignorant counsels! My extreme youth must be my excuse for those early

years of mine when I was utterly devoid of faith. Many a time since have I realised my ingratitude towards You ; You who have suffered my eyes to see the light, the sun, the marvels of Nature ; my ears to hear life's wonderful voices ; have given me the gift of speech, the full use of my limbs, and allowed no infirmity to distress my life.

I have loved work, and You have given me courage ; I have loved Art, and You have given me the means to enjoy it. My poor efforts, first as a seamstress, then as an artiste, have often met with rebuffs and disappointments, but I was always confident, thanks to Your Mercy, of arriving at my goal at last. My strength has come from Heaven, and for the last fifteen years more especially I have been filled with a strong sense of Divine Influence.

And so I thank You, oh my God ! more for the struggles and the hours of unhappiness which have been my lot in life than for its joys and its successes ; for they have fortified my soul, and lifted up my heart, and given me such virtues as I may possess. Without these struggles I should perhaps have been an egotist like the rest !

I do not think that one can achieve an individuality except under the discipline of grief, which engenders in one a spirit of love for one's fellow-men, and brings one in touch with the Divine. And above all I thank You, oh my God ! for having given me at the turning point of my career a comrade, sought for so long in vain, to offer me the chalice of his noble heart in which to drink my happiness !

What a glorious day that was for me ; and what pæans of gratitude my heart has sung to You, oh God, for thirteen years !

What union has ever been more perfect ; what marriage ever so wonderful as this of mine ? What fuller and more complete reward could a poor sensitive heart have found for all the crosses and martyrdoms of life ?

And so, I have felt it my duty to dedicate these few lines of humble gratitude to Almighty God, seeing that my Struggles and my Victories are all His Handiwork.

**PART I**

---

**STRUGGLES AND VICTORIES  
OF MY LIFE**

**BY**

**YVETTE GUILBERT**

## LUTTES ET VICTOIRES

### DE MA VIE

*Du plus lointain de mes souvenirs qui remontent à 1870, l'année de la guerre Franco-Allemande, je ne vois qu'images de misères. . . .*

*Des petits logements pauvres, ou très modestes, dans des rues populaires, des escaliers humides, sales, des cours grises, étroites, sans air, des chambres où l'on n'avait pas chaud l'hiver, où l'on mourait de chaleur l'Été. La plupart du temps perchés au sixième étage de la maison mon père et ma mère aéraient leur petit domaine par des fenêtres, dites tabatières, restant du style architectural du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

*Par hasard, dans le courant de mes premières années un balcon ! On louait l'appartement pour ce balcon qui servait de jardin, de square et même . . . de Campagne, car les très modestes ressources de mes parents ne leur permettaient pas de fréquentes sorties hors Paris, et comme nous habitions toujours dans les quartiers loins du centre, le Bois de Boulogne me fut longtemps inconnu ! Il fallait y aller et en revenir à pied, et avec une fillette qui*







YVETTE GUIBERTI AT THE AGE OF ELEVEN YEARS

## STRUGGLES AND VICTORIES OF MY LIFE

THE earliest of my remembrances, which date back to 1870, the year of the Franco-German war, recall nothing but a picture of almost indescribable misery.

The vision of tiny squalid, or at best modest, lodgings, situated in crowded thoroughfares; of damp and dirty staircases, and grey courtyards, narrow and stifling; of rooms in which one was frozen in winter and suffocated in summer. Living for the most part on the sixth floor, my father and mother were used to rooms ventilated only by small skylights, relics of an eighteenth century style of architecture.

By a happy chance my earliest days could boast of a balcony; in fact the rooms had been taken for the sake of this very balcony, which served me for garden, square, and even country, all in one. My parents' very modest means did not allow of many excursions out of Paris; and as we always lived in quarters far removed from the heart of the town, the Bois de Boulogne was for a long while to me an undiscovered land. It meant going there and

*marchait à peine, la chose devenait une corvée plus qu'un plaisir.*

*Ma mère, sortie d'une famille de bourgeois très aisés d'une Province de France (Nord) avait dû se plier aux exigences d'une vie très modeste, sa dot ayant été perdue, au début de son mariage, dans de mauvaises affaires. Mon père, plus vieux qu'elle d'une année, (il avait alors 25 ans), était fils de cultivateurs normands.*

*Sans un sou, il avait épousé ma mère, et l'avait obligée à travailler dès les premières années de leur union—chez mon père les principes étaient catalogués : La femme devait travailler, fut-elle riche, à plus forte raison, étant pauvre. . . . Et ma mère travailla, travailla de 20 à 40 ans, comme une femme douée d'une énergie supérieure peut seule travailler. . . . Elevée en province comme une "demoiselle," elle connut la misère la plus atroce, celle où plus rien n'est épargné, celle qui apporte tous les désespoirs, toutes les hontes, celle des jours sans pain, sans feu, sans logis, sans meubles, sans rien, rien, rien . . . qu'un enfant sur les bras. . . . Elle connut tout cela !*

*Et pendant de très longues années je vis la lampe allumée tard la nuit, pendant qu'une femme cousait . . . cousait . . . à sa lumière jaune, et que son mari rentrait*

back on foot, and for a little girl who could scarcely toddle the walk was more of a labour than a pleasure.

My mother belonged to a middle-class family in easy circumstances who came from the Province du Nord. But she had been obliged to adapt herself to very humble conditions of living, owing to the fact that her dowry had been lost in an unfortunate speculation in the early days of her married life. My father, who was a year older than she, (he was about 25 at the time), was the son of a Normandy farmer.

Marrying my mother without a penny to his name, he had made her work for her living from the very earliest days of their marriage. My father had certain principles catalogued in his mind ; one of which was that a woman should work, even if she had money, but ever so much more so if she hadn't ! And my Mother worked—worked from the day she was twenty years old till the age of forty, as only a woman who was endowed with extraordinary energy could have worked. She had been brought up in the country as a “ young lady ” ; now, after her marriage, she was reduced to a state of abject poverty ; the poverty that never knows what it is to have a penny put by, the poverty that brings despair and shame in its train. There were days when she was without food, without fire, without furniture, without a roof to cover her ; days when she had nothing, nothing, nothing, except the child she nursed in her arms. All this did my Mother go through !

And year in, year out, I used to see the lamp burning late into the night, while a woman sewed, sewed by

*tard les poches vidées par le jeu... car avec les années le ménage s'était disloqué... mon père gagnait "Sa" vie, ma mère gagnait la sienne et la mienne sans que plus jamais mon père l'aida. C'était encore dans le catalogue des idées paternelles qu'une femme devait se suffire à elle-même. . . .*

*Et si tu étais veuve ? disait-il souvent à ma mère.*

*Donc je n'ai pas connu mon père et ma mère dans la phase de leur lune de miel. A l'âge où j'ai commencé à un peu comprendre ce que je voyais j'ai senti très précisément la lutte de ma mère pour vivre, elle et moi, isolée d'un bonheur perdu, d'un mari qui n'en était plus un, à côté d'un père qui ne voulait pas prendre la moitié de la charge de son enfant.*

*Mon enfance ne fut heureuse que pendant une courte période passée en Normandie chez mes grands-parents. Alors là je connus les gâteries et je connus la joie des grands jardins, des grands près verts, des champs où je gambadais plus à l'aise que sur mes balcons noirs des faubourgs !*

*Mais on me ramena à Paris—pour me mettre en pension, car à cette époque ma mère avait eu la chance d'inventer la confection des formes de chapeaux de dames, en "crin," et la mode s'en mêlant, ma mère eut tant de commandes des grands magasins de Paris, qu'elle installa un vaste atelier de modistes.*

the yellow light, and her husband came home late with his pockets empty—emptied at the gaming-tables. For with the course of years the household became a divided one, my father earned his own living, my mother earned hers and mine without any help from him. Another of the principles in my father's mental catalogue was that a woman should be self-supporting !

“ What if you were a widow ? ” he would often say to my mother.

But then I never knew my parents in the light of their honeymoon days. At the time when I first began to understand a little of what I saw, I realized very vividly my mother's struggle for existence. Two solitary figures we made, she and I, isolated on the shores of a lost happiness ; she with a husband who was no longer a husband, I with a father who refused to take any share in the maintenance of his child.

My childhood was not a happy one, save for a brief period when I lived with my grandparents in Normandy. There I learnt what it was to be spoilt a little ; knew the joys of a large garden, of wide green meadows, and fields where I could gambol to my heart's content ; a pleasant change from my grimy balcony in the slums at home.

But I was brought back to Paris eventually, and sent to school ; for my mother had at this time had the good fortune to invent a new style in ladies' hats, which quickly became the fashion. So many orders poured in from the big shops that she set up a large establishment of “ modistes.”

*Pendant 4 belles années on fut riche . . . on gagnait de belles journées et ma mère en profita pour me faire instruire dans un bon pensionnat de Saint-Mandé.*

*Puis le chômage vint, les affaires devinrent très mauvaises, les économies hélas s'épuisèrent, et je fus retirée de pension. J'avais 12 ans. . . . Dès lors, je gagnai mon pain !*

*Car ma mère ayant congédié son atelier, se mit à faire, chez elle, des ouvrages perlés. Nous nous levions à 7 heures du matin et travaillions jusqu'à 11 h. du soir pour gagner à nous deux 3 francs par jour. . . . Grace à Dieu, ma mère avait des doigts de fée, et savait au bout de 24 heures tous les métiers sans en avoir appris aucun. Son adresse et sa vivacité tenaient du prodige. . . .*

*Les travaux perlés nous aidèrent à ne pas mourir de faim pendant l'Été, mais l'hiver arrivant, le feu et la lumière coûtèrent tant à nos pauvres ressources, que le propriétaire ne put être payé. . . . Mon père se refusant de venir à notre aide, on vendit nos meubles, sauf nos lits . . . et nous fûmes tous trois sans plus rien chez nous. . . . Ma mère se désespérait ! . . .*

*J'assistais, hélas ! encore impuissante, à ces lamentables journées. . . . Puis il fallut sortir du logement non payé, et comment être reçus dans un immeuble, où vous arrivez sans aucun répondant ?*

Thus for four happy years we became almost well-off, and enjoyed brighter days ; and my mother took advantage of this prosperity to give me a good education at a boarding-school at Saint-Mandé.

Then the business fell off, and things went from bad to worse again. Economy, alas ! was once more the order of the day, and I was taken away from school when I was twelve years old. From that time I had to earn my own livelihood !

My mother, having broken up her dress-making establishment, now began to do bead-work at home. We used to get up at seven, and work till eleven o'clock at night, and we made on an average 3 francs a day between us. By God's mercy my mother was endowed with fingers of supernatural quickness ; and she could learn in a day any trade of which she had not even studied the rudiments. Her skill and energy were something wonderful.

This bead-work kept us from starving during the summer. But when the winter came, the cost of food and lighting proved too much for our slender resources, and we were left without any money to pay the rent. My father refused to come to our assistance, and we were compelled at last to sell every stick of furniture except our beds. Three of us, and nothing but the beds we slept on !

My mother was in despair. I, alas ! had to look on helplessly during these sorrowful times. Eventually we had to leave our rooms with the rent still unpaid, wondering how we were going to find new ones, when we had no security to offer.



*Un cousin à nous, fort riche, nous refusa 300 francs pour acheter l'indispensable . . . et de maison en maison on refusa de nous recevoir sans mobilier. . . .*

*Pendant ce temps mon père était plus que jamais pris par sa passion du jeu, des 500 francs qu'il gagnait par mois, rien ne restait. . . .*

*Et ce furent les mêmes luttes chaque saison—! Des mois de travail (n'importe lequel) modes, passementerie, broderie, perlage, confections d'enfants, lingerie, robes, tout nous passa par les doigts. Mais les mortes saisons revenaient régulières et terribles, et les meubles et le linge, rachetés pendant la période productive, partaient de nouveau. . . . On vendait tout, petit à petit, pour manger, pourtant nos lits restaient toujours, sauf deux fois où j'eus une maladie d'enfant si grave que les soins du médecin obligèrent ma mère à vendre son matelas pour m'acheter des potions . . . et de douze ans à 17 je n'ai pas connu d'autre vie. . . .*

*Quelques semaines de répit par année, mais des mois d'atroce misère, sans plus de meubles, plus de linge, plus de bottines, rien, rien . . . qu'une misère atroce doublée du chagrin de voir ma mère que j'adorais être l'hiver à peine couverte, pleurant, se désolant, et lutter, lutter pour aboutir toujours "à la misère" !*

*Je la revois chaussée de vieilles bottines de mon père . . . allant, trottant dans Paris, moi à ses côtes. A cette*

A rich cousin of ours refused to lend us 300 francs wherewith to buy what we needed ; and we went from house to house, only to meet with refusal after refusal.

During this time my father became a worse slave than ever to his passion for gambling, and squandered every penny of the 500 francs he earned each month.

Every year the same struggle went on. During the busy months our fingers were employed on some work or other, millinery, lace-work, embroidery, bead-work, children's clothes, hosiery, dressmaking, or whatever it might be. But the dead seasons returned with terrible regularity, and the furniture and linen which we had been able to buy back during the busy season had once more to be disposed of. Little by little we sold everything in order to buy food. Our beds were always saved from the wreck, though on two occasions, when I was seriously ill with some childish complaint or other, my mother had to sell her mattress to buy the medicine which the doctor prescribed for me.

This was the sort of life I led from 12 to 17 ! Year after year a few weeks of respite, and then months of hideous misery ; furniture, linen, boots, everything gone ! And the misery was heightened by my grief at seeing the mother I adored shivering in winter in her scanty clothing, weeping, broken-hearted ; always struggling, struggling, and all to no purpose in the end !

I can see her now, shod in a pair of my father's old boots, plodding along the streets of Paris, with

*époque, elle sortait toujours avec une grande boîte en bois, et moi un sac rempli de chapeaux pour dames, et de huit heures à minuit, nous " Faisons la place," c'est à dire que nous entrions, partout, dans chaque petit magasin des faubourgs offrir notre marchandise confectionnée l'après midi.*

*Nous prenions tous les soirs un itinéraire différent.*

*Un soir, c'était le quartier Montmartre, le lendemain c'était Belleville, puis, le quartier Clichy, puis Ménilmontant ! Ah ! ces quatre heures de sortie tous les soirs d'hiver, par la pluie, la neige, le verglas ! Ces kilomètres qu'on parcourait les pieds trempés. . . . Quand nous vendions nos petits chapeaux, c'était bien ; on pouvait avec le bénéfice vivre deux ou trois jours.*

*C'était l'époque où toutes les ouvrières et les petites bourgeoises modestes de Paris étaient satisfaites avec une petite toque de 6 francs ! Que les temps sont changés . . . la moindre midinette veut à présent des chapeaux de 20 francs, ce qui autrefois était le chapeau des dimanches des petites ouvrières.*

*Quelle tristesse nous prenait, ma mère et moi, quand après les 10 heures de travail de la journée, nous ajoutions ces quatre heures de promenade nocturne et que nous rentrions sans avoir rien vendu ! Le lendemain matin on remettait les pauvres chaussures trouées, et mouillées de la veille . . . on revêtait ses pauvres vêtements mal séchés, ce que leur donnait cette espèce de parfum spécial à la misère, un parfum âcre, qui ressemble à l'haleine des gens qui restent souvent sans manger. . . .*

*Ah ! comme je les connais ces deux odeurs là !*

me at her side. She always carried a large wooden box, and I a bag filled with ladies' hats ; and from eight o'clock till midnight we were canvassing for orders, entering every little shop in the slums to try and sell the results of our afternoon's needlework.

Every evening we chose a different itinerary. One evening it would be Montmartre, then Belleville, then Clichy, and after that Ménilmontant. Shall I ever forget those winter evening expeditions ? Four hours' tramping in the rain and the snow and the frost ! The miles we used to walk with our feet soaked ! What joy when we were successful in selling our hats ! It meant food and the means to live for two or three days !

In those days working-girls and modest young ladies of the middle class were satisfied with a little toque costing 6 francs. How the times have changed since then ! Now the most modest of them wants a hat costing 20 francs, formerly a luxury which work-girls only allowed themselves to wear on Sundays.

How sad we were, my mother and I, when to our ten hours of work during the day we added those four hours of tramping in the evening, and then returned home without having sold anything after all ! In the morning we had once more to don our poor shoes, almost worn out and still wet from the evening's expedition ; put on our clothes, which were hardly dry, and exhaled that particular odour which is the accompaniment of poverty, a bitter odour, like the breath of a person who is half-starved. Ah ! how I know them both, those odours ! Whenever people

*Quand des malheureuses viennent me trouver je peux dire le degré de leur misère rien qu'à l'odeur qui se dégage de leurs vêtements et de leurs bouches. . . .*

*Je me rappelle qu'un soir, qu'il faisait si chaud, chez un marchand de modes du faubourg Montmartre, ma mère que j'accompagnais me voyant, après le grand froid de la rue, me congestionner, me conseilla de sortir, et de l'attendre dehors, devant l'étalage.*

*J'étais dehors depuis cinq minutes la regardant à travers la vitre discuter avec le commerçant quand tout à coup je sens qu'on me prend par la taille ! Je bondis de peur et vois terrifiée les 32 dents blanches d'un nègre qui se tordait de rire de ma frayeur. Je rentre tremblante dans le magasin, la figure si bouleversée qu'il me faut en dire la cause.*

*Ah ! ah ! C'est le nègre ? dit le commerçant. Il est depuis 19 ans dans le quartier et son plaisir est chaque soir de faire peur aux jeunesses de la rue . . . il a une figure terrible mais c'est un excellent homme !*

*Jamais je n'ai pu oublier les dents de ce noir !! de même que jamais je n'oublierai les heures de fatigue du soir. . . . Je m'endormais brisée, sur les comptoirs des magasins, et ma mère souvent prolongeait exprès "ses offres de service," comme disent les commerçants, pour prolonger mes repos. Je ne crois pas que beaucoup de femmes ont parcouru Paris et usé de leurs pauvres*

who are in want come to see me I can always estimate the degree of their poverty by the smell of their clothes, and their breath.

I remember one evening we were in a dressmaking shop in Montmartre, which was terribly hot, and my mother, seeing that I was stifling after coming out of the fresh air, advised me to go and wait in the street in front of the shop. For about five minutes I stood outside watching my mother arguing with the shopman through the window, when suddenly I felt someone catch hold of me by the waist. I gave a frightened jump, and turning saw the white teeth of a negro, who was grinning at my terror. Trembling, I rushed back into the shop. My face betrayed the emotion I felt, and I had to tell my mother the cause.

“Ho! ho! it's the negro, is it?” said the shopman. “He's been known in this quarter for the last nineteen years, and his chief amusement every evening is to go about frightening little girls in the street. In spite of his terrifying appearance he's really quite harmless.”

But I have never forgotten the gleam of those white teeth in that ugly black face, any more than I shall ever forget those weary evenings of tramping through the streets. So worn out was I sometimes that I used to fall asleep on the shop counter; and my mother would purposely prolong her business interviews so as to let me sleep on for a while. I doubt whether there are many women who have ever tramped the pavements of Paris to such an

*pieds les pavés de la Capitole autant que ma mère et moi !*

*Et ces fatigues qui nous épuisaient et ne nous donnaient que le stricte nécessaire, ces fatigues, nous les regrettâmes, quand le commerce, évoluant comme le reste, changea sa manière de faire.*

*"Faire la place" ne nous rapportait plus de quoi vivre au bout d'un an, et la misère fut alors terrible pour ma mère et moi. Comme une fois de plus on avait vendu nos meubles, notre linge . . . tout, tout . . . mon père partit alors et nous laissa seules, aussitôt ma mère et moi nous décidâmes de changer nos moyens de lutte pour la vie. Il fut entendu que je tâcherais d'entrer employée quelquepart, et, de cette façon étant nourrie, ma mère n'aurait plus tellement de charges sur les bras.*

*Et, concluait ma mère, de cette façon je serai certaine que tu mangeras tous les jours. . . . Et je pleurais beaucoup à l'idée que moi j'allais remplir régulièrement mon estomac, quand peut-être ma mère serait là . . . sans pain, tout cela dépendait de si peu de chose, d'un chômage, d'une maladie . . . et puis l'idée de se séparer tous les jours, après ces années terribles de luttés. Il me semblait que mes 16 ans défendaient ma mère comme un rempart ! Il me semblait que "j'étais sa mère" . . . qu'allait-elle faire sans moi tout le long du jour ?*

extent as my mother and I, with our poor tired feet, did in those days.

And yet we missed those same weary hours, exhausting as they were, and yielding us hardly enough to provide the bare necessities of life, when business, like everything else, altered in time.

At the end of a year this canvassing for orders no longer brought us in even enough to live on, and once more my mother and I were in desperate straits. Once when we had sold our furniture, our household linen, everything we possessed, in fact, my father quietly took his departure and left us to face things alone. Some new method of struggling for a livelihood had to be devised. It was agreed that I should try to obtain a situation where I could live in, so that my mother would have fewer expenses to battle with.

"And," said my mother, in coming to this decision, "I shall then be comfortable in the knowledge that you are getting something to eat every day."

Then I burst into tears at the thought that while I was going to enjoy regular food my mother for all I knew might be sitting at home without a crust in the house—a state of things which want of work or sickness would soon bring about. The idea, too, of our being separated after all these terrible years of struggling made me feel dreadfully sad. For it seemed to my childish imagination that I with my sixteen years was to my mother a sort of bulwark; as though it were I who was her mother, and she my daughter. What was she going to do without me by her side all day long?



*Enfin, après bien des raisonnements il apparut clair à ma mère que je devais chercher à me faire une situation dans le commerce. J'adorais l'activité des affaires, donc j'arriverais très vite, disait maman. Après deux semaines j'avais trouvé à entrer "mannequin" chez Hentenart, couturier de la rue du 4 septembre, j'étais nourrie, habillée, et je gagnais 75 f. par mois—c'était magnifique ! Je rapportais mes 75 f. nets, n'ayant jamais d'amendes pour des retards à l'arrivée du matin—j'étais un modèle d'exactitude. Je le suis restée, car depuis 18 ans que je fais du théâtre pas une seule fois il ne m'est arrivé de me faire attendre une minute en scène !*

*Ce bonheur, cette tranquillité relative ne dura pas ... après 10 mois il me fallut quitter cette maison, où l'on vous défendait de vous asseoir !! Mes jambes étaient faites aux dures marches, mais de 8 heures du matin à 9 heures du soir, debout à piétiner dans trois salons aux tapis épais qui nous brûlaient les pieds, furent des tortures que ma santé ne sut pas supporter. J'allais trouver le patron le priant de nous laisser nous reposer, quand nous n'avions pas de clientes à servir ; je sentais monter en moi des révoltes devant la figure pâle et dure de cet ancien petit employé, devenu gérant de cette grande maison, bref je devenais si agressive qu'il n'attendit pas que je lui donne mon congé . . . il me mit à la porte poliment, sèchement, . . . et sortie de là,*

After a great deal of discussion my mother came to the conclusion that I had better look for a business situation. I was very fond of business, she said, so I was bound to get on. After I had been two weeks looking for a situation I obtained one as a model at Hentenart's, the ladies' tailor in the rue du 4 Septembre. I was given food, clothing, and a salary of 75 francs a month—think of it! I always managed to avoid fines for being late, and so had a clear 75 francs to take home to my mother. I was a model of punctuality then—I have remained so all my life; for in the eighteen years that I have been on the stage I have never kept anyone waiting one single minute!

Unfortunately this period of comparative happiness and freedom from worry did not last. At the end of two months I had to leave this establishment where they never allowed you to sit down. My legs were capable of enduring long walks, but to tramp up and down three rooms, that had thick carpets which scorched your feet, from eight in the morning till nine at night, was a strain which my health would not stand. I went to my employer and begged him to let us rest when there were no customers to be served. Rebellion flared up in me as I looked at the pale, hard countenance of the man, who had once been only an assistant and was now the manager of this great shop, and my manner became so aggressive that he did not even wait for me to give notice, but politely showed me to the door without further parley. When I left there my legs were so swollen

*les jambes enflées, malades, il me fallut prendre des semaines de repos, et retomber à la charge de ma mère !*

*Une femme charmante était " première vendeuse " chez Hentenart, ma jeunesse, mon courage l'avait touchée, et quand à son tour elle quitta la maison Hentenart pour occuper aux grands magasins du Printemps l'emploi de directrice d'un rayon de robes, elle m'appela. J'avais 16 ans  $\frac{1}{2}$ —je jurai que j'en avais 18 (âge exigé) et l'on m'accepta d'autant que j'étais protégée par cette charmante femme.*

*Pendant 8 mois tout alla assez bien, je gagnais 50 f. par mois, 5% sur mes ventes . . . je me faisais dans la belle saison jusqu'à 125 f. ! Nous avions racheté (encore !) des meubles, nous commençons à nous tirer d'affaires quand ma santé devint si mauvaise, si anémiée par l'infâme nourriture de ce magasin qui à cette époque n'avait pas la direction qu'il a aujourd'hui où les employés se déclarent heureux, ma santé devint si mauvaise que je dus quitter " le Printemps " !*

*Et alors arrivèrent pour ma mère et moi des mois terribles . . . terribles. . . Mes expériences chez Hentenart et au Printemps me semblèrent hélas suffisantes pour tenter de faire de la couture chez nous ; j'avais depuis ces deux années fait la connaissance de dames fort élégantes, et j'allais les trouver, les informant que lorsqu'elles auraient besoin d'une robe moins élégante, moins chère, qu'au magasin, elles veuillent bien*

and weak, that I had to take several weeks' rest, and once more become a burden on my mother.

Luckily a charming woman, who was head saleswoman at Hentenart's, had been touched by my youth and my courage, and when she in her turn quitted that establishment to take up the position of manageress of the dress department at the "Printemps," she sent for me. I was then 16½ years of age, but I swore to 18 (the regulation age), and they took me on her recommendation.

For eight months things went well enough. I was paid 50 francs a month and 5 per cent. commission on sales; so that in the good season I sometimes made as much as 125 francs a month! We had just bought back (once more!) our furniture, and were beginning to get our heads above water again, when my health became so bad owing to the indifferent food which they gave us at this establishment—the shop is under different management now and the assistants are all happy and contented—that I had eventually to leave the "Printemps."

Then came some terrible months for my mother and me. I foolishly imagined that the experience I had gained at Hentenart's and at the "Printemps" would enable me to try my hand at dressmaking at home. I had during these two years made the acquaintance of several smart women, so I promptly sought them out, and informed them that if they ever wanted a frock made, not quite so smart perhaps, but also not quite so expensive as those they could buy in the shops, they might remember me. Then

*se souvenir de moi . . . et je laissais ma carte et mon adresse. . . .*

*Je savais que presque toutes les parisiennes très chic ont une "Petite Couturière" pour les chiffons féminins de moindre importance, et j'avais compté sur la sympathie que j'inspirais pour avoir vite une clientèle.*

*Seigneur ! j'avais appris bien des choses utiles à la vie dans le haut commerce, mais pour notre malheur ce qu'il me fallait apprendre encore c'était la coquinerie de certaines grandes dames, exploitant ma misère d'ouvrier.*

*Une comtesse, ayant un splendide hôtel au parc Monceau, était une telle diablesse, une telle furie, qu'elle terrorisait mes 17 ans et demi, bien facilement.*

*Elle en profitait chaque fois pour diminuer de ma modeste petite facture tout ce qui était le bénéfice de mes travaux, de sorte que je travaillais pour rien !! Elle avait un petit "groom" de 8 ans sur le siège de sa voiture, il lui servait de valet de pied, il avait si peur d'elle qu'il pleurait rien que lorsqu'elle l'appelait !*

*Pauvre petit . . . mis là par des parents pauvres pour gagner sa vie. . . .*

*Une autre grande dame, célèbre celle-là pour son élégante beauté, venait aussi chez moi. Je lui faisais des robes merveilleuses (du soir), que ma mère, remarquable brodeuse, lui garnissait de fleurs de perles fines,*

I left a card with my name and address and went home.

I knew that nearly all the smartest women in Paris had a small dressmaker of their own, who made their less pretentious frocks, and I imagined that I should at once enlist their sympathy and find a "clientèle" ready-made.

Heavens! Fashionable dressmaking had taught me one or two lessons that were to prove useful, but one thing it had not taught me—to our misfortune—was, what I very soon learnt, the dishonesty of certain smart women who were not above taking advantage of a poor working-girl.

There was a certain Countess who had a splendid house in the parc Monceau, who was such a she-devil, and had such a diabolical temper, that she had no difficulty in terrorising me, a mere slip of a girl of 17½.

She took advantage of this fact to deduct more and more from my modest little bill, gradually leaving me with no profit at all, so that eventually I was doing the work for nothing! She had a tiny groom about eight years old, who acted as footman to her carriage, who was so terrified of her that he used to burst into tears whenever she called him.

Poor little fellow! he had been thrust into this situation by his poverty-stricken parents to gain his own living.

Another great lady, who was famous for her beauty, was also among my clients. I made her some lovely evening frocks, which my mother, who was a wonderful hand at embroidery, trimmed with flowers made with

*on passait des nuits à coudre tout cela, pour toucher comptant les 250 f. demandés . . . Mais la grande dame recevait le soir tous les députés, les ministres de Paris La réception alors ayant épuisé ses ressources la petit ouvrière devait attendre . . et j'attendais, des semaines, et des semaines, allant chaque jour demander un acompte . . . on me mettait à la porte, et je devenais folle de rage quand je lisais que la dame "avait hier donné un grand bal," et, ajoutait le journal. M<sup>e</sup> X. avait une merveilleuse robe brodée de perles, sortie de chez le grand faiseur ! — Cette belle madame là avait la jolie ruse de nous faire coudre à ses corsages et à ses manteaux des étiquettes et des rubans de taille des grandes maisons où elle se fournissait aussi — Elle les faisait découdre des vêtements qu'elle ne portait plus et nous les cousions à nos commandes !*

*Est-ce beau comme vanité ! De cette façon elle cachait ses économies . . . économies faites aux dépens de deux femmes qui attendaient pour manger et payer leurs fournisseurs et leurs ouvrières la "Bienveillance" de la belle Madame X. !*

*Il y a quinze ans j'ai revu cette femme dans un salon où je chantais, elle disait de moi d'une voix argue et méchante : Elle avait moins de succès quand elle*

delicate pearls. We spent whole nights over the work, as we wanted to handle the money as quickly as possible—250 francs was the amount. But this great lady had been giving receptions to Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, and other Paris celebrities, which had somewhat drained her resources, so the poor seamstress had to wait for her money. And I went on waiting, week after week. Every day I called to ask for payment of my account, only to be shown the door. Imagine my indignation when I read in the papers one morning that this same lady had given a magnificent ball. “Madame X.,” the account read, “was wearing a wonderful gown embroidered with pearls, the creation of one of our most fashionable dressmakers.” This fine lady, it seems, had discovered the pretty trick of making us sew on her bodices and cloaks the labels and trade marks of some big shop or other where she was also a customer. She used to have them taken off the dresses she could no longer wear, and get us to sew them on the frocks we made for her. Isn’t vanity a fine thing! By this little ruse she was able to hide her economies from the outside world, economies made at the expense of two poor women, who for the money to buy their daily bread, and to pay their tradesmen and their workpeople, had to depend on the benevolence (save the mark!) of this precious Madame X.

Fifteen years ago I met this lady again. It was at an “At Home” where I was singing, and I heard her speaking about me in shrill, sneering tones:

“She wasn’t quite such a success,” I heard her say,



*avait des souliers troués . . . aujourd'hui voyez comme on fête le talent, le chic, la distinction de cette fille. . . . Je l'ai connue, figurez vous, misérable petit trottin. . . . Ce soir elle ne me connaît plus !*

*Je me retournais immédiatement et dis très souriante, très calme, à la dame :*

*Vous vous trompez chère madame . . . le petit trottin d'autrefois n'a pas oublié qu'il trotta souvent chez vous pour le règlement de ses factures !!!*

*La dame devint si rouge que tout le monde se mit à rire !*

*Une americaine partit un jour du grand hôtel avec trois robes livrées par moi oubliant de me les payer . . . ! J'appris que plusieurs marchands avaient déposé des plaintes contre elle, mais cela ne me payait pas mes étoffes achetées, et mes ouvrières que je réglais chaque samedi.*

*Dans les heures difficiles il faut reconnaître que seules nos jeunes ouvrières étaient vraiment bonnes et dévouées. Elles voyaient nos luttes, notre courage, et elles participaient à nos peines avec une admirable sensibilité.*

*Je garde depuis une tendresse à toutes celles qui cousent ! je les aime, elles sont si pleines de compréhension !*

“ when she was running about the streets in thread-bare shoes. See how everybody is paying homage to-day to the talent, the ‘chic’ and distinction of this girl. When I used to know her, she was, would you believe it, a wretched little errand-girl. Now, to-night, she pretends that she doesn’t know me ! ”

I turned round at this, and with a sweet smile, and in a perfectly calm voice, I said,

“ You are making a mistake, my dear Madame. The little errand-girl of other days has by no means forgotten you. Nor has she forgotten how often her errand was to call at your house and ask for a settlement of her account ! ”

The lady went red in the face, and everybody burst out laughing.

Another of my little experiences was with an American lady, who left her hotel one fine day with three dresses which I had supplied her with, and which she had forgotten to pay for ! I learnt afterwards that several tradespeople had taken action against her, but that didn’t help to reimburse me for the materials I had bought, nor to pay my workpeople when Saturday came round.

These work-girls were most devoted to us, and were the only people to show us any kindness when times were bad. They realised our struggles, and our courage under difficulties, and they shared in our sorrows in a wonderfully sympathetic way.

I still retain a weak spot in my heart for all women who earn their living by needlework ; they always seem so full of sympathy and understanding. It is

*C'est à l'ouvrière parisienne que je dois le fond de mon talent, oui, car c'est d'elle que j'ai appris la vie, la vie réservée aux filles pauvres qui n'ont personne pour les défendre que leur Raison, leur Pudeur, et leur Religion. Elles sont sans contrôle dans la vie, le père, la mère travaillent chacun de son côté, et pourtant beaucoup de ces jeunes filles sont des êtres "de pureté volontaire," car elles savent que leur vertu, c'est leur dot !*

*Mais à côté de ces volontaires de ces vierges fortes il y a les faibles hélas. . . .*

*Dès l'âge de 14 ans j'en entendais de toutes sortes ! car sitôt ma mère sortie de l'atelier, elles ne se gênaient pas de raconter leurs amours, leurs joies, leurs peines. Ah, j'en ai entendu des histoires de séduction, des rêves finissant dans des regrets haineux !*

*J'en ai su des fables, magnifiques d'abord, tragiques ensuite. . . .*

*En ai-je assez entendu maudire leur maternité irrégulière ! et haïr l'enfant, fruit de leur inconscient péché.*

*Pauvres filles, si lâchement dupées qu'elles en étaient devenues féroces. Quelles leçons profondes que ces aventures !*

*Comme nous les écoutions, attentives et bouleversées, nous les vierges qui serions à notre tour menacées quand l'amour viendrait frapper à la porte de nos cœurs. . . .*

to the work-girl of Paris that I owe the secret of my talent as a singer. From her I learnt what life was, life as it appears to a poor girl who has no money, and no protector save her own reason, modesty, and piety. These girls are left entirely to their own devices, since their mother and father have generally their own business to attend to, and have no time to look after them. But none the less many of them succeed in keeping straight, realising that their virtue is their most cherished possession. Yet side by side with the stronger-minded, there are, alas, to be found the weak ones also.

Ever since I was fourteen years old I had been brought into contact with both kinds. It was the custom of these girls, as soon as my mother had left the room, to begin discussing their love-affairs, their joys and their sorrows. Ah, I heard some sad stories in those days ; stories of love's young dream abruptly ended, stories of bitter shame and undying regret. Stories that often began brilliantly, and ended in a sordid tragedy. How often have I heard them revile themselves for their momentary infatuation, and express a loathing for the fruit of their unconscious sinning !

Poor girls ! the dupe of some cur or other, experience had made them hard and bitter. There was many a solemn lesson to be learnt from their history.

And we used to listen to them with ears and eyes wide open, we who should have the same danger to meet when in time love knocked at the door of our

*Mais quelle belle cuirasse de méfiance cela mettait en nous. Pour ma part je me promettais bien de rire aux nez des galants quand il en viendrait.*

*J'avais appris toutes les ruses masculines, tous les pièges tendus par les hommes m'étaient familiers, j'avais à 18 ans une vertu d'une solidité à toute épreuve — on pouvait venir, on saurait se défendre !*

*De vivre parmi toutes ces pauvres et si jeunes petites pécheresses avait fait de moi une jeune fille très curieusement femme, si grave ! si sérieuse ! si vieille déjà ! C'est dans ce milieu de luttes pour le pain et l'amour qu'a poussé certainement cette sensibilité exagérée, cette amertume, cette ironie, desquelles mon métier de chanteuse tira ses effets les plus profonds, les plus humains et les plus sincères.*

*J'ai connu la vie sous toutes les formes de ses détresses. — Celles qui ne furent jamais longuement très malheureuses, ne peuvent pas "savoir" être très bonnes. . . .*

*Cela devient une vertuosité, de savoir comprendre certains silences . . . de deviner un drame sentimental rien qu'à la façon dont on tire l'aiguille, ou à la façon dont une femme vous répond quand vous lui parlez, de deviner que son cerveau est agité dans la tourmente et qu'elle souffre.*

hearts. And yet this very knowledge engendered in us a natural mistrust of humanity—a fine shield when danger threatened. For my part I made up my mind to laugh in the face of any gallant who might come a-wooing me !

I had learnt a good deal of the wickedness of men, and was well acquainted with all their little wiles. At eighteen I was possessed of a virtue that was proof against all-comers. Let them come ! I knew how to defend myself !

Living amongst all these poor young sinners had made of me a girl who was already a woman, grave, serious, and old before my time. The companionship of girls whose whole life consisted of a struggle for their daily bread, and the pursuit of their love affairs, was no doubt largely responsible for endowing me with that excessive “sensibility,” and at the same time that flavour of bitterness and sense of irony, by means of which I have been able to make, as a singer, my strongest, my most human and sincere appeals.

I have experienced the unhappiness of life in all its forms. Those who have never plumbed the depths of misery, have never known what it is to learn the lesson of Charity.

It becomes a sort of “virtuosity” in anyone to have the power of interpreting silences, of reading a sentimental drama into the manner in which a girl will ply her needle, or of divining the emotion that is tugging at a woman’s heart-strings from the way she answers when you speak to her.

*A cette époque où je travaillais chez moi, quand les mortes saisons venaient, cela devenait atroce parce que, après les périodes passées chez "Hentenart" et au "Printemps," c'est à dire presque durant 25 mois, j'avais été nourrie par ces maisons (régulièrement!!) mais quand il fallut, chaque fin de semaine, qu'une ou plusieurs clientes ne payait pas ses notes, aller dans le quartier chercher la pâture à crédit ce fut pour moi un supplice!*

*Quels yeux terribles que ceux d'un petit épicier de la rue Miromesnil! Quand je disais une fois, mon panier plein: Ma mère passera demain, monsieur. . . . l'épicier criait devant tout le monde: sans faute, hein ma petite? sans cela vous n'avez plus besoin d'entrer ici! Seigneur, j'entendais mon sang sauter dans mon cœur et dans mes oreilles!*

*La boulangère était gentille . . . peut-être savait-elle ce que c'est que la vie des ouvrières à Paris. . . . Mais le boucher était féroce! après trois petites notes de 2 côtelettes, il vous refusait net! . . . brutal, et insolent!!! et de longues semaines se passaient avec du pain, et du fromage.*

*Une fois je fis une grande et stupide surprise à ma mère. Il y avait bien vingt jours que nous n'avions goûté un morceau de viande, quand étant descendue*



YVETTE GUIBERTI  
(From a printing by Jean Granel)





During this time when I was taking in needlework at home, the slack seasons brought me fresh misery. While I was at Hentenart's and afterwards at the "Printemps," a period of about twenty-five months altogether, I had had regular (almost too regular) meals. But now it was generally necessary at the end of the week, when one or more of my customers had failed to pay their accounts, to get food in on credit from the shops in the quarter, which to me was positive torture.

The little grocer in the Rue Miromesnil had the most horrible eyes, I remember. Once when I said to him, after purchasing my groceries, "My mother will call and pay you to-morrow," he cried out loudly, so that everyone standing round could hear, "She had better, young woman, or you won't deal here any more."

God in Heaven ! I could hear my heart thumping with the shame and indignation I felt !

The baker's wife was a decent woman. No doubt she knew something of what a work-girl's life in Paris was like. But the butcher was a brute. If we owed him for a few paltry cutlets he would refuse, with blunt and brutal insolence, to supply us with anything more until we had paid. Then for weeks together we would have to live on bread and cheese.

Once I planned to give my mother a big surprise, rather a stupid one as it turned out. We had not tasted a morsel of meat for about three weeks, and while on my way to buy a pennyworth of cheese, I

*chercher 3 sous de fromage, je passais devant un superbe magasin de volailles !*

*Ah ! si je pouvais faire manger à maman une de ces superbes bêtes !*

*Il y avait étalé dans de beaux plats, des poulets cuits, et entourés de cresson. Je les regardais . . . puis, ma foi, je me risquais . . . j'entrais dans la boutique.*

*Combien le poulet ?*

*Cinq francs, ma petite demoiselle.*

*Eh bien, dis-je d'un air très autoritaire, faites porter ce poulet chez Madame Guilbert, rue de la Boétie 42, et j'ajoutais : le poulet vous sera payé à domicile . . . j'ai dépensé tout ce que j'avais dans mon porte-monnaie.*

*Peu de temps après je vis le garçon partir avec le poulet . . . ! J'étais folle de joie à l'idée de la surprise de ma mère, et je savais qu'on paierait dès qu'on aurait de l'argent, le commerçant, lui, ne mourrait pas d'attendre cinq francs, et quel service humain cela nous rendait !*

*Je suivis le garçon . . . il entra chez nous . . . et . . . redescendit avec son poulet ! J'étais stupide d'émotion. Je courus après lui.*

*Eh bien, lui dis-je, vous remportez votre poulet ? Pourquoi ?*

*La dame l'a refusé. . . .*

*Comment ? qu'a t-elle dit ?*

*Que c'était une erreur, qu'elle n'avait rien commandé. . . .*

passed a shop window in which there was a magnificent display of poultry.

"Oh, if I could only get one of those fine birds for my mother to eat!" thought I.

For there was a row of fowls in the window, already cooked, nicely displayed on dishes and garnished with water-cress. I looked at them longingly. Yes, I would risk it! I entered the shop.

"How much are the fowls?" I asked.

"Five francs apiece, my little lady," the shopman answered.

"Very well," said I, with a lofty air, "you can send one round to Madame Guilbert, Rue de la Boétie 42. And," I added, "it will be paid for on delivery; I have spent all the money I had with me."

Shortly afterwards I saw the boy leave with the chicken. I was delighted at the idea of my mother's surprise. We could easily pay later on when we had the money; the shopman would surely not mind having to wait for a trifling sum like five francs! And what a kindly action it would be on his part!

I followed the boy, saw him mount the stairs to our rooms, and then—saw him coming down again, with the chicken. For the moment I was quite overcome with emotion. Then I turned and ran after him.

"Why are you taking the chicken away again?" I asked.

"The lady refused it," said he.

"What did she say?"

"She said," answered the boy, "that it was a mistake, and that she hadn't ordered anything."

*C'est évident, dis-je au garçon, puisque c'est moi qui suis entrée chez vous. Tenez, donnez moi ce poulet, je le remonterai moi-même.*

*Et mon argent ? dit le garçon.*

*J'irai demain ou après demain régler cela en faisant mes courses, dis-je, le cœur tout chaviré. . . .*

*Bien . . . Bon . . . dit le garçon . . . du reste si vous oubliez, j'ai l'adresse . . . et il me remit le poulet !!!*

*Enfin on allait donc manger ! !*

*Quand j'arrivais à la maison, le poulet fut mis par moi en silence sur la table . . . ma mère avait mis 2 assiettes et deux couteaux, ne s'attendant qu'à du pain et du fromage. . . .*

*J'allais la trouver dans la chambre où elle travaillait, et en riant elle me dit : Nous avons failli avoir un déjeuner de gala . . . figures-toi qu'on a apporté ici un poulet ? Une similitude de nom sans doute . . . naturellement je l'ai renvoyé, ce poulet, la dame qui le commanda fera meilleure chair que nous . . . hein, ma pauvre grande fille ? Bah, dis-je à ma mère, elle a peut-être mal aux dents !*

*Tout en parlant maman s'était levée et nous allions dans la salle à manger où nous attendait La Surprise. . . .*

*Ma mère se mit à rire si fort en revoyant la bête sur notre table, que cinq bonnes minutes nous ne pûmes rien dire . . . elle riait, je riais, elle m'embrassait, je l'embrassais, c'était inouï. . . .*

*Et je racontais mon audace. . . .*

"Of course," said I, "because it was I who ordered it. Here, give me the chicken, I'll take it home myself."

"What about the money?" the boy asked.

"Oh, I'll look in to-morrow or the next day, when I'm doing my shopping, and pay for it," I answered with my heart in my mouth.

"All right," he said. "I've got your address anyhow." And so saying, he handed me back the chicken.

We were going to eat it after all!

When I got home I laid the chicken silently on the table. My mother had put out two plates and two knives, only anticipating our usual meal of bread and cheese.

I went into the room where she was sewing. She looked up and smiled, and said, "We have just missed having a gala lunch. What do you think? They delivered a chicken here by mistake; some confusion in the name, no doubt. Of course I sent it back. The lady who ordered it will have a better meal than we shall, eh, my poor overgrown girl?"

"Pooh!" I answered, "she has probably got toothache!"

My mother rose as I spoke, and we went into the dining-room, where THE SURPRISE was waiting for us.

When she saw the chicken lying on the table my mother began to laugh, and for five whole minutes we were speechless with merriment. She laughed, and I laughed; she embraced me, and I embraced her; it was a moving scene!

Then I told her of my bold move.

*Mais, dit ma mère, nous n'aurons pas d'argent avant un mois. J'espère que ce commerçant est un brave homme qui saura attendre. . . .*

*Mais oui ! mais oui ! dis-je à maman. En attendant, à table !*

*Et nous fîmes ce jour là un repas royal . . . qui nous remit un peu l'estomac. Hélas ! nous avons payé cette petite orgie, par des insultes, que le garçon livreur hurlait régulièrement chaque jour de onze heures à midi dans la cour de la maison ! Et tous les gens des six étages étaient au courant de cette dette de cinq francs.*

*Ça se gava ! Ça mange des poulets !*

*Ça fait comme les gens riches ! Ça se fait passer pour des ouvrières et c'est des voleuses !*

*Enfin il fit pendant 14 jours tant de scandale que la concierge finit par avancer les 5 francs. . . . Ma mère et moi nous n'osions plus sortir . . . et nous rougissions en rencontrant les voisins dans les escaliers.*

*Ah quel temps affreux !*

*Et c'est en souvenir des mauvais bouchers, des mauvais épiciers, des mauvais marchands de comestibles, que depuis que je suis artiste, j'ai donné une vraie fortune à tous ceux qui vinrent chez moi crier : Pitié, pitié, j'ai faim. Je me suis souvenue ! et j'ai donné, donné, trop peut-être.*

"But," said she, "we shall not have the money to pay for it for at least a month. I hope the shopman is a good fellow, and won't mind waiting."

"Of course he won't mind!" I cried. "In the meanwhile, let's enjoy the chicken!"

That day we made a right royal repast, which did us a power of good. But we had to pay for it, bitterly enough. Every morning after that, from eleven to twelve, the errand boy would stand in the courtyard below and hurl opprobrious epithets at our windows. Very soon everyone in the building knew about the wretched five francs we owed for the chicken.

"Gluttons! Eat chickens, would you? A fine thing to be living like fighting cocks, and pretending to be poor work-people all the time! A pack of thieves, that's what you are!"

At last, after about a fortnight of this sort of thing, the scandal became so great that the landlady eventually lent us the five francs to settle the account. My mother and I for some time after that hardly dared venture out of doors; and we were covered with confusion whenever we met any of our neighbours on the stairs.

What a life!

These vivid memories of hard-hearted butchers, grocers, and tradesmen generally have led me during my artistic career to give away a fortune in response to the appeals of those who have cried, "Food, for pity's sake! I am starving!"

I have remembered the old days, and given, given, given with a free, and probably far too liberal, hand.



*Mais un jour arriva . . . un jour voulu par le destin.  
Et de ce jour là devait dépendre toute ma vie future. . . .*

*Un jour, que j'avais à sortir, je fus suivie dans la rue  
par un homme assez âgé. Il commença d'abord par me  
dire que j'avais une taille superbe . . . un corps élégant. . . .*

*Écoutez moi donc, Mademoiselle . . . ne marchez pas si  
vite. . . . Mademoiselle, écoutez moi donc ! j'ai une pro-  
position à vous faire . . . une proposition très honnête.  
. . . Je suis Zidler le directeur de l'Hippodrome. . . .*

*J'étais si vite essoufflée, que je dus ralentir ma marche,  
je serais tombée !*

*Il en profita pour bien regarder mon visage, car jusque-  
là, il n'avait vu que mon dos. Mademoiselle, soyez calme  
et laissez-moi marcher tout doucement à vos côtés . . .  
je suis vieux et je ne peux pas courir. . . .*

*Je ne répondais pas un mot.*

*Voilà, fit-il, je vous propose de vous donner des  
leçons d'équitation et de faire de vous la plus belle  
écuyère de Paris !*

*Du coup, j'éclatais de rire ! il continua :*

*Ne riez pas . . . dans deux ans vous gagnerez 20,000  
francs par an. . . .*

*Je dressais l'oreille. . . . Que faites-vous dans la vie ?  
ouvrière ?*

*. . . Oui, Monsieur. . . .*

*Eh bien ? Ça ne vous plairait pas d'être écuyère ?  
Ma mère ne consentira jamais. . . .*

But at last a day came, a day that was big with destiny for me, and altered the whole course of my life. One morning I had to go out, and was followed in the street by an oldish man. He began by telling me that I had a lovely figure and a most stylish appearance.

"Listen to me, Mademoiselle, I beg," said he, "and don't walk so fast. I have a proposal to make to you, a perfectly genuine proposal. My name is Zidler ; I'm the Manager of the Hippodrome."

I was so out of breath that I had to slow down or I should have fallen. He took advantage of this to take a long look at my face—up to then he had only seen my back !

"Mademoiselle," he went on, "don't be nervous, but let me walk beside you ; only don't go too fast. I'm an old man, and running is beyond me."

I made no reply, and presently he spoke again.

"Now I'm going to make you an offer. I propose to give you riding lessons, and I'll make you the finest horsewoman in Paris !"

All at once I burst out laughing.

"Don't laugh !" said he. "In two years' time you shall be earning 20,000 francs a year."

I pricked up my ears at this.

"What do you do for a living—dressmaking ?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you wouldn't mind being a circus-rider, would you ?"

"My mother would never consent," said I.

*J'irai la trouver, dit Zidler.*

*Oh, non, laissez moi d'abord lui parler.*

*Alors il me remit 2 places pour venir avec maman à l'Hippodrome lui apporter nos réponses. . . .*

*Réfléchissez, jeune fille, c'est la fortune pour vous. . . .  
Puis, comme il allait me quitter il me regarda des pieds à la tête : Quelle écuyère ! Quelle magnifique écuyère !*

*Il me tendit si paternellement la main que je n'hésitais pas à lui donner la mienne, et c'est ainsi que je fis la connaissance d'un des hommes les plus curieux, les plus intelligents de Paris, qui jusqu'à sa mort resta dévoué, et bon conseiller.*

*Quand je racontais l'aventure à ma mère, elle se fâcha. C'est cela ! monte à cheval, casse-toi le cou, ou les jambes, et puis après . . . ?*

*Je lui dis que j'avais promis une réponse. . . .*

*Eh bien, tu prieras Mlle. Masson de t'accompagner à l'Hippodrome, moi je n'irai pas.*

*Deux jours après, notre coupeuse Mlle. Masson et moi nous étions à l'Hippodrome.*

*Zidler fut demandé par moi, il accourut.*

*Eh bien ?*

*Maman ne veut pas !*

*Alors pendant que Mlle. Masson regardait le spectacle, j'allais avec lui dans son bureau, et je lui racontais ma vie de travail, de luttes. Et voyez vous, monsieur,*

"I'll go and see her," returned Zidler.

"Oh, no," I replied, "let me speak to her first."

Then he gave me two seats for the Hippodrome. I was to bring my mother, and give him my answer.

"Think it over, young lady," he said. "It's the chance of your lifetime." Then, just as he was going, he looked me up and down, murmuring, "What a rider she would make! What a magnificent rider!"

He held out his hand in a paternal manner, and I had no hesitation in giving him mine. It was in this way that I made the acquaintance of one of the shrewdest and most singular men in Paris; and to the day of his death he remained my most devoted friend and counsellor.

When I told my mother the story she was terribly upset.

"Horse-riding!" she exclaimed. "You'll break your neck, or your legs, and then where will you be?"

I told her that I had promised Zidler to give him an answer.

"Well, you can take Mlle. Masson with you to the Hippodrome; I shall not go," said my mother.

And two days afterwards Mlle. Masson and I went.

I asked for Zidler, and he came running up with a question on his lips.

"Well?"

"My mother won't hear of it," said I.

Then while Mlle. Masson went in to see the show, I accompanied him to his office, and told him the story of my life, a life of struggle and hard work.

*changer de métier serait changer de misères . . . Un accident pourrait me mettre pour des mois à l'hôpital . . . alors . . . et ma mère ? . . .*

*Il m'écoutait, . . . me regardait. . . .*

*Pauvre petite femme, finit-il par dire attendri, . . . eh bien, pour vous distraire je vous enverrai de temps en temps des places de théâtre. J'en reçois de partout.*

*Et je quittais le brave Zidler sur cette promesse.*

*Deux mois après je reçus deux fauteuils pour aller entendre Sarah Bernhardt au théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin. J'étais folle de joie ! jamais je n'avais vu la magnifique artiste. Ce fut encore Mlle. Masson qui vint avec moi, ma mère étant souffrante.*

*A peine assises dans le théâtre, qu'un monsieur vint occuper le strapontin à côté de mon fauteuil. C'était un voisin comme un autre. On leva le rideau . . . On jouait Cléopâtre . . . j'attendais Sarah Bernhardt nerveuse, agitée. . . . Enfin une belle jeune femme splendidement vêtue entra. . . . C'était Cléopâtre !*

*J'écoutais . . . je regardais . . . je ne perdais rien de ses gestes, de sa voix, et quand l'acte fut fini, je restais un peu désappointée . . . J'en faisais la réflexion à Mlle. Masson, qui elle aussi n'était pas enthousiasmée, quand le monsieur du strapontin qui s'amusaït follement de nos critiques, nous informa, que Sarah Bernhardt*

"To change my profession, you see, would only mean exchanging one form of unhappiness for another," I said to him. "I might meet with an accident which would lay me up in hospital for months, and then what would become of my mother?"

He looked at me hard while he listened.

"Poor little woman," he said eventually, in compassionate tones. "Well, we'll say no more. But you need amusement; I'll send you theatre tickets from time to time; I get plenty of them."

And with this promise we parted.

About two months afterwards I received two stalls for the Porte Saint Martin Theatre, where Sarah Bernhardt was playing. I was wild with joy, as I had never seen this wonderful actress. Mlle. Masson was again my companion, as my mother was ill.

We had hardly taken our places when a gentleman came and sat down on the gangway seat next to my stall. The curtain went up. The play was "Cleopatra," and I waited for Sarah Bernhardt's entrance in a state of nervous excitement. At last a handsome young woman came on, superbly clad—it was Cleopatra. I listened—I watched—I lost not a single one of her gestures, or of the intonations of her voice. But when the act was over I was left with a distinct feeling of disappointment. I said as much to Mlle. Masson. She, also, was not wildly enthusiastic. Then the gentleman next to me, who was evidently highly amused at our criticisms, informed us that Sarah Bernhardt was not playing. She had been taken

*ne jouait pas ce soir, et qu'elle avait été remplacée, ayant été indisposée en arrivant au théâtre !*

*Je suis critique dramatique . . . et il me tendit sa carte :*

*EDMOND STOULLIG,*

*Critique dramatique.*

*Evidemment, dis-je, vous devez bien connaître Sarah Bernhardt. . . .*

*Il sourit. . . .*

*Vous ne la trouvez pas bien, la remplaçante ? fit-il moqueur.*

*Non.*

*Pourquoi ?*

*Elle parle mal, et ne souffre pas avec vérité . . . (à mon avis,) ajoutai-je tout à coup honteuse d'avoir été si affirmative.*

*Il fut intéressé toute la soirée à ce que je lui disais, bref tout à coup il s'écria : Mais faites donc du théâtre, Mademoiselle, intelligente comme vous l'êtes, vous êtes certaine de réussir !*

*Et pendant tout l'entr'acte il m'assura qu'il fallait "faire du théâtre."*

*Tenez, je vais vous donner un mot pour un professeur admirable, et sur sa carte il écrivit :*

*Landrol 101 rue Laffayette. Je lui écrirai, ajouta-t-il.*

ill on reaching the theatre, and her understudy was playing the part.

"I am a dramatic critic," he added, and offered me his card, on which was inscribed,

EDMOND STOULLIG,  
Dramatic Critic.

"Evidently," said I, "you know Sarah Bernhardt very well."

He smiled.

"You don't think much of her understudy?" he asked, in a bantering voice.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"She says her words badly, and her emotion doesn't ring true—at least that's what I think," I added, suddenly overcome with confusion at having spoken so positively.

He remained interested all the evening in what I said, till suddenly he turned to me and exclaimed:

"Why don't you go on the stage, Mademoiselle? So intelligent a person as yourself is bound to succeed!"

All through the interval he kept assuring me that I ought to go on the stage.

"See here," he said. "I'll give you an introduction to an excellent teacher," and handed me a card on which he had written, "Landrol, 101, Rue Lafayette."

"I'll write to him myself," he added.

That evening was the beginning of the long and



*Et c'est de ce jour là que date la vieille et fidèle amitié de Stoullig pour sa " filleule " Yvette.*

*En rentrant, je racontais l'aventure à ma mère. . . .*

*Elle m'écouta, et à ma grande surprise elle me dit :  
Essaie !*

*Ah ! dis-je, si j'avais seulement plus de voix, j'aurais tenté le genre Judic ou Chaumont . . . mais avec mon filet de voix, impossible . . . ! Bref les rêves commencèrent . . . j'écrivis à Zidler lui racontant mes nouvelles décisions, il me répondit que mourir de faim pour mourir de faim (car je gagnerai peu de chose à mes débuts) il valait mieux mourir de faim en gaieté ! !*

*Je pris des leçons avec Landrol, au bout de huit mois il m'envoya comme tous ses élèves, débiter au théâtre des Bouffes du Nord ! ! (dans un faubourg de Paris). Ce fut dans un drame d'Alexandre Dumas . . . La Reine Margot.*

*Le rôle de Madame de Nevers me fut confié.*

*Comme il me fallait quelques argents pour acheter des souliers, des gants, ce fut au brave ami Zidler que j'écrivis.*

*Réponse : Un beau billet de cent francs ! . . . Et je débutai !*

*Jamais je n'oublierai ma première soirée . . . mon émotion . . . ma peur de commencer, ma joie de finir l'acte !*

unswerving friendship that Stoullig ever afterwards entertained for his little "godchild" Yvette.

When I got home I told my mother about it. She listened to my story, and then, to my great astonishment, she said,

"Try it!"

"Ah!" I said regretfully, "if only I had more of a voice! I might have gone in for singing after the style of Judic or Chaumont. But with my tiny little pipe of a voice it's out of the question."

Still from that time I began to dream of success on the stage. I wrote to Zidler, telling him of my new determination. He replied that if I was determined to die of starvation—since my first engagements would not be likely to bring in much—I might just as well die gaily!!

I had a few lessons with Landrol, and then after eight months he sent me, as he did with all his pupils, to make my stage début at the Bouffes du Nord, a theatre on the outskirts of Paris. The piece was one of Alexandre Dumas', "La Reine Margot," and the part entrusted to me was that of Madame de Nevers.

I needed money to buy shoes and gloves, so I again wrote to my worthy friend Zidler. His reply came in the shape of a hundred franc note! And so I made my début.

I shall never forget that first night, or the emotions I went through. The fright I was in before it began! The relief I felt when it was over!

*Je traversais la scène en quatre pas ! Je marchais comme un soldat ! et quand des épisodes comiques faisaient rire le public, je ne pensais plus à mon personnage, à mon rôle, je riais avec lui ! !*

*Mais ce public de faubourg qui n'avait jamais dans ce théâtre que des apprentis, ne se chagrinait pas de tout cela. . . . On jouait, il s'amusait et voilà tout.*

*C'était en 1888. Je jouais là cinq ou six pièces, et des comédiens ayant eu la gentillesse de me recommander à un usurier qui prêtait des petites pièces d'or aux petits artistes pauvres j'avais un peu d'argent en poche.*

*Puis un soir le directeur du théâtre Cluny (quartier Latin) vint me demander de remplacer au pied levé son étoile " Aciana " tombée malade.*

*J'acceptais et fis un mois de représentations à Cluny.*

*Puis, enfin, j'osais me présenter après 6 mois sur un vrai théâtre, un théâtre " des Grands Boulevards." Là les succès ne furent pas aussi faciles. . . . Grâce à mes amis Stoullig et Zidler, le père Brasseur, directeur du théâtre des Nouveautés, me fit passer une audition . . . plus de grands rôles là . . . des levers de rideaux ! ! Mais ma vanité était si satisfaite de faire partie d'une troupe des " Grands Boulevards " !*

I covered the stage in four strides, with a fine martial walk. And when the audience laughed at the funny situations, I forgot all about my part and the character I was supposed to be playing, and laughed with them !

But the audience at this theatre was quite used to novices, and didn't care twopence for anything like that. So long as the play went on, and they were amused, nothing else mattered.

This was in 1888. I played in about five or six pieces at this theatre. Some of the actors were good enough to give me an introduction to a money-lender, who made a practice of lending money to the smaller fry of the dramatic profession, so I had a certain amount of cash in my pocket.

Then one evening the manager of the Cluny Theatre in the Quartier Latin asked me to take the place at a moment's notice of his star, "Aciana," who had been taken ill.

I accepted his offer, and played for a month at Cluny.

Then at last, after six months of the stage, I plucked up courage to apply for a part at a real theatre, a theatre on the Boulevards. There success was not so easy. Thanks to the exertions of my friends Stoullig and Zidler, the elder Brasseur, who was manager of the Nouveautés, gave me an audition. There were to be no big parts for me here ! I was to play in curtain-raisers only. However, I was quite satisfied to feel that I was to be one of the company at a real theatre on the Boulevards.

*Petite bête que j'étais ! Pour jouer " les rôles " il fallait des toilettes et où les prendre . . . ? Je gagnais aux " Nouveautés " 250 francs par mois. . . .*

*Je pris la résolution d'aller trouver une maison de couture et de la prier de me faire crédit tout le temps qu'il me faudrait pour " arriver à une situation." Ce fut la maison Ohnet, rue du 4 Septembre, qui eut confiance en moi.*

*Je dis à Madame Ohnet que j'avais été dans la couture chez Hentenart, puis au Printemps, et qu'enfin lasse de végéter avec ma mère, j'essayais de faire du théâtre. . . . Je lui donnais ma parole d'honnête fille que je la rembourserais sitôt que je toucherais des appointements sérieux. Elle accepta ! J'étais sauvée.*

*Eh bien non . . . je n'étais pas sauvée, car lorsque je prévins mon directeur que j'étais en mesure de bien m'habiller il me répondit :*

*Mais tu es dans un théâtre très comique ici, et tu es triste à pleurer, jamais je ne pourrai t'employer, tu as une figure pour jouer les tragiques, tu ne sauras jamais rire, ma pauvre Yvette, tu n'as pas d'expression !*

*Ah cette phrase ! ce qu'elle me fut dite souvent. . . .*

*Mais je vous assure, Monsieur Brasseur, que j'ai un genre comique à moi. . . . Confiez moi un rôle, vous verrez. . . . Voulez vous, tenez, que je vous chante une chanson drôle ?*

Little fool that I was ! How could I play the parts without suitable frocks ; and where was I going to get frocks from, since at the Nouveautés I was only to be paid 250 francs a month ?

At last I made up my mind to approach a dress-maker and ask her to give me credit until such time as I should " arrive " ! So I went to Ohnet's in the rue du 4 Septembre, and they seemed willing to trust me.

I told Madame Ohnet that I had once been an assistant at Hentenart's and afterwards at the Prin-temps, and that, weary at last of vegetating at home, I was tempting fortune on the stage. I gave her my word of honour that I would repay her as soon as I got a proper engagement. She agreed to wait, and I felt I was saved !

And yet not saved ! For when I told my manager that I was being measured for some new clothes, he remarked :

" Yes, but this is a comedy theatre ; and you're such a melancholy-looking person. I shall never be able to give you a part here ; you've got the face of a ' tragédienne.' You'll never learn how to laugh, my poor Yvette ; you're absolutely lacking in expression."

Oh, that phrase, " lacking in expression ! " How often have I not been told that !

" But, I assure you, M. Brasseur," said I, " I have the comedy instinct all right. Give me a part, you shall see for yourself. Won't you let me sing you a comic song ? "

*Non, non, fiche moi la paix, tu es une triste. . . . Va à l'Odéon, au Gymnase, ici tu ne feras jamais rien, rien, rien.*

*J'étais désolée, désolée . . . on ne me retint pas le jour où je fis savoir que le théâtre des Variétés voulait m'engager . . . Brasseur déchira mon contrat et je partis aux Variétés.*

*Là j'avais aussi 250 francs par mois, mais de bons petits rôles m'étaient donnés. Je savais que, en ma qualité de débutante, il me fallait être patiente . . . je l'étais, car j'avais des exemples de comédiennes bien connues qui à cette époque gagnaient 1000 francs par mois !*

*Aux Variétés, j'avais de superbes leçons gratuites, je n'avais qu'à regarder jouer la fameuse troupe—c'était le temps de Judic, Réjane, Dupuis, Baron, Christian, Lassouche, toutes les célébrités de l'époque. Chaque répétition m'apprenait des quantités de choses, et c'est en les voyant "travailler" l'art dramatique que moi, j'appris à chanter ! Ce sont eux qui influencèrent "ma manière," car plus tard quand j'eus à apprendre une chanson je m'appliquais "à la jouer."*

*C'est aux Variétés que j'appris tous les trucs, toutes les ficelles des actrices, des acteurs, des directeurs, des auteurs, et je me disais : Mais pour faire son chemin dans ce métier-là, à Paris, il faut plus que de la diplomatie. Saurai-je m'en tirer ?*

"No, no," said he, "it's no use your worrying me ; you were made for tragedy, I tell you. Go to the Odéon or the Gymnase. Here you'll never be any good, never any good at all."

I was absolutely heart-broken. As soon as I told him that the Variétés had made me an offer Brasseur tore up my contract and packed me off.

At the Variétés I was getting only 250 francs also ; but they gave me some nice little parts. I knew that, as a beginner, I had to be patient. And I was, keeping before my mind the fact that there were several actresses I knew of who were making at that time 1000 francs a month.

At the Variétés I received some fine lessons in the art of acting. All I had to do was to watch that splendid company act—it was the time of Judic, Réjane, Dupuis, Baron, Christian, Lassouche—all the stars of the day, in fact. Every performance taught me a great deal, and it was by seeing the way in which they handled the dramatic art that I learnt how to sing ! Their influence left an indelible mark on my "style" ; and, in later years, when I had a new song to learn, I used to devote myself first to learning how to "act" it.

While at the Variétés I got to know all the "dodges" and stage tricks of actors and actresses, of managers and authors. Over and over again I said to myself that something more than mere diplomacy was required in order to make any headway in a profession like this, in Paris especially, and found myself wondering whether I should ever pull through.



*Un jour on me donne un rôle délicieux dans une pièce de Millaud. Judic était l'étoile de ses pièces, elle était charmante camarade avec les "Petits"—et je lui dis combien j'étais contente de mon rôle. Deux jours après, hélas, mon rôle m'était retiré, et une splendide fille, demi-actrice, demi-courtisane, en devenait titulaire. . . .*

*Pourquoi ? Elle était la maîtresse d'un des plus gros actionnaires du théâtre. . . .*

*J'allais toute en larmes trouver le directeur Bertrand qui très calme me dit :*

*Mon enfant, ce sont des obligations auxquelles un théâtre ne peut échapper. . . . Vous en verrez bien d'autres, allez ! Il nous faut compter avec tant de gens. . . . Croyez-vous que cela m'amuse d'engager cette femme, elle ne sait ni parler ni marcher en scène . . . mais au théâtre, personne, vous entendez, ne peut se dire libre, nous sommes tous esclaves de tous.*

*Mais alors, dis-je, c'est une carrière qui peut vous décourager toute la vie ! Mais c'est affreux ! Quand on n'est pas Étoile, comment faire pour imposer sa personnalité ?*

*Le devenir ! répondit Bertrand, sans cela on végète 10 ans, 15 ans. . . .*

*Je sortis du cabinet directorial le cœur glacé. . . . Décidément je n'avancerai à rien, qu'après de longues*

One day I was given a lovely new frock to wear in a play of Millaud's. Judic was always the star in his pieces, and very charming she was to all of us who were playing minor parts. I had told her how pleased I was with my part; but two days afterwards it was taken away from me and given to a good-looking girl who was little more than an amateur. And the reason? Oh, well, she was the "friend" of one of the most influential directors of the theatre!

I went to Bertrand, the manager, in tears. He replied calmly,

"My dear child, these are the sort of obligations which a manager cannot hope to escape. You will see plenty of similar cases before you have done. There are so many people who have to be taken into consideration. Do you think it amuses me to engage a woman who can't speak her lines properly, and hardly knows how to walk across the stage? But in theatrical matters, you must understand, we are not our own masters. Everybody is the slave of somebody else."

"Then," said I, "it seems to me that it is a most disheartening profession. It's terrible to think of. How, unless one is a star, is it possible to get a hearing?"

"Become one," replied Bertrand. "Otherwise you'll simply remain where you are for another ten or fifteen years."

I left his office with a feeling of icy despair. It was evident that I might work for years at this profession, and never get a step further than I was then.

*années dans ce métier. . . . Et puis cette atmosphère louche d'intrigues. . . . Il fallait être bien avec Mlle. X. parce que son amant était rédacteur à tel journal . . . et sur un signe d'elle, il vous éreintait ou vous couvrait de louanges. . . . Il fallait ne pas déplaire au comédien Y. parce que sa petite amie jouait dans la pièce et qu'il voulait qu'elle seule des petits rôles, fut remarquée. . . . Il fallait avoir des robes nouvelles à chaque pièce ! Et j'eus la très mauvaise chance de tomber sur quatre jours consécutifs ! Quatre pièces furent jouées sans aucun succès, la fin de la saison fut désastreuse, il y avait une pièce, La Japonaise, qui ne fut jouée que quelques jours, et ma note montait toujours chez ma couturière. Je lui devais plus de 6000 francs et je perdais la tête à l'idée de cette dette de confiance. . . .*

*Quand arriverai-je à gagner de réels appointements, dis-je à Zidler. . . . Dans dix ou quinze ans, me dit-il, —à Paris les carrières des femmes sont très lentes . . . aies du courage, ma petite . . . c'est une vertu, le courage mais au théâtre une vertu n'a jamais valu deux bons vices. . . . Il y avait longtemps que je m'en étais aperçue !*

*A mes débuts aux Bouffes du Nord, je m'étais donné deux ans pour " arriver ! " j'ignorais tout du théâtre, moi, et je croyais qu'il suffisait d'avoir en soi un*

Moreover, this unhealthy atmosphere, heavy with intrigue, disgusted me. You had to keep on good terms with Madame X., because the editor of such and such a paper was a particular friend of hers. She had only to say the word and he would slate you or praise you. You mustn't fall out with the comedian Y. because his little lady friend had a part, and he didn't want any of the other minor parts to overshadow her.

Added to all this one had to have new frocks for each new play, and I had the misfortune to appear in four successive failures ! Not one of the four had the slightest success ; the latter part of the season was disastrous, and one piece, " La Japonaise," only ran for a few nights. And all the time my bill at the dressmaker's was steadily mounting up ! I owed her over 6000 francs, and I was nearly off my head at the thought of this debt of honour, as I considered it.

" When am I going to get a proper engagement ? " I said to Zidler.

" Oh, in about ten or fifteen years' time," he answered. " In Paris a woman's career is a very slow achievement. But keep up your courage, my dear ; courage is a virtue, though in the theatre one virtue isn't half so useful as two good vices ! "

I had found that out for myself some time ago. When I first appeared at the Bouffes du Nord, I had given myself two years in which to " arrive." I knew nothing about the stage, and I imagined that so long as one had good " stuff " in one, it would be an easy

*bon matériel pour devenir une artiste et gagner sa vie !*

*Quelle blague ! C'était " le hasard " à Paris, la chance plus que le reste qui faisait les départs des belles carrières. Il fallait aider ce hasard, cette chance . . . et je me mis à y penser. . . .*

*Des mois, et des mois se passèrent, et les deux ans que j'avais fixé allaient bientôt être accomplis quand vint la fermeture annuelle des Variétés. L'Été je partis en tournée avec Monsieur Baron et sa troupe.*

*Baron était avec Dupuis la grosse vedette masculine des Variétés.*

*Il aimait beaucoup mon caractère paisible et toujours égal, il savait que jamais je n'avais de disputes avec personne, et sa sympathie m'avait par deux fois fait distribué des petits rôles gentils. La tournée partait avec une pièce de Meilhac et Halévy : Décoré.*

*J'y avais un rôle charmant, de plus je jouais pour commencer le spectacle un petit acte tout à fait exquis, " La Sarabande " du même auteur.*

*Meilhac vint un jour nous voir répéter, et s'approchant de moi, il me dit : Mais c'est tout à fait bien, ma grande fille !*

*Et ma foi, dans toutes les villes où la tournée passa, mon petit acte dans lequel je tenais le rôle principal eut un gros succès ! Ah ! que j'étais contente. . . .*

*Dans cette troupe d'Été était un comédien de grand talent, ancien pensionnaire de la Comédie Française.*

matter to become a great actress and make a decent living.

But that's all humbug ! It is just a matter of luck in Paris, luck more than anything else which lays the foundations of a successful career. What one had to do was to try to assist this element of luck, of chance ; and I set my mind to the problem.

Month after month went by, and the allotted two years had nearly gone. The annual closing of the Variétés in the summer sent me on tour with Baron's company.

Baron was, together with Dupuis, the chief star at the Variétés.

He liked me for my quiet and equable disposition, and for the fact that I never quarrelled with anyone. Twice already his goodwill had secured me nice minor parts. The touring company was sent out with a play called "Décoré," written by Meilhac and Halevy.

I had a charming part in this, and I also played in the first piece, an exquisite little play called "La Sarabande," by the same authors.

Meilhac was present at rehearsal one day. He came up to me afterwards and said, "You play it splendidly, my dear girl."

And I must say that in every town we visited, the little curtain-raiser, in which I played the principal part, had a great reception. Ah, how pleased I was !

In this touring company there was a very clever comedian, Barral, who had been at the Comédie Française in his younger days. He was always merry,

*Il était fort gai, et chantait l'opérette avec beaucoup d'esprit et dans les chemins de fer nous chantions toujours, lui et moi, pour amuser nos camarades.*

*Comme toutes les filles de Paris je savais des centaines de chansons, et Barral très enthousiaste me hurlait dans les oreilles : Mais lâche donc le théâtre, grande bête ! Au café concert tu vas gagner demain ce que tu gagneras seulement dans dix ans au théâtre !*

*Tu n'as pas assez de voix pour l'opérette pour le moment, mais pour la chanson c'est suffisant. Qu'est ce que tu gagnes aux Variétés ?*

*Deux cent cinquante francs. . . .*

*Je te parie, que tu débutes à l'Eldorado avec . . . avec 600 francs !*

*Je l'écoutais très troublée . . . 600 francs . . . ! Pas de frais de toilettes comparables à ceux du théâtre . . . c'était une idée après tout . . . et heureuse, confiante, je lui racontais que toute mon enfance j'avais eu des succès de petit prodige chanteur — on me couvrait de gâteaux dans les familles amies de la mienne pour me faire chanter . . . j'imitais la grande Thérèse ! Je m'attachais des serviettes à la taille, pour faire une robe à traine, et j'imitais la belle artiste ! J'adorais chanter mais vers 15 ans ma voix devint mince par les privations de toutes sortes et si elle avait du charme elle était bien bien menue. . . . Et petit à petit des souvenirs*



YVETTE GUILBERT.

*(From a painting by Bennowitz von Loefen.)*





and was for ever humming snatches out of some opera or other. We used to sing on the railway journeys, he and I, to amuse the others.

Like all other girls who had been brought up in Paris, I knew hundreds of songs, and Barral was very enthusiastic about my singing.

"Why don't you leave the theatre, you great silly," he would bawl in my ear, "and try the Café Concert? You'd make in one day what it would take you ten years to earn on the stage. You haven't enough voice for opera yet, but you could sing songs all right. What do you earn at the Variétés."

"Two hundred and fifty francs," I told him.

"Well," said he, "I'll wager you will get six hundred francs for your first engagement."

I listened to him with some misgivings. Six hundred francs, and hardly any outlay for clothes compared with what was wanted for the theatre! There was certainly something in the idea. Then, with a sudden feeling of happy confidence, I told him how as a child I had always made a great sensation by my singing—"infant prodigy" they had called me. Our neighbours would often load me with sweets in order to get me to sing. I used to imitate the great Thérèse! With a towel pinned to my dress, to represent a train, I would give imitations of that fine artist. I used to love singing, but when I was about fifteen my voice became very weak owing to the privations we had been through, and there was very little, if any, charm about it left. Gradually the memories of my childhood came back to me.

*me revenaient. . . . C'était à Chelles sur la Marne aux environs de Paris . . . un soir, j'avais 10 ans, je chantais assise sur l'herbe au bord de l'eau entre mon père et ma mère quand, petit à petit, des villas sortirent des gens qui tout à coup applaudirent. Puis, une autre fois, revenue à Chelles chez des amis, il me fallut rechanter au clair de lune pour la joie des petits voisins . . . !*

*Puis, une autre fois, que je chantais en plein air encore, un monsieur s'écria : Bravo ! mais ma petite fille, continuez, c'est charmant, et je m'y connais, vous savez. . . . Je suis Monsieur Fugère de l'Opéra Comique !*

*Fugère ! Un si grand artiste me complimentant, j'en avais le cœur bouleversé !*

*Bref, en écoutant les conseils de mon camarade Barral, et les affirmations de toute la troupe qui faisait chorus avec lui, de nouveaux rêves germèrent en moi. . . . Qui sait ? J'aurais peut-être plus de chance. . . . Je ne demandais pas la gloire, seigneur ! Mais des appointements possibles pour payer mes dettes et suffire aux besoins de ma mère, et aux miens. . . . Une indépendance propre, quoi !*

*La tournée se termina fin d'août 1889.*

*C'était par un jour de septembre . . . un soleil magnifique inondait Paris—je me dis qu'une telle glorieuse journée devait me porter bonheur—j'allais donc me présenter à l'Eldorado, le grand " Concert de Paris." . . .*

I remembered how one evening at Chelles, on the banks of the Marne, outside Paris, when I was about ten years old, I was sitting on the grassy bank between my father and mother, and singing to myself. Gradually people crept out of the houses round, and all at once they began to applaud. And some time afterwards, when I was at Chelles again, staying with some friends, I was once more made to sing in the moonlight for the benefit of the neighbours !

Then another time when I was singing out of doors, a gentleman suddenly cried " Bravo ! my little girl ! Go on singing, it's quite charming. And I know something of singing, I can tell you. My name's Fugère of the Opéra Comique ! "

Fugère ! To be complimented by a great singer like that ! I felt quite overcome at the thought !

At last, as I listened to the advice of Barral and the rest of the company, who were all of his opinion, I began to have other dreams. Who could tell ? Perhaps I should have more luck in this new profession. Heaven knows, I had long ago given up all idea of fame. But the thought of earning a salary which would enable me to pay my debts, and keep my mother and myself in comfort, was very attractive. Then I should indeed be independent !

The tour ended in August 1889.

It was a lovely September day, when all Paris was flooded with sunshine—such a day ought to bring me luck, I told myself—that I made my way to the Eldorado, the great Concert Hall of Paris.

*La directrice me fit auditionner. Je lui chantais un air du "Gamin de Paris," opérette créé par Jeanne Granier.*

*Elle m'écouta, la directrice . . . fit la moue et se mit à parler bas avec deux hommes noirs, deux jumeaux célèbres à Paris, deux chanteurs de salons remarquables : Les frères Lionnet.*

*Je les voyais gesticuler, la persuader . . . elle hochait la tête . . . et haussait les épaules, et je l'entendis qui disait : Eh bien vous verrez, je vais l'engager . . . mais elle ne fera rien, rien . . . elle n'a pas d'expression !*

*Pardon, répliquaient les frères Lionnet, elle chante en bonne comédienne, comme on doit chanter . . . elle manque d'habitude mais vous verrez, vous verrez. . . .*

*Bref d'une voix molle, et comme à contre cœur, la grosse dame m'offrit un contrat de trois ans. Je parlais plus d'une heure pour obtenir " mes " 600 francs la première année — 700 la seconde, 800 par mois la troisième.*

*Travaillez, ma petite, me dirent les frères Lionnet, travaillez et vous ferez une gentille diseuse. . . .*

*Je devais débiter en novembre et d'ici là il me fallait bien apprendre des chansons de " Café Concert ! "*

*Je courus aux Variétés et obtins la résiliation de mon traité, mon directeur qui savait mes luttes ne*

The manageress gave me an audition. I sang her a song out of the "Gamin de Paris," an opera composed by Jeanne Granier.

She listened attentively, pursed her lips a little, and then began to talk in a low tone to two black men who were in the room. These men were twins, two clever singers well known in Paris, the brothers Lionnet.

I saw them gesticulating; evidently they were trying to persuade her to engage me. She shook her head, shrugged her shoulders, and then I heard her say,

"Oh, very well, I'll engage her, but you'll see, she'll be no good, no good at all. She hasn't a spark of expression!"

"On the contrary," they replied, "she sings a song as it should be sung; all she lacks is experience. Just wait and see!"

Finally, in a nerveless voice, and apparently very reluctantly, the manageress offered me a three years' engagement. After about an hour's discussion I succeeded in getting the terms I wanted—600 francs a month for the first year, 700 for the second, and 800 a month for the third.

"Work hard, my dear," the brothers Lionnet said to me, "and you'll make a very fine singer."

My engagement was to start in November, and in the interval I had to learn the style of song in vogue at the Café Concerts.

I rushed off to the Variétés to get my contract there cancelled. My manager, who knew something of my struggles, raised no objection. He congratu-

*me fit aucune difficulté—il me félicita de gagner 600 francs. . . .*

*Le tout est de réussir, me dit-il, vous avez donc de la voix, Yvette ? Bonne chance !*

*Il me fallait trouver des chansons pour débiter en novembre—j'avais deux grands mois devant moi. . . . Avant toute chose je voulais connaître un peu l'atmosphère, l'esprit de ces "cafés concerts" où jamais je n'allais, donc pendant 15 jours tous les soirs j'allais partout pour me documenter. Dans les plus grands, comme dans les plus petits, je constatais la bêtise atroce des couplets ! c'était idiot tout cela !! idiot !!! Et pourtant le public était ravi, et s'amusait sincèrement . . . j'avais le cœur serré à l'idée qu'il me faudrait amuser une telle foule . . . tout à fait différente de celle du théâtre des Variétés ! Au bout de 15 jours mon plan était tracé, il s'agissait de trouver une note nouvelle . . . laquelle ? je ne savais pas . . . mais, qui tout en étant plus artistique n'en eut pas l'air, . . . il ne fallait pas brusquer le goût, l'habitude surtout de ce genre de public, je n'espérais pas alors avoir un jour, "une clientèle" à moi ! Je ne faisais pas de si grands rêves. . . . Je désirais me créer "une personnalité" afin de gagner ma vie plus largement.*

lated me on having succeeded in getting an offer of 600 francs a month.

"The main thing," he said, "is to succeed. You've got a voice, then, Yvette? Well, it's a piece of luck for you!"

I had to find some songs for my *début* in November, and had two full months to do it in. First of all I was anxious to gain some knowledge of the general "atmosphere" of the *Café Concerts*. I had never been inside one in my life; but for the next fortnight I went every night. I soon discovered that the words of the songs which were sung in these places of entertainment, the big ones as well as the small, were appallingly stupid—hopelessly idiotic they seemed to me. And yet the public were delighted with them, and seemed to find them highly amusing. I was horrified at the thought of having to entertain an audience like that, so totally different from what I was used to at the *Variétés*. However, by the end of the fortnight I had settled on my plan of action, which was to strike a new note of some kind. But what sort of note—that was the question? The songs I knew were too artistic and altogether out of the "atmosphere." It would never do to run counter to the taste of my audience, especially this kind of audience, and I had no hopes at that stage of my career of ever possessing a following of my own. Such an idea was beyond my wildest dreams. But I was anxious to establish an "individuality," so as to give me a chance of commanding a respectable salary.



*Depuis les deux années passées au théâtre, il s'était fait un beau changement dans mon instruction littéraire. J'avais beaucoup, beaucoup lu, et mon instinct pour les belles choses s'était développé, je passais des heures dans les musées, je m'instruisais toute seule, avec persévérance et enthousiasme — mon cerveau avait de longues heures de réflexion devant certaines pages de littérature, devant certains tableaux, certaines sculptures. Je suivais toutes les Expositions d'art, je passais des journées au musée du Louvre.*

*J'avais soif de beauté, une nouvelle âme était née en moi, je me découvrais des curiosités, et des compréhensions nouvelles. . . . Une artiste venait d'éclore . . . ! Dieu s'était manifesté et allait me faire vivre une autre vie . . . c'était comme un éveil des choses longtemps endormies.*

*Mais je savais très bien qu'il me faudrait des années de patience avant de trouver le noble emploi de tout ce que je sentais naître et se développer en moi. Pour le présent il ne fallait sortir rien de tout cela, il s'agissait de tâcher de créer une espèce d'art nouveau, oui, quelque chose de neuf . . . de se faire "un genre," d'être à part dans ce milieu de chanteurs et de chanteuses qui se ressemblaient tous !*

*Il fallait d'abord avoir une silhouette à soi ; ce qui me frappa c'était les coiffures vulgaires des chanteuses, leur excès de bijoux. Je décidais de venir en scène coiffée simplement, sagement, comme je me coiffais à*

During the two years I had been on the legitimate stage I had taken every opportunity of improving my education. I did a great deal of reading, which had the effect of developing my literary taste ; and I used to spend hours in museums and galleries. I educated myself—patiently, enthusiastically ; feeding my mind with long hours spent in reflection over certain books and pictures, and even sculptures. I went to all the Art Exhibitions, and spent a great deal of time in the gallery at the Louvre.

I drank in every form of beauty greedily ; a new soul seemed to be born within me. I discovered new tastes, new interests ; it was the dawning of my artistic intelligence. God had revealed Himself, and was granting me a new lease of life. It was as though I had awoke from a long sleep.

I knew well enough that I should need years of patient endeavour before I learnt how to use to the full those talents which I felt were being born in me. For the present I had to confine myself to certain limits, while trying to create a new form of art, something really novel : to strike out a new line which should serve to distinguish me from the ordinary run of music-hall singer, every one of whom was just like every other.

I determined, to begin with, to cultivate an individuality of appearance. The vulgar "get-up" of the average "chanteuse," with her lavish display of jewelry, was very distasteful to me, and I decided that I would appear on the stage as simply dressed as possible, in ordinary everyday clothes, in fact ; and

*la ville du reste, de ne jamais mettre aucun bijou (et pour cause !) sur mes corsages, ou à mes doigts, d'ailleurs étant obligée d'être économe je choisirais des gants noirs . . . et une robe claire toute unie. Une sorte d'affiche . . . oui, une affiche aux lignes nettes, simplifiées, comme un " Primitif," voilà ce que serait mon personnage physique.*

*Quant au répertoire, en cherchant, je finirais par le trouver. . . . Je ne pouvais pas compter sur les auteurs habituels des Étoiles ! J'avais vainement essayé de me faire faire des chansons par eux tous, tous refusèrent, j'étais inconnue et ne méritais pas leurs grâces . . . aucun d'eux ne voulait me confier 3 couplets ! Ils se moquèrent de moi, de ma façon de chanter . . . et pourtant plus tard ce fut moi qui ne voulus plus les interpréter.*

*Donc pour mes débuts à l'Eldorado je cherchais des couplets gais, comme me l'avait recommandé la directrice de ce concert. J'arrivais chez un éditeur, mon cher contrat en poche, pour avoir ma musique gratuitement, comme c'est l'usage, quand entra un monsieur.*

*Ce monsieur était le directeur du Casino de Lyon (music-hall).*

*Tout à coup, je l'entendis : qu'il est donc difficile de trouver au mois d'août ou septembre une artiste à Paris, disait-il, elles sont toutes dans les villes d'eaux, et je ne sais qui trouver pour faire la réouverture de mon*

would never wear any jewelry (for the best of reasons !) on my clothes or person. For economy's sake I would adopt black gloves, and wear a light dress made all in one. The effect I was aiming at was that of a poster, a poster drawn in sharp clear lines, primeval in its simplicity. So much for my personal appearance.

As for my *répertoire*, I should acquire one in time if I searched diligently enough. I should have to look elsewhere than to the usual authors who wrote the songs for popular stars. I had already tried to get them to write me songs, but in vain. They all refused ; I was quite a nonentity, and altogether beneath their notice ; there wasn't one who would trust me with a lyric of three verses. They made fun of me, and my way of singing. But later on it was they who offered me songs and I who refused to sing them !

The songs needed for my *début* at the Eldorado had to be light and gay, as the manageress had warned me. I went to see a publisher, my precious contract in my pocket, to ask for some " free " copies of songs, as was the custom among professionals. While I was there a gentleman entered the shop.

This gentleman happened to be the manager of the Casino de Lyon, a popular music-hall at Lyons. All at once I heard him speaking to the publisher.

" It is terribly difficult," he was saying, " to pick up any artists in Paris for the months of August and September. They all go off to some watering-place or other, and I am at my wits' end how to fill the bill

*Casino. . . . Je cherche une demi-étoile pas chère . . . jolie . . . élégante, venant d'un bon concert de Paris, et aucun agent n'a cela sous la main en ce moment. En connaîtriez vous une, Monsieur Benoit ? dit-il à l'Éditeur de musique.*

*Ma foi non ! répondit Benoit.*

*Pendant ce dialogue mon cœur battait . . . si je me proposais ? Seulement voilà, il avait dit : Une demi-étoile " jolie," et je me savais loin d'être belle, alors . . . ? Tout de même j'osais me lever et aller à cet homme.*

*Monsieur, lui dis-je, j'entends que vous cherchez une artiste . . . je ne suis pas jolie . . . mais je sors " des Variétés " un grand théâtre du Boulevard, de plus, voici un contrat avec l'Eldorado, et je sortis mon contrat de ma poche. . . .*

*L'Homme le lut, et voyant les appointements de 600 francs par mois, en conclut que certainement j'étais une bonne chanteuse.*

*Quel genre chantez vous, Mademoiselle, le comique, ou la Romance sentimentale ?*

*Le comique, Monsieur. . . .*

*Très bien . . . je ne vous connais pas . . . mais j'ai confiance en vous . . . nous mettrons sur l'affiche :*

YVETTE GUILBERT

DU

THÉÂTRE DES VARIÉTÉS DE PARIS.

for the re-opening of the Casino. I want a 'lesser star' of some kind, who won't ask too much money; but she must be pretty, stylish, and come from a decent Paris hall. Not a single agent has one on his books at the present moment. Do you happen to know anybody, M. Benoit?" he added, addressing the music publisher.

"I? Heavens, no!" answered M. Benoit.

During this conversation I felt my heart beating violently. Did I dare to offer my services? A "lesser star" he had said, and "pretty" into the bargain. I knew I was anything but that! However, I plucked up enough courage to speak to him.

"Sir," said I, "I heard you say you were looking for an artist. I am not 'pretty,' but I have been playing at the Variétés, one of the Boulevard theatres, and I have, besides, a contract with the Eldorado."

I took the contract out of my pocket. He read it, and seeing that I had an engagement at 600 francs a month, immediately concluded that I must be a fine singer.

"What is your line, Mademoiselle?" he asked, "humorous or sentimental?"

"Humorous," said I.

"Well," said he, "I don't know you, but I believe in you somehow. We'll have you in big letters on the bills:—

YVETTE GUILBERT

FROM THE

THÉÂTRE DE VARIÉTÉS, PARIS."

*et il dessina de suite sur le dos d'une musique de chanson le schéma de son programme en m'attribuant "la Vedette," c'est à dire qu'il réservait aux lettres de mon nom une place spéciale et de dimension supérieure. Bref il me posait en étoile aux yeux du public de Lyon. . . . Pauvre homme !*

*Il m'engagea pour dix jours, à raison de quarante francs par jour, voyages payés, bien entendu. J'étais aux anges, heureuse, heureuse, car cela me donnait l'occasion inespérée de m'essayer comme chanteuse à Lyon en province, avant mes débuts à Paris à l'Eldorado, et de cette façon, me disais-je, tu sauras à quoi t'en tenir, et tu seras plus d'aplomb pour revenir ici. . . .*

*J'appris 4 chansons comiques, qu'une chanteuse en vogue, Madame Demay, venait de créer à Paris avant de mourir—on ne les connaissait pas à Lyon, donc je ne craignais pas la comparaison avec cette Madame Demay si aimée des Parisiens, et avec raison, car elle était l'esprit même du pavé de Paris.*

*J'arrivais à Lyon. Des immenses affiches annonçaient l'ouverture du Casino avec une artiste "des Variétés" de Paris ! Je mourais de peur à l'idée de mes premiers essais de chanteuse . . . mais j'avais une belle confiance. . . .*

*Le soir arriva . . . je vins en scène habillée superbe-*

And he straightway drew up a rough scheme of his programme on the back of a piece of music, with me as the star, giving my name a special place in big letters on the programme. He was, in fact, going to boom me as a star before the eyes of the public of Lyons. Poor fellow !

He offered me a ten days' engagement at a salary of 40 francs a day, and all expenses paid, of course. I was in the seventh heaven. I should in this way get an opportunity of trying my talents as a singer in the provinces at Lyons before making my *début* in Paris at the Eldorado, and thus—so, at least, I flattered myself—I should learn what line to take up, and gain a certain amount of self-confidence before I returned to Paris.

I learnt four humorous songs, which a popular singer, Madame Demay, had just made the vogue in Paris before her death. They would be quite unknown in Lyons, so there was no fear of comparisons being drawn between me and Madame Demay, who had been the idol of the Parisian public, and justly so, for her songs had caught the true spirit of the life of lower-class Paris.

I arrived at Lyons. Huge posters announced that the re-opening of the Casino would be signalled by the appearance of an artist from the Paris Variétés. I was in fear and trembling at the thought of making my first appearance as a singer ; but all the same I had a certain amount of quiet confidence about the result.

The evening came. I went down to the stage, clad



*ment d'une robe brodée de perles fines avec laquelle j'avais joué ma dernière comédie au théâtre des Variétés, et je commençais à trembler, en entendant les applaudissements fantastiques que le public (composé en partie d'étudiants) accordait à une énorme chanteuse qui dépassait toutes les limites de la vulgarité, et dans ses gestes, et par sa voix, et par tout ce qu'elle débitait en hurlant une espèce de musique rythmée si bruyante et si commune ! Les étudiants chantaient avec elle, et faisaient un tapage infernal ; chaque fois qu'elle sortait de scène, ils l'acclamaient ! !*

*Elle, suante, et haletante, sa grosse poitrine inondée, ses bras tout rouges par la chaleur, était comme un gros homard, les yeux hors de la tête, avec, sur le front, une frange de cheveux noirs crépés comme du crin, jamais je n'ai pu me rappeler de son nom, mais jamais je n'oublierai la tristesse infinie que ce soir là son image fit descendre dans mon cœur . . . j'étais ébahie, très stupéfiée, et par elle, et par ce public.*

*De la coulisse je me rendais compte de l'orgueil joyeux de la grosse dame qui évidemment était au ciel, car à la fin, elle dit en épongeant sa sueur : Bien vrai ! y en a pas beaucoup qui me dégoteront ce soir ! ! Et ce fut vrai, personne n'eut ce soir là autant de succès qu'elle.*

*Après la grosse dame, vint un petit chanteur qui l'hiver, en pleine saison, chantait à l'Eldorado de Paris.*

in a superb gown embroidered with delicate pearls, which I had worn in the last piece I played at the Variétés. I began to tremble with apprehension when I heard the audience (largely composed of students) according a rapturous reception to an enormously fat comedienne, whose gestures, as well as her voice, were too hopelessly vulgar for words, as she bawled out her inane songs, which had a sort of rhythm and tune about them certainly, but of a very blatant and commonplace kind. The students took up the choruses, and raised an infernal racket generally ; every time she went off she was loudly recalled.

Perspiring, panting, her fat body heaving with excitement, her arms red with the heat, she looked just like some great lobster. Her eyes were bulging out of her head ; on her forehead she wore a fringe of black hair, crimped stiff like a horse's mane. Never for the life of me have I been able to recall her name ; but I shall not easily forget the infinite sadness that descended on my soul at the sight of her. I was aghast—dumbfounded—both at her personality and the effect she had on the audience.

From the wings I noted the fat lady's delight and pride at her reception. She was evidently overcome with joy. When her turn was over, she remarked, while mopping the perspiration from her face, " Well, there won't be many able to give me points this evening, I know." And she was quite right. No one that evening made half the success she did.

Following the fat lady came a diminutive male singer, who sang, during the winter months, at the

*Je me rappelais avoir vu souvent son nom sur les affiches et programmes, il avait la spécialité des chansons à refrains tyroliens, lui aussi était venu pour faire l'ouverture du Casino de Lyon et devait après faire sa rentrée à l'Eldorado. Il s'appelait Wély, et était une étoile de demi grandeur des cafés concerts Parisiens.*

*Il entra en scène et chanta. Il s'agissait d'une dame qui était jolie, et se déshabillait dans une cabine de bain, pendant qu'un indiscret la regardait par un petit trou de la porte de la dite cabine. C'était d'une équivoque mêlée des troulalaïtou de la tyrolienne du chanteur, et accompagnée de gestes sans paroles qui ne laissaient aucun doute sur les beautés détaillées minutieusement de la Venus en maillot de bain. Le public en était en extase. . . .*

*Il eut son succès habituel, mais en sortant de scène il murmura quelques épithètes malveillantes à l'adresse du public qui, disait-il, n'aimait réellement que les grosses ordures . . . comme celles débitées par la grosse chanteuse.*

*Et ce fut mon tour . . . mon cœur se déclencha . . . j'entrais en scène, et "mon entrée" seule me valut des ah ah, des oh oh, ironiques, quelqu'un cria :*

*Oh lala ! Est elle maigre ! elle a tout laissé dans ses malles !!!*

*Et pendant deux ou trois longues minutes, j'entendis*

Eldorado in Paris. I remembered having seen his name on the playbills and programmes of that theatre. His speciality was singing songs with a Tyrolese refrain. He, like myself, had been engaged to assist at the re-opening of the Lyons Casino, and was due to return to the Eldorado later in the year. His name was Wély, and he was one of the lesser lights of the Parisian Cafés Concerts.

He went on to the stage and began his opening song. This had to do with a lady, apparently pretty, who was undressing in a bathing-machine, while some indiscreet individual peeped through the key-hole. The song was a mixture of suggestiveness and the usual "*troulalaïtou*" refrain that is part of all so-called Tyrolese songs. The singer's gestures left nothing to the imagination in the way of describing in infinite detail the physical beauties of this Venus in bathing costume! The audience went into ecstasies.

He had an excellent reception as usual, but as he went off I heard him murmuring an abusive epithet or two about an audience that seemed to care for nothing except the grossities with which the fat comedienne had regaled it.

Then came my turn. My heart was in my mouth as I stepped on to the stage. My entry was the signal for several ironical remarks, mingled with cat-calls.

"Oh, la la la!" somebody called out, "isn't she thin? She's left her figure in her trunk."

For several minutes, that seemed like an eternity, I listened to comments on my personal appearance.

*des moqueries sur mon corsage . . . trop plat ! Je ne perdis pas la tête et je chantais.*

*Mais alors s'éleva un tel vacarme, un tel charivari, que je ne pus continuer, il me fallut sortir de scène, au milieu de ma chanson. . . . Toute la salle me sifflait, j'essayais de revenir . . . mais le tapage fut tel, qu'il fallut baisser le rideau !*

*Je sortis de scène pâle comme une morte . . . je me sentais défaillir, mes yeux ne voyaient plus les marches de l'escalier que j'avais à descendre pour regagner ma loge . . . mon cœur semblait cesser de battre . . . je me sentais si froide, si glacée que j'eus peur. . . . Je restais longtemps assise dans ma loge avant de commencer à me déshabiller . . . quand on frappa à ma porte, et le directeur du Casino entra !*

*Eh bien, me dit-il assez doucement, qu'est ce qui vous a pris " d'entrer en scène " de la sorte ?*

*Comment donc suis-je entrée ? Comme une dame dans un salon ! me dit-il avec un rire moqueur. . . .*

*Eh bien ?*

*Mais ma chère, c'est bon à la Comédie Française cela ! Mais au music-hall c'est affreusement ridicule. Et puis, vous chantez avec un air tranquille, ni bras, ni jambes ne semblent remuer, mais c'est triste à mourir que de vous regarder !*

*Vous ne savez pas chanter ma chère . . . regardez les autres ! Enfin, dit-il, nous verrons demain . . . et il sortit.*

"She's as flat as a pancake!" someone shouted. But I kept my head and began to sing.

Then there arose such a clamour and babel, that I simply couldn't continue. I had to go off in the middle of my song. The whole hall started hissing me. I made an attempt to go back, but the tumult grew so tremendous that they had to lower the curtain.

I left the stage as pale as death, feeling as though I were going to faint. A mist swam before my eyes, so that I could scarcely see the steps that led down to my dressing-room. My heart seemed to stop beating; I was as cold as ice, so cold that I began to feel frightened. For a long while I sat perfectly motionless in my dressing-room without making any attempt to undress. Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and the manager entered.

"Well," he said, quite gently, "whatever induced you to go on like that?"

"Like what?" I asked.

"Why," said he, "like a society woman in a drawing-room."

And he gave me rather a mocking laugh.

"My dear girl," he continued, "that sort of thing is all right for the Comédie Française, but in a music-hall it looks positively ridiculous. Besides, you sing in far too quiet a way; why, you hardly stir a muscle, it makes one melancholy to look at you. You've got no idea of singing at all; try and imitate the others a bit."

"However," he said finally, as he went out, "we'll see how you get on to-morrow."

*Le lendemain, la Presse comme le Public me ridiculisait et j'eus un chagrin immense en pensant que peut-être jamais je ne saurais gagner ma vie et celle de ma mère largement ! Je ne cessais de me désoler, et de pleurer, j'avais le cœur brisé. On saurait mon insuccès de Lyon par le chanteur Wély qui bien sûr le raconterait à son retour à l'Eldorado, et alors que deviendrions nous, ma mère et moi ?*

*Je dus quitter le Casino de Lyon après cinq jours ! le public refusait de m'écouter et se moquait de moi dès qu'il me voyait paraître en scène . . . et pourtant je n'ai jamais changé ma manière ni d'entrer, ni de saluer, ni de chanter, je suis aujourd'hui ce que j'étais en ce temps là à Lyon, mais la nouveauté de ma personne et de mon genre était telle qu'elle me créa naturellement des hostilités. . . .*

*Les journaux me conseillaient de retourner jouer la comédie !! mon directeur en me payant mes dix jours (quoique n'ayant en réalité gagné que deux cents francs) me remit mes vingt louis de vingt francs, me suppliant de ne pas insister . . . et de cesser mes représentations . . . Nous eûmes une longue et paisible conversation et toute à mon idée, que malgré mon chagrin, je ne cessais d'envisager " réalisable." Je le quittais en lui disant :*

*Ecoutez, monsieur Verdellet, tel qu'il est le café concert*

The next day the papers endorsed the opinion of the audience and poked fun at me. It made me feel miserable to think that perhaps, after all, I should never be able to make a decent living for my mother and myself as a singer. I couldn't stop worrying and crying over my failure ; my heart seemed broken. Everybody would know about it from Wély, who would be certain to retail it on his return to the Eldorado. And then what was going to become of my mother and me ?

I had to leave the Casino de Lyon after five days. The audience steadily refused to listen to me, and broke out into open mockery as soon as I appeared on the stage. It is strange to reflect that I have never since altered in any single detail my mode of entry, nor of making my bow, nor even of singing. I am just the same to-day as I was then at Lyons. No doubt it was the novelty of my appearance and my style of singing that provoked immediate hostility in the audience.

All the critics advised me to return to the legitimate stage. The manager paid me for my ten days' engagement in full, though I had not really a right to more than 200 francs, but, when handing me the 400 francs, he begged me to give up singing as a profession.

We had a long and friendly conversation, all on the subject of my ambition, which, in spite of my recent mortification, I steadily persisted in believing would be realised some day. As we parted I said to him :

“ Look here, M. Verdellet, notwithstanding the



*est démodé, et laid !! commun !!! eh bien, souvenez vous de mon nom, et vous verrez . . . tenez, vous m'avez payé 40 francs par jour, cela ferait 1200 francs pour un mois, n'est-ce-pas ?*

*Oui . . . eh bien ? dit Verdellet.*

*Eh bien, avant un an, je suis sûr de revenir ici, à 1200 francs par soirée !*

*Il me regarda, et me dit : Vous êtes folle ! vous êtes tout à fait folle, ma pauvre enfant . . . non, voyez-vous, il faut retourner au théâtre des Variétés et continuer à jouer la comédie, car jamais, vous entendez, jamais vous ne saurez chanter une chanson . . . jamais, et puis ajouta - t - il, votre physique votre tenue, votre marche, sont peut-être très bien pour " le théâtre," mais au café concert il nous faut des femmes tout à fait différentes . . . d'aspect plus joyeux, bref, ma chère Mademoiselle Guilbert, retournez vite au théâtre des Variétés.*

*Toute la nuit je pleurais . . . j'avais pendant ces cinq jours écrit des lettres désespérées à ma mère, puis comme je cherchais la vraie raison de mon insuccès je me persuadais qu'il me faudrait une chanson qui mit bien en lumière " ma fantaisie." Alors la dernière nuit comme je ne pouvais pas dormir tant j'étais*

fact that the Café Concert is hopelessly out-of-date, and vulgar and commonplace into the bargain, I would ask you to keep my name in your mind—and you'll see ! You have paid me 40 francs a day—that is at the rate of 1200 francs a month, isn't it ? ”

“ Yes,” he said, “ what of it ? ”

“ Why,” I returned, “ before a year has elapsed I shall come back here and you will pay me 1200 francs a night ! ”

He looked at me sorrowfully.

“ You are mad,” he said, “ quite mad, my poor child. No, no, the best thing you can do is to return to the Variétés, and go on playing in comedy. You will never, never, learn to sing a song properly.”

“ Moreover,” he added, “ your physique, your appearance, your gait are all far better suited to a theatre. The Café Concert needs women of quite a different kind, and of a brighter appearance altogether. In short, my dear Mademoiselle Guilbert, there's only one course open to you, to return to the Variétés, and the sooner the better.”

I wept bitter tears all night long after that conversation. During the five days I had been in Lyons I had written despairing letters to my mother. I began to analyse the reasons for my want of success. After a while I was able to persuade myself that the real reason was the want of a proper song that would give me the chance of showing myself in my true light, and vindicate my conviction that I could succeed as a singer.

So utterly worn out that I was unable to sleep,

*énervée, je me mis à rimer 4 petits couplets sur le sujet suivant :*

*Une jeune fille de bonne famille a bu une coupe de champagne au mariage de sa sœur . . . elle est gentiment grise et dit des tas de bêtises, et j'appelais ma petit chanson : La Pocharde.*

*La chanson finie, avec un refrain que je prévoyais très à effet, je me levais pour enfin prendre le train qui devait me ramener à Paris—ma chanson de la Pocharde en poche—je ne me doutais pas que La Pocharde ferait un jour ma réputation !*

*Donc me voici en chemin de fer, mes 400 francs en poche. Arrivée à Paris, en donnant mon billet, je constate avec des larmes qu'on m'a volé mon argent dans ma poche!! Imaginez-vous mon désespoir? Je rentrais chez ma mère brisée de chagrin et de découragement.*

*Enfin je me remis à étudier mes pauvres chansons, et un jour ma mère qui m'écoutait me dit soudain :*

*Ecoute, ma chérie, je crois que tu ferais vraiment mieux de retourner à la comédie. . . . Je t'écoute depuis des jours et je t'assure que tu es à côté de la vérité . . . et elle me citait des noms des chanteuses Thérèse, Amiati, Duparc, qui, me disait elle, avaient de la voix, et quelque chose enfin que je n'avais pas . . . que je n'aurais jamais, jamais !!*

I lay awake that last night at Lyons, and commenced to string some verses together in my head, the idea of which was as follows :

A young girl of gentle birth has been drinking champagne at her sister's wedding, and is feeling just a little bit "squiffy." The result is that she talks a lot of nonsense. This was the main idea of the song, and I called it "La Pocharde."

Having finished it off, and added a refrain which I foresaw was going to prove very effective, I got up to catch the train which was to take me back to Paris. I had my precious song in my pocket. Somehow or other I felt convinced that "La Pocharde" was one day going to establish my reputation.

Here was I, then, in the train with my 400 francs in my pocket. I arrived at Paris, and when I came to give up my ticket found that the 400 francs had gone ! Someone had picked my pocket ! My despair may be easily imagined. I arrived at my mother's house absolutely heart-broken.

During the days that followed I set to work to study my poor songs. One day my mother, who was listening to me, suddenly turned to me and said :

" See here, my child, I really believe you would do better to return to the comedy stage. I have been listening to you for some days now, and I assure you you are on the wrong track."

Then she proceeded to quote the names of several singers who had become famous—Thérèse, Amiati, Duparc, who all, so she impressed on me, possessed not only a voice, but a something else that I should

*Cette fois, je fus assommée de surprise et de découragement et je pleurais ! et je pleurais !*

*Non ! non ! criais-je, c'est moi qui ai raison, c'est moi qui suis dans la vraie voie, il faut démolir la routine et faire " autre chose ! "*

*Enfin arriva le jour de mes débuts à l'Eldorado. On me fit chanter à 10 heures, en belle et bonne place, la salle était pleine—la musique se fit entendre et j'entrais en scène, sur les dernières mesures de l'orchestre. Un grand silence accueillit mon entrée sur scène. . . . Je commençais . . . le public très calme m'écouta . . . sans applaudir—mais comme je devais chanter deux chansons je revins et dans le même silence poli, mais terriblement significatif pour Paris, je commençais ma seconde chanson—et je sortis de scène, sans un pauvre petit bravo. . . . Je défaillais . . . je sentis à cette minute que tous mes pauvres rêves étaient brisés.*

*Ma mère avait donc raison ? Les Lyonnais avaient donc raison ? Je remontais dans ma loge si atrocement désolée, que je n'entendis pas une énorme chanteuse crier : C'est maigre comme deux Anglais, et ça voudrait être comique !*

*Ce fut une camarade qui plus tard me raconta la*



THE FIRST POSTER ANNOUNCING YVETTE GUILBERT'S



never acquire as long as I lived. I was overwhelmed with surprise and disappointment, and burst into tears.

"No, no," I cried, "I am right, I know I am. It is I who am on the right track ; all I have to do is to beat down the barriers of convention and strike out something new !"

At last the evening of my *début* at the Eldorado arrived. I was put on to sing at ten o'clock, in an excellent position on the programme, when the hall would be full. The orchestra struck up, and I walked on to the stage as the last bars died away. A profound silence greeted my appearance. I started my song. The audience listened to me in icy calmness, and made no sign of applauding when I had finished. I had to walk on for my second song in the same atmosphere of polite silence, a silence that was terribly significant in the case of a Parisian audience. I commenced my second song. Once more I left the stage without even so much as the sound of one poor "bravo !" I felt as though I must faint. At that moment it seemed to me that all my cherished dreams were shattered.

"So my mother was right, after all ?" I thought miserably. And the Lyons audience was right too ? I made my way back to my dressing-room in such an extremity of misery that I never heard a stout comedienne call out, "She's as thin as two English-women ! And yet she imagines she can succeed as a comic singer !"

This remark, which emanated from the "colossal"



*boutade de Mlle. Block, la chanteuse "colosse." Tout alla de la même lugubre façon pendant deux semaines. Je chantais devant l'indifférence générale—alors on me mit au programme à 8 heures. . . . Je commençais le spectacle !! personne n'était dans la salle !!!*

*Ma directrice, la chère femme, espérait lasser mon orgueil et par ce procédé me faire quitter la maison, rompre mon contrat . . . mais j'acceptais tout, car mon pain et celui de ma mère en dépendait. . . .*

*Petit à petit on le sut au théâtre des Variétés . . . on sut que "la petite Guilbert" était à l'Eldorado, on vint m'y voir, et un soir des camarades amenèrent un critique dramatique (M. Bisson)—ce fut le coup de grâce ! Celui là monta dans ma loge, me dire :*

*Ma chère, c'est effarant qu'une fille intelligente comme vous puisse croire qu'elle interressera jamais un public en faisant ce que vous faites ici ! Retournez jouer la comédie de suite ! n'essayez pas de chanter, vous n'avez aucun don pour cela ! Comment, vous avez entendu des mois chanter Judic aux Variétés et vous ne sentez pas toute la différence qu'il y a entre une vraie diseuse et vous ?*

*Mais, dis-je à M. Bisson, il n'y a pas qu'une manière au monde de chanter ? Judic n'a pas le monopole de la diction, elle a "son genre," je puis avoir "mon*



YVETTIE GUILBFRT

(From a p'st'l by Bennett on Locust)



singer Mademoiselle Block, was repeated to me afterwards by a friend. Things went on in the same melancholy fashion for two weeks. I continued to sing amidst this atmosphere of stony indifference, until at last they put me down to sing at eight o'clock, to open the programme before any of the audience arrived !

My manageress, the sweet thing, hoped that she might wear out my pride and patience, and induce me to cancel my contract. But I went on with it, for my daily bread, and my mother's, depended upon it.

Gradually they got to know at the Variétés that " La petite Guilbert " was singing at the Eldorado. Some of my fellow-artists there came to hear me. One night they brought a dramatic critic, M. Bisson, with them. This was the last straw. He came up to my dressing-room, and after a moment or two said :

" My dear child, it is terrible to think that an intelligent girl like you could imagine that she would be able to please an audience by doing the sort of thing you are doing here. Go back to the stage at once. Don't try to go in for singing, you have not the slightest gift for it. You have heard Judic sing at the Variétés for this last month or two ; don't you realise the immense gulf that lies between a real singer and yourself ? "

" But, M. Bisson," said I, " is there only one style of singing, then ? Judic doesn't possess a monopoly ; she has her style, why shouldn't I have mine ? Why

*genre ? ” chambarder la routine, et enfin créer autre chose ?*

*Non, non, me répliqua Bisson. La chanson, le détail du couplet, ce n'est point ce que vous faites.*

*Croyez moi, jouez la comédie . . . jouez la comédie . . . et pendant de longs jours, on monta charitablement m'avertir de “ ma fausse route.”*

*Enfin un soir la directrice de l'Eldorado, en me payant les 600 francs de mon premier mois me mit le marché en mains : ou, de quitter la maison, ou de rester à 200 francs par mois, pour jouer les petites comédies en un acte qui en ce temps là terminaient les spectacles de l'Eldorado. Je devais si j'acceptais ces 200 francs renoncer à mon tour de chant. . . . Car j'étais ridicule et je gelais le public, m'assura-t-elle. . . .*

*C'était une façon polie de me mettre à la porte . . . je le compris, et je vois encore la figure congestionnée de la pauvre dame quand avec un calme (qui n'était qu'apparent) je lui fis savoir que je préférerais partir de chez elle, n'ayant aucune joie à toucher 600 francs par mois, ni même 700 la seconde saison, car la “ seconde saison ” elle viendrait chez moi, cette fois me les offrir par soirée. . . .*

shouldn't I be able to get off the beaten track and create a line of my own ? ”

“ Impossible,” replied M. Bisson. “ The art of singing is something quite different from what you are doing now. Take my advice and stick to comedy.”

Day after day I continued to receive the same advice from well-disposed friends, which was all to the effect that I was on the wrong road, and had better turn back.

At last one evening the manageress, while paying me my first month's salary of 600 francs, placed an ultimatum in my hands—either to leave the theatre or to stay on at a salary of 200 francs a month, and play in the short one-act sketches, which at this period always rounded off the programme at the Eldorado. It meant, if I accepted, that I should have to give up my “ turn ” as a singer. For she told me plainly, that I cut a ridiculous figure in that rôle, and had the effect of absolutely freezing the public.

This was only a polite way of giving me my dismissal, I understood that well enough. I can see to this day the anxious face of the poor lady as I informed her, with outward calmness (inwardly I was anything but calm !) that I preferred to leave. I told her that I had no wish to go on handling her 600 francs a month, nor the 700 which I was to have had for my re-engagement in the following season. Before that time arrived, I assured her, she would come to me and offer me an engagement at 700 francs, not per month, but per night.

*Vous ferez, madame, comme Verdellet le directeur de Lyon . . . lui, il me donnera 1200 francs par jour. . . .*

*Elle retira sa voilette pour mieux me voir. . . .*

*Je lui semblais folle, ou idiote ou malade, bien certainement ; car elle me regarda et éclata d'un tel rire, que jamais je n'ai pu l'oublier.*

*Un rire moqueur, un rire méchant. . . .*

*Et mise à la porte de l'Eldorado je m'en fus à l'Eden Concert rue de Rivoli au coin du Bd. de Strasbourg.*

*On m'avait dit que la directrice était bonne, et je m'en fus lui conter mes essais et mes peines. Elle m'écouta, elle était en grand deuil d'une fille de mon âge, qu'elle venait de perdre et comme je lui disais : Ah madame, que c'est dur pour une jeune fille de mon âge de gagner son pain . . . je vis ses yeux se mouiller de larmes . . . puis elle resta un long moment sans parler. . . . J'étais émue sans savoir pourquoi, car à cette minute j'ignorais la cause de son deuil, et le rapprochement que son pauvre cœur faisait en silence, entre sa fille, son âge, et le mien.*

*Combien voulez-vous gagner, mademoiselle ?*

*600 francs, madame. . . .*

*C'est bien, dit-elle, je vous engage, et le contrat fut signé de suite. Quelle joie pour moi de retrouver du travail !*

*A l'Eden nous ne choisissons pas nous-mêmes*

"You will be in the same boat, Madame, with Verdellet, the manager of the Lyons Casino," I said ; "only he is going to offer me 1200 francs a night !"

She lifted her veil in order to study my face better. No doubt she thought I was mad or ill or something, for after looking at me hard for a moment or two she burst into a loud peal of laughter, the sound of which I have never forgotten. It was a spiteful, derisive laugh.

However, I left the Eldorado, and took an engagement at the Eden Concert in the rue de Rivoli, at the corner of the Boulevard de Strasbourg.

I had heard that the manageress of that house was a kind-hearted woman, so I told her all my experiences and my troubles. She had just lost a daughter of about my age, and when I said, "Ah, Madam, it is hard work for a girl of my age to earn her daily bread," I saw her eyes fill with tears.

For a long while she said nothing. I felt moved, though I did not know why, for at that time I was ignorant of her loss. She was evidently silently comparing me with her own daughter, who had been of the same tender age.

"What salary do you want, Mademoiselle ?" she asked at last.

"600 francs, Madame."

"Very well," said she, "I will engage you."

The contract was forthwith signed, and I left, overcome with joy at the prospect of being at work again.

We were not allowed to choose our own songs at



*nos chansons, la directrice, et un poète chansonnier de talent, le vieux père Baillet, qui avait connu le grand Béranger, décidaient, si oui ou non, telles chansons étaient bonnes pour la clientèle de famille spéciale à la maison. Le style de la maison différait totalement de celui de l'Eldorado. Ici tout était honnête, familiale, les petites pièces et les chansons étaient pour des jeunes filles, la décence exagérée amenait les familles les plus prudes à venir à l'Eden Concert avec leurs enfants, et enfin le public de l'endroit savait que chaque vendredi le poète célèbre François Coppée et le grand critique Francisque Sarcey venaient entendre les vieilles chansons classiques de la France d'autrefois. C'était la spécialité de la maison, que ces vieux refrains si terriblement difficiles à dire !*

*A cette époque, j'étais plongée dans l'art naturaliste, avec les écrivains comme Zola, Goncourt, Maupassant. Je ne rêvais que Vérité, je cherchais à réaliser en chansons ce qu'ils avaient réalisé en romans. . . . Quelquechose se dessinait dans ma tête, sans se préciser . . . mais en attendant je chantais ce qu'on me distribuait.*

*J'avais un succès très ordinaire, je faisais surtout comme " effet " celui d'une grande fille " mince comme un fil ! " Mes camarades m'appelaient " La Comique à rallonges ! " parce que déjà j'avais l'habitude d'allonger, de tendre le cou pour chanter. Le critique Sarcey parlait*

the Eden. The manageress, and a clever writer of lyric poetry, old Father Baillet, who had been a friend of Béranger, decided as to what songs were, or were not, suited to the special clientèle of the Eden which was quite a "family" one. The style of this theatre was entirely different from that of the Eldorado. The moral atmosphere of the place was clean and wholesome, the sketches and songs were such as young girls could safely be brought to hear. This high moral tone induced even the strictest parents to come and bring their children to the Eden Concert. And it was well known among the patrons of this establishment that every Friday the famous poet François Coppée, and the equally celebrated critic Francisque Sarcey, came to hear the classic songs of ancient France. This was a special feature of the place, the revival of those old songs, which are so terribly difficult to sing.

I had steeped myself at this period in the "realistic" art, as represented by such writers as Zola, Goncourt, and Maupassant. My only aim was realism; I tried to do in song what they had done in fiction. These ideas were gradually taking definite shape in my mind, but while waiting for them to mature I went on singing what I was given.

I only made a moderate success at the Eden. The chief effect I appear to have produced on the minds of the critics was that of being "a lanky girl as thin as a thread." The other artists gave me the nickname of "The Extending Comedienne." This was in reference to my habit of elongating my neck when

souvent dans ses feuilletons des vendredis classiques de l'Eden, il me mentionnait à peine, car les Étoiles féminines étaient des artistes oubliées à présent.

Quelquefois des étoiles des grands concerts, comme la Scala ou l'Eldorado, venaient en courtes représentations, et alors j'étais reléguée bien loin dans l'esprit de Sarcey et du public !! Pauvre Yvette ! . . .

Enfin, à la fin de la saison, au mois de juin, le concert, comme chaque année, fermait ses portes, pour ouvrir le 1<sup>er</sup> septembre. Je voulus alors utiliser mon Été, et priais un agent dramatique de me trouver un contrat n'importe où.

Une offre m'arriva d'aller à Liège au mois d'août. J'acceptais. Un mois pour 1200 francs, j'étais ravie.

De juin à août je m'occupais de mon répertoire, de celui que je rêvais créer—où trouverai-je la chanson qui ferait partir mon succès. . . . Où ? où ?

Un jour, je fouillais dans les cent petites boîtes de livres de toutes sortes, vendus au rabais sur les quais de la Seine, quand ma main tomba sur : Les chansons sans gêne. Auteur : Xanrof. J'ouvris le livre et debout sur le quai je lus le volume entier !!

Combien ? dis-je au marchand.

singing. Sarcey often spoke of the Classic Fridays at the Eden Concert in his critical articles. But he hardly ever mentioned me at all.

The "star" ladies were artists whose names are now forgotten.

Occasionally some of the stars of the bigger concerts, like the Scala or the Eldorado, gave short turns at the Eden, and then I was relegated to a place still further in the background in the minds of Sarcey and the general public. Poor Yvette! . . .

The season ended in June, and the Eden as usual closed its doors, to re-open them in September. I was anxious to make use of the summer months, so I approached an agent and begged him to find me an engagement, I didn't much care where.

Eventually I received an offer to go to Liège for the month of August, which I accepted. 1200 francs for a month's work! I was delighted.

From June to August I occupied my time in forming my répertoire, or rather the répertoire which I hoped one day to acquire. Where was I going to find the song which was to inaugurate my triumph? Where, oh where?

One day I was turning over the volumes of all kinds that are displayed in the boxes of the second-hand booksellers on the quays of the Seine, when I came upon a volume entitled "Les Chansons sans gêne," the author, Xanrof. I opened the book, and straightway, standing there on the quay, read through the whole volume.

"How much?" I asked the bookseller.

*Douze sous.*

*J'achetais le volume . . . la musique des couplets était notée. . . . J'étais haletante de joie. J'avais découvert les premiers bouts de bois de mon futur édifice !*

*J'achetais le petit livre, me promettant d'apprendre pour ma rentrée à l'Eden, plusieurs de ces satires si joyeuses, et si vraiment Parisiennes et vivantes.*

*C'était : " Le Fiacre."*

*" La complainte des 4 Z'Étudiants."*

*" Le bain du Modèle."*

*" L'Hôtel du No. 3."*

*" C'est le Printemps."*

*" Pauvre enfant c'était pour sa mère."*

*" De Profundis."*

*" La Brasserie du Pacha " ;*

*et tant d'autres couplets joyeux ! C'était Paris vu par un étudiant, un étudiant qui fréquentait le Chat Noir, ce cabaret où l'esprit pétillait ! Xanrof avait 24 ans, et toute sa verve jeune et satirique était dans ce premier livre, inconnu de tous, car personne ne chantait ses œuvres ! Lui aussi attendait. . . . Comme moi, il espérait tout, et ne voyait rien venir. Et voilà que nous allions nous sauver mutuellement.*

*Tout le mois de juillet je travaillais les chansons de Xanrof. J'en avais choisi trois pour commencer : Le Fiacre, Les 4 Z'Étudiants, L'Hôtel du No. 3, et comme*

" Twelve sous."

I bought it and took it home. The tunes were included in the book, and I was almost breathless with joy at the discovery. For I had found the first foundation-stone on which to build up the edifice of my future career.

I made up my mind before I returned to the Eden to learn several of these gay little satires, which were so vivid and so eminently Parisian.

The volume included the following :—

" Le Fiacre."

" La Complainte des 4 Z'Étudiants."

" Le bain du Modèle."

" L'Hôtel du No. 3."

" C'est le Printemps."

" Pauvre Enfant c'était pour sa mère."

" De Profundis."

" La Brasserie du Pacha " ;

and many other merry verses. This was Paris seen through the eyes of the student ; a student who was a frequenter of the Chat Noir, that home of scintillating wit. Xanrof was then about twenty-four, and had put the best of his youthful sparkle and satire into this volume. He was at that time quite unknown, and no one ever sang his songs. He also was awaiting his opportunity. Like me, he was hoping all things, and finding that realisation was long in coming. Now we were going to enjoy it together.

All through July I worked at Xanrof's songs. I had chosen three to begin with. They were—" Le Fiacre," " Les 4 Z'Étudiants," and " L'Hôtel de No. 3."

*à l'Eldorado j'avais chanté des couplets dont la musique était d'un compositeur nommé Byrec, j'écrivis à celui ci, lui demandant de vouloir bien me mettre des notes sur les paroles de la chanson faite par moi à Lyon : La Pocharde ! Il accepta.*

*Il m'avait vue à l'Eden concert pendant les 4 mois que j'y avais chanté, et il avait, lui, une espèce de confiance en moi, souvent même il m'avait dit : Comme vous chantez drôlement ! . . . mais c'est pas mal du tout . . . c'est curieux . . . et en tout cas, c'est très personnelle votre manière ! . . . " pas Café Concert " . . . mais ça viendra. . . .*

*Ça viendra ! Pauvre cher homme ! Et moi qui ne voulais pas que " Cela vienne !!! "*

*Il vint me voir à Asnières où j'habitais, ce brave Byrec, je lui lus ma chanson en lui fredonnant l'air du refrain que j'avais imaginé, il le trouva si bien approprié aux paroles qu'il le garda, et fit seulement la musique des couplets, qu'il m'envoya huit jours après.*

*Bien entendu je savais fort bien que mes paroles étaient médiocres, mais je savais aussi qu'elles étaient " scéniques," et c'était ce que je cherchais surtout.*

*J'appris donc " La Pocharde " et voulus l'essayer à mon premier voyage d'Été à Liège où je débute en août (1892). Ainsi que mes chansons de l'Eden Concert " Les Chansons de Xanrof " furent orchestrées, et j'emportais le tout, avec " Ma Pocharde," dont*

At the Eldorado I had sung a song the music of which had been composed by a man called Byrec, so I wrote to the latter and asked him to compose some music for the verses I had written at Lyons, entitled "La Pocharde," which he agreed to do.

He had heard me sing at the Eden Concert and had a certain amount of confidence in my abilities. He had often said to me :

"How quaintly you sing; but it's not half bad. It's a curious style, and quite individual to yourself. But it's not at all in the Café Concert style; no doubt you'll acquire that in time."

"Acquire that in time!" Poor man! He little understood that that was the one thing I did not want to acquire!

Byrec came to see me at Asnières, where I was then living; I read him my verses and hummed him the air of the refrain, for which I had got a sort of tune. He thought it so well suited to the words that he kept it, and only wrote new music for the verse part. This he sent me about a week afterwards.

I knew well enough that my verses were tolerably poor; but I knew, too, that they offered plenty of scope for "business," and that is what I particularly needed.

I proceeded to learn "La Pocharde" as I wanted to try it during my first summer engagement at Liège, where I was to appear in August (1892). As the Xanrof songs, as well as those I was singing at the Eden Concert, had already been orchestrated, I took the whole lot with me, and, of course, my "Pocharde."



*voici les très pauvres rimes, que ce grand poète de Catulle Mendès appelait : Le Petit Miracle—parce que, disait-il, c'était un miracle d'en tirer le triomphe que je leur dus !*

### *JE SUIS POCHARDE !*

*Chansonette comique*

*J'viens d'la noce à ma sœur Annette  
Et comm' le champagne y pleuvait  
Je n'vous l'cach' pas je suis pompette  
Car j'ai pincé mon p'tit plumet,  
Je sens flageoler mes guiboles  
J'ai l'cœur guill' ret, l'air folichon,  
J' suis prête à fair' des cabrioles  
Quand j'ai bu du Moet-et-Chandon*

### *Refrain*

*Je suis pochard'  
J' dis des bêtises  
J' suis grise  
Mais ça me regarde  
Qu'est c'que vous voulez que j'vous dise ?  
Je suis pocharde !*

*Je fais très-rar' ment des folies,  
Mais quand j'en fais, ah ! nom de nom !  
Je dépass' tout's les fantaisies :  
J' suis plus une fill' j' suis un garçon ;*

Here are the four poor verses of "La Pocharde," a song which that fine poet Catulle Mendès used to call "The Little Miracle," because, as he said, it seemed a miracle that I should have been able to make the success out of it I did.

# JE SUIS POCHARDE !

## CHANSONETTE COMIQUE

J'viens d'la noce à ma sœur Annette  
Et comm' le champagne y pleuvait  
Je n'vous l'cach' pas je suis pompette  
Car j'ai pincé mon p'tit plumet,  
Je sens flageoler mes guiboles  
J'ai l'cœur guill' ret, l'air folichon,  
J' suis prête à fair' des cabrioles  
Quand j'ai bu du Moët-et-Chandon.

## REFRAIN

Je suis pochard'  
J' dis des bêtises  
J' suis grise  
Mais ça me regarde  
Qu'est c'que vous voulez que j'vous dise ?  
Je suis pocharde !

Je fais très-rar' ment des folies,  
Mais quand j'en fais, ah ! nom de nom !  
Je dépass' tout's les fantaisies :  
J' suis plus une fill' j' suis un garçon ;

*A moi l' plaisir, la rigolade,  
J' m'en fais craquer l' corset d'aplomb,  
Car y a pas, moi, faut que j' cascade  
Quand j'ai bu du Moet-et-Chandon.*

*Au Refrain.*

*J' dis aux gens qui m' reproch'nt la chose,  
Remisez donc vos airs de deuil,  
Car c'est l'Champagn' qu'en est la cause  
Si j'ai parfois Mariann' dans l'œil,  
Et puis j' trouv' que c'est toujours bête  
De vouloir cacher son pompon,  
C'est pas un crim' que d'êtr' pompette  
Et d'aimer le Moet-et-Chandon.*

*Au Refrain.*

## 4

*Avoir son grain dans la boussole  
Voyons, ça n'est pas un défaut ?  
Moi, j' ris, je chant', je batifole,  
Tou's les fois qu' j'ai mon coup d' sirop.  
Alors, quoi ? pour un' petit' mèche  
Faudrait-y m' battre à coups d'chausson ?  
J'aim' mieux qu'on m' batt' que d' batt'r la dèche,  
J' pourrais plus boir' d' Moet-et-Chandon.*

*Au Refrain.*

*Donc j'arrivais à Liège (Belgique) en août. Je  
chantais là :*

*" A 35 ans."*

*" Dans les chasseurs."*

*" Joséphine elle est malade."*

*" Le Fiacre."*

A moi l' plaisir, la rigolade,  
J' m'en fais craquer l' corset d'aplomb,  
Car y a pas, moi, faut que j' cascade  
Quand j'ai bu du Moët-et-Chandon.

Au Refrain.

3

J' dis aux gens qui m' reproch'nt la chose,  
Remisez donc vos airs de deuil,  
Car c'est l'Champagn' qu'en est la cause  
Si j'ai parfois Mariann' dans l'œil,  
Et puis j' trouv' que c'est toujours bête  
De vouloir cacher son pompon,  
C'est pas un crim' que d'êtr' pompette  
Et d'aimer le Moët-et-Chandon.

Au Refrain.

Avoir son grain dans la boussole  
Voyons, ça n'est pas un défaut ?  
Moi, j' ris, je chant', je batifole,  
Tout's les fois qu' j'ai mon coup d' sirop.  
Alors, quoi ? pour un' petit' mèche  
Faudrait-y m' battre à coups d'chausson ?  
J'aim' mieux qu'on m' batt' que d' battr' la dèche,  
J' pourrais plus boir' d' Moët-et-Chandon.

Au Refrain.

I duly arrived at Liège in August. The songs I sang there were :

" A 35 ans."

" Dans les chasseurs."

" Joséphine elle est malade."

" Le Fiacre."

*" Les 4 Z'Étudiants."*

*" L'Hôtel de No. 3."*

*" La Pocharde "—*

*et jugez de ma stupeur quand dès les premières chansons, la salle entière acclama la pauvre Yvette ! On applaudissait, on trépignait, on m'appelait. Je vins saluer plus de dix fois et je dus chanter huit chansons, dont ma " Pocharde " pour finir. Alors ce fut inimaginable. . . . Ma pauvre petite chansonette m'apportait la fortune, le grand succès, une petite gloire . . . !*

*J'étais abrutie de joie, de stupeur, je pleurais (de joie cette fois). Le lendemain les journaux Belges me consacraient des colonnes de louanges, où les mots de : Nouveau, inédit, original, diction admirable, se retrouvent dans toutes les critiques.*

*Le bruit de mon succès arriva à Bruxelles et, un soir, le directeur de l'Alcazar de Bruxelles vint m'offrir de chanter chez lui 15 jours à raison de cent francs par jour ! j'étais folle de joie—mais tout de même ce furent les Liègeois qui les premiers comprirent mon art—je leur garde une affectueuse et si tendre gratitude !*

*Le succès me suivit à Bruxelles et j'eus une telle vogue, que je signais un contrat à raison de 300 francs par jour pour l'Été suivant, car l'hiver j'étais engagée encore pour deux ans à L'Eden Concert. La Presse*

"Les 4 Z'Étudiants."

"L'Hôtel de No. 3."

"La Pocharde."

You may imagine my surprise when at my very first song the entire audience broke out into transports of enthusiasm over poor Yvette. They applauded, stamped on the floor, and shouted out my name. I had to go on and bow at least ten times, and I had to sing eight songs in all, "La Pocharde" to finish up with. It was hardly credible that my poor little song should bring me fortune, success, fame, at last.

I was quite overcome with delight and amazement ; I wept—but this time they were tears of joy. The next day the Belgian papers gave me columns of nothing but praise, in which the words "novel," "fresh," "original," and "wonderful diction" were freely repeated.

The rumour of my success reached Brussels, and one evening the manager of the Alcazar Theatre in that city came over with an offer of a fortnight's engagement at a salary of 100 francs a day. I was in ecstasies !

But all the same it was the public of Liège who were the first to show an understanding of my art, and I have ever since retained a feeling of affection for them, mingled with a warm gratitude.

The success I had made at Liège followed me to Brussels, and I became so much the fashion that I soon afterwards signed a contract at 300 francs a day for the following summer, as during the winter season I was still engaged to the Eden Concert for the

*de Bruxelles fut aussi encourageant que celle de Liège— bref je rentrais à Paris, reassurée, heureuse ! heureuse ! Maintenant, me disais-je, il faut conquérir Paris. . . .*

*Je rentrais donc le 15 septembre à L'Eden Concert. J'avais entretemps envoyé tous mes splendides articles à Madame Saint Ange, ma directrice, et quelle ne fut pas ma stupeur de la voir me recevoir avec son habituelle impassible froideur triste, o si triste !*

*Vous nous chanterez ces fameuses nouvelles chansons, Mademoiselle Yvette, et le père Baillet et moi, nous verrons si elles conviennent à notre maison. . . .*

*Je fis organiser une répétition toute spéciale . . . l'effet fut terrible, sauf " La Pocharde," rien ne me fut permis.*

*Ce sont des chansons d'artistes, de peintres, des chansons de studio, me dit-elle, . . . le public Parisien n'en voudra pas.*

*Toute la matinée j'insistais, je suppliais qu'on me les laisse essayer un soir, rien qu'un soir. Elle ne voulut rien entendre, et je dus me soumettre. . . . Mais j'avais espoir que " La Pocharde " me ferait avancer en grade. . . .*

*En effet, devant le succès fait par le public à mes couplets, je chantais à 10 heures, au lieu de neuf, ce qui était l'heure " des Etoiles." Chanter à 10 heures au beau milieu de la soirée ! c'était le rêve de toutes les artistes de L'Eden ; et pendant un mois, on me permit de garder ma chanson au programme, c'était*

next two years. The Brussels Press was as kind to me as that of Liège had been. I returned home confident and happy. Now, I thought, I had got to conquer Paris.

It was on the 15th September that I made my reappearance at the Eden Concert. I had in the meanwhile sent Madame Saint Ange, the manageress, all my splendid notices. To my astonishment she received me in the same calm, frigid, mournful manner as usual—she was a terribly mournful person !

“ Sing us these famous new songs of yours, Mademoiselle Yvette,” she said, “ and Father Baillet and I will see whether they suit our theatre.”

I gave a special rehearsal, but the effect was disastrous. The only one of the songs they would allow me to sing was “ La Pocharde.”

“ They are songs for the café and the studio,” she told me. “ The Parisian public wouldn’t care for them.”

The whole morning I urged them to let me have my own way ; I begged, implored them to allow me to try the songs just for one evening. But the manageress wouldn’t listen to me, and I had to give way. I could only hope that “ La Pocharde ” would raise me a step in the public estimation.

As a matter of fact, owing to the success of my songs, I was put on to sing at ten o’clock, the time allotted to the “ stars,” instead of at nine as formerly. To be on at ten in a good programme was the dream of every artist at the Eden. And I achieved it ! Besides which, they allowed me to keep the same



*une faveur, car la règle était de changer son répertoire tous les quinze jours. Donc, pendant 4 semaines je chantais " La Pocharde."*

*J'espérais toujours que Sarcey ou un autre des journalistes qui venaient au concert parlerait de moi . . . mais le silence restait le même!! et à part la petite clientèle des modestes bourgeois du quartier, personne ne daignait s'apercevoir de moi . . . et j'étais revenue à mes petits 20 francs par jour . . . puisque mon contrat était de 600 francs par mois—et je rageais en pensant que mon engagement à l'Eden était signé pour trois années ! J'allais un jour demander à ma directrice une réelle augmentation, il y avait près de 8 mois que j'étais sa pensionnaire, et vu mes services j'espérais un beau geste de la part de Madame Saint Ange. Mais elle refusa net dès les premiers mots—alors je n'eus plus aucune prudence—j'oubliais que je pouvais rester sans pain, si je quittais l'Eden.*

*Où irai-je ? Mais ma vivacité fut plus forte que mon raisonnement, et heureusement, car ce fut cette nervosité soudaine qui précipita le grand essor de mon vol . . . vers la gloire, la petite gloire, qui n'est pas sans amertume pour les êtres, qui nés pauvres, comme moi, ne pensent jamais que " la réussite " puisse créer de la haine envieuse autour de ceux que la chance favorise.*

song on the programme for four consecutive weeks, which was a distinct mark of favour, as the rule was for a singer to vary her *répertoire* every fortnight. Thus I sang "La Pocharde" for a whole month.

I kept on hoping that Sarcey or one of the other critics who used to come to the Eden would give me a line in their papers, but they maintained a conservative silence. Save for my own little following among the "bourgeois" of the quarter, no one deigned to take the slightest notice of me.

I had, of course, gone back to my modest 20 francs a day, as my contract was for 600 francs a month; and I was furious to think that it held good for three years. One day I asked the manageress for a rise. I had been there nearly eight months, and I hoped, considering my services, that Madame Saint Ange would agree. But my first words produced a blank refusal, a refusal that afterwards led me to throw prudence to the winds, and to forget that if I left the Eden I might be unable to get an engagement elsewhere, and so be left without the means of earning a livelihood.

But my enthusiasm outran my discretion, and fortunately, as it happened, for it was this sudden impulse on my part which proved to be the turning-point in my career and the first real step on the road to fame, that fame which is such a small thing after all, and has its moments of bitterness for all who, like me, began life in poverty, and never dreamt that success could engender envy and malice towards those whom fortune has favoured.

*Donc, Madame Saint Ange me refusa l'augmentation demandée, alors très tranquillement elle m'expliqua que mes succès Belges ne signifiaient rien pour Paris, la preuve, me dit-elle, c'est qu'aucune de ces critiques superbes n'a été reproduite par un journal Parisien. . . . J'étais certaine, continuait Madame Saint Ange, que cela vous tournerait la tête, Mademoiselle . . . mais, ce n'est pas le petit succès que vous venez d'obtenir avec "La Pocharde" qui fait de vous l'égale d'une Madame Duparc dont vous souhaitez les appointements.*

*Oh, répondis-je, Madame Duparc gagne à Paris, à l'Eldorado, au moins cent francs par jour, Madame ! Et après tout, je ne sais pas si je n'ai pas autant de talent qu'elle. . . .*

*A ces mots, ma directrice éclata de rire. C'était la première et la vraiment seule fois que j'ai vu cette femme avoir un accès de gaieté. . . . En tout cas, je fus horriblement froissée. Que de fois j'ai ri depuis en repensant à cette scène ! Mais je fus si vexée que je lui dis :*

*Eh bien, Madame, puisque vous croyez que je n'ai pas au moins autant de talent que Mlle. Duparc, c'est que jamais vous ne me comprendrez . . . et que vous ne devinez pas ce que je puis faire ! dans ce cas là il vaut mieux nous séparer. . . .*

*Ma vanité imbécile était à ce moment si exaspérée, que je ne me rendis pas compte de l'idiotie de mes paroles.*

*En tout cas, me dit-elle, puisque vous-même voulez rompre notre contrat, Mademoiselle, n'oubliez pas que vous avez un dédit de 10,000 francs à me verser !*

To return to Madame Saint Ange.

She refused to give me a rise, and then calmly proceeded to tell me that my successes in Belgium went for nothing in Paris, in proof of which statement she cited the fact that none of my magnificent notices had been reproduced in any of the Parisian papers.

"I was quite sure, young lady," she added, "that your head would be turned by all this; but the tiny success you have had with "La Pocharde" does not make you the equal of Madame Duparc, and yet you are asking for a salary equal to hers!"

"Oh," I replied, "Madame Duparc gets at least 100 francs a night at the Eldorado. But I'm not so sure, after all, that I do not possess just as much talent as she does."

The manageress burst out laughing. It was actually the first time I had ever seen her give way to merriment! I was horribly offended for the moment, though I have often laughed since in recalling the scene. I was so annoyed that I said,

"Very well, Madame, since you seem to think that I haven't even as much talent as Madame Duparc, it is evident that you will never understand me, nor grasp what I am capable of. Under those circumstances we had better part company."

My silly vanity was so much up in arms that I never stopped to consider the foolishness of what I was saying.

"Don't forget," replied the manageress, "that if you are desirous of cancelling your contract, you will have a fine of 10,000 francs to pay!"

*Je devins toute froide à ces mots . . . mais poussée par je ne sais quelle audace, je criais :*

*C'est entendu, c'est entendu, je vous paierai vos 10,000 francs ! et je partis.*

*Depuis quelques mois mon vieil ami Zidler était le directeur d'un music-hall-bal, qui s'appelle : Le Moulin Rouge. L'Hippodrome ayant été démoli, Zidler avait créé ce bal music-hall, où tout Montmartre se trouvait chaque jour, mêlé à l'aristocratie du faubourg St Germain, venant là se distraire aux danses de la Goulue, et de Grille d'égout. Le Bal commençait à 10 heures. Une partie concert commençait à 8 heures et finissait à 9.45 heures.*

*C'est donc à Zidler que je pensais en quittant L'Eden Concert. Je lui racontais mon violent départ de chez Madame Saint Ange. Il m'approuva.*

*Tu as bien fait, me dit-il, jamais tu n'aurais eu la chance de parvenir à quelque chose devant un public habitué aux fadeurs du répertoire de l'Eden ; tu es moderne, essentiellement moderne ! . . . Alors, je dis :*

*Laissez moi chanter chez vous, Monsieur Zidler ; . . . à Montmartre on me comprendra, je chanterai mon répertoire applaudi à Liège et à Bruxelles, et vous verrez que mon succès Parisien partira de chez vous.*

*Je veux bien ma petite, me dit Zidler, mais tu*

I turned cold all over, but, impelled by some mad impulse, I cried :

“ Very well, I understand. The 10,000 francs shall be paid.”

Then I turned and left the theatre.

For the last few months my old friend Zidler had been the manager of a Music and Dancing Hall, called *Le Moulin Rouge*, the Hippodrome having been pulled down. This idea of a hall for music and dancing combined was Zidler's own, and all Montmartre used to flock thither night after night, mingled with the aristocracy of the Faubourg St Germain, to watch the dance of “ *la Goulue* ” and of the “ *Grille d'égout*.” Dancing began at ten o'clock ; there was a concert at eight o'clock which was over by a quarter to ten.

When I left the Eden Concert I immediately thought of Zidler. I told him of my angry parting with Madame Saint Ange, and he expressed his approval of the step I had taken.

“ You have acted rightly,” he said, “ you would never have had the chance of making a name by singing to a public that is used to the insipidities of the Eden. You are nothing if not modern and up-to-date.”

“ Let me sing at your hall, M. Zidler,” I said. “ Montmartre will understand me. I will sing the songs that were so popular at Liège and Brussels, and my first real Parisian success shall be made with you.”

“ I should be only too pleased, my child,” replied

sais bien qu'ici les étoiles ont des appointements médiocres. . . .

Ça ne fait rien, je sens que ma carrière commencera ici, à Montmartre.

Il fut convenu que je toucherais comme à l'Eden 600 francs par mois, soit encore 20 francs par jour.

Mais, me dit Zidler, tu as le droit de t'en aller si tu trouves mieux . . . tu es ici comme une amie, comme ma fille, car j'ai pour tes luttes et tes efforts une sympathie très affectueuse.

C'est que, vois-tu, moi aussi dit-il, j'ai eu une jeunesse terriblement malheureuse, moi aussi, j'ai eu des jours sans pain . . . aujourd'hui je suis riche, heureux, et j'ai idée que tu feras comme moi si tu travailles dur, Yvette.

J'ai du courage et de la volonté, et qui sait, j'ai peut-être du talent, Monsieur Zidler.

Eh bien, on le verra ; tu débiteras la semaine prochaine ici.

Il m'expliqua que quant à mon dédit de 10,000 francs à payer à Mlle. Saint Ange je n'avais pas à m'en tourmenter trop, car la loi n'autorisait qu'une retenue d'un quart des appointements mensuels. Donc il s'agissait d'avoir de la patience pour se liquider petit à petit de cette dette.

Mes débuts au Moulin Rouge furent inaperçus. Ni la Presse, ni le Public ne me donnèrent des batte-

Zidler. "But you must remember we can't afford to pay star salaries here."

"Never mind," I cried, "I feel convinced that I shall win my first success here, in Montmartre."

It was finally settled that I should have the same salary as I had been getting at the Eden: 600 francs a month, equivalent to 20 francs a day.

"But," said Zidler, in making the arrangement, "you will have the right of leaving at any moment if you get a better offer. You will come here as my friend, as my daughter almost, for I have taken a very warm interest in your struggles for success."

"Besides," he added, "I myself had a very unhappy youth, and went through a good many privations. To-day I am well-off and contented, and I have an idea that you will be in the same position one day if you work hard, Yvette."

"I have plenty of courage, and the desire to succeed, M. Zidler," I answered; "and perhaps—who knows—a little talent also."

"Very well, we shall see," he replied. "Your engagement will begin next week."

As to my fine of 10,000 francs, which Madame Saint Ange had said I should have to pay, he told me not to worry too much about that. The law would never sanction a fine that amounted to more than a quarter of my monthly salaries. He advised me to be patient, and pay it off little by little, as and when I could.

My appearance at the Moulin Rouge attracted no attention whatever. Neither the press nor the public




*ments de cœur . . . et des semaines et des semaines se passèrent, quand un jour, un homme de lettres M. René Maizeroy, vint au Moulin Rouge et, par hasard, assista à la partie de concert. Le lendemain, un article me fut consacré par lui dans le "Gil Blas." Je fus informée de la chose par le brave Zidler qui brandissait le journal comme un étendard de victoire !*

*Il y avait dans cet article, une telle description pittoresque de mon physique, que des gens, des artistes (et des gens du monde) se dérangèrent pour voir l'étrange petite femme qui chantait au Moulin Rouge. . . . Et les peintres, les sculpteurs, les chansonniers, les poètes, tout le Montmartre artiste défila chez Zidler et vint "poser les premières pierres" Parisiennes de ma réputation. . . . J'avais vaincu la misère !*

*Puis un cabaret voisin du Moulin Rouge m'offrit 40 francs par soirée, si, après ma représentation au Moulin, je consentais à venir chanter—cela me fit 60 francs par jour. C'était la fortune. Ma mère et moi étions sauvées.*

*Ce cabaret où ne fréquentait que le Montmartre des studios, s'appelait le Divan Japonais.*

*O souvenirs heureux de ma jeunesse, de mes premières grandes minutes d'indépendance, jamais je ne vous oublierai ! Quelles acclamations folles sur cette petite scène si basse, que ma tête touchait presque le plafond ! Et tous ces gens qui chaque soir quittaient le Moulin Rouge en même temps que moi—t'en souviens-tu, Maurice*



BUNNEVITZ Y LOEFEN  
1904

YVETTE GUILBERT

(krom 1 pastel by Bunnevitze o i Loefen)



gave me any encouragement. Week after week passed, until one day a literary critic, M. René Maizeroy, happened to look in at the Moulin Rouge while the concert was in progress. The following day he devoted an article to me in "Gil Blas." I was informed of it by Zidler, who rushed in brandishing the paper like a flag of victory.

The article contained a very picturesquely-worded account of my personal appearance, and excited the interest of many people, both of the theatrical and the fashionable world, who came out of their way to see the "quaint little woman" who was singing at the Moulin Rouge. Painters, sculptors, song-writers, poets, the whole of the artistic population of Montmartre, flocked to Zidler's Hall, and by so doing "laid the first stones" of my Parisian reputation.

I had done with poverty for ever!

Very shortly afterwards a neighbouring Hall offered me 40 francs a night, to perform there after I had finished my turn at the Moulin Rouge. I accepted this offer, which brought my total earnings up to 60 francs a day. It was a veritable fortune, and my mother's and my salvation.

All the painters of Montmartre used to frequent this Hall, which was known as the "Divan Japonais."

Shall I ever forget those first glorious days of independence? Or the wild bursts of enthusiasm that filled that Hall, the ceiling of which was so low that my head almost touched it! Or the crowds who used to leave the Moulin Rouge every evening at the same time as I did—do you remember, Maurice

*Donnay ?—pour arriver au Divan Japonais entendre de nouvelles chansons.*

*Quelle cohue ! Quelle fumée ! quelle gaité, quelle jeunesse amusée et spirituelle était dans l'air . . . pendant que Jehan Sarrazin, le directeur—poète, faisait le tour des chaises vendant des olives à ses clients. . . . Il allait, un petit tonneau sous le bras. Il enveloppait sa marchandise dans des feuillets poétiques, ses œuvres, non vendues par les mauvais libraires . . . à Paris.*

*C'est de Montmartre qu'est partie ma réputation. Tout Paris monta là haut. Comment, pourquoi suis-je alors semblée " perverse " à Jean Lorraine, et à tant d'autres hommes de lettres célèbres, je n'en sais rien ! Mais on me trouva " divinement perverse " (comme écrivit Jean Lorraine) alors que je n'étais qu'ironique (étant moqueuse) et douloureuse, ayant connu la misère. . . . Enfin voilà, on me fit " Perverse," Morbide, Macabre, etc., etc. Je racontais la chose à Auguste Vacquerie, l'ancien directeur de la Comédie Française.*

*Mais qu'est-ce que cela peut bien vous faire, ma chère petite ? Laissez dire . . . et devenez une belle artiste, vous le pouvez, mais ne restez pas au music-hall, vous avez les dons d'une admirable comédienne . . . faites du théâtre, c'est trop dommage de ne pas mieux utiliser un talent pareil.*

*Vacquerie et beaucoup d'autres me conseillèrent de la*

Donnay?—in order to go on to the “*Divan Japonais*” and hear some more of my songs.

Oh, the crowd, and the smoke, and the gaiety! The spirit of wit and eternal youth was in the air; while Jehan Sarrazin, the manager-poet, went round from chair to chair selling his olives. I can see him now, with his little cask under his arm! His wares were wrapped up in leaflets on which were printed his poems—those great works which the wicked Paris Libraries refused to sell!

It was Montmartre that established the beginnings of my reputation. All Paris came to the Moulin Rouge. Why it was that I was dubbed “perverse” by Jean Lorraine, and so many other well-known critics, I can’t imagine. “Divinely perverse” was what Jean Lorraine called me. But, as a matter of fact, my cynicism was only born of a spirit of raillery; and my pathos was the pathos of one who had known poverty and wretchedness.

Still they insisted on calling me “perverse,” “morbid,” “macabre,” and so on. I mentioned this once to Auguste Vacquerie, the former manager of the Comédie Française.

“But what does it matter, my dear girl?” said he. “Let them say it, it won’t do you any harm. Develop into a first-rate artist, and, above all, don’t remain on the music halls. You have all the attributes of an excellent comedy actress. Stick to the theatre, it is a great pity not to make a better use of your talents.”

Not only Vacquerie but many other notable men

*même façon, Zola, Goncourt, et Alphonse Daudet et Octave Mirbeau, et Marcel Prévost—et tout le monde !*

*Mon succès Montmartrois me fit signer à raison de cent francs par jour un contrat avec le "Concert Parisien," cent francs la première année—200 francs la seconde année et 300 francs la troisième année—ma mère et moi étions délivrées de tous soucis.*

*Je débutais en septembre 1892 à ce concert, et ma popularité fut si vite acquise que mon directeur, de peur de me voir enlevée par l'Eldorado, changea de suite les termes de notre contrat, et me donna 300 francs par jour au lieu des 100 francs stipulés !*

*Mais comme la directrice de l'Eldorado m'écrivit qu'elle n'hésiterait pas à me payer le double j'allais consulter Zidler. Il me dit de montrer cette lettre au directeur du Concert Parisien qui consentit à me donner ce que m'offrait mon ancienne directrice de l'Eldorado, stupéfiée elle aussi de mon ascension, qu'elle avait si peu encouragée. . . . Elle fut prise de rage quand, venue chercher ma réponse, je lui déclarais que je ne voulais pas quitter le Concert Parisien où venait de naître ma petite popularité. Je chantais là 3 années de suite. Puis un procès, que je gagnais du reste, me fit quitter le Concert Parisien. La Scala m'engagea pour trois ans, et renouvela trois fois*

gave me the same advice ; among them Zola, Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, Octave Mirbeau, and Marcel Prévost—everybody, in fact.

My success in Montmartre was followed by a contract with the Concert Parisien at a salary of 100 francs a night, which was to be raised to 200 francs a night for the second year, and 300 for the third. My mother and I were truly delivered out of all our troubles !

I began my engagement here in September 1892, and my popularity was so instantaneous that my manager, fearing I might be carried off by the Eldorado, altered my contract straight away, and paid me 300 francs a night instead of the 100 originally arranged.

The manageress of the Eldorado then offered to pay me double what I was getting at the Concert Parisien. I consulted Zidler on the subject. He advised me to show the letter to my manager, and the latter promptly agreed to pay me the salary offered by my former manageress at the Eldorado. This lady was amazed at my success, which she had done so little to encourage. And she was finely angry when she called to hear my decision, and I told her that I didn't care to leave the Concert Parisien, where I had had my first big success.

I sang at this Hall for three years in succession, and then left as the result of a lawsuit, which I won, by the way.

I next took an engagement at the Scala. The contract was originally for three years, but it was renewed three times, and I sang there for nine years



*mon contrat. J'y restais donc neuf années consécutives, et chaque Été je chantais aux Champs Elysées où pour deux mois je touchais cinquante mille francs.*

*J'ai oublié de dire que juste un an après mes débuts à Lyon, j'y retournais comme je l'avais prédit à raison de 1200 francs par soirée. Je fus acclamée cette fois par le public. . . . Pourquoi ? Je ne sais pas . . . car je m'étais payé le plaisir de lui chanter les mêmes chansons . . . celles qu'il avait sifflé 12 mois avant. Ah que les artistes ont donc des minutes agréables dans leur vie . . . et que ce succès de Lyon me fut directement instructif. . . . Dieu, que les foules sont donc curieuses . . . !*

*Et à Paris, comme ailleurs, je voyais tous les gens qui m'avaient tant découragée, me regarder avec une stupeur et une gêne bien comiques. Cela durera un an, affirmaient-ils.*

*Mais mon exemple doit servir à d'autres. La volonté, soutenue par un travail excessif, mène à tout. Depuis mes débuts je travaille plusieurs heures chaque jour le matin, et le soir dans mon lit, je lis et note des chansons, que je chanterai plus tard. C'est ainsi que dès la première année, j'ai commencé à collectionner les chansons des siècles passés, me disant que dans 10 ans je les ferai connaître. Et voilà cinq ans que je les chante après les avoir mises de côté, étudiées avec soin il y a 18 ans !*

*En chemin de fer une valise-bibliothèque me suit,*

in succession. During the summer months in each year I sang at the Champs Elysées, where they paid me 50,000 francs for a two months' engagement.

I had forgotten to mention that exactly a year after my first début at Lyons I returned there at a salary of 1200 francs a night, as I had predicted. And this time the audience received me with acclamations. I wonder why? For it so happened that I made a special point of singing the same songs which they had greeted with hisses twelve months before. There are certain "great" moments in the life of an artist, and to me this success at Lyons was one of them. It also taught me many things, one of which was that audiences are strange beings.

In Paris, too, as elsewhere, the people who had been so ready to discourage me were now filled with astonishment at my success, and with a mortification that was truly ludicrous. But they consoled themselves by saying that it wouldn't last a year!

My experience ought to be of some use to others. Determination and hard work can do anything. Ever since my first engagement I have worked for several hours every morning, while at night I read through and study in bed the songs I am going to sing. It was in this way that I began to form from the very beginning my collection of old songs, in the hope that in about ten years' time I might make them known. Now for five years I have been singing songs that I had laid aside after having carefully learnt them eighteen years ago.

I always take a bag filled with books with me on a

*et je lis et note des chansons. Je suis une habituée des bibliothèques, et j'ai toujours dix ans de travail en préparation ! Si je vivais 500 ans, j'aurais de quoi remplir ma vie. Car la chanson est une mine si ancienne et si riche ! J'aime la chanson que je chante, mais j'adore celle que je chanterai. J'aime le travail et mon art avec passion, je n'ai jamais de vacances, car partout, à la mer ou à la montagne, j'emporte du travail — c'est mon repos à moi — ma fête.*

*J'ai donc chanté 12 ans à Paris sans jamais quitter la capitale que pour de petits voyages, mais après mon mariage, (en 1900) je profitai d'une fort grave et douloureuse maladie pour rompre mes contrats. J'en avais assez des music-halls parisiens, je voulais faire autre chose, évaluer, élever mon art, je sentais d'une façon absolue que j'avais en moi des possibilités de faire " mieux ", et " plus beau, " mais pour cela il fallait changer de milieu — et je résiliais de mon plein gré 300,000 francs de contrat, pour aller vers mon idéal. Cela me réussit à merveille. Je voyageais partout — avec des œuvres poétiques. Petit à petit, des chansons de petits poètes, j'arrivais aux œuvres des grands poètes, je m'évadais du répertoire du music-hall — mais ma santé commença dès 1894 à devenir un sujet de grands tourments. Une longue période de souffrances*

railway journey, so as to study the songs in the train. I am a regular "habituée" of the libraries ; and am always engaged on work for at least ten years ahead ! If I lived for five hundred years I believe I should find enough material to work upon, for there is still a rich and endless store of songs that only needs unearthing. I am always delighted with the songs I am singing, but I simply adore those which I am going to sing some day. I love my work and my art with a passionate devotion. I never take a holiday ; wherever I may be, on the sea, in the mountains, my work goes with me. It is my way of resting—my holiday.

I sang in Paris for twelve years, never leaving it except for one or two short tours abroad. But after my marriage in 1900 I took advantage of a very serious illness to cancel all my engagements. I had had enough of Parisian music-halls. I wanted to do something better ; to develop and elevate my art. I felt convinced that I had within me infinite possibilities for higher things ; but I should have to change my surroundings first. And so of my own accord I cancelled contracts amounting in all to about 300,000 francs, in order to try and realize my ideal. The result was wonderfully successful. I travelled everywhere, singing a far more artistic type of song than I had done hitherto. From the minor poets I gradually climbed to the greater, and eventually abandoned my music-hall repertoire altogether.

Ever since 1894 ill-health has been a constant trial to me. I went through a long period of suffering ;

*m'était réservée, une grave maladie des reins me mit en danger de mort. Une opération radicale du rein droit fut faite et plus d'une longue année je fus couchée . . . c'était en 1899. Mon cœur passa par toutes les transes, car la mort se mit cinq fois sur mon passage . . . et depuis 1899 je suis "La malade miraculeuse," car grâce à la bonté Divine je suis encore de ce monde, et cette fois partie pour la santé parfaite.*

*Mais quelles luttes !! De 1894 à 1910 j'ai souffert, et comment ! Seize ans de souffrances sur dix-huit ans de carrière—ajoutez à cela, que depuis l'âge de 13 ans je suis au travail, soit un ensemble de trente ans de luttes de toutes sortes. Ah ! sans Dieu où serais-je ? ! C'est lui qui soutint mes énergies. Je suis fière de mes quarante-trois ans, ils furent employés magnifiquement. Du jour où j'ai gagné cent francs par soirée, je me suis souvenue des mauvais bouchers et des boulangers durs . . . et ma bourse et mon cœur ne se fermèrent plus jamais à ceux qui vinrent crier au secours chez moi—grâce à l'aisance gagnée par mon travail j'ai pu réaliser le rêve de mes nuits de misère, j'ai pu éviter à des centaines d'êtres malheureux les désespoirs, les angoisses, connus et endurés par moi.*

*J'ai vécu noblement, dépensant avec largesse ce que Dieu mettait en mon pouvoir, mais si j'ai vécu bellement*

once a dangerous illness nearly terminated fatally. I had to undergo a severe operation, which resulted in my having to lie up for a whole year in 1899. On five separate occasions I have been confronted with the fear of death ; and I look upon myself as a really " miraculous " invalid, for by the mercy of God I am not only still alive, but at last on the road to perfect health.

But, oh, it has been a struggle ! How I have suffered during the past sixteen years ! Sixteen years of suffering out of the eighteen during which I have been before the public ! Adding to this the fact that I have been working for a living ever since I was thirteen years old, I may be said to have had thirty years of constant struggle. Where should I have been without God's help ? It is He Who has sustained my energies, and I am proud of my forty-three years of life, for they have been wonderfully full and not ill-spent. Ever since I began to earn a salary of 100 francs a night, I have thought of the hard-hearted butchers and bakers of my youth ; and my heart and purse have ever been accessible to those who sought my help. Thanks to the comfortable income my work has earned for me I have been able to realize some of the dreams of my earlier days of want and poverty, and to do something to mitigate the misery and despair—evils with which I had myself been so intimately acquainted—of numberless unfortunates.

I have lived unselfishly, distributing with a lavish hand according to my means. If I have lived in

*j'ai fait vivre les autres. J'ai toujours évité les folies de parade, si chères aux femmes en vue, j'ai toujours eu le goût des parures simples, pas voyantes ; je ne porte jamais de bijoux, et ne me montre jamais dans les réunions à la mode. Je n'aime ni les courses, ni le jeu, ni la vie mondaine, ni les receptions, ni les restaurants, rien de ce qui constitue " Le Bonheur " de tant de femmes !*

*Mon bonheur à moi est tout autre . . . c'est mon " home," où la tendresse inépuisable d'un époux me remplace mille fois toutes les pauvres accessions des belles dames en quête éternelle de la vie heureuse—nous sommes réunis parfois à des amis qui ont nos goûts discrets, et notre maison est celle du travail—de la charité chrétienne—de la Paix, et du Bonheur, n'est-ce point la plus belle, la plus rare surtout, des rares victoires remportées sur la vie ?*

*Merci à Dieu ! Et voici fin de cette longue préface écrite en toute simplicité, sans souci, d'une forme littéraire quelconque, mais tout bonnement exprimant les tourments et les joies d'une vie d'artiste.*

*Yvette Guilbert*  
1910

comfort, I have given comfort to others too. I have avoided all outward show and display, so dear to the hearts of many women ; have kept my taste for simple clothes ; and never wear jewelry. I seldom attend fashionable functions ; I don't care for racing or gambling, nor the life of fashion ; dining-out, and all the other little pleasures that go to make up so many women's lives, have no attractions for me.

My pleasures are of quite a different kind. My home, and the loving and tender care of my devoted husband, more than compensates for all the empty pleasures so beloved of women of fashion in their eternal quest after happiness.

We have little gatherings of friends occasionally, people of the same quiet tastes as ourselves, but our house is mostly a place of work, and also, if I may say so, of Christian charity, peace, and above all, happiness, the most precious of all life's gifts, and the one most difficult to acquire.

For all this my thanks are due to Almighty God !

And now I am at the end of my life's story, a story written in all sincerity, and laying no claims to literary distinction. It is just a simple tale, depicting in all faithfulness the joys and sorrows of an artist's life.





**PART II**

**THE LIFE OF YVETTE GUILBERT**

**BY**

**HAROLD SIMPSON**



## PREFACE

IN endeavouring to present a true picture of Yvette Guilbert's career it is inevitable that I should, to some extent, have to cover the same ground over which she has already travelled in her autobiography. But the two pictures, though similar in some of their details, are yet essentially different. They represent two distinct views, the inward view of the artist herself, and the outward view of the world at large. This will, I hope, be considered a sufficient apology and defence for any seeming repetitions that may occur.

H. S.



POSTER BY C. LIANDER FOR A JOURNAL WHICH XVIII GUBERI UNDERLOOK  
WITH SOME MONIMARTRI SINGERS

## THE ART OF YVETTE GUILBERT

THE art of Yvette Guilbert is something unique, apart. To attempt to describe it in words is almost a hopeless task. One is in despair ; there is so much to say, and yet, when one comes to say it, so little. And to try to gain any adequate impression of her from the written word is very much like studying a beautiful picture from its description in the catalogue. The catalogue will inform you as to the subject, and the name of the painter ; it may add a line or two of intelligent criticism ; but when you see the picture itself you are tempted to throw the catalogue in the fire, from sheer irritation at its ineffectiveness. So it is with Yvette Guilbert. You must see her, and study her for yourself.

For she is, for all the world, like a beautiful picture. There are some pictures, excellent enough in their way, which make a certain appeal to the senses, but they require very little study, their beauties are superficial and apparent ; they cannot hold your attention long. But there are other pictures before which you may stand for hours, and yet not be able to comprehend all their beauties, or read aright the message they are meant to convey. All you know

is that here is genius, real living genius ; and day after day you are tempted to visit that picture again. And that is just the difference between Yvette Guilbert and all the others, great and small, who have appeared on the music-hall stage.

For here, too, is genius, real, living, sparkling genius. Whether she is singing of tragedy, as in the song "Ma Tête," the grim horrors of which she brings so vividly before you, or light-heartedly carolling some dainty, airy trifle, she holds you with an irresistible spell. What are the secrets that enable her to weave this magic spell ?

First and foremost, then, there is genius. Yvette Guilbert has that sure touch which seldom, if ever, makes mistakes—a touch that turns everything she does to gold. Out of an apparently simple ballad she evolves a whole tragedy or comedy, as the case may be. And such a tragedy, such a comedy ! Without the aid of any extraneous effects, such as scenery or costume (for she very seldom "dresses" the part she is portraying), she brings vividly before your eyes the story and the atmosphere of the song she is singing. Her emotions become yours ; you enter by way of her art into every phase of joy and sorrow that the world has ever known ; you forget that it is an imaginary world of which she sings ; to you for the moment it is a real living world, your world, the everyday world of human emotion, of mirth and laughter, sorrow and tears. You even forget that such a person as Yvette Guilbert exists, which is, perhaps, the highest tribute you can pay her.

This genius, though to a great extent inherent, as genius must always be, is very largely the outcome of that infinite capacity for taking pains, for which it is popularly supposed to be a synonym. Anyone who follows the story of Yvette Guilbert's life in detail will be bound to acknowledge that the heights to which she has attained have not been scaled without much arduous climbing. It is a story of strenuous endeavour, of constant struggling in the face of difficulties, of opposition and discouragement. Added to the eye quick to see, and the brain swift to understand, she possesses to an extraordinary degree the faculty for painstaking observation, and the minute consideration of detail, which is one of the elements that make for greatness. Every one of the songs which she presents to her audiences is the result of an elaborate study, a study in the first place of the actual phases of life with which it deals, and in the second place of the song itself. Thus, though it is of an imaginary world she sings, it is only imaginary in the sense that the story belongs to the realm of fiction. The types of character that she represents are of the real world, their emotions are the emotions of living people, brought before us in all the human intensity by the sympathetic insight of one who has seen, and known, and understood. Perhaps it is because she understands life and humanity so well that she reaches our hearts so quickly. For Yvette Guilbert, in everything she does, is intensely human.

Indeed, Realism, in all her songs, is the keynote to Yvette Guilbert's art. She depicts for us the little



daily tragedies and comedies of life, those tragedies and comedies which are often in themselves so mean and so petty, and yet go to make up the sum total of humanity's joys and sorrows. Under her inspired touch these tragedies lose their pettiness, and stand out as great human dramas, invested with an indescribable pathos. We see life as we never saw it before; we see the infinite littleness of it, and also its infinite bigness. Immorality becomes merely a saddening phase of human character; vice "loses half its evil by losing half its grossness"; life stands forth naked and unashamed, shorn of all its deceptions and make-believes. And her handling of life's comedies has just the same effect, though approached through a different door. We begin to appreciate how much of humour there is in the little everyday incidents of our narrow world; and in the light of that knowledge our world becomes at once less narrow, and our outlook saner, broader, and more sympathetic.

In addition to the possession of genius, natural and acquired, she has in a marked degree the two important qualities of personality and temperament. Every great artist, of course, has a personality of his or her own; but in Yvette Guilbert it is so beautifully subdued to, and blended with, her art, that while it never obtrudes itself, it is for ever making its presence felt in a subtle, intangible sort of way. It is a delightful personality, feminine to the finger tips, full of little unexpected surprises, a thing of infinite charm. And in the range and scope of her temperament she is almost unique. The Yvette Guilbert in her long

black gloves and severely-cut gown was the very picture and essence of tragedy. Ten years later, in Pompadour powder and crinoline, she became the living incarnation of all that is gay and frivolous. But whether it is of tragedy or comedy she sings, she invariably sounds exactly the right note. With her pathos and humour are curiously intermingled. In her moments of deepest tragedy there is always a subtle element of humour, albeit a rather grim humour, running through it, so that you hardly know whether to laugh or cry. It is the humour that is born of infinite pity, a pity that comes in its turn from an infinite understanding. And, in the same way, underneath her lightest humour one can always discern the touch of tragedy born of the same infinite pity. "Life is so sad!" she seems to say. "But what matter, mes amis? Let us laugh and be merry, you and I!"

This, indeed, would seem to be the manner of Yvette Guilbert's outlook upon life. She is a cynic, but a genial cynic, and an optimist at heart. If she does not preach from the text that "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds," she still would have us believe that the world with all its drawbacks, its troubles and heartaches and tears, is not such a bad place after all. It all turns on the question of making the best of things, and of being possessed of a sense of humour. And so when she weeps, it is with laughter on her lips, and when she smiles, she smiles through a mist of tears. Thus, even in her most tragic songs, she never gives you the impression that her desire is merely to inspire you with horror,

while her gayest and most light-hearted ditties are always something more than mere humorous songs. They are one and all little pictures of life, touched in with the sure and unerring hand of the true artist.

There is one song in particular she sings which illustrates this wonderful blending of tragedy and comedy to a very marked degree. This is "Notre Petite Compagne," the words of which are by Jules Laforgue. The song is arranged to a melody of a valse of Waldteufel, a melody whose spirit of reckless gaiety and abandon at once gives the keynote to the picture. It is a woman of the cafés who is singing. She stands there, a hopeless picture of a wasted life, with the shadow of some deeper understanding dawning in her eyes, and a smile of bitter mockery on her lips. She is addressing her admirer of the moment; bidding him to be content with her outward beauty and charm—what is left of it—and not to seek to probe the hidden mysteries of her nature. "Je suis 'La Femme!' On me connaît!" That is the cry that haunts one through the song; the refrain that comes again and again. "Je suis 'La Femme!' On me connaît!" Beneath those words lies the whole mysterious problem of the Eternal Feminine. Now she delivers them blatantly, defiantly; now mockingly, almost mirthfully. Always the shadow in the eyes and the laughter on the lips. She is tearing her very soul to pieces with thoughts of the past, and, above all, of the future. But the present is still hers; there is yet time for a laugh and a song. So with an effort she pulls herself together. "Je suis 'La Femme!'

On me connaît ! " with a shrug of her shoulders this time. You want to weep, and you find yourself smiling. Tragedy is there, but it is the child and offspring of Comedy.

In her lighter moments Yvette Guilbert's art is a thing of sheer joy and fascination. Humour bubbles out of her as spontaneously as song from a bird. And it is infectious. The laughter seems to ripple off her lips as she sings ; the delicious intonations of her voice, varying with every line, with every word almost, seem to play upon your senses as a skilled musician plays upon an instrument. Every fibre in you responds to the gaiety, the drollery of her ; till at the close of the song you feel yourself drawn irresistibly to your feet, compelled to shout " bravo ! bravo ! " from the sheer force of your pent-up feelings.

Admitting her possession of these qualities which go to make a great artist, we are naturally tempted to go still further and seek to discover the particular methods by which she makes her effects. They are, for the most part, curiously negative in quality. It is not so much by what she does as by what she leaves undone that she finds her way so quickly, through our intelligence, to our hearts. Restraint is the dominant feature of her art. There is no striving after effect in Yvette Guilbert's singing, no exaggeration of action in order to drive her moral home. As a matter of fact she scarcely moves at all ; and her gestures are at times so minute as almost to escape the notice of the uninitiated. " She gets more significance out of a sigh, a laugh, a pout, than

most actors get out of a whole act," as a writer has well put it. An almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders can convey, with her, a whole world of meaning. Every little movement tells; the severest critic would find it hard to detect a superfluous gesture. It is all so simple and beautifully restrained, that one is inclined to wonder sometimes at the effect she creates.

Perhaps one of the chief secrets of her charm lies in her facial expression, and, above all, in the play of her mouth. She once referred to this herself, when speaking of her singing. "I discovered," she says, "that the applause I received for certain songs always depended on the lines which I gave to my mouth. I was three months trying to solve the clue to this mystery, when one day a friend who had just heard me sing made the remark that whenever I protruded my lips the most sentimental lines took on an air of absurd gaiety. That gave me the clue I had been looking for, and I have never forgotten it." But this, after all, is an unsatisfactory way of trying to explain the unexplainable. It is in the whole play of her facial expression that Yvette Guilbert reigns supreme. And here, as in her gestures, she shows a wonderful restraint. There are no exaggerated contortions, no superfluous grimaces. In the uplifting of her eyebrows, the slightest movement of her lips, the expression of her eyes, she gets all the effects she needs. And it is marvellous how by doing so little she can achieve so much.

Lastly, there is her voice. Yvette Guilbert is not

a great singer. As a matter of fact she can hardly be said to sing at all in the actual sense of the word. Her delivery of her songs is not so much singing, as a perfect combination of the singing and the speaking voice. Yet it is nothing like recitation to music ; far from it. The music is always an integral part of her song ; and she never entirely loses the thread of the melody, though here and there breaking off into what might be described as a half-spoken recitative. And in one respect there are many singers, not only those on the music-hall stage, who might learn a valuable lesson from her. Her diction is well-nigh perfect. Every word, every syllable, rings as clear as a bell—and each is given just its proper significance. It was this which made such an impression on Max Nordau when he first heard her. He declared that he had never heard an artist who so absolutely conveyed the meaning of the words of a song. And this is perfectly true. Yet, as I have said, it is nothing like recitation. Spoken, the words would lose half their effect, would become divested of those subtle shades of meaning which Yvette Guilbert gives to them in her singing. It is the harmonious blending of these two modes of expression, recitation and singing, which make Yvette Guilbert's art a thing unique, apart. The inflections of her voice are so many and so varied, that she can convey a whole range of emotions by the use of them alone. Anger, fear, mockery, grief, or irresponsible gaiety, she seems to slip from one to the other with the slightest of efforts. Indeed, the ease with which she depicts for

us the play of emotion is one of the most perfect phases of her art.

Quite recently Yvette Guilbert made an instantaneous success as an actress in ordinary comedy. But the stage is not the true place for her talents. Her individuality, brilliant and conspicuous as it is, must necessarily become more or less merged in that of the other characters of the play, and in the atmosphere and story of the play itself. In a play she is only one character, and the shades of meaning which she can read into the interpretation of that character are naturally limited, by the inherent limitations of the drama. In the singing of her chansons, in which she is not one character but a hundred, she has found a perfect medium for the revelation of her wonderful personality, of her talents, and of her genius in that peculiar form of art which she has made so inimitably her own.

## CHAPTER I

### YVETTE GUILBERT "ARRIVES"

YVETTE GUILBERT, like many another great artist, had her early struggles and disappointments. She herself has given us, in the earlier portion of this book, a vivid picture of her career as a singer, but it is hardly out of place to supplement this with a brief résumé of her history, and to fill in the outlined sketch with the comments and criticisms of many notable writers who have followed her career with interest, and have given to the world from time to time their impressions of her personality and her art.

M. Carle des Perrières, in "Gil Blas," has given a very striking and eminently faithful picture of the different stages of her career. Speaking of her early struggles and history, he says :

"One of the most interesting features in the character of this Parisian star is her wonderful tenacity and will-power ; the energy which has enabled this young anæmic-looking girl, by no means beautiful, and possessed of none of the Parisian elegance and chic, to scale the ladder of fortune and reach a position of eminence, with no advantage to help her win her way in the career, so thickly strewn with obstacles, which she had chosen for herself.

"Her history is commonplace enough. Left at an



early age without a father, she and her mother, two honest, intelligent women, bravely facing the struggle which awaited them, started a dress-making business ; and Yvette, at fifteen years of age, scoured the big shops in search of new fashions, and sold the hats which her mother and her assistants had made.

“ The business, which began to prosper, was eventually ruined by the necessity of having to pay off the debts which had been left behind by Guilbert’s father. Then Yvette became an assistant at the Magasin du Printemps, where she was the light and life of the place. Always merry, with plenty of intelligence, and possessed of a highly-developed artistic instinct, Yvette had a charm of manner all her own, frank and almost boyish, unaffected and happy-go-lucky, that was quite in keeping with her appearance. At this time the law for providing seats for shop assistants had not been passed ; and Yvette, anæmic as she was, and suffering from an internal complaint which prevented her taking sufficient nourishment, had eventually to quit the shop and return to her mother.

“ In order to provide the necessities of life, and maintain her delicate child, the mother became a seamstress. Then followed a terrible period of misery, during which these two poor women supported themselves by the meagre products of their needle, which were rendered all the more inadequate by the fact that they had to find money to pay for the daily medicine, since a dispensary gives no credit.

“ It was a mere chance that lifted Yvette out of these modest surroundings. Longing to breathe a

little fresh air, she was taken by a friend to Sari's house, at a time when poor Leon was still Squire of Vaux, and the Seine, so delightfully picturesque between Triel and Meulan, flowed past the end of his garden.

"It was there that I saw her for the first time, clad in a modest black dress, but merry and intelligent ; a happy girl, laughing with sheer delight of the open air and the sunshine mirrored in the waters of the river.

"Among this band of artists and holiday-makers the conversation was not always too strait-laced ; but Yvette, endowed with a wisdom beyond her years, took their pleasantry all in good part, and in the matter of repartee held her own with the best of them, so that she soon became very popular with all the guests. But she was so sickly and weak that she would often faint dead away while running or jumping into a boat.

"And then poor Leon, with a scared look on his kindly face, would say to her in a tone that was half-tender and half-reproachful : ' My dear girl, you will kill yourself if you're not careful. Stay here a fortnight, a month if you like, but take care of yourself. Get plenty of fresh air, and some gentle exercise, or you'll die to a certainty ! ' She often returned to Vaux in later days, and these country excursions and mouthfuls of fresh air would renew her strength for the work of the coming week.

"It was at Vaux, surrounded by theatrical people, that Yvette began to be haunted with the idea of

tempting fate, and striking out a career for herself. With her inborn courage and resolution she gave herself two years for the attempt. It was Landrol who gave her her first lessons in elocution, and secured her eventual début at the Bouffes du Nord."

The way in which she was brought to Landrol, to break off M. des Perrières' narrative for a moment, has already been graphically described by Yvette Guilbert herself. How she met M. Stoullig, and how he sent her to Landrol, may be read in her autobiography.

"I gave her an introduction to Landrol," says M. Stoullig, writing in "Le National," "and the latter wrote to me (I have his letter still) that he had seldom met so intelligent an individual."

Then after detailing the various stages of her subsequent career, M. Stoullig closes his article with the following appreciation :—

"What she was—that you know as well as I do. What she wants to be—the Judic, the Granier, the Réjane of the Variety Stage, when Réjane, Granier, and Judic are but a memory. What she is—a witty, amazing, and original singer, who richly deserves the success accorded her, not only by the approval of the critics, but by the applause of the public, which is a more intelligent creature than we are inclined to think, and does not take a new Music Hall Diva to its heart without good reason. Go and hear my little god-daughter ; she is worth the trouble !"

After some months' study with Landrol, Yvette Guilbert obtained her first engagement at the Bouffes

du Nord, playing the part of the Duchesse de Nevers in "La Reine Margot." Other small engagements followed, at the Cluny and at the Variétés, where she played small parts for two seasons, alongside of such well-known figures as Réjane, Judic, Granier, Baron, Lassouche, and Christian. "It was in watching them act," she says in her autobiography, "that I learnt the art of singing."

At the point of her début at the Bouffes du Nord, M. des Perrières takes up the narrative once more :

"They were playing 'La Reine Margot'; I shall always remember it. Never in my whole life have I seen so peculiarly comic a Duchesse de Nevers as was this one when she cried, 'Guards, follow me!' She reached the other door with such rapidity that the guards were obliged to break into a trot in order to follow her at all. She covered the stage in three strides! In the pathetic scenes with la Mole and Coconas her laughing eyes wore an expression of roguery which she could not succeed in hiding. Her grand airs, accompanied by the gestures of a street urchin, gave one the impression of a duchess born at Menilmontant, and won for her the applause of the workmen of the quarter. Try and imagine Alice Lavigne playing the part of the Duchesse de Guise!

"Still, she imparted so excellent a comedy element to this dismal tragedy, that Marx, the manager from the Cluny, who had gone there to see her play, engaged her straightway to play the principal part in 'Rigobert.' From 'La Reine Margot' to 'Rigobert' was a step indeed! From this date Yvette

became a rolling stone, moving from theatre to theatre, meeting with nothing but disappointments. Then followed another eighteen months of misery, no longer with the trade of seamstress in prospect, but trotting about in the snow and mud from one end of Paris to the other to rehearsals.

"After the Cluny followed the Nouveautés, and then the Variétés, where the débutante was tried in 'Le Fiacre 117' and 'Décoré.' Only Meilhac, quick to see the artist in her, praised her rendering of the parts.

"Reduced to playing small parts, she was next seen at the Variétés, as one of Bluebeard's wives, wearing a long white dress, with her wide forehead bare, and an air of melancholy about her, the sure sign of the disappointed.

"The experiment had been a conclusive one. Eighteen months had gone by and she had only attained to the dignity of playing Bluebeard's fifth wife! The part could certainly not be called an extensive one. With the resolution which is characteristic of her, Yvette suddenly decided to quit the theatre altogether.

" 'I have no talent for it,' she told her friends; 'and then, besides that, I am too ugly; I shall never make a success on the stage. Moreover, the time I allotted to myself for the purpose has expired. I am going to make a new lease, and give myself two years to succeed at the Cafés Concerts.'

"And so, rebuffed but not discouraged, this persistent and tenacious creature, who had only her

own wits to depend on, began to seek for a new engagement."

The story of these eighteen months, as told by an outside observer, is illuminating, and reveals more vividly than anything else could do the extraordinary courage and tenacity of purpose which have helped to raise Yvette Guilbert to the position which she holds to-day. For the time being, at any rate, her career as an actress was over. Henceforth she intended to woo the favour of another public, the public of the Cafés Concerts, and that in the rôle of a singer.

Her family were horrified at her decision. Her mother told her frankly that with a voice like hers it was quite impossible for her to achieve any success in her proposed career! In fact, it was the purest folly even to think of it. And all her friends, and the rest of her family, endorsed that opinion. Nine people out of ten, after the failures and rebuffs that Yvette Guilbert had experienced, would have given up in despair. But then nine people out of ten always do the obvious and the commonplace thing. It is the tenth person who has the courage and strength of mind to strike out an independent line; and Yvette Guilbert was essentially that tenth person. And so she stuck to her guns, and persisted in following the course she had mapped out for herself.

It is interesting at this juncture, when, smarting under past failures and disappointments, she was being assured by her family and friends of further dismal failures to come, to look forward a year, and

to read, by way of contrast, of another appearance of Yvette Guilbert at the Variétés, in December 1891.

"Last Sunday," says a writer in "L'Echo de Paris," "Mademoiselle Guilbert tasted the full sweetness of her fame. She was asked to sing at a benefit *matinée*, but declined for some purely personal reason. With her refusal, however, she sent a princely cheque of five hundred francs. This the beneficiary declined, persisting in a demand for the actual appearance of Yvette, upon whom, she declared, the whole success of the *matinée* depended. Thus importuned, Mademoiselle Guilbert gave way. She came, she conquered! What a pleasure she must have experienced on returning in triumph to this same stage (the Variétés), where five years before she was eking out a meagre pittance in playing small parts. She was received with almost delirious applause!"

What a contrast to that other picture! And how small the prophets of failure must have felt! But this is anticipating matters a good deal, and we must return to the moment when Yvette Guilbert, sick at heart with her non-success as an actress, was courageously seeking an engagement as a singer.

Fortune favoured her at first. She managed to persuade Madame Allemand, the manageress of the Eldorado, to give her an audition. She came out of the theatre with a three years' engagement at 600 francs a month in her pocket. Delighted with her good fortune she hastened home to tell her mother the good news. But alas! as her mother at once pointed out, with tears in her eyes, how could she

possibly take an engagement elsewhere when she would have to pay a forfeit of some ten thousand francs to the Variétés? That was a thing she had never thought of.

However, through the intervention of some of her friends, she managed to persuade the manager of the Variétés to release her from her engagement. She was not due to appear at the Eldorado till September, and in the meanwhile, by way of a preliminary canter, she took a short engagement at Lyons. There the predictions of her friends and relations seemed verified; she was met with a storm of hisses and groans, and her engagement terminated abruptly. She returned to Paris in tears.

Her début at the Eldorado was scarcely more successful. At the end of three weeks, on protesting at being put on at eight o'clock before the general public had arrived, she was offered one of the two alternatives, either to accept 300 francs a month, instead of 600, or else to leave. Yvette left, calmly declaring that she would never set foot inside the Eldorado again until they offered her for a single night the 600 francs which they had refused her per month! Ironical surprise on the part of the management! But the fact remains that two and a half years afterwards Madame Allemand came round to Yvette's house to beg her to join her company. The latter, no doubt thoroughly enjoying the situation, jokingly reminded the manageress of the vow she had made on quitting the Eldorado, and was promptly engaged on her own terms.



Her next engagement, after the fiasco at the Eldorado, was at the Eden, where she was formally forbidden to sing the very songs which, five months afterwards, were to make her reputation. Her success was, in consequence, only moderate ; but in the following year she scored her first real triumph, at Liège. " I had," she said on one occasion when speaking of this, " for the first time sung what I wanted and how I wanted without interference."

The recollection of this, her first real success as a singer, lingered long in Yvette Guilbert's memory ; and on her return visit to Liège, two years later, she penned the following characteristic letter to M. Victor Raskin, the manager of the Pavillon de Flore, the scene of her victorious début :—

"A. M. VICTOR RASKIN.

"4 December 1893.

"MY DEAR RASKIN,—I haste to convey to you, before I come to Liège, the very great pleasure it gives me to think that I am to appear there once more. Honestly, I have retained so vivid and so grateful a recollection of my first appearance at the Pavillon de Flore, that I am most happy at the prospect of revisiting your delightful town and its inhabitants, who gave me confidence in the future of my career by their generous applause. And my old friends of yesterday, shall I find them still the same ? Or will they hesitate to hold out the hand of welcome just because to-day, forsooth, I am a ' star ' ?



# XXVIII CUBBIT

(From an engraving of the frieze of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi)



"It may be that many of the participators in my former success will no longer dare to say : ' Yvette, how are you ? '

"I sincerely hope that I shall find my old comrades the same as ever, and that they will not be astonished if I fall on their necks and embrace them !

"Success is a grand thing. Yes, but friendship is a better thing yet ; and I would wish them still to retain a tender memory of the 'gawk of a girl!' I used to be ; and realise that I still am of the company of the 'cabotine originale,' as the newspapers say.

"Do you remember, my old friend Raskin, that evening when I heard a piece of verse 'en wallon,'<sup>1</sup> and learnt it almost all through by heart ?

"Liège brought me luck, and gave me courage and self-confidence, and I am coming back to it with real pleasure and gratitude.

"Adieu for the present. My kindest remembrances to you and all the rest.—Yours sincerely,

"YVETTE."

Returning to Paris, after her welcome success at Liège, she cancelled her engagement with the Eden, and appeared at the Concert Parisien, only a little while later to tempt fortune once more at the Casino de Lyon. Here, where a year before they had received her with hisses and cat-calls, and paid her a salary of 40 francs a day, they now overwhelmed her with applause, and paid her 1200 francs a day for

<sup>1</sup> i.e. "in dialect." The Walloons are descendants of the old Gaelic Belgæ who occupied Flanders, and still have a dialect of their own.

singing the self-same songs. A striking comment, this, on the strange vicissitudes of fortune which fall to the lot of every artist who attempts to gain the favour of the public.

The spark of enthusiasm thus kindled in Lyons spread to Paris, where on her return she was welcomed with acclamations. But still her friends kept up their parrot-cry. "Give up singing and go into comedy!" was the refrain, and that at the very moment when she had obtained her first assured success as a singer. Luckily for the gaiety of the world at large Yvette Guilbert turned a deaf ear to friends and family, and kept to the even tenor of her way, now just beginning to be smoothed for her by the hand of success.

At this point, for the last time, we take up once more the narrative of M. des Perrières, in which he concludes his study of Yvette Guilbert's career.

"The world of fashion took her up in due course; the first person who was bold enough to ask her to sing at one of her parties was the Princess de Sagan. Her example at once began to be followed, and Sarrasin's former protégée soon became a recognised figure at all fashionable gatherings. Yvette with her sprightly English air, her cool demeanour and quiet gestures, is the very incarnation of Montmartre. Nothing could give her greater pleasure than this success, but it has not spoilt her. Quite recently her old friend and benefactor, Sarrasin, wrote her a letter that was almost tragically laconic. 'I have got to pay 1800 francs within the next few days, and I haven't a halfpenny.' Yvette didn't need

asking twice. 'Very well,' she wrote: 'I will sing to-morrow at the Divan.' Sarrasin duly received his 1800 francs, and paid his debt; and when Yvette drove home down the Rue des Martyrs after the performance, she received such an ovation that she fell back in a corner of the carriage and sobbed.

"In her private life Yvette is simplicity itself. Her success has left her surprised but not over-elated; she is ready any day to see it pass away from her, knowing what a fickle thing is fame. Those who were her friends in misfortune are her friends still; far from wishing to stifle the memory of her unhappy days of poverty she is fond of anyone and anything that serves to recall them.

"At home her correspondence lies scattered about on a table; anyone is at liberty to read it. Some of the letters she receives are very amusing. There was one I remember from a 'Capitaine de Gendarmerie,' who wrote that he had spent a whole night in a railway train in order to come and hear her sing. He begged her to give him a few minutes' interview. 'You will not be bored, I promise you,' he wrote; 'I shall tell you all about my campaigns. I am of a naturally lively disposition, although, as a rule, I admit, a gendarme is not a very lively person!'

"Another was from a student, expressing his devotion. 'Give me but an hour,' he wrote; 'we shall be good friends. You will learn that it is the love of a boy of eighteen that I offer you; and on Sunday we can go for a drive.' This letter amused Yvette very much.

“ She lives very simply and unaffectedly, with no hankerings after luxury. All she looks forward to are the fine days when she can be off to the estate which she has bought at Vaux, on the banks of the Seine. This is the old house of our poor friend Sari, the self-same spot whither, as an humble seamstress, she used to come in search of sunshine and fresh air, and a few hours of happiness.”

## CHAPTER II

### YVETTE GUILBERT AND THE FRENCH CRITICS

THE history of Yvette Guilbert's engagements after this is one long string of triumphs. She appeared at the Eldorado, the Scala, and at the Folies-Bergère, for nine successive years under the same management. She also sang during the summer for two seasons at the Horloge, and for seven seasons at the Ambassadeurs, the two theatres in the Champs Elysées.

A long and severe illness, during which her life was seriously in danger, compelled her to cancel all her engagements with the Folies-Bergère and the Ambassadeurs, just at a time when, during the Paris Exhibition, visitors from all parts of the world were flocking to hear her sing. The daily papers at the time were full of letters asking for the latest bulletins, and clamouring to know the date of her probable reappearance on the stage. But the disease was obstinate, and her convalescence unduly prolonged. Throughout this long weary struggle between life and death Yvette Guilbert displayed a wonderful amount of patient endurance. "Life is nothing but a struggle," she remarked. "In my young days I struggled for a living; later on I struggled for success, and now, when success has come, I am struggling for health."

But at last her wonderful constitution won the day,



and Yvette, fully restored to health, made her reappearance at the Olympia. The audience gave her such an ovation that she was too overwhelmed with emotion to sing a note. All she could do was to murmur brokenly, "Please forgive me—I cannot—I cannot—" and fled from the stage. She said afterwards that for the first time in her life her nerve had completely failed her.

All Paris at this time went mad over her; the critics were unanimous in her praise; Yvette Guilbert had come and conquered! Francis de Nion, writing a few years ago, in *Le Théâtre*, gives a vivid account of the effect she had on those who heard her about this time. He says:

"Artists, ordinary middle-class people, and even the working-class, realised that they had before them something different to the average singer of sticky and tearful sentiment. The spirit of song, and song of a peculiar kind, sometimes dismal, sometimes gay, but always cruel and fierce, and often bitterly tender—the song of Montmartre, in fact, to give it its right name—had become a thing incarnate in that slender body, had taken shape on those tightly-drawn lips, and in that voice at once indifferent and passionate, attractive and bizarre. The rumour of this new birth was spread abroad; critics—those of them at least who had the leisure to wander afield outside the classic haunts in search of copy for their paper—came to hear her, and went away possessed!"

Sarcey wrote: "We love her because she is as fine as amber and sparkles with roguery and wit."

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Jules Lemaître : " The new diva has just the right touch in interpreting her medley of delicate fantasies. Her special characteristic is that she knows what to say and how to say it." Max Nordau declared without sarcasm that " formerly the first thing a foreigner did when he came to Paris was to visit the Louvre and Notre Dame ; now his only thought is to go and see Yvette Guilbert ! "

Meanwhile André Corneau in " Le Jour " had also added his meed of praise. " She is a curious woman of a rare originality, with the art of maintaining just the right level without ever descending to the commonplace. Will they leave her to scintillate in the smoky atmosphere of the Cafés Concerts, or will they try to make use in the theatre of her undeniable qualities of elocution, and her wonderful imagination ? Is she only a fugitive meteor which will return into outer darkness after blazing for a brief moment ? Is Yvette Guilbert the future star of light opera, a star of a new kind, the want of which is so urgently felt ? Such are the questions, and many others, which one asks oneself, and dare not undertake to answer. Meanwhile she is somebody to be reckoned with. Among all the mediocrities of the day Yvette Guilbert brings with her a new and absolutely individual note. Her talent, which is delightfully fresh, shows up in a worse light than ever the pitiable sameness of the average performances on the music-hall stage. Parisians who are not above indulging in a hearty laugh or two would do well to take this opportunity of hearing a singer who is nothing if not original."

And once more, Parisis in "Le Figaro": "And now here comes Yvette Guilbert, Queen of Singers, the pet of Paris, as was Thérèse under the second Empire. Her voice is ringing, and altogether fascinating, her gestures are made with her nose, her throat, her head, every part of her, in fact. She obtains irresistible effects with a single movement. Her mask never slips from her; her exquisite art makes even this monotony full of character. The more immovable she is, the more full of variety she seems."

The same writer goes on to relate how Albert Millaud, listening to the singer one night, dashed off an impromptu verse about her, and proceeds to quote it:

C'est une divette adorable,  
De charme son être est rempli;  
Yvette a la beauté du diable—  
Alors, le diable est bien joli !  
  
Elle est d'une verve incroyable,  
Dans tous les propos qu'elle dit;  
Elle a, dit-on, l'esprit du diable—  
Le diable a donc beaucoup d'esprit !  
  
Qui l'entend—destin effroyable—  
A l'aimer se sent entraîné;  
Or, si Guilbert a tout du diable,  
Voilà tout le monde damné,

Which, if one should be tempted into giving a free translation, might be rendered somewhat as follows:

She's too adorable for speech,  
Her charm no written word could teach;  
As beautiful as the devil is she—  
What a good-looking fellow the devil must be !

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She's full of verve as an egg of meat,  
Her style's immense, her humour neat ,  
The wit of the devil, they say, has she—  
What a witty fellow the devil must be !

Go, see her for yourself, and then  
You'll fall in love like other men ,  
For were she the devil himself, you know,  
To the devil we'd all of us have to go !

Delighted with a particularly appreciative notice which appeared in "L'Étincelle," Yvette wrote to the author, M Dreville, a letter expressing the gratitude she felt

' 1st February 1891.

"DEAR SIR,—I have just received your delightful paper, in which, thanks to you, I am the subject of certain remarks which simply scintillate<sup>1</sup> with kindness.

"I am overcome, my dear sir, with your entirely appreciative article. Permit me to say that you must be easy to please, if you are in reality as enthusiastic as you make out. But if you reflect a little you will admit that my success and your appreciation thereof ought by rights to be divided equally between Yvette and her author Xanrof. The interpreters of the songs get all the applause, which is extremely unfair, since without amusing words to sing the applause would be considerably less, believe me.

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to reproduce in English this gentle pun upon the name of the paper, "L'Étincelle." The actual words in the original are, "lignes étincelantes de bienveillance."

"A thousand thanks for devoting so lengthy an article to my unworthy self. I hope your friends, the young students and poets, will believe me when I say that I shall always be willing to render humble assistance whenever the Association needs it. And should you yourself, or any of your friends, ever condescend to write me some songs suitable to my audience at the Cafés Concerts, I need hardly say that I shall be only too happy to sing them.

"Again many thanks.

"YVETTE GUILBERT."

But amid all the pæans of praise that were every-day being sounded in her honour, there appeared in "L'Echo de Paris" an article, clever and cynical, by M. Raitif de la Bretonne, which, though at times bitterly sarcastic, did more towards establishing Yvette Guilbert's reputation than all the laudatory epithets that were being constantly showered upon her. The article is worth quoting almost in full, as much for its originality and wit, as for the shrewd criticisms it contains, criticisms that Yvette Guilbert can now at this distance look back upon with equanimity.

"She is the very latest thing in up-to-date Paris; we shall have the Christmas hawkers selling toy models of her soon on the Boulevards. Her fame has spread from the Café Concert to the street already. 'Yvette! Yvette!' Her name is in everyone's mouth.

"The enormous poster, so striking to the eye, so





YVETTE GUILBERT

(An initial letter (Y) by Charles Lindbergh)

drawn as to give the effect of a 'V' of white chalky flesh in a blaze of light, has been placarded all over Paris and made her popular in a month. Now she is of the number of those whose names, written in little flaming gas jets, scintillate through the heavy fogs of the December evenings, a veritable star !

" And it seems but yesterday that she was obscure and unknown, save to a few night-revellers, stranded in an idle moment at Montmartre, this Montmartre which has made her what she is, cadaverous and intensely modern, with a sort of bitter and deadly modernity which she must have acquired at the *Chat Noir*—oh, songs of *Xanrof* !

" Has she talent, you may ask ? Sometimes, yes. Beauty ? No ! She is not exactly beautiful, nor exactly the reverse ; but just that happy medium by which ugly women are content to be described. One thing must be granted her, she has an exquisite profile !

" She is long, oh, so long ! and thin, oh, so thin ! Her chest is of a chalky whiteness, and her figure slightly rounded ; but she has no throat to speak of, and her chest is quite extraordinarily narrow. Long, too long, thin arms, clad in high black gloves, that look like flimsy scarves ; with a bodice that always seems about to slip off her shoulders, give her an appearance, especially as regards her waist and neck, like that of *Madame Gauthereau*, whose rather clumsy carriage and fondness for short bodices she deliberately exaggerates. On this body at once stylish and languishing, after the fashion of society women, and



as little like the style of the Cafés Concerts as can be, is set a small irregular head with a blunt nose, large mouth, and little gimlet eyes outrageously darkened with kolk juice. But she has a fine forehead, which is an exquisite oval surmounted with a delightful head of hair, waved in fair red curls, which near the neck are almost golden.

"There is something about her, in fact, that is disturbing, peculiar and very individual—I am speaking of her profile.

"Her enunciation is clean-cut and precise; words and sentences emerge from her carmined lips with a wonderful clearness, as though cut out with scissors. She has no voice, but very quaint intonations, and skilful inflections, borrowed from Demay, from Paulus, and even from Thérésa. Her diction is the least original part about her. The great originality of this very modern singer lies in her almost rigid immobility; the 'English' appearance of her long thin over-grown body, and the absence of gestures, which is in strong contrast to the almost diabolical rolling of her eyes, and the grimaces and contortions of her bloodless face.

"How charming a first impression one gets of this fashionable star at the Martyrs or the Divan Japonais.

"Her répertoire is a very unfamiliar one, consisting of such songs as 'Le Fiacre,' 'De Profundis,' 'Héloïse et Abélard,' 'La Promenade des Potaches,' all the facile and 'chat-noiresque' verse of Xanrof. Or else foolish naughty ditties like 'Le Petit Rigolo'—fie, mademoiselle!—or stupid songs like the one

about Cleopatra, an inanity quite unworthy of the great artist you aspire to be, Yvette. To sing songs like this is to cast pearls before swine, and you, mademoiselle, are the pearl.

"However, needless to say, she is the vogue, she fills every seat in the house, does this long thin Yvette Guilbert. And on the evenings when she is singing you will see the boxes filled with women who have enormous earrings and dyed hair, and you will see the pit filled with companies of butcher boys in their shirt blouses. From the latter she receives badly-spelt letters on flowered note-paper; from the others, the women with red hair and pale cheeks, symbolical bouquets of orchids."

In January 1891 Yvette Guilbert sat for her bust to Edouard Lormier, the sculptor. M. Hugues de le Roux, who was present at the first sitting, thus describes the scene:

"At last the model was in position, and I watched eagerly. For the last week I had been seeking for some definition to explain the personality and genius of Mademoiselle Yvette, and had been quite unable to evolve one. I thought to myself: 'Surely this sculptor will help me to formulate my impressions by giving me an insight into his own!' That is just what happened. Having taken the measurements with his compasses, and prepared his clay, M. Lormier stepped backwards a pace or two, took a long look at his model, and then plunged his hands feverishly into the clay.

"Sculptors are so trained and educated in classical

lore that when they are confronted with a model for a bust they are always searching for some hidden prototype of which the model may be said to be a human reflection. It was only a few minutes before we saw evolving from the sticky mass of clay, though vague and undefined, and half-veiled, as it seemed, the chaste countenance of Diana.

"Here then was the patron goddess of our little singer, our Yvette of the Concert Parisien, this ultra-modern child of old Paris. And, now one comes to think of it, was not Diana the "ingénue" of Olympos, the maid who fled in terror from her suitors, the patroness of all young girls who want to be delivered from undesirable Actæons? There it all was, the same long neck, as graceful as a swan's, the same pure wide forehead, the aureole of hair; nothing was lacking but the crescent.

"M. Lormier went on working. All at once I uttered an exclamation; Diana had disappeared. Having got the general idea the artist now began to work in the details of the model's own personality. The portrait grew under his fingers, at times becoming almost a caricature for a moment or two while some dominant feature or other was being given undue prominence, but in time combining the expression of every feature into one harmonious whole, which became the laughing countenance of a young faun, every bit as life-like a portrait of Yvette as Diana had been.

"Then I took the sculptor by the hand, and congratulated him. 'My dear M. Lormier,' I said,

'you have at last illuminated the darkness in which I was groping. Without a word, with only the aid of your fingers and a lump of clay, you have given me a definition of this undefinable and delightful state of mind which, for the want of a better name, we call ingenuousness. There you have it. In its fundamental essentials it possesses the maiden purity of Diana ; incidentally it has also something of the nature of the laughing faun, with a desire to love and be loved. And between these two extremes lies a delightful medium, an exquisite Eden, a Paradise to be lost, round which mankind will throng in adulation. It is, in a word, the kingdom of Yvette Guilbert.' "

She was by this time the recognised star of the Cafés Concerts in Paris. There were many who said that she was wasting her talents in confining herself to the atmosphere of the music hall ; others who prophesied that the music hall would not be able to keep her for long ; that genius such as hers must in due course find its vent in other and more elevated spheres. In England the theatre and the music hall are every year being brought more into line with one another, and the gulf between them was never after all an insuperably wide one. But in Paris the Cafés Concerts possess an atmosphere that is all their own, and at the time when Yvette Guilbert was their reigning star they were something quite distinct and apart, and as far removed from the atmosphere of the regular theatre as could possibly be imagined. In order to gain an adequate idea of the surroundings in which Yvette Guilbert won her way to fame, and

of the audiences to whom her art must be made to appeal, we cannot do better than turn to the description of the Cafés Concerts, as they were some eighteen or nineteen years ago, which was given by M. Émile Blémont in "L'Événement" in February 1891.

"There are," he says, "two publics, different and totally distinct from one another in the Cafés Concerts. On the one hand you will find the masses, a trifle heavy, a trifle slow, but simple-minded, sympathetic and generous. This public is composed of the loyal and steady workers in life, who come here for rest after their daily toil, and to get, without much trouble, a certain amount of cheap, but perfectly honest amusement.

"These people have an ideal of amusement which is as simple as their own natures, they have certain general ideas on the subject implanted in their minds, and, provided that these ideas are catered for, according to the fashion of the moment, with something not too complicated, they don't bother. They remain faithful to the old traditional form of song, cast in the ancient mould, with its four fatuous verses, one verse for wine, one for women, one political, and one in praise of God and country.

"On the other hand, in these by no means unpicturesque places of amusement, where one can smoke and drink and chat in comfort to the accompaniment of music, you will find another public which is, in some respects, more highly cultivated. They are the rakes, the 'déclassés' of literature or trade, forming the bohemia of the more well-to-do middle



A POSTER BY F. TAC



class; free lances most of them in their particular professions of trade or art. This public is blasé, subtle, whimsical; prone to sudden exhibitions of feeling, and savage pleasantries; a public that has run through the whole gamut of emotions, and is always looking for some new sensation.

"These two publics side by side form a strange combination, a heterogeneous assembly where two entirely different classes sit close together but never intermingle. In such surroundings it is the popular element that counts with its desire for easy patriotism and banal sentiment. In other places the bohemian element is paramount, and there the cry is all for realism, and heavily-pointed satire. Moreover as soon as anyone becomes a declared success, and a new 'discovery' is announced by the press, and proclaimed by the posters, all grades of Parisian life flock to the spot out of curiosity in order to see the latest sensation."

How was it, then, that Yvette Guilbert managed to conquer in a sphere so composite and so curious, and what sort of songs could she find to suit so diversified an audience? It follows naturally that such songs, to find favour, could not be entirely free of the element which we are apt to define as "riskiness." But the extraordinary part of her success with these audiences is that while she could not omit this element altogether from her songs, she appears to have delivered them with so much naïveté and innocence, that she delighted the fastidious as much as she pleased those who were only used to, and indeed



preferred, the indecencies of the average music hall singer of that day.

Perhaps the explanation lies partly in the nature of the songs themselves; and she was fortunate indeed in finding exactly the right medium for the expression of her art at exactly the right moment. But more than in anything it lies in the individuality of the artist, and Yvette Guilbert was able to do with these songs what another, with less genius and originality, could never have done, and to raise the grosser part of her audience to the high level of her own art.

This question has been very aptly dealt with by Henry Bauer. Writing in "L'Echo de Paris" in December 1891 he says :

"Between the song of inane depravity, which reigns supreme in the Café Concert, and the artistic picturesque and powerful verses of Jules Jouy and Bruant, there is now a middle kind equally acceptable to music-hall audiences; action songs of delicate fancy, pointed without being ill-natured, and not broad enough to be unpleasant. This class of song has its own particular bard, whose name is Fourneau, or in Latin Fornax, whence by anagram, Xanrof. His songs of Paris retain all the atmosphere of the cafés on the left bank of the Seine, those nightly-gathering places of the Perigord and Limousin students, depicting an atmosphere that is made up of the silly laughter, broad provincial humour, and the prankishness of the average medical student, with just a thin coating of 'parisianism' acquired by reading the daily papers.

"On the scenario of these songs, and others like them, Mdlle. Guilbert has built up by her own individual genius the fabric of her art. With the aid of a natural taint of morbidity, a nervous energy that every now and then drops into languor, a manifest and palpable weariness of herself and audience, and with an astonishing amount of physical energy, she has been able to mirror for the public all its own little failings and weaknesses, and the public in return has taken her to its heart and made her its own, its very own Yvette."

But Yvette Guilbert, as many had already prophesied, was not to remain for ever in the sphere of the Café Concert. Fashionable Paris wished to hear her, and fashionable Paris could not frequent the Café Concert. And so, through the medium of M. Hugues de la Roux, she made an appearance at the Théâtre d'Application in the Rue Saint-Lazare, and all Paris, especially feminine Paris, was there. M. de la Roux presented the singer to the audience, and begged the ladies present not to be shocked! Whether shocked or not—no doubt they expected to be, for was not this new singer already the pet of the Cafés Concerts?—the fact remains that they applauded her vigorously; and from that moment she became as prime a favourite with the fashionable Parisians as she already was with the inhabitants of Montmartre.

Yes, undoubtedly, Yvette Guilbert had "arrived." Henceforth for her there was to be no looking back; and, in 1894, having taken her native country by storm, she set out in search of new worlds to conquer.

## CHAPTER III

### SOME INTERESTING LETTERS

DURING Yvette Guilbert's severe illness, to which reference has been made in the previous chapter, a kindly thought suggested the collection of autograph letters from eminent contemporary writers giving their opinions on her art. This collection was presented to her on her recovery, and forms one of her most cherished possessions in connection with her artistic career; not only on account of the high literary standing of the writers, but also because of the kindly sentiment expressed in the letters themselves.

Some of these letters are reproduced below, and if any further proofs were needed of Yvette Guilbert's arrival in the halls of fame, these letters, signed as they are by such writers as Zola, Pierre Loti, Alphonse Daudet, and others, should certainly supply them.

#### FROM EDMOND DE GONCOURT.

"Maintenant chez Yvette Guilbert c'est dans une animation enfièvre du corps, une vivacité de paroles tout à fait amusante. . . .

"Ce qu'il y a d'original dans sa verve blagueuse, c'est que sa blague moderne est emailée d'épithètes

de poètes symboliques et décadents, d'expressions archaïques, et de vieux verbes, remis en vigueur : un mélémélo, un pot-pourri de parisienismes de l'heure présente, et de l'antique langue facétieuse de Panurge.

" Et la soirée se termine par La Soularde ; la Soularde où la diseuse de chansonnettes se révèle comme une grande, une très grande actrice tragique, vous mettant au cœur une constriction angoisseuse."

EDMOND DE GONCOURT.

" With Yvette Guilbert the secret lies in an almost feverish animation of body, and a quite amusing vivacity of speech.

" What is so original about her humour is the fact that, while essentially modern in spirit, it is often expressed in the language of old-world poets, full of archaic idioms and old-fashioned words brought back to life, the whole forming a sort of pot-pourri made up of present-day Parisianisms and a sprinkling of old-fashioned witticisms after the style of Panurge.

" And her performance concludes with ' La Soularde ' ; that song in which this singer of chansonnettes reveals herself as a great, a very great, actress of tragedy by an interpretation which thrills you to the very soul."

FROM ALPHONSE DAUDET.

“ Si j'en avais le loisir, si j'en avais le courage, et si, et si, je voudrais écrire pour cette Yvette Guilbert dont le merveilleux talent s'étrique en des inepties boulevardières, un drame lyrique, moitié mimé, moitié chanté, tiré des tragiques annales de l'Irlande ou de la Commune. La voyez-vous en pétroleuse on en féniane ? Ce corps long et souple, cette face toute blême et suante de Wisky ou d'eau-de-vie blanche, et les rauquements de cette voix, si douloureusement passionnée ; ou encore, à bord “de quelque chaland, pendant ces dures saisons de sécheresse, et de chômage que les mariniers de la Seine appellent l'affameur, imaginez au milieu de sa marmaille une femme de la Catellerie, attendant son homme, qui chante et se soûle dans un mastroquet du bord de de l'eau. Je songeais à tout cela en entendant l'autre soir cette délicieuse Yvette chanter je ne sais quelle niaiserie avec des yeux, des gestes, une expression !!! ”

ALPHONSE DAUDET.

“ If only I had the leisure, if only I had the courage, if and if and if—I would write for this Yvette Guilbert, whose marvellous talent is at present being wasted on the inanities of the Boulevards, a lyrical drama, to be half acted, half sung, drawn from the tragic annals of Ireland or the Commune. What a fine ‘pétroleuse’ or Fenian she would make, with that long supple body of hers, that sallow perspiring face

Je j'is atout le bon, si j'en avais le courage,  
et si et si, je voudrais être pour cette Grotte Guilbert dont la  
maestrie talent s'écrie en des éruptions bouillonnantes, en d'innom-  
brables, en d'innombrables, en d'innombrables, en d'innombrables  
l'Irlande ou de la Commune la voyez-vous en pectolane ou en  
ferricane? Le cœur long et simple, cette fleur toute blanche et blanche  
de l'Église ou d'un cœur de vie blanche, et les rangs de cette  
vie si douloureusement passionnée, en amour, à bord de  
quelque malheur, pendant la phase d'incertitude de l'incertitude et de  
l'incertitude que les musiciens de la vie appellent l'affaire,  
majesté au milieu de sa maestrie une femme de la fustellée,  
d'autant son honneur, qui chante et se livre dans une maestrie  
la bord de l'eau Je serais à tout cela en attendant l'autre  
ou cette délicieuse Grotte d'autre je ne sais quelle vision  
ou des yeux, des yeux, une expression !!!

Alphonse Pérodet



of the colour of whisky or pale brandy, and that hoarse voice, with its note of passion and grief. Or picture her on board a barge during the bad seasons of drought and enforced idleness which the Seine boatmen call the 'Starving Season,' a woman of the Catellerie, with her brats round her, waiting for her husband, who is at that moment engaged in singing and drinking himself blind in a wine-shop on the river bank. I thought of all this the other night, while listening to that delicious Yvette singing some nonsense or other, with—such eyes! such gestures, such expression!"



FROM PAUL HERVIEU.

“ Je ne crois pas qu’il faille s’étonner que Mlle. Yvette Guilbert puisse se montrer si tragique—étant si comique— ; mais, au contraire, qu’elle puisse se montrer si comique, étant si tragique.

“ Car, à mon sentiment, c’est avant tout une tragédienne, une grande tragédienne, avec sa stature étrangement harmonieuse, son visage masqué de pâleur, ses yeux brusques, son geste qui, par des allures presque desobéissantes, prend les caractères de la fatalité.

“ Aussi, quand il ne s’agit, pour Mlle. Yvette Guilbert, que de faire rire, son art dédaigneux et sûr consiste peut-être surtout dans le contraste entre l’intention des légères paroles qu’elle chante, et la gravité de ses moyens d’expression ! Elle dresse sur la foule une longue encolure de prophétesse aux écoutes, dont les bras sont plongés jusqu’aux coudes dans le deuil de ses gants noirs ; et tandis que sa voix enfonce alors, en nous, les mots grivois ou drolâtiques, et les sons joyeux, comme avec un rude marteau fantastique, l’artiste nous impose tantôt le drame de son immobilité, et tantôt, dans ses mouvements de torse ou de physionomie, des arrêts macabres.”

PAUL HERVIEU.

“ I do not think that one should be astonished at the fact that Mlle. Yvette Guilbert should be able to appear so much of a tragedian, when she is so

Je ne crois pas qu'il faille s'étonner que M<sup>lle</sup> Yvette Guilbert  
soit si morte si lugubre au point de comique ; mais, au contraire,  
qu'elle réussisse si bien de comique, et au point de :

Car, à mon sentiment, c'est avant tout une tragédienne, une  
grande tragédienne, avec sa stature étrangement harmonieuse, son  
visage marqué de pâleur, ses yeux bruns, son geste que, par  
des allures presque déshabillées, prend les caractères de la fatalité.

Mais, quand il ne s'agit, pour M<sup>lle</sup> Yvette Guilbert, que de  
faire rire, son art dédaigneux et sûr consiste peut-être surtout  
dans le contraste entre l'intention des légères parades qu'elle chante, et  
la gravité de ses moyens d'expression : Elle dresse sur la foule une  
longue encolure de prophétesse aux épaules, dont les bras sont  
plongés jusqu'aux coudes dans le deuil de ses gants noirs et tombés,  
que sa voix enfonce alors, en nous, les mots gravis ou orolâtiques,  
et les sons joyeux, comme avec un rude marteau fantastique,  
l'artiste nous impose l'arrêt le drama de son immobilité, et  
l'arrêt, dans ses mouvements de torsion ou de physionomie, des  
arrêts macabres :

Paul Henne



great a comedian—on the contrary, the real wonder is that she should be so much of a comedian, when one considers what a tragedian she really is.

“For, to my mind, she is a tragedian, and a great tragedian, first and foremost. She has the very stature for it, the pale immobile face, the piercing eyes ; while her gestures, by their very awkwardness, seem to convey an atmosphere of fatality.

“Moreover, even when she is only occupied in singing humorous songs, the spell of her art, an art that is at once careless and sure, lies, more than in anything else, perhaps, in the contrast between the gravity of her methods of expression and the light character of the words themselves. She stands before the audience like a watchful prophetess, whose arms are clothed to the elbow in gloomy black gloves ; and all the while her voice is beating into our heads, as though with a rough fantastic hammer, the words of her light and merry ditties, the artist herself at one moment by her dramatic immobility, at another by her gestures and her facial expression, is giving us the impression of the most sinister tragedy.”

FROM EMILE ZOLA.

"C'est à la fin d'une soirée chez Charpentier que j'ai entendu Yvette. Il était tard déjà, et jusqu'à deux heures elle nous a tenus dans une grande émotion. Je crois bien qu'elle nous a chanté à la file les meilleures chansons de son répertoire, sans un arrêt, avec une verve, un désir passionné d'être admirée et aimée. Et tout le monde s'est évoqué, à moitié réel, à moitié fantasque, d'un excès dans le caractère qui est l'art tout entier. Jamais je n'ai mieux compris qu'une artiste n'est qu'une nature qui s'exalte et se donne.

EMILE ZOLA.

"It was at the end of an evening entertainment at Charpentier's house that I heard Yvette. It was already late, and she kept us all spell-bound till two in the morning. I believe she sang us all the best songs in her répertoire one after the other without stopping, with a wonderful amount of 'verve' and a passionate desire to please. Quite another world was conjured up for us, a world half real, half fantastic, with just that amount of caricature which is the whole secret of art. I had never before realised so well, that art, in the hands of a great artist, is only the reflection of nature in an exalted and slightly exaggerated form."

C'est à la fin d'une soirée, chez Char-  
fontier, que j'ai entendu Yvette. Il était  
tard déjà, et jusqu'à deux heures du ma-  
tin elle nous a tenus dans une grande  
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monde s'est évoqué, à moitié réel, à  
moitié fantasque, d'un excès dans le car-  
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je n'ai mieux compris qu'une grande  
artiste n'est qu'une nature qui  
s'exalte et se donne.

Emile Zola

FROM MARCEL PRÉVOST.

" Tout est dit sur Mme. Yvette Guilbert, depuis le temps qu'elle a des auditeurs illustres, et qui écrivent sur son album. Donc, je louerai surtout son tempérament de lutteuse pour la gloire, qui vaut une admiration singulière. Fut-elle assez discutée, diminuée, niée, cette Yvette ! A chaque rentrée, combien la guetterènt, qui comptaient cette fois ' avoir sa peau '—sa jolie peau au grain de soie. . . . Or, chaque fois, elle s'est défendue ; elle a montré, comme rageusement, un art plus inattendu, plus haut, plus mûr. Hier encore, avec Rosa la Rouge, elle nous donnait, d'elle, un nouveau frisson.

" Cette conscience du mieux-faire, cette rage de l'effort artistique, de grands écrivains les ont illustrées : mais elles sont rares, trop rares au théâtre.

" Mlle. Yvette Guilbert est un grand exemple moral."

MARCEL PRÉVOST.

" Almost everything possible has been said about Mme. Yvette Guilbert since she first performed to illustrious auditors, who have all written down their impressions for her. I shall therefore confine myself chiefly to praising the persistency with which she has striven for success, which is worthy of all admiration. Could anyone have been more discussed, belittled, scouted, than Yvette has been at one time or another ? How many people at each

Tout en dis, touchant le talent de  
M<sup>lle</sup> Yvette Guilbert, depuis le temps qu'elle  
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diminuée, niée, cette Yvette ! A chaque rentrée,  
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M<sup>lle</sup> Yvette Guilbert est un grand exemple  
moral.

Marcel Révoil





appearance have been on the watch, thinking that this time at any rate they would have her skin,<sup>1</sup> her beautiful satin-like skin. But every time she has emerged triumphantly from the ordeal, displaying, as though in revenge for these expectations, an art more astonishingly advanced and mature than ever.

“Only yesterday, with her ‘Rosa La Rouge,’ she gave us all a fresh sensation.

“This conscientious desire for improvement, and this passion for fresh artistic effort, are qualities which have already been referred to by well-known writers; but they are rare, all too rare, in the history of the stage.

“Mlle. Yvette Guilbert sets a splendid moral example in this respect.”

<sup>1</sup> “Avoir sa peau,” i.e. “to catch her tripping.”

## FROM PIERRE LOTI.

" Tout le monde admet qu'Yvette est adorablement drôle. Mais on ignore en général quelle autre artiste exquise elle peut devenir quand elle chante des choses mélancoliques. Un jour que nous étions seuls chez elle, au piano, elle m'a fait frissonner en interprétant à sa manière ' l'Automme ' de Rollinat et je ne sais plus quelle vieille étrangeté de Ronsard. . . .

" Je la remercie pour cela, plus encore que pour les bons moments de fou rire que je lui dois.

" Et je suis son admirateur."

PIERRE LOTI.

" Everyone admits that Yvette is adorably droll. But most people overlook the fact that there is another artist in her, the exquisite singer of sad songs. One day when we were alone together at her house, she sat down at the piano and made my flesh creep with her rendering of Rollinat's ' L'Automne,' and after that of some weird poem of Ronsard's, which I cannot now recall.

" I owe her even more gratitude for that than for all the moments of hearty laughter she has given me.

" And I remain her humble admirer."

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manière l'"Automne" de Rollinat et je  
ne sais plus quelle vieille "étrangère" de  
Pontault...

Je la remercie pour cela, plus encore  
que pour les bons moments de fou riez  
que je lui dois

Et je suis son admirateur,

Pierre Loti



## FROM OCTAVE MIRBEAU.

" Parbleu ! Je sais bien ce que c'est que la chanson. Avec les autres ce n'est rien, le plus souvent, que de décourageantes inepties. Mais avec Mlle. Yvette Guilbert ! . . . C'est un drame frissonnant, la saisissante évocation d'une type, d'un état social—ou d'un état d'esprit . . . de la douleur comique ou du fou rire qui fait pleurer . . . quelque chose enfin qui entre avec elle dans l'art et dans l'émotion humaine.

" J'admire même qu'avec rien il n'y ait pas d'exemple qu'elle n'ait su créer quelque chose d'exceptionnel et de caractéristique, suppléant par sa propre imagination, par son invention à elle à l'indigence du texte chansonnier, devenu, heureusement, inutile . . . et génial.

" Mais ce n'est pas assez, quoique cela soit beaucoup. Avec ses dons merveilleux d'intelligence, de composition, d'expression, de goût, de mouvement et de voix, qui font de Mlle. Yvette Guilbert, dans n'importe quoi, une artiste si originale, si vibrante et mordante, parfois, si étrangement tragique, et si tragiquement comique, ce serait un de mes plus vifs regrets, qu'elle ne les apportât pas, dans un grand rôle, au théâtre. . . .

" On demande pour Mlle. Yvette Guilbert, un moderne Shakespeare."

OCTAVE MIRBEAU.

" Heavens ! I know what 'singing' is as a rule. With many artists it is only an excuse for bawling

out silly inanities. But with Mlle. Yvette Guilbert it is quite another matter ! With her a song becomes a blood-curdling drama ; a startling presentment of a type, either of society, or of a mental state, in which she imparts an element of comedy to the pathetic and a touch of pathos even to the broadly comic—an individual touch, in short, which she brings to bear upon all the phases of her art, and her interpretation of human emotions.

“ I admire, too, the way in which she never fails to create out of nothing, as it were, something out-of-the-ordinary, and eminently characteristic ; enriching by her own powers of imagination and genius 'the inherent poverty of her material ; so that the song itself becomes almost of no importance in the pleasure which her rendering of it gives.

“ But this is not enough, although it is a good deal, I admit. With her wonderful intelligence, her qualities of emotion and expression, and her good taste, the charm of her movements and her voice, all those attributes, in fact, which combine to make Mlle. Yvette Guilbert in anything she undertakes so original, so striking, and so incisive an artist, sometimes so weirdly tragic and so tragically humorous, I should consider it a matter for sincere regret if she should never be persuaded to exploit them in some big part on the legitimate stage. . . .

“ What is wanted for Mlle. Guilbert is a modern Shakespeare.”

## FROM HENRI LAVÉDAN.

“ Yvette Guilbert est une affiche, qui parle, qui chante, qui remue, mais une affiche, une grande affiche macabre et insolente qui fait froid dans le dos. Je pense toujours, en la voyant et en l’entendant, à quelque troublant automatique, à une dame en cire d’Edgard Poë qui aurait un phonographe dans le ventre. Est-elle en vie ? Je n’en pas plus sûr que ça.

“ C’est la Rose Caron du café concert.”

•  
•

HENRI LAVÉDAN.

“ Yvette Guilbert is a poster, which speaks and sings and moves, but still a poster, a big ghastly impudent poster which sends a shiver down your back. I am always reminded, when I see and hear her, of Edgar Allen Poe’s woman in wax with a phonograph inside it. Is she really alive ? Well, I cannot say any more than that.

“ She is the Rose Caron of the Café Concert.”



## FROM JEAN RICHEPIN.

“ Qu'elle chante du bon, du mauvais, ou du médiocre, cela n'a aucune importance. Le texte, paroles et musique, n'est ici en effet qu'un prétexte, pour elle, à commentaires, pour vous, à évocations. Commentaires et évocations uniquement créés par elle, son geste, sa physionomie, sa voix. Et avec une puissance de suggestion d'autant plus magique et inattendue, que c'est son geste qui parle, sa physionomie qui vocalise, et sa voix qui gesticule ! Écoutez-la plutôt en vous bouchant les yeux, ou regardez-la en vous bouchant les oreilles ! Il semble alors que les aveugles doivent la voir en l'entendant, et les sourds l'entendre en la voyant. Ce qui est, j'en suis sûr.”

“ — Mais cette Yvette est donc une artiste miraculeuse ?

“ — N'en doutez-pas.”

JEAN RICHEPIN.

“ Whether the song she is singing is good, bad, or indifferent, this in itself makes no difference. The song, both as regards words and music, is, in fact, simply a pretext on which to hang, for her, her observations, for you, your impressions. Both observations and impressions are created solely by her, by her gestures, her facial expression, and her voice. And her power of suggestion is all the more wonderful and unexpected from the fact that it is her gestures that do the speaking, her facial expression

Qu'elle chante du bon, du mauvais, ou du médiocre, cela n'a aucune importance de texte, paroles et musique, n'est ici en effet qu'un prétexte. Pour elle, à commentaires, pour vous, à évocations. Commentaires et évocations uniquement créés par elle, son geste, sa physionomie sa voix. Et avec une puissance de suggestion d'autant plus magique et inappréhensible, que c'est son geste qui parle, sa physionomie qui vocalise et sa voix qui gesticule. Ecoutez-la plutôt en vous bouchant les yeux, ou regardez-la en vous bouchant les oreilles ! Il semble alors que les aveugles doivent la voir en l'entendant, et les sourds l'entendre en la voyant. Ce qui est, j'en suis sûr

- Mais cette Yvette est donc une artiste miraculeuse ?

- N'en doutez pas.



the singing, and her voice the gesticulation. You should shut your eyes when you are listening to her, or cover up your ears when you are watching her ! Thus it would seem that the blind would be able to see her by listening to her, the deaf hear her by simply looking at her. And that, I believe, is actually the case.

“ ‘ This Yvette must be a wonderful artist, you will say ?

“ ‘ She is—there isn’t a doubt of it.’ ”

•

FROM CATULLE MENDÈS

“ Yvette, non seulement par génie naturel, mais aussi par une volonté acharnée, par un travail dont la ténacité et la minutie ont de quoi stupéfier, finit par donner quelque chose qui ressemble à du charme, à de l’émotion, aux bassesses du café-concert.

“ Que d’art déplorablement employé ! Mais l’artiste est extraordinaire.”

CATULLE MENDÈS.

“ Yvette, not only by her natural genius, but also by her indomitable strength of will, her astounding capacity for work and passion for detail, has succeeded in imparting something, which very nearly resembles charm and genuine emotion to the gross inanities of the Café Concert.

“ What a lamentable misuse of her art ! But she is a wonderful artist all the same.”

Henri Rochefort's contribution was witty and concise, written after Yvette Guilbert's first visit to England in 1894.

"All honour to Yvette Guilbert! She has found a way of making even the English laugh!" a dry reference to the proverbial (according to Continental ideas) solemnity of English audiences.

Francois Coppée expressed in verse his admiration for the clearness of her enunciation, which enabled her to be heard even above all the din and hubbub which is one of the peculiarities of the Café Concert.

Yvette a du génie, oui, dans le genre arsouille,  
Mais un de ses talents, et non le plus petit,  
C'est qu'au café-concert, ce monde où l'on bafouille,  
On entend tout ce qu'elle dit.

FRANCOIS COPPÉE.

M. Jules Troubat, in his recent book, "Saint-Beuve et Champfleury," has an interesting account of a letter he received from Eugène Baillet, the song writer, and secretary of the Eden Concert, quoting a letter from Champfleury on the subject of Yvette Guilbert.

It appears that Baillet and Champfleury had gone one night to the Eden Concert, after dining together in the Rue Favart. It was on a Friday night, a classical night, when one could still hear the songs of Béranger, besides those of Xavier, Privas, Déroulède, and others.

"A certain number of the songs pleased Champfleury very much," wrote Baillet. "But one of the artistes attracted his notice particularly, and he

became quite excited as he gazed at her through his eye-glass. 'Oh, what a lovely neck!' he said to me ecstatically. 'What a glorious neck! Who is that charming creature?'

" 'Yvette Guilbert,' said I.

" 'Well,' said Champfleury, 'Mademoiselle Yvette Guilbert may pride herself on possessing the most beautiful neck in the world. It resembles those which Célestin Nanteuil used to sketch in his happiest moments—truly a most romantic neck!'

" 'I ought to tell you,' added Baillet in his letter, 'that at that time Yvette Guilbert was not the artist with the great reputation whom we have come to know since. She was a modest singer, earning her 400 francs a month.

" 'On this particular night she sang 'Grenadier, que tu m'affiges,' and 'La Déesse du Bœuf-gras.' I accompanied Champfleury afterwards as far as the Louvre, where he caught the tram which took him all the way home to Sèvres. Four days afterwards I received the following letter :—

'MY DEAR BAILLET,—I want you to come to lunch next Thursday at twelve; we shall be having a few friends.

" 'I have to confess to you that I revisited the Eden Concert by myself on Sunday, in order to admire once more the lovely neck of Mlle. Yvette Guilbert. I hope you can read my writing.<sup>1</sup>—Sincerely yours,

'CHAMPFLEURY.'

<sup>1</sup> Champfleury's writing, says M. Troubat in a footnote, was, as a matter of fact, almost unreadable.

"You see, my dear friend," continued Baillet, "that our much-regretted master had his lighter moments. As for Yvette, I told her of the admiration her neck excited; she laughed heartily, and asked me to introduce her to Champfleury. But the event never came off."







YVETTE GILBERT.  
(From a caricature by I. Cappiello)

## CHAPTER IV

### YVETTE GUILBERT IN LONDON

IN 1894 Yvette Guilbert came to London, and made her first appearance at the Empire on Wednesday, May 9th, in that year. She sang four songs :—" La Promise," " A La Vilette," " Sur le scène," and " La Femme à Narcisse." The " Times " of the following day, in giving an account of her first appearance, says : " The four songs sung last night are fairly rich in innuendos, but the effect of this is softened by the singer's artless humour, the simplicity of her dress and manner, and the limpidity of her enunciation."

Her appearance at the Empire made a great sensation. All London flocked to hear this singer of strange songs. It was not to be expected, of course, that an English audience should all at once understand her. Apart from the natural difficulty of following a foreign language, her form of art was something so new, so individual, that people were at first a little at a loss how to take it. And her songs, too, breathed the very spirit of lower-class Paris, the Paris of Montmartre and the Quarter, containing much that was unintelligible to a London audience.

But even those who failed to understand completely yet felt themselves carried away by the magnificence of her genius, and were quick to realise that in Yvette

Guilbert the world of the Music Hall had gained a new star, a star that was utterly unlike anything that had ever appeared before in the firmament of Vaudeville.

One of the first critics to recognise this, and to give public expression to his sentiments, was Mr Bernard Shaw, who, in an article in "The World," in May 1894, set the seal of artistic approval on Yvette Guilbert's achievement. By the courtesy of Mr Shaw, and the proprietors of "The World," it has been rendered possible to quote this interesting and characteristic appreciation in full.

"Another great artist has come. I suppose I ought to have been quite familiar with her performances already when I went to her reception of the English Press (musical critics NOT included) at the Savoy Hotel last week ; but as a matter of fact I had never been to the Chat Noir ; I have looked at its advertisements on the Boulevards time after time without the least conviction that my sense of being in the fastest forefront of the life of my age would culminate there. To me, going to Paris means going back fifty years in civilisation, spending an uncomfortable night, and getting away next morning as soon as possible. I know, of course, that there must be places and circles in Paris which are not hopelessly out of date, but I have never found them out ; and if I did, what figure could I make in them with my one weapon, language, broken in my hand ? Hence it is that I had never seen Mdlle. Yvette Guilbert when Monsieur Johnson, of the

'Figaro,' introduced her to a carefully selected audience of the wrong people (mostly) at the Savoy Hotel as aforesaid. Monsieur Johnson, as a veteran, will not feel hurt at any comment which only goes to prove that 'the power of beauty he remembers yet'; therefore I need have no delicacy in saying that the remarks which he addressed to the audience by way of introducing Mdlle. Guilbert were entirely fatuous when his emotion permitted them to be heard. When the young lady appeared, it needed only one glance to see that here was no mere music-hall star, but one of the half-dozen ablest persons in the room. It is worth remarking here, that in any society whatever of men and women there is always a woman among the six cleverest; and this is why I, who have a somewhat extensive experience of work on the committees of mixed societies, have been trained to recognise the fact that the efficient person in this world is occasionally female, though she must not on that account be confounded with the ordinary woman—or the ordinary man, for that matter—whom one does not privately regard as a full-grown, responsible individual at all. You do not waste 'homage' on the female efficient person; you regard her, favourably or unfavourably, much as you regard the male of the efficient species, except that you have a certain special fear of her, based on her freedom from that sickliness of conscience, so much deprecated by Ibsen, which makes the male the prey of unreal scruples; and you have at times to defend yourself against her, or, when she is an ally, to assume her

fitness for active service of the roughest kinds, in a way which horrifies the chivalrous gentlemen of your acquaintance, who will not suffer the winds of heaven to breathe on a woman's face too harshly lest they should disable her in her mission of sewing on buttons. In short, your chivalry and gallantry are left useless on your hands, unless for small-talk with the feminine rank and file, who must be answered according to their folly, just like the male rank and file. But then you get on much better with the female master-spirits, who will not stand chivalry, or gallantry, or any other form of manly patronage. Therefore let others, who have not been educated as I have been, pay Mlle. Guilbert gallant compliments ; as for me, no sooner had the lady mounted the platform with that unmistakable familiarity with the situation and command of it which shows itself chiefly by the absence of all the petty affectations of the favourite who has merely caught the fancy of the public without knowing how or why, than I was on the alert to see what an evidently very efficient person was going to do. And I was not at all deceived in my expectancy. It amuses her to tell interviewers that she cannot sing, and has no gestures ; but I need not say that there would be very little fun for her in that if she were not one of the best singers and pantomimists in Europe. She divided her programme into three parts : Ironical songs, Dramatic songs, and—but perhaps I had better use the French heading here, and say ‘*Chansons Légères.*’ For though Mlle. Guilbert sings the hymns of a very ancient faith, profusely

endowed and sincerely upheld among us, we deny it a name and an establishment. Its 'Chansons Ironiques' are delivered by her with a fine intensity of mordant expression that would not be possible without profound conviction beneath it; and if there is anything that I am certain of after hearing her sing 'Les Vierge,' it is the perfect integrity of her self-respect in an attitude towards life which is distinctly not that of a British matron. To kindle art to the whitest heat there must always be some fanaticism behind it: and the songs in which Mlle. Guilbert expresses her immense irony are the veil of a propaganda which is not the propaganda of asceticism. It is not my business here to defend that propaganda against the numerous and highly respectable British class which conceives life as presenting no alternative to asceticism but licentiousness; I merely describe the situation to save people of this way of thinking from going to hear Mlle. Guilbert, and proposing to treat her as their forefathers treated Joan of Arc. Perhaps, however, they would only laugh the innocent laugh of the British lady who, not understanding French, and unwilling to let that fact appear, laughs with the rest at the points which prevented Mlle. Guilbert from inviting the episcopal bench as well as the Press to her reception. In spite of her superb diction, I did not understand half her lines myself. Part of what I did understand would have surprised me exceedingly if it had occurred in a drawing-room ballad by Mr Cowen or Sir Arthur Sullivan, but I

am bound to add that I was not in the least shocked or disgusted, though my unlimited cognition of an artist's right to take any side of life whatever as subject-matter for artistic treatment makes me most indignantly resentful of any attempt to abuse my tolerance by coarse jesting. The fact is, Mlle. Guilbert's performance was, for the most part, much more serious at its base than an average Italian opera 'Scena.' I am not now alluding to the avowedly dramatic songs like 'Le Conscrit' and 'Morphinée,' which any ordinary actress could deliver in an equally effective, if somewhat less distinguished manner. I am thinking of 'Les Vièrges,' 'Sur la Scène,' and the almost frightful 'La Pierreuse.' A Pierreuse, it appears, is a garrotter's decoy. In the song she describes how she prowls about the fortifications of Paris at night, and entraps some belated bourgeois into conversation. Then she summons her principal with a weird street cry; he pounces on his prey; and the subsequent operations are described in a perfect war-dance of a refrain. Not so very horrible, perhaps; but the last verse describes, not a robbery, but the guillotining of the robber; and so hideously exquisite is the singing of this verse that you see the woman in the crowd at La Roquette; you hear the half-choked repetition of the familiar signal with which she salutes the wretch as he is hurried out; you positively see his head flying off; above all, you feel with a shudder how the creature's impulses of terror and grief are overcome by the bestial excitement of seeing the great State show of killing a man in the

most sensational way. Just as people would not flog children if they could realize the true effect of the ceremony on the child's pet playmates, to whom it is supposed to be a wholesome warning, so the French Government would certainly abolish public executions 'Sans Phrase' (and perhaps private ones too) if only they would go and hear Mlle. Guilbert sing 'La Pierreuse.'

"Technically Mlle. Guilbert is a highly accomplished artist. She makes all her effects in the simplest way and with perfect judgment. Like the ancient Greeks, not to mention the modern music-hall artists, she relies on the middle and low registers of her voice, they being the best suited for perfectly well-controlled declamation; but her cantabile is charming, thanks to a fine ear and a delicate rhythmic faculty. Her command of every form of expression is very remarkable, her tones ranging from the purest and sweetest pathos to the cockniest Parisian cynicism. There is not a trace of the rowdy restlessness and forced 'go' of the English music-hall singer about her; and I suggest to those members of the London County Council, who aim at the elevation of the music-hall, that they could not do better than offer Mlle. Guilbert handsome terms to follow up her reception of 'La Presse Anglaise' by a series of receptions of Miss Marie Lloyd, Miss Katie Lawrence, and other eminent English prima donnas, in order that they might be encouraged to believe that there is room in music-hall singing for art of classic self-possession and delicacy without any loss of gaiety, and that the author of a



music-hall song may not be the worse for being a wit, or even a poet."

The enthusiasm which was thus gradually kindled in London for Yvette Guilbert and her art soon spread from critics to public, and on her second appearance in 1896 she was accorded an ovation that revealed the immense hold she had already gained on the affection of the latter. Her songs were beginning to be better understood, and with a fuller understanding there came, as a natural consequence, a fuller appreciation. Henceforth Yvette Guilbert held an established position in the hearts of London audiences.

This period of her second visit to England was marked by the appearance in the "Yellow Book" for April, of a delightful appreciation of the artist, written by Mr Stanley V. Makower. Some of this deals more particularly with her songs, and Mr Makower's masterly analysis of "La Soûlarde" will be found elsewhere. But what he has to say of the artist herself, her art, and the impression she made on the minds of London audiences, is well worth listening to, and with the kind permission of the author and Mr John Lane, the publisher of the "Yellow Book," I take the opportunity of quoting it here.

"Yvette Guilbert constitutes the one brilliant exception to the general statement, advanced with some hesitation through want of sufficient knowledge, that we have more individual ability on the Music Hall Stage than the French have in the Café Chantant.

But the weight of Yvette Guilbert's individuality goes far to counterbalance the deficiency, if there is one. It is an individuality so marked, so rare, that it almost constitutes by its own force a development by itself, independent of a place in the history of its art, in the same way that the strength of Chopin's individuality makes it impossible to put him into relation with other composers of music. Curiously enough we find that during the life-time of Chopin there was the same tendency to call him 'modern,' 'new-fangled,' and so forth, that we observe in those critics who have used the word 'fin-de-siècle' in connection with Yvette Guilbert. In both cases the epithets are idle. It is the misfortune which attends all histrionic art that it cannot be handed down to posterity, but if it were possible to preserve something of the art of Yvette Guilbert, we should want to preserve the beauty she conceives internally, the look of inward imagination that comes from her eyes, whilst the simplicity of her dress, the almost conventional quality of her gestures, and the long black gloves are, at the most, evidence of an unerring taste and of a distinguished simplicity.

"There is, then, nothing essentially contemporary in Yvette Guilbert, nor, indeed, is there anything contemporary in the form of the art, which her instinct has guided her to select for the display of her genius, for it is a compromise between the dramatic and lyrical form which has its parallel in early classical times. Nothing could equal the obtuseness of more than one English critic who has advised Yvette

Guilbert to forsake this quasi-lyrical form for the drama—advice which goes conclusively to prove that such critics misunderstand the nature of her genius from beginning to end. Moreover, if we examine the qualities which constitute Sarah Bernhardt the greatest living actress, we find at once that they are entirely different from those possessed by Yvette Guilbert. It is indeed by setting the two side by side that we are enabled to grasp more clearly the character of the genius which has secured for each a unique position in her art. Sarah Bernhardt has a personality—a personality so strong that she has succeeded in reducing the drama to a formula by which 'that personality can be expressed. It is the extraordinary power of that personality that makes her a great actress, and perhaps the predominant characteristics of it are pictorial and musical. She cannot avoid looking and sounding beautiful. Only once do I remember the reality of the situation to have asserted itself over a superb pose, and then the result was destructive. In the last act of 'Fédora,' in which the heroine dies in her lover's arms, there is a moment when the magnificent harmony of her movements is merged in the realism of a dying woman's agony. The tiny lace handkerchief (an exquisite symbol of her art), which has accompanied her through two and a half acts of frenzy, is flung to the ground, and with it she seems to abandon the last artifice of a great artist; but this death, unlike most of her deaths, is unlovely—it is as revolting as would be the actual death of a person on the stage; it is outside





XVI TI CUILIERT IN HEK SONG 'MA CRAND MÈRI  
(From a painting by + GILLY)

the domain of art. From this we see that, the moment Sarah Bernhardt forsakes her personality and falls into a realism, she ceases to be an artist. On the other hand, in Yvette Guilbert personality can never be detected, and her realism, as will be seen later on, is never naked or unlovely. You can have no idea of what she is like off the stage from seeing her on the stage. With unerring instinct she moves very little when she is singing, and with an unflinching courage which makes us marvel she has never been tempted to employ the dress or 'make-up' of any character from the beginning of her career until to-day. She pins herself to no personality, but stands completely unfettered, illustrating in the abstract, by a method of intense conception, a number of fundamental truths of humanity in a song which does not take her five minutes to sing. When she is singing Béranger's 'Ma Grand'mère,' she makes no attempt at looking and speaking like any individual old grandmother whom one can picture to oneself. It is true that she wears a white cap and sits in an arm-chair, but that is only for her own purposes, as, so far as the audience is concerned, the incongruousness of her youthful face and dress and the white cap only serve to dissociate the mind more than ever from any single character. She gives the impression of infirmity in her voice, and in the last verse you can almost see the mist of age creep over her eyes as she waves her hand feebly in front of her. No impersonation of an individual grandmother could give such an impression of all grand-

motherhood as Yvette Guilbert manages to convey by the subtle variety of tone and manner in which she sings the refrain :

Combien je regrette  
Mon bras si dodu,  
Ma jambe bien faite  
Et le temps perdu.

“ After this, to talk of the drama as an appropriate field for the display of her powers is surely irrelevant, for, in its present conditions, it could do nothing but corrupt and reduce to a minimum those powers of lyrical intensity which are the keynote of her success. Luckily for us there is no chance of her forsaking her present form, for she well knows the nature of her talent. And it is sufficient answer to the ignorant, who look upon the drama as a higher form of art, that eminent teachers of Schumann’s songs take their pupils to hear Yvette Guilbert, in order that they may learn the value of words in singing.

“ It is worth noticing here that Yvette Guilbert has to suffer largely from that class of people who admire and misunderstand. This is a penalty that all public people have to pay, and its effect is not really far-reaching ; but the nature of the misunderstanding in the case of Yvette Guilbert is a singular one. It creates an impression in the mind of the uninitiate that the charm of Yvette Guilbert is that of a very pretty, very wicked, sparkling soubrette. Such impression is conveyed by remarks which everybody

has heard, such as, 'She sings the most indecent songs with the most absurd innocence.' Young men tell it you with a perplexed look in their eyes which at once conveys the impression that the point of the songs is that they are all that Mrs Grundy loathes. It is almost needless to say that it is usually people who do not understand the French who speak like this. Moreover, it is little short of fatuous to suppose that a few indecent sentences delivered naïvely will account for the spell which Yvette Guilbert throws over her audience. Obviously such an effect is produced by something far more rare and fundamental—the possession of an individuality without parallel. Indeed, the obscene with her is clearly a mere accident in her art—a thing so entirely outside herself that she can treat it with the utmost indifference, with even a frank gaiety that is inborn, which no amount of study or pose could ever produce—an almost unique cleanness of soul, 'under which vice itself loses half its evil by losing all its grossness.' The novelty of method, the total lack of sensuality were what took the French by storm; for, wearied by a host of singers whose individuality never raised them above the grossness and sordidness of the 'bête humaine,' they had never yet dreamed of a treatment of another kind—a treatment that again seems to remind us of the classics more than of anything contemporary.

"Yvette Guilbert is lucky in having poets of no mean order to write for her. Prominent among these there is Aristide Bruant, a well-known literary



figure of Paris, who was presented to the 'Société des Gens de Lettres' in 1892 by Francois Coppée as 'the descendant in a direct line of our Villon,' in a speech full of genuine enthusiasm. Beside Aristide Bruant stands Jules Jouy, whose work Yvette Guilbert interprets with perhaps even greater success, and examples of which we have heard in 'La Soûlarde' and 'Morphinée' — both very remarkable, but 'La Soûlarde' the more successful of the two owing to its far greater simplicity. Indeed, in this song the art of Yvette Guilbert is exhibited to perfection.<sup>1</sup> . . .

"The reality of the picture that she creates is not the lettered realism that is conveyed by any external method, like that, for example, of Mr Tree, when he is made up to look exactly like a Russian spy, an Italian cut-throat, or a Jewish pianist; nor is it the realism of Sarah Bernhardt, when she dies in 'Fédora,' but the spiritual realism of a thing deeply conceived, deeply felt, and translating itself to the audience without any delusion of accessories. It is conveyed in the quality of the voice, in the marvellous narrative of the eyes; and these are so inimitable that we are not surprised at the incapacity of a Cissy Loftus to give us a more fundamental notion of Yvette Guilbert than could be given by anyone who would put on a pair of long black gloves. It is not possible that she should suggest her prototype any more than a stuffed animal suggests a living one. The best

<sup>1</sup> NOTE.—For Mr Makower's description of "La Soûlarde," which follows, see page 319.

proof of this is, that if you hear the accomplished little mimic before you have heard Yvette Guilbert, you get an absolutely false and ineffectual impression of what the French singer is like ; if you hear her afterwards, the impression made on you by her prototype is so strong that you cannot stop yourself from filling up in your mind the big gaps in the imitation, and you come away thinking of Yvette Guilbert, and yet feeling perplexed, cheated, dissatisfied. You have wanted the suggestion of a mind—you have been given the suggestion of a body, and even a very imperfect one, because of the distinction of *physique* in Yvette Guilbert. This is obvious enough when we look at a photograph of her, which all the cunning of M. Reutlinger is unable to conjure into anything approaching a likeness ; and of the three hundred pictures which have been painted by different artists of the singer, no single one gives any complete idea of the original, though many have caught a trait here and there, and suggested it powerfully enough. In fact, there is nothing sufficiently photographic about Yvette Guilbert to lend herself to imitation of any sort ; and when Cissy Loftus tries to imitate Yvette Guilbert, she is like a child trying to make a drawing after Velasquez.

“ The type of song mentioned above forms but an infinitesimal part of a very large *répertoire* which Yvette Guilbert is always extending by the study of new productions. Infinitely delightful are her renderings of the songs of Xanrof and others in

which she displays the lighter side of her talent, a vein of broad and yet delicate humour and a taste that is unimpeachable. When you hear her sing 'Les demoiselles de pensionnat,' you realise how impossible it is for her to be vulgar. The treatment is so frank and direct, that before you have time to collect your thoughts you are laughing with the performer at the demoiselles. She has the knack of getting her audience on her side before she has said two words. Who will forget the charming intimacy that she established between herself and the London public rather more than a year ago,<sup>1</sup> when she stood in front of the stage and announced 'Linger Longer Loo' with a distinct emphasis on the last syllable of Longer? The audience of the Empire stroked itself all over, and took with the most friendly courtesy and enthusiasm the compliment which Yvette Guilbert elected to pay them by burlesquing the popular song of the hour. This excellent bit of foolery never failed to put the whole house in a boisterous good humour, and though her burlesques cannot be put on a level with her greatest achievements, yet they exhibit a humour and a delicate fancy that makes it difficult to forget them. They show again that she has an extraordinary feeling for the value of words. Her burlesques of the American songs are full of a fun that is robust, incisive, spontaneous, and her French version of the English 'Di, Di' illustrates the creative nature of her genius. Out of the rather colourless, commonplace English text she makes

<sup>1</sup> In 1894.

a thing that sparkles and dances with fun, with at least one masterly phrase in it :

Ne fais pas ça :  
Ça m'fait du mal,  
*Ça froissera*  
*Mon idéal.*

But the numerous songs of which she has written both text and music afford abundant proof that she is never at a loss for an idea, and, indeed, in many of her great successes she has suggested the idea of the songs herself, as in Jules Jouy's 'La Soullarde.'

"To attempt to describe the appearance of Yvette Guilbert would be folly when even the art of M. Steinlen has failed to give us more than a very imperfect idea of what she is like. Indeed, as might be expected, her physique is as rare as her qualities as an artist. Her face bears in it the irregularities of genius, and, moreover, it never seems to look the same twice running. It has in it something 'insaisissable,' something which evades the precision of mental as well as actual portraiture. Perhaps this is owing to the remarkable imagination in the eyes, which in Yvette Guilbert more than in anybody else give the key to the individuality. There is in those eyes a great melancholy; not the morbid melancholy of a creature unable to struggle with the world—but a look borrowed from the whole of nature, something of the infinite sadness which shines from the eyes of Botticelli's *Prima Vera*; and in that look lies a wisdom which makes us wonder.

“ Mr Walter Pater, in his study of Dionysus, points out the tinge of melancholy in the god's face in that point in his evolution when he passes from the joyous spirit in the country, with its rivers and rich imagery of grape and wine, to the town, the abode of human misery and woe. He traces from this the growth of Greek tragedy.

“ Such is the look that steals into the eyes of Yvette Guilbert when she leaves the rose gardens of her villa on the Seine, to come and sing in the heart of Paris of the joys and sorrows, the laughter and the tears that are born in the great French city.”       ”





YVETTE GUILBERT IN HER XVIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SONGS.

## CHAPTER V

### TEN YEARS LATER

It was exactly ten years after her first appearance in England that Yvette Guilbert introduced to London audiences a style of song as diverse from the songs of Montmartre as could possibly be imagined. In a dress of flowered silk and a powdered wig, she sang quaint old ditties of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, lyrics by Beaudelaire and Rollinat, set to the music of the period, which had been unearthed for her by M. Wekerlin, the custodian of the library at the Paris Conservatoire.

"A new Yvette," wrote Arthur Symons to the "Saturday Review," "who has forgotten the learned Paris face as she has forgotten the long gloves, sings, with an articulation itself a very elaborate art, old French songs, which she takes out of dusty shelves and restores, with all their old gesture and odour, to daylight. Mme. Guilbert has long been a fine artist, in the sharp, nervous, somewhat brutal modern way, a Forain; she has become suddenly another kind of artist, with the eighteenth-century grace, precision, sensibility, witty delicacy of a Fragonard."

No happier criticism of Yvette Guilbert's earlier and later methods could possibly have been made. The caricatures of Forain, almost brutally realistic,



form an adequate parallel to the songs of Montmartre, as sung by Yvette Guilbert on her first visit to London, ruthless, hard, and typically modern ; while her later songs, the songs of Old France, dainty, picturesque and redolent of lavender, find a fitting counterpart in the delicate idealistic pictures of Fragonard.

"One cannot always remain the same," she remarked once, when the comparison was pointed out to her. "Il faut se renouveler, se modifier. Art is a mirror which should show many reflections, and the artist should not always show the same face, or the face becomes a mask."

Her success in this new line was as instantaneous and as assured as ever. It was a revelation in versatility. From the slang songs of the Paris streets to the ditties describing life at the Court of Marie Antoinette is a far cry, but Yvette Guilbert's genius shone as brightly in the one as it had done in the other.

Under the heading of "Yvette Exquise," Mr Harold Owen, writing in the "Morning Post," has given us a vivid impression of Yvette Guilbert as she appeared to London audiences in 1904 :

"At a first hearing of Yvette Guilbert the impression is that of the unanalysable perfection of her art. It differs not in degree but in kind from the artistry of any other—comédienne ! For one must pause at that word in deference to the sheer difficulty of classifying her—she is above and beyond and outside any standard that modern stage representation sets 'Tragi-comédienne' takes the classification a stage

nearer the truth, but it still leaves something wanting. Moreover, in some of her songs and phrases she dwells in the realms of pure comedy—with a difference. For she soars into its ether, and it is this etherealised, volatilised quality of her comedy which distinguishes it from that of any other artist.

“ But at a first seeing and hearing of her the impression is one of uncritical bewilderment at a new phenomenon. It is like discovering a new colour in the prismatic scale—a simile that again needs qualification to allow for the melting iridescence of her moods. It is only after seeing her twice, and a dozen times after that, that the details of her art stand out to allow of being detected, separated and ticketed. Her voice, of course, is the chief instrument of her art. And how sensitive it is to the inspiration of her mind! I once heard a physiologist’s learned lecture on the vocal chords, which, he said, constituted the most wonderful of all stringed instruments. The lecture explained everything except the inexplicable—which may be stated by the example that the voice of Yvette Guilbert offers. By what mysterious interpretative process of nerve and muscle does the breath of her body become the subtlest echo of her mind? Her voice ripples, quivers, chirps, and trills; hardens into shrewish perversity or softens to a caress, all at a breath. It becomes roguishly coquettish, or superbly disdainful, or cajoling; overflows with quiet, simple merriment; rises, with a lift of her eyebrows, to a mocking challenge; skims like a swallow over shallow water, or plunges to a deep

note of forlornness like a stone dropped into a pool of molten lead. It is the nimblest hair-trigger of a voice—touched with the lightest fancy of her mind it shoots its message right into your intelligence, to set you laughing with a delicious delicacy of comprehension; or it goes straight to the heart with a quick little stab and leaves something quivering in your soul. It is like the flash of summer lightning, playing in harmless frolic; it falls into a reverie, and has something of the witchery and sweet melancholy of moonlight on a shadowed lake; and suddenly it drops like an ironic bolt from the serene blue of laughing skies to the earth of sordid tragedy. Now it is wide open with the frankness, the surprise, and the ingenuousness of innocence; now it is languishing on a note of arch, sophisticated coquetry; now it is strangled and narrowed to a note of perversity and defiance; now it undulates with a careless, sensuous, sunny content. It is always specialised to an unmistakable meaning; never vaguely expressive of a primary emotion—as of love, fear, hate, or jealousy—but always subtly definite. A column of print would not be wasted on the shades of meaning she can throw into a sigh.

“But her voice, for all the infinite resource of its ‘nuances,’ does not exhaust the expression of her art, which is touched to the finest precision by the auxiliaries of gesture. Who can express so much by a raised eyebrow or a lowered eyelash? Who can put as much meaning in the twiddle of a saucy finger, or shrug a shoulder or toss a head to such effect?

There are two or three tiny, almost imperceptible, movements in 'Les Housards de la Garde' which give all the meaning to the line 'Eh ! bien, ma chère, it était mon amant.' She is the very embodiment of expression. And yet no one could be more frugal of gesture than she is—she is content to hint and insinuate, and scorns exuberance. In the department of gesture her art is disciplined like Phil May's eloquent line—it is fined down to the essential thing, and that is presented with a perfect finish. She seems, indeed, to carry the power of human personal expression to its limit. The subjective impressionism which discovered so many moods in Sir Willoughby Patterne's leg might conceive of human gestures indulging in finer shades of expression than Yvette Guilbert conveys, but such a conception or perception would only be carrying matters a little beyond the scope of the five senses to which human comprehension is limited.

"To employ a summary adjective, she is exquisite in all her phases—whether she is the ruthless realist in the long black gloves as first we knew her, or the old Pompadour dame with quavering voice and limbs and the wrinkled face, recalling her young days with a senile leer, or is singing an old English ballad of fragrant sentiment like 'The Keys of Heaven.' English audiences have now seen her in these three phases. At first we knew her, an ultra-modern, in the shuddering ironic realism of the 'rouleuse' and the 'soûlarde.' Then a new Yvette Guilbert appeared dressed à la Pompadour, and carrying us

back to the eighteenth century and to the 'Grandes dames' of the French Court, with their vivacity and elegances and graceful languors, and at the Palace Theatre now we see her dressed in sprigged muslin, singing 'chansons crinolines,' songs of the Third Empire, and an old English ballad from which she has wiped the dust of ages, restoring its fragrance. To hear her sing 'The Keys of Heaven' is like seeing one's mother's wedding dress taken out of its lavender wrappings."

On the whole Yvette Guilbert appears to have found London audiences surprisingly sympathetic. They were naturally unable to take up her points as quickly and readily as Parisian audiences, partly owing to the difficulty of following a foreign language, and partly to the fact that the English temperament is by nature more slow to respond to any call upon its emotions. But Yvette Guilbert found them "très intelligents," nevertheless, and their appreciation "fine and delicate." Still she missed in some degree that sympathetic thrill which she was used to feeling in her Parisian audiences at some subtle point of tone or gesture, a thrill which at times almost seemed to translate itself into words and come across the footlights as the actual voice of the audience. English audiences, she declared once, were more inclined to criticise the singer than the song, to let their thoughts dwell too much on the personality of the artist, and thus lose that sense of intimate relationship with her art, which is so essential to a complete

and sympathetic understanding between an artist and her public.

While in London in 1904, Yvette Guilbert took the opportunity of studying our English stage, both in the theatre and the music-hall, and, as a result of her investigations, communicated her views on the subject to the Press. Of the music-halls there was apparently nothing much to say, but with regard to the legitimate stage, she declared, while expressing the deepest admiration for our actors and actresses, that she was absolutely astounded at the vapidness of the majority of plays that were offered to a discriminating public. "Why is it?" she once said to an interviewer,<sup>1</sup> "that you have such poor intellectual productions? Do they not take the theatre seriously—do the politicians, the men of science, the rich merchants of the City, the aristocracy whose bedrooms overlook the parks, the rich colonial visitors, the lawyers, the soldiers, even the literary men themselves—in short, all the cream of London—do they all regard the theatre as a Punch and Judy show to make them laugh? Would they read novels that are no better than the plays they see? Or do they merely think that nobody expects much from theatres, whereas books must, at least, be intelligent, or people would be ashamed to be seen reading them. For me, I have been in every theatre in London, and I am filled with sorrow, I am 'désolée,' my heart has been broken to see such waste of material. Often I have come out before the first 'entr'acte.' Yet you

<sup>1</sup> See "Manchester Daily Dispatch," 28th May 1904.

generous English applaud these stupidities—is it because you think them clever ? ”

Another interview appeared in the “ Morning Post,” in which, while expressing very similar sentiments, Yvette Guilbert pays a sincere tribute to our actors and actresses, and, incidentally, to the Public.

“ What a pity it is,” she says, “ that with the elements you possess—fine staging, fine theatres, lovely women, and splendid audiences—you should, through heedlessness, suffer the quality of your taste to be disturbed. Your public is better than the fare provided for it—too good for it, in fact—and it is truly disheartening to see the talents of your marvellously clever artists put to such trivial uses.”

The publication of this interview provoked a reply from Mr (now Sir Herbert) Beerbohm Tree, in which he declared that “ the English are serious about religion but rarely about art,” and reminded Madame Guilbert that “ the French are apt to confuse the ‘ obstetric ’ with the ‘ artistic.’ ”

A friendly correspondence ensued, in which honours may be described as being fairly even. It served to show, if nothing else, that the French and English view the drama from entirely different standpoints, and that between the two there is a wider gulf fixed than the mere crossing of the English Channel from one coast to the other can ever hope to bridge.

## CHAPTER VI

### YVETTE GUILBERT AND ALBERT CHEVALIER

THE history of the English Variety Stage contains no parallel to Yvette Guilbert. There have been clever singers and clever reciters, but no one has been found to combine in one art the distinctive qualities of these two separate arts. It may be partly because we have not the material to work upon. There is nothing in the English language to correspond quite with the works of Bruant, Xanrof, and Jules Jouy. English songs, as a rule, though they may dip into pathos, avoid direct tragedy. It is partly the outcome of our national character. The French, as a nation, are more hysterical and morbidly emotional than we are ; more prone to sudden transilience from comedy to tragedy, and vice versa. Hence we have no ballads of the nature of " La Soûlarde " or " Ma Tête " to exploit, even should an interpreter arise who was capable of their exploitation. In our comedy songs, too, we miss that light touch which makes the French chansonnette so dainty a thing. One or two of the songs of this class which Yvette Guilbert sings have, when considered in the cold light of an English translation, a distinctly " naughty " tendency. But the French have such a way of expressing these things that they become in their interpretation



irresistibly droll, and innocent of all offence. In English they would often become merely vulgar comic songs. But it must not be forgotten that the interpretation is more than half the battle, and it is in just this that Yvette Guilbert stands on a plane so far apart from even the best of our music-hall artists. And this becomes even more patent when she meets them more or less on their own ground. One has only to think of her singing of "Mary was a Housemaid," which, from being a feeble and rather "banal" music-hall song, becomes in her hands a sparkling little comedy of "Life below stairs." •

Perhaps the nearest approach to her on our music-hall stage has been Albert Chevalier. Chevalier has done for the English coster what Guilbert did for the Paris hooligan, albeit in a somewhat different way. Both the subject-matter of his songs and his manner of delivering them differ materially from hers. But the two have many points in common. Each is a great artist; each gives us little, clear-cut, well-defined silhouettes of certain phases of life, which are not so far apart as they might appear. The Paris hooligan and the English coster are, of course, quite distinctive types of humanity in many respects; but the pathos, the sordidness, the tragedies of their daily lives are very near akin.

Both artists have the power of bringing home to us vividly the scenes of which they sing; of creating that wonderful sense of atmosphere which makes us forget the singer and think only of the song. But in their methods of producing this effect, in

their gestures, their enunciation, and their manner of delivery, they present a somewhat striking contrast.

This contrast was very marked when, in 1896, they appeared together on the same platform at the Duke of York's Theatre, prior to their combined tour in America. Mr Max Beerbohm, writing in the "Saturday Review" in June of that year, gives a very interesting comparison of the two, and points out that while there is a distinct kinship between these two artists, there are also subtle differences between them which have a certain significance, as illustrating the differences between French and English art. "No one, I imagine," he says, "will dispute the platitude that French acting is better than English. The points of superiority are many; but the most noticeable of them all is the quickness and apparent ease with which (I speak, of course, generally) French mimes express as much as can by English mimes be expressed only with much deliberation and apparent effort."

Mr Beerbohm then proceeds to illustrate this statement by a study of Mme. Guilbert's methods compared with those of Mr Chevalier, and with his permission, and that of the "Saturday Review," I may be allowed to quote him here.

"One of Mme. Guilbert's virtues is that she never forgets that a singer's first duty to a song is to sing it. Always she obeys the rhythm of the music. All her acting is done within that limitation. Yet is not lost one tittle of the acting necessary to express the full meaning of the words. I do not think that

her face, voice, and hands are more naturally eloquent than Mr Chevalier's. But she knows just how much use to make of them. Notice in the famous 'Ma Grand'mère,' how perfectly she differentiates the words of the girl from those of the old woman, yet with hardly a perceptible change of key. Something happens in her eyes, and we know that it is the girl speaking; we see the girl herself; and then again, in another instant, we see the old woman. One can imagine the pauses with which Mr Chevalier would mark those transitions, and the violent contortions he would go through before he got under weigh. And yet he would not make us realise the old woman and the girl half so vividly as does Mme. Guilbert. We should realise that he was performing an ingenious feat of character-acting. We should think him frightfully clever. But—well, it never strikes us that Mme. Guilbert is clever. She does but fill us with a perfect illusion of whatsoever scene she sings, of whatever type she apes. How she does it is (at the moment of watching her) a mystery. And but for that mystery she couldn't do it."

In America they were received with open arms in all the forty towns which they visited. The appearance of these "two stars on a red firmament of serge," as one paper described it, was everywhere hailed as a unique opportunity, as indeed it was.

Both had been to America before. Chevalier was voted not to have changed at all. But they found Yvette Guilbert altered, just as the style of her songs had altered, and her audiences apparently considered



YVONNE GUILBKI.

(From a caricature by Charles Landre when she first went to America.)



the change to their liking. "Her touch was far more mellow," says Mr James O'Donnell Bennett in "The Record Herald" (of Chicago), "because her material was more gracious than when a decade ago she sang savage little ballads of a realistic trend at Old Central Music Hall. In truth the artist has changed herself, too. She is quite dimply now, and notably pretty, and her air is jolly—a very different little picture from the thin little creature with the knitting-needle arms, and the wan eyes that looked out over rows upon rows of empty seats in the vanished concert-room."

This note of approval for the new order of things was echoed by practically all the critics. American audiences had apparently failed to enter into the spirit of her earlier songs, the songs that dealt in so wonderful and intimate a fashion with the life of the streets of Paris. They found the sprightliness of her Pompadour and Crinoline songs very much more to their tastes; and special appreciation seems to have been accorded to "La Fille de Parthenay," described by one critic as "an exquisitely coquettish and politely suggestive item," "Les Cloches de Nantes," "Le Jaloux et la Menteuse," "Les Housards de la Garde," "Les Belles Manières," and her singing of English songs.

It is perhaps of interest to note in passing that Yvette Guilbert's songs of ten years before were in America voted somewhat "improper." The subject has already been referred to once or twice in this book from the standpoint of English audiences, but

the American outlook would appear to be somewhat different. In a rather amusing article, under large headlines, recording the fact that "GUILBERT SINGS PROPER DITTIES," an American critic deals with this side of the question in some detail. "Nothing," he says, "could have been more polite and decorous than Yvette Guilbert's share of the entertainment, and not a single song she sang could have caused a blush. Though the audiences read the translated verses as she carolled and acted them, there wasn't a line that recalled the songs of the canaille and of the half-world that she sang once upon a time. Those songs, or some of them, were saved to be read behind a screen at home, for the books so avidly purchased by the non-French-speaking audience contained many of the verses which once caused the more discreet mammas and chaperons to pack their wards quickly away."

America took the new Yvette very much to its heart, and the critics were unanimous in their appreciation. "As to the rippling grotesquerie of this delicious humorist"—to quote Mr Bennett once more—"there is little one can do but rave. She is too elusive to be describable. She pouts, she whimpers, she flouts, she is coquettish and she is demure, all in four lines of the same song. She has Calvé's fire and Mrs Fiske's flutter. She can shade her tones into any emotion, and her knack in grimace is incomparable. She can give you spite, impudence, vexation, languor, and appeal in as many seconds as there are words here for her moods. . . . In the old English songs

she was very prim, but very enticing, and the way she affected alarm and shyness over her own English captivated and touched the house."

A writer in the "Boston Transcript," in a notice of the Guilbert-Chevalier recital, having made a reference to France as being the "wickedest country in Europe by reason of masculine selfishness and lack of conscience," Yvette promptly indited him a letter, in the course of which she said :

"France is the sumptuous fatherland of Beauty—all the arts, from the smallest to the greatest, blossom there and multiply magnificently. Painting, sculpture, literature, music, dramatic art, poetry, lyric art, all the lights of the French soul are born of French sentiment, French sensibility. All nations regard the Frenchman as a man of refined tastes—delicate, sensitive—and he is therefore very hard to please.

"He carries sentiment even into business, abhors brutality in gesture or speech, knows how to be a great merchant and at the same time a 'grand seigneur,' to make millions in trade and spend ten hours a day in his office—courteous, affable, polished, with the manners of a very perfect gentleman—and to make his office a salon. But—but!—he is more exacting than any other! More sensitive and more sentimental, he is 'curieux.' Money isn't his sole objective. For he is too Latin not to appreciate the other beauties of the forces of life. To his way of thinking money isn't a source of strength, but rather a weakness. How can you interpret in America a soul like his? The Frenchman alone knows that



happiness—noble happiness, voluptuously refined—isn't solely the product of riches. He regards money as only one of the thousand sources of the joy of living, and he wants full knowledge of the nine hundred and ninety-nine others. The Frenchman doesn't merely want to be rich, he wants to be happy.

"His sentimentalism craves love, and beauty in love, mental fervour in love, originality in love, and tenderness, devotion, surprise, unexpectedness, drollery, melancholy, sincerity, and deception—in a word, all the humanities that love inspires in women. And a Frenchman's eternal sorrow, a Frenchman's eternal distress, is the perpetual and indefatigable search for her who shall sum up within herself all that his sentimentalism, his artistic responsiveness, dreams of finding.

"A Frenchman of marked individuality and any elevation of mind cannot find his ideal. No one woman has all the physical and intellectual beauties to satisfy him, and he runs from the brunette to the blonde, from the slender to the plump, from the spirituelle to the intelligent, from the American girl to the Russian, from the English woman to the German, always busily seeking complete happiness, which he succeeds in gaining in its fulness only by long and multiple sojourns almost everywhere.

"If this isn't an excuse, it's at least an explanation. You say that the Frenchman lacks conscience. Perhaps. There are weaknesses in abundance in his character, but he nevertheless possesses a character, and it is lashed by divers sentimentalities—now of

the higher order, now of the lower—yet never, never petrified by the sole motive, money.”

The tour, which entailed a prodigious amount of hard travelling in a short time, was an immense success. The combined performance of these two artists, at once so alike and so different, must have been something of a revelation. Each is well-nigh perfect in his or her way ; together, they spell an entertainment that for sheer artistry it would be difficult to surpass.

## CHAPTER VII

### FROM VAUDEVILLE TO COMEDY

IN 1907 Yvette Guilbert sprang something of a surprise upon the theatrical world, by announcing that she intended to say farewell to vaudeville, and become a comedy actress. The news was received with unfeigned regret, for, however successful she might prove as an actress, and there were few who doubted her success for a moment, it was felt that nothing could make good the loss of Yvette Guilbert as a singer. "One might urge on Madame Guilbert," said a writer in "The Nation," "that there are many comedy actresses, and but one Yvette: that art is not to be measured by the size of the medium through which it is presented; that one of her songs, sung as she sings it, is worth a whole scene of a comedy." However, apparently her mind was made up, and she bade a formal farewell to her audiences at the Palace Theatre in July of that year.

No doubt her decision was largely influenced by the triumph she had already achieved at Brussels in February, in playing the part of Léa Marciliana in a piece entitled "L'Eau Trouble," by Ed. Guiraud and Jean de Hinx. Her family, it will be remembered, had assured her in the early days that she would never succeed as a singer, and had begged her to

pin her faith to the legitimate stage, in spite of her previous failures in this direction.

To this advice she turned a deaf ear, and persisted in the pursuit of the career which she had chosen for herself ; now, when as a singer she had succeeded, with a success that even in her most sanguine moments she could never have dreamt of, it may be that, sighing for new worlds to conquer, her mind went back to those early days, her former tribulations in the theatre, and the unheeded counsels of her friends. And so at Brussels she made her venture, threw the die, and won. The stage had gained another star !

The way in which this came about is told by M. Guiraud himself. " About a year and a half earlier," he says, " I became acquainted with a charming society woman, Mme. de Gardilanne, whose play, 'Le Dernier Rêve du Duc d'Enghien,' written under the pseudonym of Jean de Hinx, had just been performed at the Bouffes-Parisiens. Encouraged by the success of this play, and feeling that her friend Yvette Guilbert had, from an excess of modesty, confined her talents too long to the Cafés-Concerts, she wrote a new play, entitled 'La Loi du Sang,' expressly for Madame Guilbert, and sent the manuscript to me. I saw at once that the piece contained, above everything else, one extremely poignant situation, and I wrote to Yvette Guilbert my appreciation of its literary merits. She replied as follows :— ' Mme. de Gardilanne fully appreciates the fact that her play is somewhat lacking in the proper elements of dramatic construction, and, knowing your talents

in this direction, is anxious for you to collaborate with her. Will you do it?' I immediately accepted this tempting offer, and set to work to compress 'La Loi du Sang' into three acts, changing the title to 'L'Eau Trouble.' The piece then went into rehearsal."

M. Guiraud himself was confident of Yvette Guilbert's ability to create the part of Marciliana. "Her excellent dramatic qualities struck me at once," he says. "I saw that her genius was what might be called 'comprehensive,' capable of entering into the part to the smallest detail, and of bringing her fine intelligence to play upon the audience. \*She has a natural gift for sentiment, and her artistic powers seemed to me to have just reached their fullest expansion at this time."

Her success in "L'Eau Trouble" was never for a moment in question; it was more than a success, it was a veritable triumph. Her part was that of a young Italian woman, married to a man much older than herself. Her husband, an austere and rather wearisome person, quite fails to understand the nature of his young wife, brimming over with youth and the joy of life; and after two years of married life she goes off with someone else, leaving a little son behind her. The son grows up and becomes a dramatist. The mother in her turn has become a great actress; the two are introduced, and the mother consents to create the leading rôle in a new play written by her son, who, of course, has no idea of the real relationship between them. The inevitable

happens. Intoxicated with the success of his play, the young dramatist throws his heart at the feet of the woman whose superb genius has so greatly contributed to his triumph.

This is the great scene of the play, and Yvette Guilbert handled it as only a great actress could. It was impossible to tell him the truth, the shock of the discovery would drive him to suicide. All she can do is to disappear out of his life, disappear finally and irrevocably. But she reckons without the impetuosity of youth. He follows her, and she tells him, not the whole truth, but a semblance of it, which is that she loves him devotedly, but not with the love that he asks of her. Uncomprehending, but realising the finality of her refusal, the young dramatist shoots himself.

"Mme. Yvette Guilbert," wrote a critic of this performance, "revealed herself as an artist in the highest sense of the word. She interpreted the part of Léa Marciliana not alone with warmth and passion, but with that sense of the beauty of proportion which is the hall-mark of a great actress."

"One thing is certain," wrote another, "and that is that there is in her acting more than mere carefully-acquired talent; there is personality, temperament, a deep and penetrating sensibility. Yvette Guilbert with just a murmured word or two brought tears to many people's eyes last night."

The following letter to "L'Express" of Liège, from a correspondent at Brussels who witnessed the production, sums up to a nicety the general verdict of the

critics, and also goes to show clearly that Yvette Guilbert brought to bear upon her new adventure in the realms of art those qualities of patience and perseverance which had contributed so greatly to her success as a singer.

"You know that Yvette Guilbert has just made a very happy début as an actress at the Théâtre du Parc. She was playing in 'L'Eau Trouble,' and her interpretation of the part was not only original, but extremely interesting. No doubt the recollection of 'Yvette the singer' prevented some of the audience from realising impartially how great this new achievement was; but that is a recollection which, I can assure you, she is very shortly going to dispel.

"Let me say at once how deserving of praise is the decision of this woman, who has won fame and fortune in her own particular form of art, and who could so easily continue to reap the harvest of that hard-earned success, to devote herself to the service of another and more serious art, the art of the stage.

"Her ability to serve this art is unquestionable. Those who followed her interpretation, marred only by a slight evidence of nervousness, of the part of Marciliana, can testify to that. There was nothing conventional about her performance. It revealed traces of careful study throughout, and a desire in every detail to give a faithful rendering of the part. It was in the emotional scenes above all that she shone supreme, revealing a depth of intelligence

and warmth of feeling that surprised her audience. One could not help thinking, in watching her, that as a singer she had found her true scope in such songs as 'La Roussotte' and 'La Soullarde,' rather than in those of the type of 'Les Petits Cochons.'

"She had, as a matter of fact, studied her part with all the patience and timidity of a débutante. She was six weeks rehearsing. Her colleagues in the cast declared that she was word-perfect weeks before, but that she was never satisfied with herself, was always adding little finishing touches, and was as nervous as a novice about the first performance, which she had postponed twice. By the actual night she was in a pitiable state of nervousness; which increased to such an extent that by the end of the performance she was seriously ill, in spite of the instantaneous success which she made, and the very warm and sincere applause with which she was received.

"This nervousness is rather touching in a woman who has for years been used to applause of the public; it is the outcome of a keen intelligence and an 'artistic conscience,' which makes us hope all the greater things of this transference of her talent to a new sphere, which demands qualities of a higher type than those by which her genius first revealed itself."

The verdict of the critics was everywhere unanimous. Yvette Guilbert herself was entranced with her triumph. On the following morning she wrote to Ed. Guiraud, one of the authors of the piece, who had



not been present at the production, the following characteristic letter :—

“MY DEAR GUIRAUD,—TRIUMPH! The thing is done! Oh! the emotions I have been through! Never shall I forget last night! From seven o’clock to nine I was paralysed with nervousness, cold as ice; my heart felt as though it had stopped beating, my legs as though they would give way under me. It was terrible! . . . Then all in a moment I felt the atmosphere of sympathy, of tenderness even, that enveloped the audience. My heart began to beat once more; I felt I could smile—ouf! People say that I made a splendid Marciliana. Let me believe them so as to gain courage. In every scene I expended all the nerve force of which I was capable, and after each act they recalled me. The climax of the last act was, they tell me, extraordinary. . . . Come and see for yourself whether it is so. . . .

“Thank you, thank you a thousand times, dear friend!

“YVETTE.”

It was small wonder that Yvette Guilbert, after so triumphant a reception, should feel that henceforth her métier lay on the legitimate stage. She came back to England to fulfil her engagement at the Palace, when, as has already been mentioned, she announced her intention of leaving the music-hall for the stage. In the autumn of that year—

October 1907—she made her first appearance in Paris at the Variétés as a comedy actress. And yet not her first, for some seventeen years before, at the very outset of her career, she had, as we know, appeared in the small part of the Duchesse de Nevers in “*La Reine Margot*,” strangely enough, at the self-same theatre. Then she was an unknown quantity; now she faced the critics of Paris with the record of a long and well-merited success as a singer behind her.

Prior to her appearance at the Variétés, she contributed an article to “*Le Figaro*,” in which she gave some of her reasons for wishing to appear on the legitimate stage, and incidentally threw some interesting side-lights on the story of her career as a singer.

“Whether I make a success or not, the fault will not be mine, but the public’s. My decision to play in comedy is simply the result of the expressed desire of my audiences in every country, including Parisians, to which they have given voice during the last fifteen years.

“In every town through which I have passed, the critics have over and over again expressed their regrets in the papers that I should be so mis-using (as they called it) my natural gifts, which, they persisted in saying, were of a high order. The ‘*chansons*’ out of which I was trying to make little comedies in miniature apparently gave both the critics and the public a desire to see me give what they were pleased to call my talents a wider scope.

“Well, what are my particular talents? I’m sure I don’t know. They must be of a somewhat peculiar

quality if, when people hear me sing, they immediately advise me to do something else !

“ All the same I’m not deaf ; and when one’s ears are open one is bound to listen. And so, one fine day, while I was still hesitating as to what I should do, the angel Gabriel, in the shape of Madame de Gardilanne, reproached me for my lack of courage. I was ashamed, I freely confess it. Life had held many severe struggles for me, from each of which I had emerged smiling and victorious, and this after all was only ‘ play.’ And so it came about that I played in ‘ L’Eau Trouble,’ by Madame de Gardilanne (Jean de Hinx) and Ed. Guiraud, at Brussels. •

“ Shall I ever forget that first night ? All that a highly-strung nervous system can suffer I suffered ; every pang of agony of which the human heart is capable, my heart experienced. I can imagine that sleep-walkers must move and speak and smile very much in the manner in which I went through most of the first act of ‘ L’Eau Trouble.’ Then during the five minutes in which I had no lines to speak, I took myself to task with a feeling of shame. ‘ Was it really possible to take oneself so seriously ? ’ I thought. ‘ Wasn’t it a pitiable thing to throw one’s whole mental balance so hopelessly out of gear, and all for a play, a simple play. After all, it was only one of two things, failure or success, and after that, what did it matter ? ’

“ ‘ Have you so much foolish pride,’ I thought angrily, ‘ that you allow yourself to be possessed with so unhealthy a craving for success. How silly !

Are you such a coward that you fear failure? How weak!' I had been surprised into displaying an intellectual asthenia, and caught myself in the very act! I felt most horribly small!

"But fortune, which has always stood my friend, gave me the victory that evening nevertheless. But my success did not inspire me with the idea that I had talent, but simply courage. On the very next day I began to study a new part, as a sort of mental training, and found time to master it before the end of the thirty performances of 'L'Eau Trouble' at Brussels.

"Now here I am at the Variétés, an attentive pupil, fascinated by the atmosphere of an art which seems to be the peculiar property of this particular theatre; an art which reflects the life of the Paris Boulevards—light, smart, airy, and flippant; an 'art du soir' in fact.

"Samuel,<sup>1</sup> who has known me for twenty years, treats me like an old friend. He is strict but just; and what an artist he is! What a wonderful knowledge of the theatre is his! It is a pleasure to work under him!

"He wants me to have a success, he too! So do I, needless to say. It is useless for me to reiterate that three years ago I knew nothing of the stage. This terrible man (a very monument of pertinacity) keeps on telling me that I must have a success, and that at once. Almost at my wits' end, I ask for a postponement, but all in vain. Samuel wishes me to

<sup>1</sup> The Manager of the Variétés.

have a success. If the gods listen to him at all, I shall certainly have it !

“ If I fail, I shall have to begin all over again, for I mean to succeed as an actress. I meant to succeed as a singer, but success did not come all at once. I was hissed and hooted at Lyons, dismissed from the Casino, then in Paris dismissed from the Eldorado. At last, with my ninth song, ‘ La Pocharde,’ I established my reputation ; it had taken me eighteen months to do it. After that I was obliged to leave ‘ L’Eden Concert,’ where my songs of the ‘ Chat Noir ’ type horrified the directors, and made my fellow-artists smile. Success came at last—it would last a year, people said ! I had given it up in despair, poor Success to whom everyone pays court. It came to me who had scarcely thrown it a smile.

“ Yes, it came to me as a happy surprise, in the guise of a wealthy lover to the daughter of a poverty-stricken household. He was welcomed with astonishment and emotion ; everybody offered him a chair I alone could take no part in the general rejoicing. The marriage took place in due course ; I was nineteen years old, and since the age of twenty my work, so amply and persistently rewarded, has continued to offer him an affectionate gratitude. I am most grateful of all to him for having given me the taste and passion for work ; I could not live without the desire of acquiring more knowledge, and of striving always after perfection. And I am grateful to those who have urged me to make this new venture for having understood that I have always remained a

learner and a student, only too pleased to find new difficulties to be conquered, and tickled at the idea of tasting all the sauces in the kitchen of dramatic art.

"When I was a little girl I had a great distaste for spinach. My father insisted on my eating it every day, until, when I had begun to grow really fond of it, he refused to have spinach on the table. That was his method of education. I think I shall take my cue from it. When I have mastered my new profession to perfection I shall give it up. So, you see, I have plenty of years of work in front of me!!!

"But I am oh! so terribly nervous at the thought of occupying the place of honour in the Variétés 'Academy,' a place that so many great artists have occupied before me. I don't like being the 'star'; I should have preferred a more modest début. But my colleagues, Leberg, Brasseur, Guy, Dearly, Prince, and Diéterle are all so charming, and give me so much encouragement, and so congenial a relationship has been established between us during rehearsals, that I cannot but gain courage and confidence from my surroundings. Then there is Samuel, most magnetic of stage-managers; and our witty author, L'Artus, under whose guidance work becomes at once a pleasure and a profit.

"In short, I am much touched and moved by so many indications of confidence, and I long for a great success to give them pleasure, and a small meed to satisfy myself. My apprenticeship as an actress will

help to improve me as a singer, notwithstanding the fact that I am a singer first and an actress afterwards.

"Heavens, Samuel! what a complicated affair is life! And how difficult, oh friend Louis Artus, to act in the full glare of an established reputation. I wish I were an unknown celebrity! Though then, it is true, I might have less courage to make the attempt. And the beginning and the end of everything is—courage!"

As at Brussels, so in Paris, Yvette Guilbert received an ovation. The play was "*L'Amour en Banque*," a comedy in three acts, by M. Louis Artus. The cast was almost completed, but one thing was still lacking—an actress to play the principal part. One after another was asked, but each, for some reason or other, was compelled to refuse. At last Albert Brasseur, who was playing in the piece, bethought him of Yvette Guilbert. She was only too willing. Brasseur therefore approached the author and broached the subject. "Here," said he to M. Artus, "is an artist whose renown as a singer does not satisfy her; she wants to win a reputation on the stage. At the very zenith of her fame she wishes to risk another throw with fortune. She is ready to play in '*L'Amour Banque*'—what do you think of the idea?" The author was not long in making up his mind. His was a temperament by nature inclined to take risks. Besides, the idea caught his fancy immediately; it seemed to him that here was the very woman he had been looking for. And



[Mante / Paris]

NETTE GUILBERT IN A COMEDY AT THE THEATRE DES VARIÉTÉS IN PARIS





so it was settled. Yvette Guilbert should play the part.

That the confidence of the author was not misplaced was abundantly shown by the verdict of Press and public. Yvette Guilbert in her new rôle conquered Paris as completely as she had done in that of a singer of the Songs of Montmartre, or the old-world ditties of the time of Marie Antoinette.

It was in the second act of this comedy that Yvette Guilbert had her great chance. It was practically a scene between herself, as the wife of an absent husband, and Max Dearly, who played the part of an American millionaire, and one can easily imagine how finely it was played. But though Yvette the actress scored a genuine triumph, it was Yvette the singer who triumphed most. Her singing of two songs in this act, one a French ditty, the other, "I want you ma honey" in English, while accompanying herself at the piano, was the signal for a tumultuous round of applause that shook the house to its foundations.

It would seem now as though Yvette Guilbert were destined infallibly to spend the rest of her public life in playing comedy parts. But the old love proved too strong for her to desert altogether. And it is doubtful, with all her acknowledged talents as an actress, whether she will ever find so perfect a medium for the expression of her individual genius as is found in her songs, whether grave or gay.

## CHAPTER VIII

### YVETTE GUILBERT AS AUTHORESS

NOT content with her hard-earned triumphs in other spheres, Yvette Guilbert a few years ago made up her mind to enter a fresh arena—that of literature. The decision was not an unnatural one, nor the revolution from singer and actress altogether so surprising as it might appear. It must be remembered that in winning her way to success in the particular career which she had mapped out for herself, she had experienced almost every kind of human emotion, and in almost every degree; and the new form of art which she had evolved was in great measure simply a reflection of the joys and sorrows of humanity as seen and understood by her, and mirrored back to humanity through the medium of her songs. She, who knew human nature so well, was surely fully equipped to enter the field of romance, a romance that loses nothing by being eminently true to life, and based on actual knowledge and experience.

“Yvette Guilbert,” wrote Auguste Joly in “*Le Journal*,” “having reached the point where she found herself endowed with creative power, suddenly turned writer. It would have been impossible for her to interpret so powerfully and vividly all the terrible spirit of ‘abandon’ that characterises ‘La

Sotlarde,' or of the sense of revolt against the social and moral law that is displayed in 'Ma Tête'; to say nothing of the amorous folly of 'Le Fleur de Berge,' the primitive innocence of 'Lisette' or the amused unconsciousness of the 'caricature' songs beloved of the Cafés Concerts, without the creative power. And when the study of humanity has been brought to so intense and so complete a pitch, it naturally seeks to find expression through the more formal medium of literature."

Her first novel, "La Vedette," was published in Paris in 1902, and won considerable praise from the French critics. It was, as might have been expected, a novel dealing with that life which she had cause to know so well, the life of the Cafés Concerts, and the note that runs through the book is a very intimate and a very personal one. "The peculiar art of the Cafés Concerts," says one writer in reviewing the book,<sup>1</sup> "is a firmament that can boast of stars of very varying magnitude, and of a very diverse destiny. Some of them are permanent, more or less; but there are far more which are but fleeting, and suffer a total eclipse after blazing for a brief moment. They fall into the gutter or the mud, and no one is in the slightest degree dazzled. The tricks and knaveries of those who make and lose fortunes by engaging artists to sing for them; the whims and caprices of the Goddess of Fortune and Success; the extraordinarily varied répertoire of songs, sentimental, comic and vulgar, which go to make up the programmes

<sup>1</sup> In "Le Journal des Débats."

at these places of amusement ; the sort of public they attract, and the fickle tastes of this same public, at one moment all warmth and enthusiasm, at another frigidly hostile ; all this is faithfully portrayed in Mme. Guilbert's book."

We have already had, in an earlier chapter, some description of the peculiar atmosphere of the Cafés Concerts by a writer well acquainted with his subject. But Yvette Guilbert, in her novel, gives us a much more intimate and vivid impression, an impression that comes from the inside, and is gained at first-hand, by one who has seen with her own eyes, and heard with her own ears, the things of which she writes. No apology, therefore, should be needed for quoting from the opening chapter of the book a passage which paints in life-like colours a typical scene at one of the Sunday musical evenings of lower-class Paris.

"Mademoiselle Edmée is going to sing 'Les Coccinelles.' "

This announcement had only the smallest of effects on the hubbub of conversation, the noise of scraping chairs and the clinking of glasses on the marble tables.

Nevertheless Mademoiselle Edmée, emerging from out the veil of smoke which almost obscured the gas jets that lighted the hall, was already mounting the inverted packing case which served as a stage, and the first chords of this song of Massenet's were already being droned out from the emaciated-looking piano in the corner.

The scene was the basement of a wine merchant's shop in the Rue Julien-Lacroix, which on this Sunday, as on every other Sunday, had been turned into the "temple lyrique" of the Fauvette de Ménilmontant musical society.

This basement was a long, almost square room, with a low ceiling, and reached by a spiral staircase, up and down which the waiter trotted unceasingly. The waiter, with a total disregard for the claims of high art, had a knack of breaking in upon the most vital moments of a recitation, or the most brilliant passage of a song, with a resounding "Kirsch, sir?" or "A bottle of wine for you, sir," which would invariably be followed by cries of "Hush! hush!" and "Get out!" emanating from the music-lovers in the audience, the whole of which produced a medley of noise not at all conducive to the proper execution of masterpieces.

Well, well, it is not every artist who can afford to hire the Opera House, and the performers at the Fauvette de Ménilmontant musical society, only too happy to be allowed to display their fine voices, were not disposed to be over-particular. After all, what did it matter, as long as one sang?

Meanwhile Mademoiselle Edmée, decked in a black straw hat, was declaring, in the shrillest of voices, and with a painful monotony of gesture, that

"Les coccinelles sont couché-é-es,"

and then, having brought her efforts to a close, she leapt down lightly from her perch.

"Encore ! encore !" shouted a voice from a far corner.

"No, no ! Shut up !" came from another corner.

Then several faint signs of applause were followed by more vigorous cries of "Hush !"

Eventually Mademoiselle Edmée, with a muttered "I don't know any more," proceeded to sit down.

The disturbance thus averted in this quarter suddenly broke out in another.

"Our friend Paquet is going to sing," the chairman announced.

"Rubbish ! It's not his turn !" roared an angry voice.

Then there was a sudden scuffle close to the platform. Friend Paquet, dressed in a short dinner jacket, a stand-up collar, and a "Lavallière" tie, had just risen at the announcement of his name, when a heavy hand fell on his shoulders, and forced him back into his seat.

"It's my turn, mine !" growled the voice of Florent, nicknamed "Bat d'Af," in his ear ; "and here everyone takes his proper turn, my friend."

Then, in drunken accents—for Florent, nicknamed "Bat d'Af," was as drunk as a lord—he began to bellow out, without waiting for any preliminary announcement, the following lines :—

V'la l'Bat d'Af qui passe !  
Ohé ! ceux d'la classe !

He was a great giant of a man, with muscles that stood out on his arms like miniature legs of mutton.

In vain the chairman rapped on the piano to demand silence ; it was no good.

Qui qui rigol'ra  
Quand la classe,  
Quand la classe,  
Qui qui rigol'ra  
Quand la classe partira !

he bawled, his voice growing in vigour and ferocity.

The ladies began to get alarmed, and the chairman had an inspiration. Just as Florent was beginning to brandish the chairs about the former shouted,

"Florent, my friend, you are frightening the ladies. Our guests will have a queer opinion of the "Fauvette" if you behave like this !"

These words had the desired effect. The drunkard suddenly stopped singing, and taking off his hat to one of the ladies, he muttered :

"My respects to the sex. All I ask is that Paquet shall not be allowed to sing. If he sings I shall do for him."

"Very well," said the chairman soothingly, "Paquet shall not sing. Only sit down !"

"Ladies and gentlemen," he went on, "it is now our friend Fernand's turn."

A chorus of acclamation broke out at this announcement. The enthusiasm was unanimous, and even Florent himself shouted with the rest of them.

"Bravo ! bravo ! Fernand ! Fernand !"

In the following year she published a second novel,



entitled, "Les Demi-Vieilles." This book, written with much natural grace and felicity of expression, deals with the tragedy of the middle-aged actress, who is desperately trying to remain, and appear, young. It reveals, perhaps even more than in her singing, if that were possible, Yvette Guilbert's extraordinary knowledge of life and humanity, and her wonderful insight into, and pity for, human miseries. The "Demi-Vieille," of whatever profession, or whatever nationality, is more often than not a semi-pathetic figure. Yvette Guilbert herself once wrote some verses on the same subject, and they might well have stood as a preface to her novel.

La demi-vieille, c'est l'image  
D'un beau fruit lourd, lourd et doré,  
Beauté chaude comme un feuillage  
De paysage mordoré.

La demi-vieille, c'est le rire  
D'un jour des morts éternisé,  
Comme la "Toussaint du Sourire,"  
Un soir de novembre irisé.

The particular "demi-vieille" of the novel is Esther Renot, an actress, who at forty-three, with a grown-up son of twenty-four, poses to the world, both on and off the stage, as a woman of twenty-eight. She has long been in love with Maurice Roval, a young and successful dramatist, and has the foolishness to imagine that her love is returned. But Maurice is a ferocious egoist; he looks on all human beings as so many puppets for his plays, and makes copious

notes in his diary of their actions, their words, and their emotions, for his future use. He is not a creator, in fact, but only an imitator from life, the little life in which he moves, and breathes, and has his being. Indeed, he is made to confess as much in the book in the following passage, where he says :

“ We have no longer any heroes left, and consequently very few legendary stories ; besides, one gets tired of dealing with subjects which one can only study at a distance. Thus prevented from soaring, inspiration has to content itself with the lesser flight of actualities, which consist of impressions obtained at first hand and gained by probing the thoughts of those around us to the quick. Thus we are able to acquire a morbid and unhealthy knowledge of human life and emotion which shall satisfy our sordid curiosity.”

Eventually Maurice discovers her real age, and, while still allowing her to think that he is more or less in love with her, his first idea is to “ study her every line and wrinkle ” in order to decide whether she is still capable of playing the leading part in his next piece. Finally he tells her that he proposes writing a play to be called “ *Les Demi-Vieilles*,” dealing with middle-aged women who conceal their age in order to keep their lovers’ affection, and, when the play is written, offers her the principal part. She is to appear as what she is, a woman of middle age, without concealment or disguise. He tells her she is the one woman who could play the part, and give it the semblance of reality ; and for the sake of women

in general, for the sake of art, and perhaps, most of all, for the sake of his own dramatic reputation, he implores her to consent. Even the cold brutality of this suggestion fails to kill her love for him, and she eventually falls in with his proposal.

The book is powerfully written, and touches with a sure hand the mysteries of human existence, while displaying an infinite pity for the sorrows, whether of the spirit or the flesh, of suffering humanity.

Besides her novels, Yvette Guilbert has written a great number of articles at various times, mostly on the subject of the stage. At the time when she was rehearsing for "L'Eau Trouble" at Brussels, she contributed to the "Revue Nationale" an article on the difficulties and trials which beset the lot of the ordinary actress on the stage, and the qualifications which are necessary for success, in the course of which she says :

"That she must have talent is, of course, understood, but can an actress reap the reward of her talents if she is unattractive in face and figure ?

"There is hardly a single known instance on the stage of a successful actress who has not a certain amount of personal charm, for the public resolutely refuse to allow of any physical defects in their stage heroines, however willing they may be to tolerate them in private life.

"It is true that plenty of men fall in love with unattractive and even ugly women ; but that is only natural, after all, seeing that the greater majority of human beings present, in face and figure, subjects

that no painter or sculptor would dream of using as a model.

“ Who amongst us does not know of people, either relations or friends, who have been the heroes or heroines of romantic marriages, who are toothless or bald, have red noses, wrinkles, eyes as dull as ditch-water, badly-shaped ears, and necks that are either scraggy or else too fleshy ; people who stoop, are undersized or hopelessly stout, and have ugly hands and feet ? And yet we accept them for what they are, without a thought of criticising them, simply because our eyes have got used to seeing them every day. Our streets are moving museums of human imperfections ; a glance round our restaurants will bear out the truth of my statement. Everyone seems indifferent to the universal ugliness which surrounds us on all sides. But on the stage it is quite another matter. There the demand is all for heroes and heroines of surpassing beauty.

“ Stage heroines must have eyes, such eyes ! lively, tender, or dreamy, it matters not which, so long as they be beautiful. And as for their mouths, they must be filled with pearls, a natural brilliancy must light up their countenances ; and their skin must be like velvet. Beautiful shimmering hair, ears small and well-shaped, neck slender and graceful, and altogether attractive ; elegant shoulders, back nicely curved, alluring hips and a well-turned leg, dainty feet and hands ; these are a few of the qualities which they are expected to possess. And to these must be added the power to evoke laughter or tears

at a moment's notice, to be, in fact, tuned up to the highest pitch of nervous sensibility at a fixed hour every night, the hour for which the public have paid anything ranging from eighteenpence to half-guinea.

" Their private anxieties and worries must be vigorously kept in the background ; no trace of them must be allowed to appear on faces which have to smile to order, the order of the public. No matter if one be physically or mentally ill, an aching heart must be hidden by a smiling face, and one's nerves be at the mercy of one's audience night after night.

" Nor is this all. The great public, which is engaged in a struggle for a livelihood, and knows only too well what the expenses of maintaining a family or a household are, dresses itself, for the most part, with moderation, decently enough of course, but still within the bounds of reasonable expenditure. But this same public expects very different things from the actress. She must wear expensive ' toilettes,' jewels, a constant succession of elegant gowns. It demands, in fact, from the ' femme de théâtre ' what it would never dare to ask of a woman in private life without running the risk of being thought exacting to the point of absurdity : talent, beauty, elegance, youth, good health, intelligence."

After dealing, in her own free and candid fashion, with the terrible struggles experienced by many actresses in trying to " keep up appearances " to the extent demanded of them on totally inadequate means, she goes on to speak of the more fortunate,

the actresses who are married, and, moreover, happily married.

“ There are some married actresses whose ‘ ménages ’ are the envy of certain simple-minded people, who cannot understand how women who earn their living on the stage find it possible to be so happy in their home life, and to become devoted wives and mothers. But it is largely, after all, a matter of education and of sentiment, the outcome of a wide experience of life, which gives them a charitable outlook, based on their knowledge of human weaknesses, and renders them very readily prone to forgive the frailties of mankind. Such women as these need neither sermon nor gospel ; theirs is the religion of the heart ; they are virtuous for the mere delight of being virtuous ; and the peaceful joys of the domestic hearth and the merry laughter of children are all the happiness they need. These are the pleasures that lighten their daily labour ; and when at meal-time the whole family is gathered round the table, happiness, I can assure you, reigns supreme. Actress mothers are delightful beings ! ”

And of the actress's inner life she says :

“ In the life of every true artist there are hours devoted to study, to solitude, or to reading. Sculpture, music, painting, all have something to contribute to her knowledge of her own art ; from them she can always derive something in the way of inspiration. To the reflective mind nothing is altogether immaterial or irrelevant, Nature's colour effects, the freshness of spring, the melancholy of autumn, can all be

reduced to a matter of material comparison, and brought to bear upon such things as the colour of one's frock, or the result of certain light effects, and the art of blending perpetual youth with the experience of maturity. The true artist can find pleasure in everything, because everything, in one sense or another, is only a reflection of life itself."

There is another article by Yvette Guilbert which may be fittingly quoted, since it reveals very fully the nature and extent of her dramatic outlook. In it she deals with the standard which we may reasonably expect of the actress of the future, and the ideals to which she may attain.

#### "THE ACTRESS OF TO-MORROW"<sup>1</sup>

"The actress of to-morrow must not imitate her comrade of to-day, who learns, when she learns at all, while she is producing, without giving a thought to the fact that her total ignorance of letters and of art of all kinds makes her a doubtful scholar and an actress of undoubted inferiority. She may have talent—'a certain amount of talent'—but how much more she would have and how much finer would its quality be if she had acquired some of the knowledge which she ought to possess !

"The actress of to-morrow will start upon a more solid basis. To begin with, and above all, she will speak several languages, so that her renown need not be mechanically confined to one country. Even

<sup>1</sup> By kind permission of the "Evening Standard."



YVETTE (GUILBERT)

(From a caricature by Brod a Hungarian caricaturist. Her former pianist Mr. Archambaud now conductor at the Opera de la Gaité Paris is seen at the piano.)





now, those actresses who are content with the success which they obtain at home hem their fame between very narrow boundaries, and can necessarily never become popular favourites ('les grandes populaires') or universal celebrities. As their careers are small ones, so of necessity are their reputations limited, and it is needless to add that by their ignorance of foreign languages they lessen the field of their activity.

"The actress of to-morrow will belong to Paris and to London, to Berlin, to New York, to everywhere. She will act in French, in English, and in German, wherever her presence may be called for. All stages will be 'her stage'; she will be summoned to create a part here or there, wherever the creation may be wanted; she will not vegetate in one single capital, waiting perforce for 'the part,' 'the author,' 'the engagement,' or 'the manager'; but, well educated, fond of travel, and in possession of several languages, she will be the chosen interpreter of the work of the men of letters of her own and of other countries, and she will be somebody to be reckoned with, for she will add the elegance and charm of the Frenchwoman to her own natural talent.

"Shakespeare and Goethe interpreted by a Frenchwoman whose English and whose German are as pure as her French! Imagine the glorious chances of the actress of to-morrow! Of course, she must be neither too small nor too thin, for heroines require majesty and stature. These are two necessary decorative adjuncts.

"There will be a very great reform which will be of

immense benefit to the actress of to-morrow. She will be obliged to spend a term—the length of which will depend on her activity and her intelligence—in a college created specially for her benefit. This institution, ‘The College of Literary Instruction,’ will have one object—namely, that of affording the intellectual nourishment to her powers of expression and of impression, which are quite indispensable to every woman destined for the stage.

“So shall we have no more débutantes of eighteen either on free stages or in theatres where subsidies are paid, but from the age of eighteen to the age of twenty-four women will have a course of serious preparatory study in a literary college and a school of acting. For in our day the actress—who is, mind you, the interpreter in act and gesture of the thought of the man of letters—knows little or nothing about literature. This A B C of her profession will be taught her through books, by means of lessons to which she will have to listen, which she must learn, and which she will be expected to discuss, and this groundwork of knowledge will be the lifebuoy of the actress of to-morrow.

“At the School of Literary Instruction she will learn of the great and tragic episodes of Greek and Roman history. In our day the only insight into the life, customs, and the tortured souls of the heroes of the old tragedies which an actress obtains before she is asked to play the part of one of them is very often gathered from the small paper-covered book which is given her to study at the tragedy class.

And she is so lost in the strange company of these formidable personages, to whom she attempts to give life and movement with the help of the advice of a counsellor, who is often little more informed than she herself, that she plays her part with a diminished horizon, which her adviser—even if he have the power—has rarely time to widen or interest in widening, and makes her little gestures in a fog.

“The actress of to-morrow will be spared this art which has no truth or conscience. She will learn and will know more about Socrates than the unvarying hemlock draught which pictures have perpetuated ; she will become familiar with the great past of bronze and fire, the sumptuous and sanguinary combats from which emerged, victorious or vanquished, the legendary heroines whom she will be expected to portray. Which of the tragico-classic actresses who made their débuts yesterday have had the honesty to grope for knowledge of the past elsewhere than in the Greco-Roman novels which have chanced to be in fashion at the moment ? I know more than one actress for whom ‘Quo Vadis’ epitomises all her knowledge of antiquity.

“The actress of to-morrow will refuse to clothe Agrippina or Flavia in ‘Liberty’ fabrics, she will not let Messalina flit about the stage in a spangled tunic, and her Cleopatra will have the terra-cotta face which nature gave her.

“The actress of to-morrow will know how to draw, and how to take advantage of the treasures in our museums. She will know what difference to make be-

tween the types of a Greek, a Roman, or an Egyptian ; she will know that a courtesan of Alexandria does not resemble a Roman or an Athenian courtesan either in line or in walk ; she will know how to trace the arch of her eyebrows and the bows of her lips in accordance with the people and the country to which she belongs, and will no longer paint herself in unvarying pink and white, characterless and without either imagination or discrimination.

“ Having thus learned something, having thus gained from the literature she has absorbed a reserve fund of intellectuality, or, if you prefer it, a solid foundation, of knowledge, the actress of to-morrow will become an intelligent, enlightened, and well-informed interpreter of literary effort, to whose highly-strung sensibility the genius of great writers will lend wings for her flight into the realms of Phantasy and Dreamland. The school of literature will have prepared her, logically and progressively, for the journey.

“ This school would also, and this will be quite indispensable, organise travelling lectures for its pupils, not only round the museums of France, but also to those abroad. Something might be organised in the nature of a Prix de Rome, which would be awarded to the most successful student of literature, and which would throw open to her not only the doors of the Conservatoire but the gates of Italy. A sojourn there would be of inestimable value to the dramatic artist, for where is the professor who can teach plastic art with the mæstria of Michael Angelo ? Titian and Rubens are excellent masters in attitudes, poses,

and in colouring of costume and of scenery. What educated actress could fail to be usefully impressed by the literature of the Primitive school? The actress of to-morrow will undoubtedly gain inspiration there, and learn from the primitive masters how to reduce Truth to its most simple expression in a soul, or in a gesture, for the actress of to-morrow is symbolised in the work of Van Eyck or of Memling.

“There are Phèdres and Medeas to be seen in the faces of several of the martyrs in the pictures of Guido Reni, and I have seen the misery of Marguerite Gauthier in the faces of his women who follow our Lord. What actress will convey the intense sadness of expression in the face of a Mater Dolorosa drawn by Boecklin? What marquises, soubrettes, and ingénues of the seventeenth and eighteenth century can be better than those of Watteau, Lancret, Greuze, and Fragonard? Those actresses who play ‘les grandes coquettes’ will have Gainsborough to dress them, and to teach them, too, the haughty and disdainful pose which fits their part.

“There are mouths which an actress must see before she can give expression with genius and with success to terror, grief, joy, prayer, and love. There are hands which an actress must see to realise what fingers can and must be able to express. Art has all arts for its servants, and inspiration comes from nature, colour, from sonorous sound, from marble, and from everything. And that is why the time will come when our French stage-craft will require from its apostles a cultivated and a solid art basis.

"Ignorant enthusiasts, of course, learn little by little as they go on producing, but the actress of to-morrow will be spared this additional fatigue and loss of time during her creative period, for it is then that she will have need of all her physical strength. The actress of to-morrow—and this will be one of her greatest victories—will be no mere doll woman to pander to desire. She will not have to struggle any longer against doubtful prejudice and against social offence. Serious books will have taught her morally, and the simplicity of her attitude will defend her against all attack upon her private sentiments. In her the woman will disappear, yielding her throne, a throne which this time will be respected, to the High Priestess of Expression, Priestess of Noble Thought, and her efforts will not be without effect upon her wisdom, for much reading of the works of the philosophers will have freed her from exaggerated ambitions and puerile vanities. She will pay more attention to the appearance of her soul than to that of her face. When abroad, she will cleanse her heart of grease paint, as well as her mouth and lips. She will love glory as she will love health, neither more nor less, with a calm and a wise heart. In the hour of the dusk and the silence she will strengthen her hope of a love which shall be honourable and safe, for the actress of to-morrow, having a better education and knowing more, will be a better woman. The horizon of her desires and her duties will be far beyond the footlights which burn and blind her. The glitter of the spangles of the actress of to-day will be

dulled in the case of the actress of to-morrow, whose taste will be more chastened and refined. She will imitate certain Englishwomen with whom the stage was the glorious complement of the life of a wife and of a mother. With Marcus Aurelius as her counsellor, she will know how to drop her last curtsey to Glory, and, as Ecclesiastes has taught her that happiness consists in living happily with the object of her love, the actress of to-morrow will bury the 'pretty little woman' ('la petite femme') of yesterday."



## CHAPTER IX

### YVETTE GUILBERT—THE WOMAN

OF Yvette Guilbert's personality, apart from her public life, a great deal could be written. Much of it is revealed in her writings ; but one cannot from them gather anything like an adequate impression of her extraordinary personal charm, her subtle wit and keen sense of humour ; her broad and tolerant outlook upon life and humanity ; her unwearying charity and kindness of heart. Only a year or two ago she founded an institute for supplying dresses to poor actresses who were anxious to make their début upon the stage. Success has not spoiled her ; it has, on the contrary, made her more generous, more sympathetic, more warm-hearted, and withal more fascinating and delightful a personality than ever. Those who would know more of " Yvette—the Woman," may turn to an appreciation of her, part of which appeared in " The Mask " in September 1908,<sup>1</sup> written by one who has for many years been intimately acquainted with Yvette Guilbert and her art—Mr Haldane Macfall. Speaking of the early days of her career, he says :

" She was a slender Parisian girl in those days,

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by kind permission of the author and the proprietors of " The Mask."

scarce out of her teens. But that slender girl had the innate instinct for art in her every fibre. It was this slender girl that, by the illumination of her genius and a dogged and forthright will, determined to rid the music-hall of the indecent and suggestive vulgarities that, until her coming, had been the atmosphere and essence of the theatre of varieties in Paris. When Yvette Guilbert appeared on the boards of the music-hall, the Chansonniers, the poetic makers of the French lyric, were gone—for ten years they had ceased from weaving verse. 'Tis true the satiric song existed—it exists always—in Montmartre ; but it is a passing thing, its field narrow, its subject fatiguing, its horizon petty—the same jests, the same personalities, upon the celebrities of the theatre or government of the day, or such like. This little more than girl turned to the best of the living poets, and the poets eagerly answered her call to the up-raising of the song of France. The vulgarities gave place to astounding artistry. The theatre of varieties rose to the dignity of a place of art. She brought the humorous and pathetic songs of the students of the Latin quarter to life—the struggles, the happy laughter at the struggles, the gaiety, the loves and trials of youth. She made the stage to blossom with the ancient balladry of France, and wove with exquisite skill the atmosphere of Watteau across the scene. She brought back to life, raised from the very dead, the beautiful country ballads and carols that once were the music of the peasants, and made romance in the life of the village from Yuletide to St Martin's

Mass. She gave power and significance to the fierce irony and bitter suffering of modern France. She, this marvellous woman, built up this splendour—evoking it out of the place that had aforetime been but the home of rough laughter or the suggestive snigger.

“And she came to the business well dowered by her fairy godmother with marvellous and wide-ranging gifts. I know no one who has a larger sympathy with, and insight into, the several arts. Her intuition, and her appreciation of the arts, are prodigious, whether literature in verse or prose, painting or music, or the dramatic statement of these. But these gifts had ended in pedantry, exquisite pedantry it is true, but pedantry and technique nevertheless, had she not been born with a heart as large as a cathedral. Yvette’s sympathy with the sufferings of her race, her pride in the human achievement, her glory in the heroism of the people, her pity for the crushed and the maimed, her bitter detestation of all that is contemptible, these are at the foundations and make the structure of her exquisite achievement. These things are the breath of her compelling genius. And all this it is that projects itself across the footlights to us, and seizes upon our imagination, and wins us in the presence of her magnetic personality that gives itself forth in the charm of her subtle and elaborate art.

“It is claimed for Yvette Guilbert that she had found in the old romantic French songs a higher field for her astounding artistry than was hers before. I

à Yvette Guilbert

à souvenir

de mes interviews

à Landy



YVETTE GUILBERT.

(From a caricature by Charles Landy)



cannot bow to this. I never saw her, even in the very earliest days, but that she was a woman of genius. Whatsoever she touches she makes into a work of art. She is, within the limits imposed upon her by the music-hall, as supreme a genius as ever stepped the stage. It could not be otherwise, for it were impossible to state with more exquisite beauty and perfection and power the emotions that she essays to arouse. The gamut of the emotions (the sole instrument of any artist whatsoever) aroused by her ranges from sordid to sublime tragedy, from low to light comedy, from pathos to quaint whimsicality ; and she plays each part with unerring surety and finesse ; above all, she convinces—for, whilst she holds the stage, we walk by way of her personality throughout the experience of every emotion that she would make us feel.

“ It is astounding what sense she wrings from every syllable, from every phrase, of the balladry and songs she transmutes into dramatic gems. Her pantomime, her gesture, her inflection of voice, and her employment of the utterances of the throat, to express the passions and emotions that may be conveyed by words, are a revelation of the power that lies within the words. And it is precisely in his achievement in this realm that an actor is a creative artist or merely a clever and accomplished mimic.

“ I have heard the greatest singers, with all their most perfect command of music, give the song of ‘ Coming through the Rye.’ I had read it again and again. But it was only when I heard it delivered

by Yvette Guilbert, in a tongue that is alien to her, bringing out with all the searching skill of her inquisitive genius the lusty womanhood of the country girl, that I first realised the real significance and the full intention of the famous lyric.

“ And it is exactly this deep understanding that lies behind all the technical perfection of her artistry ; it is exactly by virtue of her wide and gracious sympathy with humanity that she rises above all the artifice of craftsmanship, and compels our homage. It is owing to this profound communion with the great emotions, that amidst the applause of gently-mannered women or the cheers of strong men, which suddenly burst forth on every side at her song’s ending, we find ourselves no longer seated, but risen to our feet, violent partakers in that hail of enthusiasm that greets this gracious gentlewoman—the blood stirring, the senses thrilled, as we find ourselves, half unwitting of it, joining the thunder of acclaim :

‘ YVETTE GUILBERT ! ’

“ To whatsoever Yvette gives her glorious genius she brings distinction. The limits of her range it were difficult to define. In comedy or tragedy, laughter or tears, Yvette is an evoker of the dramatic such as a people rarely produce more than once. When we consider for a moment what she creates out of an English country-song, remembering that the very speech of it is foreign to her ears ; when we hear and see her utter a lilt that has been familiar to us from childhood, and gaze in surprise to find

how little we understood it until the searching genius of this graceful and gifted Frenchwoman came to reveal it to us ; when we consider that this is but a tithe of her large achievement, but a small part of her superb artistry ; when we meditate upon the overwhelming fact that not the greatest of actresses could produce out of a song the large drama, whether of tragedy or comedy, the volume of laughter, or tears, or pity, or regret, or the like emotions into which this one woman standing alone before the footlights can at her mere willing sway us, we must surely pay her the scant homage of admitting that she is one of the supreme geniuses who ever trod the boards.

“ Yet vast as is her achievement to-day, and vast her triumph ; deeper and wider, more profoundly as she has developed her art, to me the days when I first saw Yvette, a slender girl, leap into her early success in the early ‘ nineties ’ will always hold a significance apart. Well, we were all young in the Quarter then—the world before us. Youth is a wondrous glory ; and what a youth it was, with Yvette in song, and Steinlen and Leandre and Toulouse—Lantrec and the other youngsters making their art, and poor Salis and mine host ‘ on the hill ’ at the old Chat Noir, and the young poets singing like an aviary, and the whole pack of us not giving a tinker’s trough for the policeman or governments or ministers or kings ! ”

In looking back upon Yvette Guilbert’s career one is imbued more than anything with an impression



of indomitable courage ; a courage that, in the face of many failures and disappointments, the ups and downs inseparable from an artistic career, has yet pursued its way unfalteringly towards the destined goal. "An artist's life ought to have experienced every kind of difficulty and trouble," she said once : "I have known those of poverty, failure, and ill-health."

Now that she has won triumphs as a singer, as an actress, as an author, one wonders in what direction her genius will shine next. No doubt she has up her sleeve some fresh surprise in store ; for hers is a genius that is never satisfied, that never stands still ; but, ever seeking new spheres of conquest, pushes on unceasingly towards that great goal, Perfection, which is the aim of every true artist since the world began.

**PART III**

**YVETTE GUILBERT'S SONGS**



## YVETTE GUILBERT'S SONGS

IN dealing with a répertoire so vast and so varied as that possessed by Yvette Guilbert, it is impossible to do more than glance at a few of the most famous songs which she has created, and more especially those which she has made familiar to London audiences. These songs may, for the sake of convenience, be divided into three heads :—(1) *Chansons Modernes* ; (2) *Chansons Pompadour* ; (3) *Chansons Crinoline* ; and though there are others which cannot be said to come under any one of these heads, the classification will serve its purpose well enough.

Her range of English songs is, naturally, not so wide. But no one can easily forget her delightful and very individual rendering of "The Keys of Heaven," which is a complete comedy in itself, a comedy of exquisite sentiment. Even of a song of the feeble, nerveless order, like "Mary was a Housemaid," she is able to make almost a work of art, by her treatment of the humming refrain, so varied, and so deliciously droll, that the song stands out as a thing transformed, and becomes invested with a world of meaning that it never possessed before. And in her singing of Old English Folk-songs she is

almost as much at home as in her lighter French chansons, to which they bear a certain amount of resemblance. The fragrant old-world humour of such songs as "I'm Seventeen come Sunday," "The Dumb Wife Cured," and "With my Holyday Gown," and many others of the kind, is a thing after Yvette Guilbert's own heart, and, as may be expected, she makes the most of it.

But it is, of course, as a singer of French songs, grave and gay, that she will go down to posterity, and for nothing will she be better remembered than for her rendering of those "terrible" songs, the Chansons Modernes, with which, in her long black gloves, she took London by storm at the Empire Theatre sixteen years ago.



YVETTE GUILBERT IN HER SONG : " MARY WAS A HOUSEMAID. "



## CHAPTER I

### CHANSONS MODERNES

UNDOUBTEDLY the most famous of all these songs, and the one which created the greatest impression at the time, was "La Soûlarde."

A study of the actual words of the song, written by Jules Jouy, will bring back to the minds of many the picture of that tall slim figure, in long black gloves, depicting for us, with a wonderful realism that was yet free from all suggestion of vulgarity, the poor old drunken derelict of the streets. This song has by many been counted as Yvette Guilbert's masterpiece; it was a revelation to those who heard it, a revelation not only of the singer's genius, but of something new and hitherto undreamt of in the power of song as a medium of dramatic expression.

#### LA SOÛLARDE

On n'lui connaît aucun parent ;  
A Clichy, pour cent francs par an,  
A couch' par terr', dans un' mansarde,  
La soûlarde.

Dès le matin, on peut la voir,  
Sur le pavé, sur le trottoir,  
Cheminer, la mine hagarde,  
La soûlarde.



Un ancien châle à mêm' la peau,  
Coiffé d'travers d'un vieux chapeau,  
En marchant, tout' seule, à bavarde,  
La soûlarde.

Les mastroquets, l'air rigolo,  
Sur le seuil de leur caboulot,  
Se disent : " Elle a sa cocarde,  
La soûlarde."

Chien égaré cherchant son trou,  
Parfois, allant sans savoir où,  
Loin d'la barrière ell' se hasarde,  
La soûlarde.

Un tas de gamins l'entourant,  
Criant, chantant, sautant, courant,  
Escortant ainsi qu'une garde,  
La soûlarde.

Mais elle, indifférente à tout,  
Va devant elle, n'importe où,  
Alors, de cailloux on bombarde,  
La soûlarde.

Sensible à ce brutal affront,  
Du sang lui coulant sur le front,  
Ell' se retourne et les regarde,  
La soûlarde.

Tous interrompant leurs lazzi,  
Filent, le cœur d'effroi saisi,  
Devant les regards que leur darde,  
La soûlarde.

Au milieu des passants surpris,  
Baladant l'vice en cheveux gris,  
Pour sûr, elle est vraiment tocarde,  
La soûlarde.

Pourtant, ouvrier ou gamin,  
Laisse la passer son chemin.  
Qui sait le noir souci que garde,  
La soûlarde ?

Peut-être que pleurant un fils,  
Songeant au bonheur de jadis,  
Le soir, ell' trouv'que sa fin tarde,  
La soûlarde.

An elaborate and masterly analysis of this song, by Mr Stanley V. Makower, appeared in his article in the "Yellow Book," already referred to, and may be fitly quoted here, with all due acknowledgment to author and publisher.

"It was Yvette Guilbert herself who suggested the idea of a woman half crazy with drink lurching along the street with madness and disease in her eyes. Jouy wrote the song and gave it to her, saying, 'I have written a masterpiece, but I don't know whether you will make anything of it.' Then Yvette Guilbert took it and studied it with all that power of intensification which is her peculiar gift. She decided the character of the melody that was to be used, by constant recourse to the piano to try different effects. Finally, when the song was sung Zola was wild with enthusiasm, and the whole of Paris rang with applause. Certainly the song is admirably

written. There is truth in its simplicity, a directness of purpose, a perfect knowledge of the requirements of the art; but no one from reading the poem could dream of the extraordinary thing which Yvette Guilbert would create from it. She threw into it all her imagination, and out of the bare words sprang a beauty which baffled every one. When it was sung in London the audience were taken by storm, and yet not one half of them could understand the meaning of the words. At the end of the verse which describes the people throwing cabbages and rubbish at the drunken woman as she lurches along, Yvette Guilbert throws her head back and breaks the final syllable of the refrain "La Soûlarde" (the "arde" in Soûlarde) into a cry of two notes. It would scarcely be too much to call this the greatest moment that has ever been brought off in executory art. It takes your breath away. The whole scene rushes on the mind with a force that is overwhelming. You positively see the drunken woman, with dishevelled hair and bloodshot eyes, reeling down the street, pursued by a jeering crowd—but in the meanwhile Yvette Guilbert, in modern evening dress, is standing comparatively still on the stage with that background representing a Mauresque palace which has become a traditional drop-scene at the Empire Theatre.

The effect that Yvette Guilbert produces is far removed from that produced by any external realism. If we were to see a person imitate accurately a drunken woman—so accurately, in fact, that, were it not for

the stage, we should be unable to guess that she was acting, we should feel much the same physical disgust that is aroused in us when we see a drunken woman reeling down the street. We should be no more edified than by the ingenuity of the man who exhibited a picture with a real face peering through the canvas. But when Yvette Guilbert is telling you about the drunken woman, though you shudder, it is not with disgust—for the thing is transfigured by her into something different. You see the scene, but you see it in a new light, with something of the light which goes to make the genius of the performer, and which she has such a rare power of communicating. When she steps outside the characters of the scene, crying out against the profanity of ridicule and raising a plea for the woman to pass unmolested, she conveys in her voice a suggestion of that universal humanity which binds the world together. The subtlety of this is indescribable. It reaches its climax again in the refrain "*La Soularde*," sung this time in a way which makes us feel at one moment both the infinite pity of the spectator and the crushing weariness of the woman. It is just this poetry of vision which robs these songs of all their horror, for it is in the beautifying of the terrible that lies the supremacy of her art."

Perhaps the other song of this class which made the greatest impression on English minds, a song that is just as vivid and realistic to us when Yvette Guilbert sings it to-day, is "*Ma Tête*."

## MA TÊTE

Le long des fortifications,  
Y'a pas d'erreur, c'est moi l'plus bath,  
Avec ma casquette à trois ponts  
Et mon foulard rouge écarlate  
Les copains, moi, j'les dégott' tous,  
J'leur ai soul'vé plus d'un' conquête  
Auss' r'gard'nt-ils d'un œil jaloux  
Ma tête !

Les mô'm's, ell's tomb'nt en pamoison,  
Ell's voudraient tout's dev'nir ma femme,  
Moi, j'y mets pas d'opposition,  
C'est mon métier d'êtr' polygame ;  
J'suis bien tranqui', sans m'émouvoir,  
J'ai toujours pas mal de galette,  
V'la c'que c'est que d'bien fair' valoir  
Ma tête !

Quand un sergot, d'un air malin,  
Essay' de fair' d'la rouspétance,  
Je te l'retourn' comme un lapin  
C'est pas ma faut', j'ai pas d'patience ;  
Tu parl's, si je l'passe à tabac  
Mêm' s'il est fort comme un athlète  
J'y coll' dans l'creux d'son estomac  
Ma tête !

Quand vient la nuit, pour travailler,  
J'attends derrière un' port' cochère  
Le bourgeois qui vient d'ripailler,  
Et j'y fais viv'ment son affaire.  
Alors, quand il est sur le flanc,  
Et qu' la lune éclair' ma silhouette  
I' crach' son â'm' rien qu'en voyant  
Ma tête !



YVETTE GUILBERT IN HER SONG : " MA TÊTE. "

*(From a drawing by Charles Léandre.)*



Fatal'ment, je s'rai condamné,  
Car y s'ra prouvé qu'j'assassine,  
Faudra qu'j'attend', blême et vanné,  
L'instant suprêm' d'la guillotine,  
Alors un beau jour on m'dira :  
C'est pour c'matin, fait's vot' toilette ;  
J'sortirai, la foul' salu'ra  
Ma tête !

This is one of the few songs in which Yvette Guilbert makes use of any extraneous aid in the way of costume. She wears the peculiar black cap of the Paris hooligan, and uses it, in the last verse, with terrible effect. No one who has heard her sing this song can ever forget the wonderful way in which she depicts the recklessness, the strange strain of vanity, and the devil-may-care humour which go to make the character of this type of wasted humanity, born and brought up in an atmosphere of criminal viciousness. For the moment it is not Yvette Guilbert who stands there, singing of this curious creature, but the creature himself, revealing to us all the fantastic sidelights of his depraved nature. Vicious he may be, and wholly bad ; but we cannot resist a sneaking sympathy for him, as he goes on his way to his predestined end. After all, he never had a chance of being anything better. He deserved his end, of course, but only because Fate made him what he was. This is the feeling that Yvette Guilbert imparts to her interpretation of the song, and she carries you with her by the sheer force of her impersonation. The various intonations, each conveying a different and subtle



shade of meaning, with which she renders the two words which constitute the refrain, "Ma Tête," the play of her facial expression, and, above all, of her eyes, as the story gradually draws towards its tragic climax, are things that dwell indelibly in the memory. And then the breathless silence which accompanies the words :

"J'sortirai, la foul' salu'ra——"

the pause during which she removes the black cap from her head and holds it out at arm's length ; the dull thud with which the cap falls to the ground ; and then the final despairing cry—really more 'of a gasp than a cry :

"Ma Tête !"

A song very similar in character, but lacking, perhaps, a little of the intensely vivid realism of "Ma Tête," is Aristide Bruant's "A La Villette." Though not so well known as others of these tragedies of the Paris streets, it is well worth quoting for its own sake, as being typical of the class of song which it represents, and also for the fact that it was one of the four songs sung by Yvette Guilbert on her first appearance at the Empire in May 1894.

#### A LA VILLETTE

Il avait pas encor' vingt ans.  
I'connaissait pas ses parents,  
On l'app'hait Toto Laripette  
A la Villette.

Il était un peu sans façon,  
Mais c'était un joli garçon :  
C'était l'plus beau, c'était l'plus chouette  
A la Villette.

Il était pas c'qu'y a d'mieux mis,  
Il avait pas de beaux habits :  
I' s'rattrapait sur sa casquette  
A la Villette.

Il avait deux p'tits yeux d'souris.  
Il avait deux p'tits favoris  
Surmontés d'un'fin' rouflaquette  
A la Villette.

Il avait un gros chien d'bouvier  
Qu'avait un' gross' gueul' de terrier :  
On n'peut pas avoir un' levrette  
A la Villette.

De son métier i'faisait rien,  
Dans l' jour i'baladait son chien :  
La nuit i' comptait ma galette,  
A la Villette.

I' m'aimait autant que j'l'aimais.  
Nous nous aurions quittés jamais  
Si la police était pas faite  
A la Villette.

Q'on l'prenn' grand ou p'tit, rouge ou brun,  
On peut pas en conserver un :  
I' s'en vont tous à la Roquette  
A la Villette.

La dernièr' fois que je l'ai vu,  
Il avait l'torse à moitié nu,  
Et le cou pris dans la Lunette  
A la Roquette.

This song, as I have said, is somewhat similar to "Ma Tête" in character. Here once again we have the Paris hooligan—"only twenty and never knew his parents"—and the inevitable apotheosis of all such poor unhappy flotsam on the sea of life :

"I' s'en vont tous à la Roquette."

There are two other songs of this class which deserve passing mention, both written by Rollinat. They are "L'Idiot" and "Le Convoi Funèbre," the latter revealing a power of description in the interpreter for which it would be hard to find a parallel. One almost saw, in listening to the song, the simple funeral cortège wending its way through the fog, as the pauper went to his last long home.

"Le mort s'en va dans le brouillard,  
Avec sa limousine en planches."

It was in these songs, and others of a similar nature, that Yvette Guilbert fought her way through prejudice and convention to a success that in the space of a few short months was to become certain and assured—not for a year, but for all time.

## CHAPTER II

### CHANSONS POMPADOUR AND CHANSONS CRINOLINE

WHEN Yvette Guilbert came to London again in 1904, ten years after her first appearance, she brought with her, as we have already seen, an entirely different style of song to the Chansons Modernes. These were the songs of old France, the Chansons Pompadour and the Chansons Crinoline. Of the former, which mostly date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there is, first of all, the altogether delicious "Le Curé de Pomponne."

In this song the spirit of comedy reigns all supreme. The village maiden, going to confess to the village priest, falters out a recital of her sin. She has allowed a man to kiss her! Terrible! says the Curé, she must go a pilgrimage to Rome to expiate her offence. What, and take my lover with me? says she. Shame! says the Curé. She evidently delights in her sin, instead of being properly penitent. Come, he will suggest another and more speedy absolution. She shall give him a kiss or two, and so earn forgiveness!

### LE CURÉ DE POMPONNE

A confesse m'en suis allé  
Au curé de Pomponne.

Le plus gros péché que j'ai fait  
C'est d'embrasser un homme.

Ah ! il m'en souviendra,

Larira,

Du curé de Pomponne.

Le plus gros péché que j'ai fait  
Fut d'embrasser un homme.

Ma fille, pour ce péché-là

Il faut aller à Rome.

Ah ! il m'en souviendra, etc.

Ma fille, pour ce péché-là

Il faut aller à Rome.

Dites-moi, monsieur le curé,

Y menerai-je l'homme ?

Ah ! il m'en souviendra, etc.

Dites-moi, monsieur le curé,

Y menerai-je l'homme ?

Ah ! vous prenez gout au péché ?

Je vous entends, friponne.

Ah ! il m'en souviendra, etc.

Ah ! vous prenez gout au péché ?

Je vous entends, friponne.

Embrassez-moi cinq ou six fois

Et je vous le pardonne.

Ah ! il m'en souviendra, etc.

Embrassez-moi cinq ou six fois

Et je vous le pardonne.

Grand merci, monsieur le curé,

La pénitence est bonne.

Ah ! il m'en souviendra,

Larira,

Du curé de Pomponne.

Nothing short of hearing her sing it can convey the sly humour, the sprightliness, the drollery, and the spirit of childish gaiety she imparts to the song.

“ Ah ! il m'en souviendra,  
Larira,  
Du curé de Pomponne.”

The refrain is haunting by reason of its very simplicity ; and the variety of meanings which she manages to convey by her enunciation of the single word “ Larira ” would make enough to fill a whole poem. And nothing could be more delightfully arch than the air with which she delivers the words

• “ La pénitence est bonne.”

Another song in which the village priest plays a prominent part is the “ Légende Bretonne.” But here the fair penitent has a different confession to make. She has learnt to love the priest himself ! “ Ah, then we must see one another no more,” says he. “ But then I should die of a broken heart,” says she. “ Then I should bury you,” says he. “ And would you weep ? ” asks she.

“ Non, car il faudra chanter, Simonne, ma Simonne,  
Requiescat in pace,  
Ma Mignonne ! ”

In “ Les Belles Manières ” we have a very different picture. In this she poses as a “ grande dame ” of the old French Court, reading her daughter a gentle lesson in manners.

## LES BELLES MANIÈRES

Javotte enfin, vous grandissez,  
Venez, il faut que je vous gronde,  
Vous ne vous donnez pas assez  
Les belles manières du monde ;  
    Car c'est comm'çi,  
    Car c'est comm'ça,  
Regardez-moi, ma fille,  
C'est comm'çi, c'est comm'ça,  
Qu'on fait honneur à sa famille.

Il faut, sans y faire semblant,  
Lorsque vous sortez le dimanche,  
Pour qu'on vous regarde en passant,  
Avoir un certain tour de hanche.  
    Car c'est comm'çi,  
    Car c'est comm'ça,  
Regardez-moi, ma fille,  
C'est comm'çi, c'est comm'ça,  
Qu'on fait honneur à sa famille.

Lorsqu'un gentilhomme viendra  
Vous glisser son tendre martyre,  
Vous ne repondrez rien à ça,  
Mais vous lui ferez un sourire,  
    Car c'est comm'çi,  
    Car c'est comm'ça,  
Regardez-moi, ma fille,  
C'est comm' çi, c'est comm'ça,  
Qu'on fait honneur à sa famille.

Un époux je vous choisirai,  
Vous direz : j'en suis bien contente ;

Volontiers je me marierai . . .  
 Non pas une fois mais bien trente . . .  
 Car c'est comm'çi,  
 Car c'est comm'ça,  
 C'est le bon ton ma fille,  
 C'est comm'çi, c'est comm'ça,  
 Que l'on sait faire honneur à sa famille.

The transformation is complete. She is the "grande dame" to the life, with all the languid graces, the exaggerated curtseys, the absurd affectation of dignity, and the smiling superciliousness of the ladies of the period. She runs through the whole catalogue of virtues, as represented by good manners, with her

"Car c'est comme'çi,  
 Car c'est comme'ça,"

as she indicates each particular smile or posture, and one can almost imagine the daughter actually sitting there, following with her eyes every movement of the old lady's, and drinking in the words of wisdom that fall from her lips. The song is set to an old air that once Marie Antoinette used to hum, and its quaintness only serves to strengthen the old-world atmosphere which Yvette Guilbert's genius so successfully creates.

Quite different again is "La Mort de Jean Renaud," a tragedy of simple pathos. In a song of this kind a little exaggeration would spoil the whole effect; but Yvette Guilbert is never exaggerated in anything she does, and her rendering of this song is beautifully unaffected and sincere.



## LA MORT DE JEAN RENAUD

Quand Jean Renaud de guerre revint  
Tenant ses boyaux dans ses mains  
Sa mère à la fenêtre en haut  
Dit : voici v'nir mon fils Renaud !  
Renaud Renaud réjouis toi  
Ta femme est accouchée d'un roi !  
Ni de ma femme, ni de mon fils  
Mon cœur ne peut se réjouir  
Je sens la mort qui me transit  
Mère faites dresser un lit !  
Mais faites le dresser si bas  
Que ma femme n'entende pas.  
Et quand ce fut vers le minuit  
Jean Renaud a rendu l'esprit.  
Ah ! Dites moi mère mamie  
Ce que j'entends clouer ici.  
Ma fille c'est le charpentier  
Qui raccommode l'escalier.  
Ah ! Dites moi mère mamie  
Ce que j'entends chanter ici.  
Ma fille c'est la procession  
Qui fait le tour de la maison.  
Ah ! Dites moi mère mamie  
Ce que j'entends pleurer ici.  
C'est la voisine d'à côté  
Qui a perdu son nouveau né.  
Ah dites moi mère mamie  
Pourquoi donc pleurez vous aussi ?  
Ma fille ne puis la cacher  
Renaud est mort et enterré.  
Ma mère dites au fossoyeux  
Qu'il creuse la fosse pour deux ;

Et que le trou soit assez grand  
 Pour qu'on y mette aussi l'enfant.  
 Terre ouvre toi—terre fends toi  
 Que j'aïlle retrouver mon roi !  
 Terre s'ouvrit—terre se fendit  
 Et la belle rendit l'esprit.

Jean Renaud comes home from the war, wounded to death. His mother greets him joyfully : " Your wife has borne you a son ! " " Alas, mother, I shall never live to see him ; my hours are numbered. Make me a bed whereon to die." And before the night had waned he died. Upstairs lay the wife with her child dreaming of the day when her husband would come back to her and look upon his first-born. " Mother, what is that knocking I hear ? " " My daughter, it is but the carpenter mending the stairs." " Mother, I can hear singing ! " " It is the carol-singers, my dear." " But now I hear sounds of weeping ? " " It is our neighbour, poor thing, she has lost her child." " But, mother, your own eyes are wet ? " " My daughter, I cannot hide it any longer ; your husband is dead and in his grave ! " " Tell them to dig a grave wide enough for two, my mother, and for the little one who lies in my arms." And so, with a sigh, her spirit fled.

Of others that might be mentioned there is that dainty little idyll, " Est-il donc bien vrai ? " :

Est-il donc bien vrai,  
 Gentille fillette !  
 Qu'amour vous ait fait  
 Le soir en cachette,  
 Qu'amour vous ait fait présent d'un bouquet ?

and that stirring ballad entitled "Le Roi a fait battre tambour," which tells of a king's offer of a marshal's bâton to a man whom he is about to dishonour. There is also "Le Jaloux et la Menteuse," a domestic tragedy of a jealous husband and an erring wife, "Le Mort du Mari," grimly cynical; and "La Peureuse," a little naughty, even wicked, but wholly delightful as rendered by Yvette Guilbert.

The Chansons Crinoline, dating from about 1830, are closely allied in character to the Pompadour songs. Undoubtedly the best known of all, and the one that lingers most gratefully in the memory, is Béranger's "Ma Grand'mère."

### MA GRAND'MÈRE

Ma grand'mère un soir à sa fête  
De vin pur ayant bu deux doigts  
Nous disait en branlant la tête,  
Que d'amoureux j'eus autrefois.

Combien je regrette  
Mon bras si dodu,  
Ma jambe bien faite,  
Et le temps perdu.

Quoi ! maman, vous n'étiez pas sage ?  
—Non vraiment ; et de mes appas  
Seule à quinze ans j'appris l'usage,  
Car la nuit je ne dormais pas.  
Combien je regrette, etc.

Maman, Lindor savait donc plaire ?  
—Oui, seul il me plut quatre mois ;





YVETTIE GILBERT IN HER CRINOLINE SONGS.

*(From a poster.)*

Mais bientôt j'estimai Valère,  
Et fis deux heureux à la fois.  
Combien je regrette, etc.

Quoi, maman, deux amants ensemble ?  
Oui, mais chacun d'eux me trompa,  
Plus fine alors qu'il ne vous semble,  
J'épousai votre grandpapa.  
Combien je regrette, etc.

Maman, que lui dit famille ?  
—Rien, mais un mari plus sensé  
Eût pu connaître à la coquille  
Que l'œuf était déjà cassé.  
Combien je regrette, etc.

Comme vous, maman, faut-il faire ?  
—Eh ! mes petits-enfants, pourquoi,  
Quand j'ai fait comme ma grand'mère,  
Ne feriez-vous pas comme moi ?  
Combien je regrette, etc.

Reference to Yvette Guilbert's rendering of this song has already been made by Mr Makower. It is, perhaps, one of the most perfect things she does. The old lady's half-humorous, half-pathetic regret for the days that are gone, and for the charms of her departed youth, is tinged with another note, a note of defiance, as though she were bidding old age to do his worst. And the curious chuckle with which she relates the conquests of her younger days is a thing delightful to hear.

Then there is the famous "Les Cloches de Nantes,"

which tells of the escape of a prisoner on the eve of his execution, with its familiar refrain

“ Ah ! Ah ! Ah !  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah ! ”

in which, by the different intonations of her voice, the singer is able to convey every shade of emotion from fear to triumph, and the ringing of the bells themselves.

### LES CLOCHES DE NANTES

Dans les prisons de Nantes  
Il y a un prisonnier,  
Il y a un prisonnier ;  
Que personn' ne va voir  
Que la fill' du geôlier.  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah !  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Que personn' n'y va voir  
Que la fill' du geôlier,  
Que la fill' du geôlier ;  
Va lui porter à boire,  
A boire et à manger.  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah !  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Va lui porter à boire,  
A boire et à manger,  
A boire et à manger ;  
“ On dit dans tout' la ville,  
Que demain vous mourrez.”  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah !  
Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Hélas si demain je meure,  
 Déliez moi les pieds !  
 Déliez moi les pieds !  
 Toutes les cloch's de Nantes,  
 Se mirent à sonner.

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Toutes les cloch's de Nantes,  
 Se mirent à sonner,  
 Se mirent à sonner ;  
 La fillette est jeunette,  
 Ell' se prit à pleurer.

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

La fillette est jeunette,  
 Ell' se prit à pleurer,  
 Ell' se prit à pleurer ;  
 Le prisonnier alerte,  
 Dans le fleuve a sauté.

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Le prisonnier alerte,  
 Dans le fleuve a sauté,  
 Dans le fleuve a sauté ;  
 Vivent les fill's de Nantes,  
 Et tous les prisonniers.

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

Ah ! Ah ! Ah !

The following vivid description of Yvette Guilbert's singing of this song is taken, with permission, from Mr Haldane Macfall's article in "The Mask"—

"In the prison at Nantes there is a prisoner—a



prisoner whom no one goes to see, save the daughter of the turnkey. Ah! ah! ah! . . . Ah! ah! ah! . . . Whom no one ever goes to see save the daughter of the turnkey—she who takes him water to drink and food to eat, ah! ah! ah! . . . ah! ah! ah! . . . ah! ah! ah! . . . ‘Ah, me! since to-morrow I die, strike the fetters from my feet! Strike the fetters from—my—feet.’ . . . All the bells of Nantes got them a-ringing: Ah! ah! ah! . . . Ah! ah! ah! All the bells of Nantes got them a-ringing. The little maid’s a young thing. She frees his feet a-weeping. . . . She frees—his—feet—a-weeping. Quick the prisoner with a bound leaps into the river; hey! hey! hey! . . . Hey! hey! hey! . . . Leaps into the river. . . . So, here’s to the girls of Nantes! likewise to all prisoners! Ho! ho! ho! Ha! ha! Hah!

“In those all too few swift-speeding minutes of song, by her magic of artistry, just standing there in that quaint fantastic garb that in no slightest degree aids her in actually creating the pictured thing, the art’s skill of this wonderful woman has banished space and time and the dark hushed world of eager faces in the surrounding gloom, and we are back to the years and air and pathetic winsomeness of the old tragi-comedy. We leap into the tide that flows by the walls of Nantes, and eagerly, as with the cramped limbs of the prisoner, we are breasting that flow of waters to the sea; and, all the while, sounds the carillon of bells, that peal forth above the towers of Nantes, now sad, now triumphant, now eager,

now sobbing, running like litany through all the adventure of our vision and our hearing ; yet, even as the youth stands fetterless and free at an inn at last, drinking to the jailor's daughter, the carillon sounds the note of pain, contracts one's heart—for in the old prison at Nantes there is another prisoner, a girl, and there are tears in the eyes of the girl who bows her head in the empty cell—alone.

"This is supreme acting—the indescribable, consummate, compelling thing that no mortal can teach ; that it is given only to genius to do. No rule nor plummet can measure it ; no laws produce it.

• "It has all been roused in us, this vision and emotion, so completely, that one starts at the thunder of applause which leaps at the music's ending. Read the simple lines in cold blood, and you are filled with wonder how from such scant fabric this graceful woman has woven so rich a tapestry."

To these must be added the naïve and tender song "*La Légende de St Nicholas*," in which she strikes yet a different note, a note of childish innocence and glee ; the famous "*Les Housards de la Garde*," with its plaintive recurrent phrase "*il était mon amant*," into the rendering of which Yvette Guilbert manages to read a hundred different meanings and that piquant comedy "*Les Rues d'Anjou et de Poitou*," which tells the love story of Claude and Rose, who used to meet every morning where

" la ru' d'Anjou  
Donn' dans la ru' d'Poitou " ;

and last, but by no means least, "La Fille de Parthenay."

One might go on writing indefinitely on this subject, as one after another of Yvette Guilbert's songs rises to the mind, but it is not possible to do more than refer to a few of the most typical and the best known. Even a casual study of only those songs which have been mentioned would be sufficient to reveal the infinite range and variety of her répertoire.

To this répertoire she is even now constantly adding. No account of Yvette Guilbert's songs, however cursory, would be complete without some reference to these later additions. They are for the most part of a different type to those already mentioned; and the article in the following chapter, kindly written by Mr Haldane Macfall, forms a fitting conclusion to the study of this all-engrossing subject.

## CHAPTER III

### YVETTE GUILBERT'S LATER SONGS

(BY HALDANE MACFALL)

THEY that have only heard Yvette sing in the music-hall have but small acquaintance with the largeness and wide range of her astounding genius. In the theatre of varieties she is by necessity compelled to limit the field of her art within the general comprehension—the more compelled since she speaks a foreign tongue. It is at her special concerts, as at the aristocratic theatre in Paris, the Gymnase, where her now famous “Thursday afternoons” (known as “The Yvette Thursdays”) had their beginnings, that her genius may be realised at its subtlest, its most potent, and its largest flights. It is at these Yvette Concerts that you may hear her inimitable delivery of the exquisite poesy of Francis Jammes; hear as you have never heard the delivery of the tragic and grim intensity of the sterner genius of Rollinat and the biting tragic art of the school of Baudelaire; or be charmed with the sweet-sad or lighter accent of the dainty word-craftsmanship of the eighteenth century. It is not the least part of Yvette's bright achievement that she has breathed life again into the old French ballad,

that had lain so long forgotten, folded and put away in lavender in the lumber-rooms of a great people's historic and romantic past ; not the least part of her wizardry that she has brought before the footlights and revived the old English country songs that had passed away even from the cottage of the labourer. But there is no lyric (given that it held dramatic essence) to which the genius and skill in artistry of this marvellous woman do not bring an added dignity, a wealth of significance, an added intensity of purpose, transmuted to its full and most precious value by the alchemy of her exquisite perceptions and compelling utterance. "

It is astonishing what added beauty she reveals, in all verse that she declaims to musical refrain. Whether the poet's soul be white or scarlet or black, Yvette interprets each with just balance and wondrous insight.

Take the art of Francis Jammes, whom the writers of France set upon a throne apart. From the warm gentle airs of the foothills of the Pyrenees that bred him, he has caught the colour and tenderness of the South. He is the modern Jean Jacques Rousseau in his love of nature. He creeps into the heart of nature, becomes intimate with her, winning her secrets from her with all the wheedling simplicity of the trust and confidence of a big child. Francis Jammes is in strange contrast with the singers of his age that bred black pessimism in La Forge, bitterness in Rollinat, grey naturalism in Zola. Amongst these he is like a being from another world, a re-incarnation

of sainthood. He is akin to Saint Francis of Assisi—tender, exquisite, his heart going out to all living things, with a saint-like simplicity of communion with the smallest and weakest creatures of God.

Listen to Yvette uttering the charm of his exquisite lyric "I speak of God" ("Je parle de Dieu"), and you realise how she reveals the full significance of his delightful and fragrant art, giving it forth with a grace, light as thistledown, fragile as gossamer, in which the poet, praying as he has been taught to pray in childhood at his mother's knee, suddenly asks himself the harsh question—"But do I believe?" When—there comes floating to him, out of the past, the memory of the days when, as a little child, he trudged to the village church of France with his nurse—there comes to him the fragrance of the incense, the glowing hues of the flowers of gaudily painted cotton, the dear, delightful, crudely-coloured jars such as one wins in lotteries at country fairs—the girls strewing roses before the priests and choristers in procession—the sound of the distant monotonous chanting of the priest at the high altar, whose words were but veriest Greek to him—the reverent hush of the worshipping people—the tinkle of the bell that announces the elevation of the Host—the little Manger in which the Infant Christ lay amidst the straw, with the Mother of Grief watching over all, and the browsing ass standing beside them—the call for help to the Lady of the Seven Dolors—the comfort and peace of it all, as when a tired child comes home at the end of the day to nestle its weary

limbs in its mother's lap. . . . Shall Doubt tear all this from him ? . . . " No," says the poet—the man—" if, after all, some people do not believe in God, he cannot empty his heart of the delight of it. It was all so restful—si paisible ! "

Through the poem runs all that delightful sweet intimacy with the lords of Heaven that we see in a Frenchwoman who runs to a little child, gathering it up in her arms, and crooning it, regardless of sex, as her " *petit Jesu*." And with what skill Yvette and her composer have wrought the fragrance of it all into song ! and with what consummate power she utters its every subtlety and shade of meaning ! Here is one of the unforgettable things in all art. .

Then, in a moment Yvette puts the white from her soul, puts on scarlet. With what different eyes Francis Jammes looks upon, with far different speech he speaks of womanhood from the keen-searching eyes and bitter satirical tongue of La Forgue and Rollinat, whose scalding verses Yvette utters without mitigation of their suggestion, with full sense of their significance !

With La Forgue and Rollinat the sweet and tender aspect of the fair heavens is gone—giving place to the scowling skies that threaten the storm-tossed voyaging of scarred and broken souls. Both singers, oddly enough, uttered their art chiefly interested in the eternal duel of sex—above all, deeply impressed by the injustice doled out to womanhood in her battle with the cruelty of her destiny.

In the terrible and pitiful ballad of " *The Drinker*

of Absinthe" ("La Buveuse d'Absinthe") Rollinat took for his symbol of pity a woman of La Villette, the lowest quarter of Paris—a bedraggled soul, the squalid victim of constant motherhood undesired, and of constant drunkenness. In nothing does the genius of the man show so supreme as in the profound pity aroused in the awful presence of this tattered soul of one whom the French call "a forget of God." And in all her wide-ranging art Yvette reaches to no more sublime heights than in her dramatic statement of this haunting and terrible thing—it is as though the sublime pity of the very Christ uttered itself through the instrumentality of her genius—she steps thereby to the supreme rank of tragedians of all time. And when the husky voice ceases from speaking, the pity of the dead woman, who has crept her way along the walls, feeling for solid support in the mad realm of the drunken, there are tears in the eyes of Yvette Guilbert. She has bared the soul of the broken woman; ay, more, the soul of the poet who created her, the pity of the God who gathered her . . .

Yvette steps out of the soul of Rollinat, enters the soul of La Forgue—he a literary descendant of Baudelaire, but even more black in bitterness. In La Forgue's "Our Little Companion" ("Notre Petite Compagne") we find woman at duel with her destiny, but facing it now with mockery, and recklessly.

To La Forgue life is ever a vast farce—everyone is but a grimace—men lie to each other and to them-



selves. The eternal aim is to avoid the truth. Every woman conceals herself behind a mask, poses her real self behind the part expected of her. Woman is the Sphinx. Man can say what he likes of woman—and whatever he says is all true. All women are one—THE Woman. And to woman La Forgue mostly devotes his verse. To the study of woman he brought all his bitter irony, all his keen vision: and she drew him to the utterance of verse that rises to a rare dignity and haunting mystery by very intensity of eagerness to discover her soul.

Dress a woman—and she will play the part, no matter who the woman, no matter what the dress.<sup>9</sup> Clothe her in rags, she will act a life of rags; array her in splendour and she will draw herself to her full height and act the splendour. Even in sleep she plays the comedy of looking as nice as she is expected to look.

And it was part of the tragedy of La Forgue's genius that, passionately desiring to love and be loved, he could discover but the trickeries of woman, never the soul. He was dead at twenty-seven, lord of an astounding intensity of poetic achievement—his cry to the last: "When will women try to be our brothers?" and uttering in counter-cry for womanhood: "When will men try to be our sisters?"

To weave this philosophy into poetic form, La Forgue wrote this poem of "Notre Petite Compagne," in which he states the idea with marvellous and haunting power. He took as his symbol a woman of the cafés of Paris who has gone through every

experience, freed herself from the trammels of convention, and, knowing all, in the eternal duel of sex can turn upon the world and say with an irony that vaunts her triumphs :

"Ay, but you do not know me! I am THE Woman! . . ."

Yvette and her composer, Gustave Ferrari, have taken for their motive, as the music to her feet, that waltz by De Wäldteufel that one hears being played at every night-café of Paris, jigged by weary fingers of every weary fiddler—and to the refrain, Yvette, cigarette in fingers, and boldly giving by gesture and bearing and carriage of the body, by air and manner, a sense of the commonplace as the setting to such a woman's tawdry wayfaring, by very contrast raises the sublime significance of this song to that triumph that she wins.

It is no mouthing tragedy-queen that spouts the tremendous lines and their vast purpose, but a very woman of the cafés, cynical, contemptuous, with the triumph of her august mystery behind all.

"If I please you," she says, "take me as I am. I am a woman. Handle me as you like, rough or smooth, I am WOMAN. . . . Don't you know me? If you would have me a saint, I pull my hair down smoothly over my forehead like a madonna; if you would have a chorus-girl, I put up my hair and look reckless; I play a part for every taste. Choose your style, each to his liking; and I am it—and will make you mad. But, whatever outward part I play, I am always One—I am WOMAN. . . . Drink of my lips,

not of my soul. Do not look for more. You cannot understand. Nobody understands me—not even myself. Our weapons are not equal, therefore I hold out my hand to you—you simple men-things. But I? I am the eternal feminine—the enigma—Woman! . . . My aim is lost in the stars. I am the great Isis. No man may raise the veil. No man has raised it. . . . Dream only of me for what I can give you; don't pretend, don't try to understand Me. I cannot be understood. I am the Incomprehensible. . . . So—if my ways attract you, take me as I am. I am a woman. Everyone knows me. But, duchess or girl of the gutter, I am the same—always the One<sup>o</sup>—WOMAN!” •

So, to the refrain of the worn-out waltz-tune, with paint on cheek and fineries and fripperies, the smoke of cigarette curling into the air, with compelling gesture and wonderful voice, Yvette suggests the sublime mystery of womanhood in a way that never leaves the memory, that compels the imagination.





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## **AUTUMN ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

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### **Wagner at Home.**

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### **Yvette Guilbert : Struggles and Victories.**

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