TRILBY

Part First

"Mimi Pinson est une blonde,
Une blonde que l'on connait;
Elle n'a qu'une robe au monde,
Landérirette! et qu'un bonnet!"

It was a fine, sunny, showery day in April.

The big studio window was open at the top, and let in a pleasant breeze from the northwest. Things were beginning to look shipshape at last. The big piano, a semi-grand by Broadwood, had arrived from England by "the Little Quickness" (*la Petite Vitesse*, as the goods trains are called in France), and lay, freshly tuned, alongside the eastern wall; on the wall opposite was a panoply of foils, masks, and boxing-gloves.

A trapeze, a knotted rope, and two parallel cords, supporting each a ring, depended from a huge beam in the ceiling. The walls were of the usual dull red, relieved by plaster casts of arms and legs and hands and feet; and Dante's mask, and Michael Angelo's alto-rilievo of Leda and the swan, and a centaur and Lapith from the Elgin marbles—on none of these had the dust as yet had time to settle.

There were also studies in oil from the nude; copies of Titian, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Rubens, Tintoret, Leonardo da Vinci—none of the school of Botticelli, Mantegna, and Co.—a firm whose merits had not as yet been revealed to the many.

Along the walls, at a great height, ran a broad shelf, on which were other casts in plaster, terra-cotta, imitation bronze: a little Theseus, a little Venus of Milo, a little discobolus; a little flayed man threatening high heaven (an act that seemed almost pardonable under the circumstances!); a lion and a boar by Barye; an anatomical figure of a horse with only one leg left and no ears; a horse's head from the pediment of the Parthenon, earless also; and the bust of Clytie, with her beautiful low brow, her sweet wan gaze, and the ineffable forward shrug of her dear shoulders that makes her bosom a nest, a rest, a pillow, a refuge—to be loved and desired forever by generation after generation of the sons of men.

Near the stove hung a gridiron, a frying-pan, a toasting-fork, and a pair of bellows. In an adjoining glazed corner cupboard were plates and glasses, black-handled knives, pewter spoons, and three-pronged steel forks; a salad-bowl, vinegar cruets, an oil-flask, two mustard-pots (English and French), and such like things—all scrupulously clean. On the floor, which had been stained and waxed at considerable cost, lay two chetah-skins and a large Persian praying-rug. One-half of it, however (under the trapeze and at the farthest end from the window, beyond the model throne), was covered with coarse matting, that one might fence or box without slipping down and splitting one's self in two, or fall without breaking any bones.

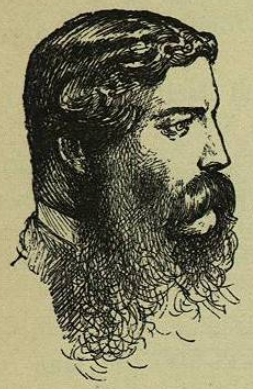
Two other windows of the usual French size and pattern, with shutters to them and heavy curtains of baize, opened east and west, to let in dawn or sunset, as the case might be, or haply keep them out. And there were alcoves, recesses, irregularities, odd little nooks and corners, to be filled up as time wore on with endless personal knick-knacks, bibelots, private properties and acquisitions—things that make a place genial, homelike, and good to remember, and sweet to muse upon (with fond regret) in after-years.

And an immense divan spread itself in width and length and delightful thickness just beneath the big north window, the business window—a divan so immense that three well-fed, well-contented Englishmen could all lie lazily smoking their pipes on it at once without being in each other's way, and very often did!

At present one of these Englishmen—a Yorkshireman, by-the-way, called Taffy (and also the Man of Blood, because he was supposed to be distantly related to a baronet)—was more energetically engaged. Bare-armed, and in his shirt and trousers, he was twirling a pair of Indian clubs round his head. His face was flushed, and he was perspiring freely and looked fierce. He was a very big young man, fair, with kind but choleric blue eyes, and the muscles of his brawny arm were strong as iron bands.

For three years he had borne her Majesty's commission, and had been through the Crimean campaign

without a scratch. He would have been one of the famous six hundred in the famous charge at Balaklava but for a sprained ankle (caught playing leap-frog in the trenches), which kept him in hospital on that momentous day. So that he lost his chance of glory or the grave, and this humiliating misadventure had sickened him of soldiering for life, and he never quite got over it. Then, feeling within himself an irresistible vocation for art, he had sold out; and here he was in Paris, hard at work, as we see.

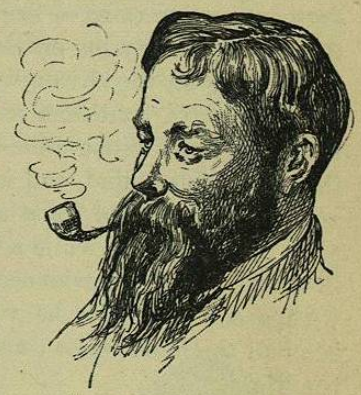


TAFFY, ALIAS TALBOT WYNNE

He was good-looking, with straight features; but I regret to say that, besides his heavy plunger's mustache, he wore an immense pair of drooping auburn whiskers, of the kind that used to be called Piccadilly weepers, and were afterwards affected by Mr. Sothern in Lord Dundreary. It was a fashion to do so then for such of our gilded youth as could afford the time (and the hair); the bigger and fairer the whiskers, the more beautiful was thought the youth! It seems incredible in these days, when even her Majesty's household brigade go about with smooth cheeks and lips, like priests or play-actors.

"What's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms . . . ?"

Another inmate of this blissful abode—Sandy, the Laird of Cockpen, as he was called—sat in similarly simple attire at his easel, painting at a lifelike little picture of a Spanish toreador serenading a lady of high degree (in broad daylight). He had never been to Spain, but he had a complete toreador's kit—a bargain which he had picked up for a mere song in the Boulevard du Temple—and he had hired the guitar. His pipe was in his mouth—reversed; for it had gone out, and the ashes were spilled all over his trousers, where holes were often burned in this way.



"THE LAIRD OF COCKPEN"

Quite gratuitously, and with a pleasing Scotch accent, he began to declaim:

"A street there is in Paris famous
For which no rhyme our language yields;
Roo Nerve day Petty Shong its name is—
The New Street of the Little Fields. . . ."

And then, in his keen appreciation of the immortal stanza, he chuckled audibly, with a face so blithe and merry and well pleased that it did one good to look at him.

He also had entered life by another door. His parents (good, pious people in Dundee) had intended that

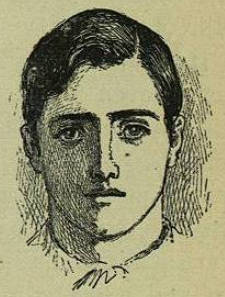
he should be a writer to the signet, as his father and grandfather had been before him. And here he was in Paris famous, painting toreadors, and spouting the "Ballad of the Bouillabaisse," as he would often do out of sheer lightness of heart—much oftener, indeed, than he would say his prayers.

Kneeling on the divan, with his elbow on the window-sill, was a third and much younger youth. The third he was "Little Billee." He had pulled down the green baize blind, and was looking over the roofs and chimney-pots of Paris and all about with all his eyes, munching the while a roll and a savory saveloy, in which there was evidence of much garlic. He ate with great relish, for he was very hungry; he had been all the morning at Carrel's studio, drawing from the life.

Little Billee was small and slender, about twenty or twenty-one, and had a straight white forehead veined with blue, large dark-blue eyes, delicate, regular features, and coal-black hair. He was also very graceful and well built, with very small hands and feet, and much better dressed than his friends, who went out of their way to outdo the denizens of the quartier latin in careless eccentricity of garb, and succeeded. And in his winning and handsome face there was just a faint suggestion of some possible very remote Jewish ancestor—just a tinge of that strong, sturdy, irrepressible, indomitable, indelible blood which is of such priceless value in diluted homœopathic doses, like the dry white Spanish wine called montijo, which is not meant to be taken pure; but without a judicious admixture of which no sherry can go round the world

and keep its flavor intact; or like the famous bulldog strain, which is not beautiful in itself; and yet just for lacking a little of the same no greyhound can ever hope to be a champion. So, at least, I have been told by wine-merchants and dog-fanciers—the most veracious persons that can be. Fortunately for the world, and especially for ourselves, most of us have in our veins at least a minim of that precious fluid, whether we know it or show it or not. *Tant pis pour les autres!*

As Little Billee munched he also gazed at the busy place below—the Place St. Anatole des Arts—at the old houses opposite, some of which were being pulled down, no doubt lest they should fall of their own sweet will. In the gaps between he would see discolored, old, cracked, dingy walls, with mysterious windows and rusty iron balconies of great antiquity—sights that set him dreaming dreams of mediæval French love and wickedness and crime, bygone mysteries of Paris!



"THE THIRD HE WAS 'LITTLE BILLEE'"

One gap went right through the block, and gave him a glimpse of the river, the "Cité," and the ominous old Morgue; a little to the right rose the gray towers of Notre Dame de Paris into the checkered April sky. Indeed, the top of nearly all Paris lay

before him, with a little stretch of the imagination on his part; and he gazed with a sense of novelty, an interest and a pleasure for which he could not have found any expression in mere language.

Paris! Paris!! Paris!!!

The very name had always been one to conjure with, whether he thought of it as a mere sound on the lips and in the ear, or as a magical written or printed word for the eye. And here was the thing itself at last, and he, he himself, ipsissimus, in the very midst of it, to live there and learn there as long as he liked, and make himself the great artist he longed to be.

Then, his meal finished, he lit a pipe, and flung himself on the divan and sighed deeply, out of the overfull contentment of his heart.

He felt he had never known happiness like this, never even dreamed its possibility. And yet his life had been a happy one. He was young and tender, was Little Billee; he had never been to any school, and was innocent of the world and its wicked ways; innocent of French especially, and the ways of Paris and its Latin quarter. He had been brought up and educated at home, had spent his boyhood in London with his mother and sister, who now lived in Devonshire on somewhat straitened means. His father, who was dead, had been a clerk in the Treasury.

He and his two friends, Taffy and the Laird, had taken this studio together. The Laird slept there, in a small bedroom off the studio. Taffy had a bedroom at the Hôtel de Seine, in the street of that name.

Little Billee lodged at the Hôtel Corneille, in the Place de l'Odéon.

He looked at his two friends, and wondered if any one, living or dead, had ever had such a glorious pair of chums as these.

"IT DID ONE GOOD TO LOOK AT HIM"

Whatever they did, whatever they said, was simply perfect in his eyes; they were his guides and philosophers as well as his chums. On the other hand, Taffy and the Laird were as fond of the boy as they could be.

His absolute belief in all they said and did touched them none the less that they were conscious of its being somewhat in excess of their deserts. His almost girlish purity of mind amused and charmed them, and they did all they could to preserve it, even in the quartier latin, where purity is apt to go bad if it be kept too long.

They loved him for his affectionate disposition, his lively and caressing ways; and they admired him far

more than he ever knew, for they recognized in him a quickness, a keenness, a delicacy of perception, in matters of form and color, a mysterious facility and felicity of execution, a sense of all that was sweet and beautiful in nature, and a ready power of expressing it, that had not been vouchsafed to them in any such generous profusion, and which, as they ungrudgingly admitted to themselves and each other, amounted to true genius.

And when one within the immediate circle of our intimates is gifted in this abnormal fashion, we either hate or love him for it, in proportion to the greatness of his gift; according to the way we are built.

So Taffy and the Laird loved Little Billee—loved him very much indeed. Not but what Little Billee had his faults. For instance, he didn't interest himself very warmly in other people's pictures. He didn't seem to care for the Laird's guitar-playing toreador, nor for his serenaded lady—at all events, he never said anything about them, either in praise or blame. He looked at Taffy's realisms (for Taffy was a realist) in silence, and nothing tries true friendship so much as silence of this kind.

But, then, to make up for it, when they all three went to the Louvre, he didn't seem to trouble much about Titian either, or Rembrandt, or Velasquez, Rubens, Veronese, or Leonardo. He looked at the people who looked at the pictures, instead of at the pictures themselves; especially at the people who copied them, the sometimes charming young lady painters—and these seemed to him even more charming than they really were—and he looked a great deal out of the

Louvre windows, where there was much to be seen: more Paris, for instance—Paris, of which he could never have enough.

But when, surfeited with classical beauty, they all three went and dined together, and Taffy and the Laird said beautiful things about the old masters, and quarrelled about them, he listened with deference and rapt attention and reverentially agreed with all they said, and afterwards made the most delightfully funny little pen-and-ink sketches of them, saying all these beautiful things (which he sent to his mother and sister at home); so life-like, so real, that you could almost hear the beautiful things they said; so beautifully drawn that you felt the old masters couldn't have drawn them better themselves; and so irresistibly droll that you felt that the old masters could not have drawn them at all—any more than Milton could have described the quarrel between Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig; no one, in short, but Little Billee.

Little Billee took up the "Ballad of the Bouillabaisse" where the Laird had left it off, and speculated on the future of himself and his friends, when he should have got to forty years—an almost impossibly remote future.

These speculations were interrupted by a loud knock at the door, and two men came in.

First, a tall bony individual of any age between thirty and forty-five, of Jewish aspect, well-featured but sinister. He was very shabby and dirty, and wore a red béret and a large velveteen cloak, with a big metal clasp at the collar. His thick, heavy, languid, lustreless black hair fell down behind his ears on to his

shoulders, in that musicianlike way that is so offensive to the normal Englishman. He had bold, brilliant black eyes, with long heavy lids, a thin, sallow face, and a beard of burnt-up black which grew almost from his under eyelids; and over it his mustache, a shade lighter, fell in two long spiral twists. He went by the name of Svengali, and spoke fluent French with a German accent, and humorous German twists and idioms, and his voice was very thin and mean and harsh, and often broke into a disagreeable falsetto.

His companion was a little swarthy young man—a gypsy, possibly—much pitted with the smallpox, and also very shabby. He had large, soft, affectionate brown eyes, like a King Charles spaniel. He had small, nervous, veiny hands with nails bitten down to the quick, and carried a fiddle and a fiddlestick under his arm, without a case, as though he had been playing in the street.

"Ponchour, mes enfants," said Svengali. "Che vous amène mon ami Checko, qui choue du fiolon gomme un anche!"

Little Billee, who adored all "sweet musicianers," jumped up and made Gecko as warmly welcome as he could in his early French.

"Ha! le biâno!" exclaimed Svengali, flinging his red béret on it, and his cloak on the ground. "Ch'espère qu'il est pon, et pien t'accord!"

And sitting down on the music-stool, he ran up and down the scales with that easy power, that smooth even crispness of touch, which reveal the master.

Then he fell to playing Chopin's impromptu in A flat, so beautifully that Little Billee's heart went nigh

AMONG THE OLD MASTERS

to bursting with suppressed emotion and delight. He had never heard any music of Chopin's before, nothing but British provincial home-made music—melodies with variations, "Annie Laurie," "The Last Rose of Summer," "The Blue Bells of Scotland;" innocent little motherly and sisterly tinklings, invented to set the company at their ease on festive evenings, and make all-round conversation possible for shy people; who fear the unaccompanied sound of their own voices, and whose genial chatter always leaves off directly the music ceases.

He never forgot that impromptu, which he was destined to hear again one day in strange circumstances.

Then Svengali and Gecko made music together, divinely. Little fragmentary things, sometimes consisting but of a few bars, but these bars of *such* beauty and meaning! Scraps, snatches, short melodies, meant to fetch, to charm immediately, or to melt or sadden or madden just for a moment, and that knew just when to leave off—czardas, gypsy dances, Hungarian love-plaints, things little known out of eastern Europe in the fifties of this century, till the Laird and Taffy were almost as wild in their enthusiasm as Little Billee—a silent enthusiasm too deep for speech. And when these two great artists left off to smoke, the three Britishers were too much moved even for that, and there was a stillness. . . .

Suddenly there came a loud knuckle-rapping at the outer door, and a portentous voice of great volume, and that might almost have belonged to any sex (even an angel's), uttered the British milkman's yodel, "Milk

below!" and before any one could say "Entrez," a strange figure appeared, framed by the gloom of the little antechamber.

It was the figure of a very tall and fully developed young female, clad in the gray overcoat of a French infantry soldier, continued netherwards by a short striped petticoat, beneath which were visible her bare white ankles and insteps, and slim, straight, rosy heels, clean cut and smooth as the back of a razor; her toes lost themselves in a huge pair of male list slippers, which made her drag her feet as she walked.

She bore herself with easy, unembarrassed grace, like a person whose nerves and muscles are well in tune, whose spirits are high, who has lived much in the atmosphere of French studios, and feels at home in it.

This strange medley of garments was surmounted by a small bare head with short, thick, wavy brown hair, and a very healthy young face, which could scarcely be called quite beautiful at first sight, since the eyes were too wide apart, the mouth too large, the chin too massive, the complexion a mass of freckles. Besides, you can never tell how beautiful (or how ugly) a face may be till you have tried to draw it.

But a small portion of her neck, down by the collar-bone, which just showed itself between the unbuttoned lapels of her military coat collar, was of a delicate privetlike whiteness that is never to be found on any French neck, and very few English ones. Also, she had a very fine brow, broad and low, with thick level eyebrows much darker than her hair, a broad, bony, high bridge to her short nose, and her full, broad

cheeks were beautifully modelled. She would have made a singularly handsome boy.

As the creature looked round at the assembled company and flashed her big white teeth at them in an all-embracing smile of uncommon width and quite irresistible sweetness, simplicity, and friendly trust, one saw at a glance that she was out of the common clever, simple, humorous, honest, brave, and kind, and accustomed to be genially welcomed wherever she went. Then suddenly closing the door behind her, dropping her smile, and looking wistful and sweet, with her head on one side and her arms akimbo, "Ye're all English, now, aren't ye?" she exclaimed. "I heard the music, and thought I'd just come in for a bit, and pass the time of day: you don't mind? Trilby, that's my name—Trilby O'Ferrall."

She said this in English, with an accent half Scotch and certain French intonations, and in a voice so rich and deep and full as almost to suggest an incipient tenore robusto; and one felt instinctively that it was a real pity she wasn't a boy, she would have made such a jolly one.

"We're delighted, on the contrary," said little Billee, and advanced a chair for her.

But she said, "Oh, don't mind me; go on with the music," and sat herself down cross-legged on the model-throne near the piano.

As they still looked at her, curious and half-embarrassed, she pulled a paper parcel containing food out of one of the coat-pockets, and exclaimed:

"I'll just take a bite, if you don't object; I'm a model, you know, and it's just rung twelve—'the rest.'

"WISTFUL AND SWEET"

I'm posing for Durien the sculptor, on the next floor. I pose to him for the altogether."

"The altogether?" asked Little Billee.

"Yes—*l'ensemble*, you know—head, hands, and feet—everything—especially feet. That's my foot," she said, kicking off her big slipper and stretching out the limb. "It's the handsomest foot in all Paris. There's only one in all Paris to match it, and here it is," and she laughed heartily (like a merry peal of bells), and stuck out the other.

And in truth they were astonishingly beautiful feet, such as one only sees in pictures and statues—a true inspiration of shape and color, all made up of delicate lengths and subtly modulated curves and noble straightnesses and happy little dimpled arrangements in innocent young pink and white.

So that Little Billee, who had the quick, prehensile, æsthetic eye, and knew by the grace of Heaven what the shapes and sizes and colors of almost every bit of man, woman, or child should be (and so seldom are), was quite bewildered to find that a real, bare, live human foot could be such a charming object to look at, and felt that such a base or pedestal lent quite an antique and Olympian dignity to a figure that seemed just then rather grotesque in its mixed attire of military overcoat and female petticoat, and nothing else!

Poor Trilby!

The shape of those lovely slender feet (that were neither large nor small), fac-similed in dusty, pale plaster of Paris, survives on the shelves and walls of many a studio throughout the world, and many a

sculptor yet unborn has yet to marvel at their strange perfection, in studious despair.

For when Dame Nature takes it into her head to do her very best, and bestow her minutest attention on a mere detail, as happens now and then—once in a blue moon, perhaps—she makes it uphill work for poor human art to keep pace with her.

It is a wondrous thing, the human foot—like the human hand; even more so, perhaps; but, unlike the hand, with which we are so familiar, it is seldom a thing of beauty in civilized adults who go about in leather boots or shoes.

So that it is hidden away in disgrace, a thing to be thrust out of sight and forgotten. It can sometimes be very ugly, indeed—the ugliest thing there is, even in the fairest and highest and most gifted of her sex; and then it is of an ugliness to chill and kill romance, and scatter young love's dream, and almost break the heart.

And all for the sake of a high heel and a ridiculously pointed toe—mean things, at the best!

Conversely, when Mother Nature has taken extra pains in the building of it, and proper care or happy chance has kept it free of lamentable deformations, indurations, and discolorations—all those grewsome boot-begotten abominations which have made it so generally unpopular—the sudden sight of it, uncovered, comes as a very rare and singularly pleasing surprise to the eye that has learned how to see!

Nothing else that Mother Nature has to show, not even the human face divine, has more subtle power to suggest high physical distinction, happy evolution, and