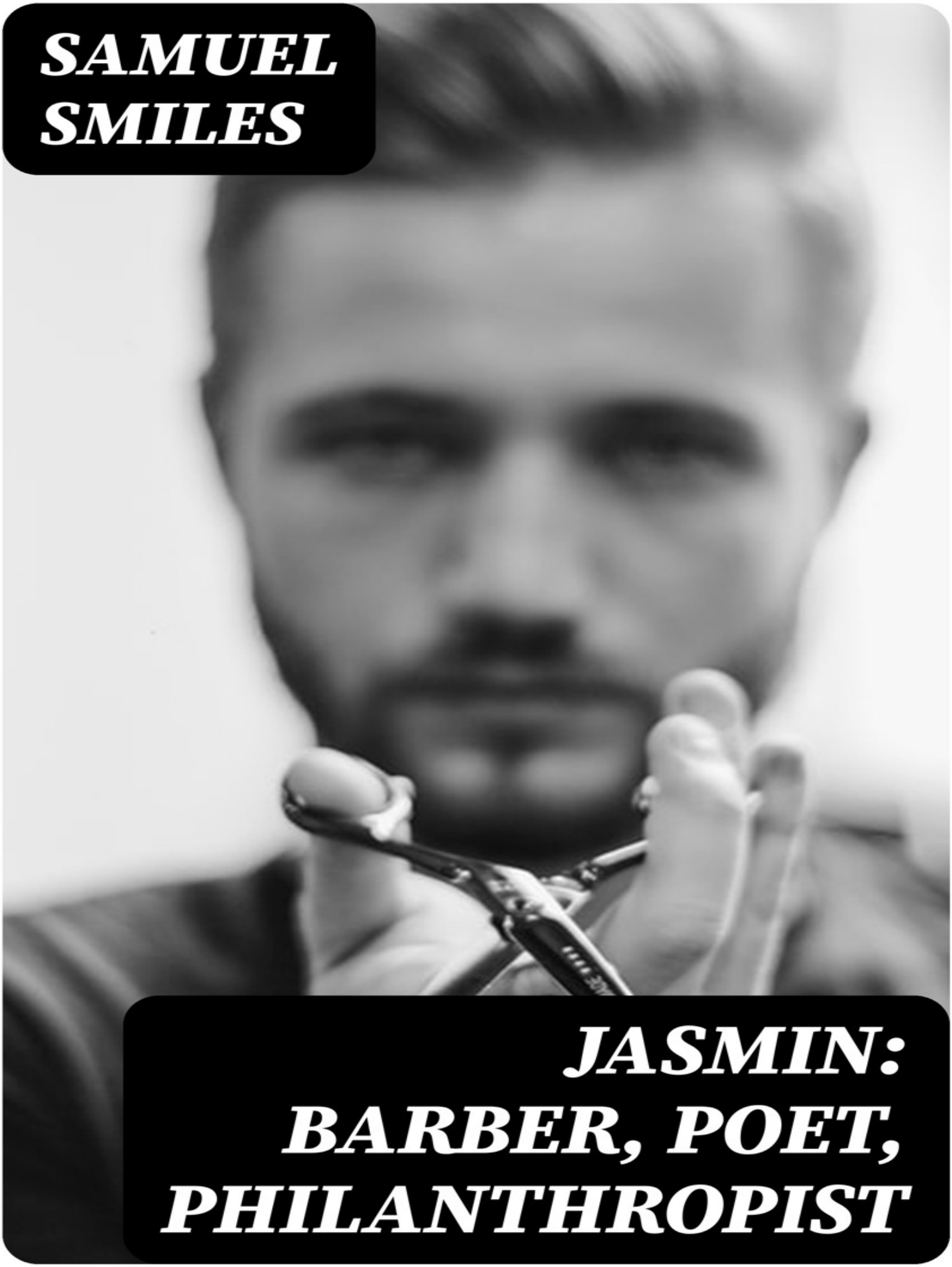
SAMUEL SMILES



JASMIN: BARBER, POET, PHILANTHROPIST

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EAN 8596547360520

DigiCat, 2022
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PREFACE.

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My attention was first called to the works of the poet Jasmin by the eulogistic articles which appeared in the Revue des Deux Mondes, by De Mazade, Nodier, Villemain, and other well-known reviewers.

I afterwards read the articles by Sainte-Beuve, perhaps the finest critic of French literature, on the life and history of Jasmin, in his 'Portraits Contemporains' as well as his admirable article on the same subject, in the 'Causeries du Lundi.'

While Jasmin was still alive, a translation was published by the American poet Longfellow, of 'The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuille,' perhaps the best of Jasmin's poems. In his note to the translation, Longfellow said that "Jasmin, the author of this beautiful poem, is to the South of France what Burns is to the South of Scotland, the representative of the heart of the people; one of those happy bards who are born with their mouths full of birds (la bouco pleno d'aouvelous). He has written his own biography in a poetic form, and the simple narrative of his poverty, his struggles, and his triumphs, is very touching. He still lives at Agen, on the Garonne; and long may he live there to delight his native land with native songs."

I had some difficulty in obtaining Jasmin's poems; but at length I received them from his native town of Agen. They consisted of four volumes octavo, though they were still incomplete. But a new edition has since been published, in

1889, which was heralded by an interesting article in the Paris Figaro.

While at Royat, in 1888, I went across the country to Agen, the town in which Jasmin was born, lived, and died. I saw the little room in which he was born, the banks of the Garonne which sounded so sweetly in his ears, the heights of the Hermitage where he played when a boy, the Petite Seminaire in which he was partly educated, the coiffeur's shop in which he carried on his business as a barber and hair-dresser, and finally his tomb in the cemetery where he was buried with all the honours that his towns-fellows could bestow upon him.

From Agen I went south to Toulouse, where I saw the large room in the Museum in which Jasmin first recited his poem of 'Franconnette'; and the hall in the Capitol, where the poet was hailed as The Troubadour, and enrolled member of the Academy of Jeux Floraux—perhaps the crowning event of his life.

In the Appendix to this memoir I have endeavoured to give translations from some of Jasmin's poems. Longfellow's translation of 'The Blind Girl of Castel-Cuille' has not been given, as it has already been published in his poems, which are in nearly every library. In those which have been given, I have in certain cases taken advantage of the translations by Miss Costello Miss Preston (of Boston, U.S.), and the Reverend Mr. Craig, D.D., for some time Rector of Kinsale, Ireland.

It is, however, very difficult to translate French poetry into English. The languages, especially the Gascon, are very unlike French as well as English. Hence Villemain remarks,

that "every translation must virtually be a new creation." But, such as they are, I have endeavoured to translate the poems as literally as possible. Jasmin's poetry is rather wordy, and requires condensation, though it is admirably suited for recitation. When other persons recited his poems, they were not successful; but when Jasmin recited, or rather acted them, they were always received with enthusiasm.

There was a special feature in Jasmin's life which was altogether unique. This was the part which he played in the South of France as a philanthropist. Where famine or hunger made its appearance amongst the poor people—where a creche, or orphanage, or school, or even a church, had to be helped and supported Jasmin was usually called upon to assist with his recitations. He travelled thousands of miles for such purposes, during which he collected about 1,500,000 francs, and gave the whole of this hard-earned money over to the public charities, reserving nothing for himself except the gratitude of the poor and needy. And after his long journeyings were over, he quietly returned to pursue his humble occupation at Agen. Perhaps there is nothing like this in the history of poetry or literature. For this reason, the character of the man as a philanthropist is even more to be esteemed than his character as a poet and a song-writer.

The author requests the indulgence of the reader with respect to the translations of certain poems given in the Appendix. The memoir of Jasmin must speak for itself.

London, Nov. 1891.

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CHAPTER I. AGEN.—JASMIN'S BOYHOOD.

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Agen is an important town in the South of France, situated on the right bank of the Garonne, about eighty miles above Bordeaux. The country to the south of Agen contains some of the most fertile land in France. The wide valley is covered with vineyards, orchards, fruit gardens, and corn-fields.

The best panoramic view of Agen and the surrounding country is to be seen from the rocky heights on the northern side of the town. A holy hermit had once occupied a cell on the ascending cliffs; and near it the Convent of the Hermitage has since been erected. Far underneath are seen the red-roofed houses of the town, and beyond them the green promenade of the Gravier.

From the summit of the cliffs the view extends to a great distance along the wide valley of the Garonne, covered with woods, vineyards, and greenery. The spires of village churches peep up here and there amongst the trees; and in the far distance, on a clear day, are seen the snow-capped peaks of the Pyrenees.

Three bridges connect Agen with the country to the west of the Garonne—the bridge for ordinary traffic, a light and elegant suspension bridge, and a bridge of twenty-three arches which carries the lateral canal to the other side of the river.

The town of Agen itself is not particularly attractive. The old streets are narrow and tortuous, paved with pointed

stones; but a fine broad street—the Rue de la Republique—has recently been erected through the heart of the old town, which greatly adds to the attractions of the place. At one end of this street an ideal statue of the Republic has been erected, and at the other end a life-like bronze statue of the famous poet Jasmin.

This statue to Jasmin is the only one in the town erected to an individual. Yet many distinguished persons have belonged to Agen and the neighbourhood who have not been commemorated in any form. Amongst these were Bernard Palissy, the famous potter{1}; Joseph J. Scaliger, the great scholar and philologist; and three distinguished naturalists, Boudon de Saint-Aman, Bory de Saint-Vincent, and the Count de Lacepede.

The bronze statue of Jasmin stands in one of the finest sites in Agen, at one end of the Rue de la Republique, and nearly opposite the little shop in which he carried on his humble trade of a barber and hairdresser. It represents the poet standing, with his right arm and hand extended, as if in the act of recitation.

How the fame of Jasmin came to be commemorated by a statue erected in his native town by public subscription, will be found related in the following pages. He has told the story of his early life in a bright, natural, and touching style, in one of his best poems, entitled, "My Recollections" (Mes Souvenirs), written in Gascon; wherein he revealed his own character with perfect frankness, and at the same time with exquisite sensibility.

Several of Jasmin's works have been translated into English, especially his "Blind Girl of Castel-Cuille," by

Longfellow and Lady Georgina Fullerton. The elegant translation by Longfellow is so well known that it is unnecessary to repeat it in the appendix to this volume. But a few other translations of Jasmin's works have been given, to enable the reader to form some idea of his poetical powers.

Although Jasmin's recitations of his poems were invariably received with enthusiastic applause by his quick-spirited audiences in the South of France, the story of his life will perhaps be found more attractive to English readers than any rendering of his poems, however accurate, into a language different from his own. For poetry, more than all forms of literature, loses most by translation—especially from Gascon into English. Villemain, one of the best of critics, says: "Toute traduction en vers est une autre creation que l'original."

We proceed to give an account—mostly from his own Souvenirs—of the early life and boyhood of Jasmin. The eighteenth century, old, decrepit, and vicious, was about to come to an end, when in the corner of a little room haunted by rats, a child, the subject of this story, was born. It was on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, the 6th of March, 1798,—just as the day had flung aside its black night-cap, and the morning sun was about to shed its rays upon the earth,—that this son of a crippled mother and a humpbacked tailor first saw the light. The child was born in a house situated in one of the old streets of Agen—15 Rue Fon-de-Rache—not far from the shop on the Gravier where Jasmin afterwards carried on the trade of a barber and hairdresser.

"When a prince is born," said Jasmin in his Souvenirs, "his entrance into the world is saluted with rounds of cannon, but when I, the son of a poor tailor made my appearance, I was not saluted even with the sound of a popgun." Yet Jasmin was afterwards to become a king of hearts! A Charivari was, however, going on in front of a neighbour's door, as a nuptial serenade on the occasion of some unsuitable marriage; when the clamour of horns and kettles, marrow-bones and cleavers, saluted the mother's ears, accompanied by thirty burlesque verses, the composition of the father of the child who had just been born.

Jacques Jasmin was only one child amongst many. The parents had considerable difficulty in providing for the wants of the family, in food as well as clothing. Besides the father's small earnings as a tailor of the lowest standing, the mother occasionally earned a little money as a laundress. A grandfather, Boe, formed one of the family group. He had been a soldier, but was now too old to serve in the ranks, though France was waging war in Italy and Austria under her new Emperor. Boe, however, helped to earn the family living, by begging with his wallet from door to door.

Jasmin describes the dwelling in which this poor family lived. It was miserably furnished. The winds blew in at every corner. There were three ragged beds; a cupboard, containing a few bits of broken plates; a stone bottle; two jugs of cracked earthenware; a wooden cup broken at the edges; a rusty candlestick, used when candles were available; a small half-black looking-glass without a frame, held against the wall by three little nails; four broken chairs; a closet without a key; old Boe's suspended wallet; a tailor's

board, with clippings of stuff and patched-up garments; such were the contents of the house, the family consisting in all of nine persons.

It is well that poor children know comparatively little of their miserable bringings-up. They have no opportunity of contrasting their life and belongings with those of other children more richly nurtured. The infant Jasmin slept no less soundly in his little cot stuffed with larks' feathers than if he had been laid on a bed of down. Then he was nourished by his mother's milk, and he grew, though somewhat lean and angular, as fast as any king's son. He began to toddle about, and made acquaintances with the neighbours' children.

After a few years had passed, Jasmin, being a spirited fellow, was allowed to accompany his father at night in the concerts of rough music. He placed a long paper cap on his head, like a French clown, and with a horn in his hand he made as much noise, and played as many antics, as any fool in the crowd. Though the tailor could not read, he usually composed the verses for the Charivari; and the doggerel of the father, mysteriously fructified, afterwards became the seed of poetry in the son.

The performance of the Charivari was common at that time in the South of France. When an old man proposed to marry a maiden less than half his age, or when an elderly widow proposed to marry a man much younger than herself, or when anything of a heterogeneous kind occurred in any proposed union, a terrible row began. The populace assembled in the evening of the day on which the banns had been first proclaimed, and saluted the happy pair in

their respective houses with a Charivari. Bells, horns, pokers and tongs, marrow-bones and cleavers, or any thing that would make a noise, was brought into requisition, and the noise thus made, accompanied with howling recitations of the Charivari, made the night positively hideous.

The riot went on for several evenings; and when the wedding-day arrived, the Charivarists, with the same noise and violence, entered the church with the marriage guests; and at night they besieged the house of the happy pair, throwing into their windows stones, brickbats, and every kind of missile. Such was their honeymoon!

This barbarous custom has now fallen entirely into disuse. If attempted to be renewed, it is summarily put down by the police, though it still exists among the Basques as a Toberac. It may also be mentioned that a similar practice once prevailed in Devonshire described by the Rev. S. Baring Gould in his "Red Spider." It was there known as the Hare Hunt, or Skimmity-riding.

The tailor's Charivaris brought him in no money.

They did not increase his business; in fact, they made him many enemies. His uncouth rhymes did not increase his mending of old clothes. However sharp his needle might be, his children's teeth were still sharper; and often they had little enough to eat. The maintenance of the family mainly depended on the mother, and the wallet of grandfather Boe.

The mother, poor though she was, had a heart of gold under her serge gown. She washed and mended indefatigably. When she had finished her washing, the children, so soon as they could walk, accompanied her to the willows along the banks of the Garonne, where the

clothes were hung out to dry. There they had at least the benefit of breathing fresh and pure air. Grandfather Boe was a venerable old fellow. He amused the children at night with his stories of military life—

"Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shouldered his crutch, and showed how fields were won."

During the day he carried his wallet from door to door in Agen, or amongst the farmhouses in the neighbourhood; and when he came home at eve he emptied his wallet and divided the spoil amongst the family. If he obtained, during his day's journey, some more succulent morsel than another, he bestowed it upon his grandson Jacques, whom he loved most dearly.

Like all healthy boys, young Jasmin's chief delight was in the sunshine and the open air. He also enjoyed the pleasures of fellowship and the happiness of living. Rich and poor, old and young, share in this glorified gladness. Jasmin had as yet known no sorrow. His companions were poor boys like himself. They had never known any other condition.

Just as the noontide bells began to ring, Jasmin set out with a hunch of bread in his hand—perhaps taken from his grandfather's wallet—to enjoy the afternoon with his comrades. Without cap or shoes he sped' away. The sun was often genial, and he never bethought him of cold. On the company went, some twenty or thirty in number, to gather willow faggots by the banks of the Garonne.

"Oh, how my soul leapt!" he exclaimed in his Souvenirs, "when we all set out together at mid-day, singing. 'The Lamb whom Thou hast given me,' a well known carol in the south. The very recollection of that pleasure even now

enchants me. 'To the Island—to the Island!' shouted the boldest, and then we made haste to wade to the Island, each to gather together our little bundle of fagots."

The rest of the vagrants' time was spent in play. They ascended the cliff towards the grotto of Saint John. They shared in many a contest. They dared each other to do things—possible and impossible. There were climbings of rocks, and daring leaps, with many perils and escapades, according to the nature of boys at play. At length, after becoming tired, there was the return home an hour before nightfall. And now the little fellows tripped along; thirty fagot bundles were carried on thirty heads; and the thirty sang, as on setting out, the same carol, with the same refrain.

Jasmin proceeds, in his Souvenirs, to describe with great zest and a wonderful richness of local colour, the impromptu fetes in which he bore a part; his raids upon the cherry and plum orchards—for the neighbourhood of Agen is rich in plum-trees, and prunes are one of the principal articles of commerce in the district. Playing at soldiers was one of Jasmin's favourite amusements; and he was usually elected Captain.

"I should need," he says, "a hundred trumpets to celebrate all my victories." Then he describes the dancing round the bonfires, and the fantastic ceremonies connected with the celebration of St. John's Eve.

Agen is celebrated for its fairs. In the month of June, one of the most important fairs in the South of France is held on the extensive promenade in front of the Gravier. There Jasmin went to pick up any spare sous by holding horses or

cattle, or running errands, or performing any trifling commission for the farmers or graziers. When he had filled to a slight extent his little purse, he went home at night and emptied the whole contents into his mother's hand. His heart often sank as she received his earnings with smiles and tears. "Poor child," she would say, "your help comes just in time." Thus the bitter thought of poverty and the evidences of destitution were always near at hand.

In the autumn Jasmin went gleaning in the cornfields, for it was his greatest pleasure to bring home some additional help for the family needs. In September came the vintage—the gathering in and pressing of the grapes previous to their manufacture into wine. The boy was able, with his handy helpfulness, to add a little more money to the home store. Winter followed, and the weather became colder. In the dearth of firewood, Jasmin was fain to preserve his bodily heat, notwithstanding his ragged clothes, by warming himself by the sun in some sheltered nook so long as the day lasted; or he would play with his companions, being still buoyed up with the joy and vigour of youth.

When the stern winter set in, Jasmin spent his evenings in the company of spinning-women and children, principally for the sake of warmth. A score or more of women, with their children, assembled in a large room, lighted by a single antique lamp suspended from the ceiling. The women had distaffs and heavy spindles, by means of which they spun a kind of coarse pack-thread, which the children wound up, sitting on stools at their feet. All the while some old dame would relate the old-world ogreish stories of Blue Beard, the Sorcerer, or the Loup Garou, to fascinate the ears and

trouble the dreams of the young folks. It was here, no doubt, that Jasmin gathered much of the traditionary lore which he afterwards wove into his poetical ballads.

Jasmin had his moments of sadness. He was now getting a big fellow, and his mother was anxious that he should receive some little education. He had not yet been taught to read; he had not even learnt his A B C. The word school frightened him. He could not bear to be shut up in a close room—he who had been accustomed to enjoy a sort of vagabond life in the open air. He could not give up his comrades, his playing at soldiers, and his numerous escapades.

The mother, during the hum of her spinning-wheel, often spoke in whispers to grandfather Boe of her desire to send the boy to school. When Jasmin overheard their conversation, he could scarcely conceal his tears. Old Boe determined to do what he could. He scraped together his little savings, and handed them over to the mother. But the money could not then be used for educating Jasmin; it was sorely needed for buying bread. Thus the matter lay over for a time.

The old man became unable to go out of doors to solicit alms. Age and infirmity kept him indoors. He began to feel himself a burden on the impoverished family. He made up his mind to rid them of the incumbrance, and desired the parents to put him into the family arm-chair and have him carried to the hospital. Jasmin has touchingly told the incident of his removal.

"It happened on a Monday," he says in his Souvenirs: "I was then ten years old. I was playing in the square with my

companions, girded about with a wooden sword, and I was king; but suddenly a dreadful spectacle disturbed my royalty. I saw an old man in an arm-chair borne along by several persons. The bearers approached still nearer, when I recognised my afflicted grandfather. 'O God,' said I, 'what do I see? My old grandfather surrounded by my family.' In my grief I saw only him. I ran up to him in tears, threw myself on his neck and kissed him.

"In returning my embrace, he wept. 'O grandfather,' said I, 'where are you going? Why do you weep? Why are you leaving our home?' 'My child,' said the old man, 'I am going to the hospital,{2} where all the Jasmins die.' He again embraced me, closed his eyes, and was carried away. We followed him for some time under the trees. I abandoned my play, and returned home full of sorrow."

Grandfather Boe did not survive long in the hospital. He was utterly worn out. After five days the old man quietly breathed his last. His wallet was hung upon its usual nail in his former home, but it was never used again. One of the bread-winners had departed, and the family were poorer than ever.

"On that Monday," says Jasmin, "I for the first time knew and felt that we were very poor."

All this is told with marvellous effect in the first part of the Souvenirs, which ends with a wail and a sob.

Endnotes to Chapter I.

{1} It is stated in the Bibliographie Generale de l'Agenais, that Palissy was born in the district of Agen, perhaps at La Chapelle Biron, and that, being a Huguenot, he was imprisoned in the Bastille at Paris, and died there in

1590, shortly after the massacre of St. Bartholomew. But Palissy seems to have been born in another town, not far from La Chapelle Biron. The Times of the 7th July, 1891, contained the following paragraph:—

"A statue of Bernard Palissy was unveiled yesterday at Villeneuvesur-Lot, his native town, by M. Bourgeois, Minister of Education."

{2} L'hopital means an infirmary or almshouse for old and impoverished people.

CHAPTER II. JASMIN AT SCHOOL.

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One joyful day Jasmin's mother came home in an ecstasy of delight, and cried, "To school, my child, to school!" "To school?" said Jasmin, greatly amazed. "How is this? Have we grown rich?" "No, my poor boy, but you will get your schooling for nothing. Your cousin has promised to educate you; come, come, I am so happy!" It was Sister Boe, the schoolmistress of Agen, who had offered to teach the boy gratuitously the elements of reading and writing.

The news of Jacques' proposed scholarship caused no small stir at home. The mother was almost beside herself with joy. The father too was equally moved, and shed tears of gratitude. He believed that the boy might yet be able to help him in writing out, under his dictation, the Charivari impromptus which, he supposed, were his chief forte. Indeed, the whole family regarded this great stroke of luck for Jacques in the light of a special providence, and as the beginning of a brilliant destiny. The mother, in order to dress him properly, rummaged the house, and picked out the least mended suit of clothes, in which to array the young scholar.

When properly clothed, the boy, not without fear on his own part, was taken by his mother to school.

Behold him, then, placed under the tuition of Sister Boe! There were some fifty other children at school, mumbling at

the letters of the alphabet, and trying to read their first easy sentences. Jasmin had a good memory, and soon mastered the difficulties of the A B C. "'Twixt smiles and tears," he says, "I soon learnt to read, by the help of the pious Sister."

In six months he was able to enter the Seminary in the Rue Montesquieu as a free scholar. He now served at Mass. Having a good ear for music,he became a chorister, and sang the Tantum ergo. He was a diligent boy, and so far everything prospered well with him. He even received a prize. True, it was only an old cassock, dry as autumn heather. But, being trimmed up by his father, it served to hide his ragged clothes beneath.

His mother was very proud of the cassock. "Thank God," she said, "thou learnest well; and this is the reason why, each Tuesday, a white loaf comes from the Seminary. It is always welcome, for the sake of the hungry little ones." "Yes," he replied, "I will try my best to be learned for your sake." But Jasmin did not long wear the cassock. He was shortly after turned out of the Seminary, in consequence of a naughty trick which he played upon a girl of the household.

Jasmin tells the story of his expulsion with great frankness, though evidently ashamed of the transaction. He was passing through the inner court one day, during the Shrove Carnival, when, looking up, he caught sight of a petticoat. He stopped and gazed. A strange tremor crept through his nerves. What evil spirit possessed him to approach the owner of the petticoat? He looked up again, and recognised the sweet and rosy-cheeked Catherine—the housemaid of the Seminary. She was perched near the top

of a slim ladder leaning against the wall, standing upright, and feeding the feathery-footed pigeons.

A vision flashed through Jasmin's mind—"a life all velvet," as he expressed it,—and he approached the ladder. He climbed up a few steps, and what did he see? Two comely ankles and two pretty little feet. His heart burned within him, and he breathed a loud sigh. The girl heard the sigh, looked down, and huddled up the ladder, crying piteously. The ladder was too slim to bear two. It snapped and fell, and they tumbled down, she above and he below!

The loud screams of the girl brought all the household to the spot—the Canons, the little Abbe, the cook, the scullion—indeed all the inmates of the Seminary. Jasmin quaintly remarks, "A girl always likes to have the sins known that she has caused others to commit." But in this case, according to Jasmin's own showing, the girl was not to blame. The trick which he played might be very innocent, but to the assembled household it seemed very wicked. He must be punished.

First, he had a terrible wigging from the master; and next, he was sentenced to imprisonment during the rest of the Carnival.

In default of a dungeon, they locked him in a dismal little chamber, with some bread and water. Next day, Shrove Tuesday, while the Carnival was afoot, Jasmin felt very angry and very hungry. "Who sleeps eats," says the proverb. "But," said Jasmin, "the proverb lies: I did not sleep, and was consumed by hunger." Then he filled up the measure of his iniquity by breaking into a cupboard!

It happened that the Convent preserves were kept in the room wherein he was confined. Their odour attracted him, and he climbed up, by means of a table and chair, to the closet in which they were stored. He found a splendid pot of preserves. He opened it; and though he had no spoon, he used his fingers and soon emptied the pot. What a delicious treat he enjoyed enough to make him forget the pleasures of the Carnival.

Jasmin was about to replace the empty pot, when he heard the click-clack of a door behind him. He looked round, and saw the Superior, who had unlocked the door, and come to restore the boy to liberty. Oh, unhappy day! When the Abbe found the prisoner stealing his precious preserves, he became furious. "What! plundering my sweetmeats?" he cried. "Come down, sirrah, come down! no pardon for you now." He pulled Jasmin from his chair and table, and the empty jar fell broken at his feet. "Get out, get out of this house, thou imp of hell!" And taking Jasmin by the scruff of the neck, he thrust him violently out of the door and into the street.

But worse was yet to come. When the expelled scholar reached the street, his face and mouth were smeared with jam. He was like a blackamoor. Some urchins who encountered him on his homeward route, surmised that his disguise was intended as a masque for the Carnival. He ran, and they pursued him. The mob of boys increased, and he ran the faster. At last he reached his father's door, and rushed in, half dead with pain, hunger, and thirst. The family were all there—father, mother, and children.

They were surprised and astonished at his sudden entrance. After kissing them all round, he proceeded to relate his adventures at the Seminary. He could not tell them all, but he told enough. His narrative was received with dead silence. But he was thirsty and hungry. He saw a pot of kidney-bean porridge hanging over the fire, and said he would like to allay his hunger by participating in their meal. But alas! The whole of it had been consumed. The pot was empty, and yet the children were not satisfied with their dinner. "Now I know," said the mother, "why no white bread has come from the Seminary." Jasmin was now greatly distressed. "Accursed sweetmeats," he thought. "Oh! what a wretch I am to have caused so much misery and distress."

The children had eaten only a few vegetables; and now there was another mouth to fill. The fire had almost expired for want of fuel. The children had no bread that day, for the Seminary loaf had not arrived. What were they now to do? The mother suffered cruel tortures in not being able to give her children bread, especially on the home-coming of her favourite scapegrace.

At last, after glancing at her left hand, she rose suddenly. She exclaimed in a cheerful voice, "Wait patiently until my return." She put her Sunday kerchief on her head, and departed. In a short time she returned, to the delight of the children, with a loaf of bread under her arm. They laughed and sang, and prepared to enjoy their feast, though it was only of bread. The mother apparently joined in their cheerfulness, though a sad pain gnawed at her heart. Jasmin saw his mother hide her hand; but when it was necessary for her to cut the loaf, after making the cross

according to custom, he saw that the ring on her left hand had disappeared. "Holy Cross," he thought, "it is true that she has sold her wedding-ring to buy bread for her children."

This was a sad beginning of life for the poor boy. He was now another burden on the family. Old Boe had gone, and could no longer help him with his savoury morsels. He was so oppressed with grief, that he could no longer play with his comrades as before. But Providence again came to his aid. The good Abbe Miraben heard the story of his expulsion from the Seminary. Though a boy may be tricky he cannot be perfect, and the priest had much compassion on him. Knowing Jasmin's abilities, and the poverty of his parents, the Abbe used his influence to obtain an admission for him to one of the town's schools, where he was again enabled to carry on his education.

The good Abbe was helpful to the boy in many ways. One evening, when Jasmin was on his way to the Augustins to read and recite to the Sisters, he was waylaid by a troop of his old playfellows. They wished him to accompany them to the old rendezvous in the square; but he refused, because he had a previous engagement. The boys then began to hustle him, and proceeded to tear off his tattered clothes. He could only bend his head before his assailants, but never said a word.

At length his good friend Miraben came up and rescued him. He drove away the boys, and said to Jasmin, "Little one, don't breathe a word; your mother knows nothing. They won't torment you long! Take up thy clothes," he said. "Come, poverty is not a crime. Courage! Thou art even rich.

Thou hast an angel on high watching over thee. Console thyself, brave child, and nothing more will happen to vex thee."

The encouragement of the Abbe proved prophetic. No more troubles of this kind afflicted the boy.

The aged priest looked after the well-being of himself and family. He sent them bread from time to time, and kept the wolf from their door. Meanwhile Jasmin did what he could to help them at home. During the vintage time he was well employed; and also at fair times. He was a helpful boy, and was always willing to oblige friends and neighbours.

But the time arrived when he must come to some determination as to his future calling in life. He was averse to being a tailor, seeing the sad results of his father's trade at home. After consultation with his mother, he resolved on becoming a barber and hairdresser. Very little capital was required for carrying on that trade; only razors, combs, and scissors.

Long after, when Jasmin was a comparatively thriving man, he said: "Yes, I have eaten the bread of charity; most of my ancestors died at the hospital; my mother pledged her nuptial ring to buy a loaf of bread. All this shows how much misery we had to endure, the frightful picture of which I have placed in the light of day in my Souvenirs. But I am afraid of wearying the public, as I do not wish to be accused of aiming too much at contrasts. For when we are happy, perfectly happy, there is nothing further from what I am, and what I have been, as to make me fear for any such misconstruction on the part of my hearers."

CHAPTER III. BARBER AND HAIRDRESSER.

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Jasmin was sixteen years old when he was apprenticed to a barber and hairdresser at Agen. The barber's shop was near the Prefecture—the ancient palace of the Bishop. It was situated at the corner of Lamoureux Street and the alley of the Prefecture. There Jasmin learnt the art of cutting, curling, and dressing hair, and of deftly using the comb and the razor. The master gave him instructions in the trade, and watched him while at work. Jasmin was willing and active, and was soon able to curl and shave with any apprentice in Agen.

After the day's work was over, the apprentice retired to his garret under the tiles. There he spent his evenings, and there he slept at night. Though the garret was infested by rats, he thought nothing of them; he had known them familiarly at home.

They did him no harm, and they even learnt to know him. His garret became his paradise, for there he renewed his love of reading. The solitariness of his life did him good, by throwing his mind in upon himself, and showing the mental stuff of which he was made. All the greatest and weightiest things have been done in solitude.

The first books he read were for the most part borrowed. Customers who came to the shop to be shaved or have their hair dressed, took an interest in the conversation of the bright, cheerful, dark-eyed lad, and some of them lent him books to read. What joy possessed him when he took refuge

in his garret with a new book! Opening the book was like opening the door of a new world. What enchantment! What mystery! What a wonderful universe about us!

In reading a new book Jasmin forgot his impoverished boyhood, his grandfather Boe and his death in the hospital, his expulsion from the Seminary, and his mother's sale of her wedding-ring to buy bread for her children. He had now left the past behind, and a new world lay entrancingly before him. He read, and thought, and dreamed, until far on in the morning.

The first books he read were of comparatively little importance, though they furnished an opening into literature. 'The Children's Magazine'{1} held him in raptures for a time. Some of his friendly customers lent him the 'Fables of Florian,' and afterwards Florian's pastoral romance of 'Estelle'—perhaps his best work. The singer of the Gardon entirely bewitched Jasmin. 'Estelle' allured him into the rosy-fingered regions of bliss and happiness. Then Jasmin himself began to rhyme. Florian's works encouraged him to write his first verses in the harmonious Gascon patois, to which he afterwards gave such wonderful brilliancy.

In his after life Jasmin was often asked how and when he first began to feel himself a poet. Some think that the poetical gift begins at some fixed hour, just as one becomes a barrister, a doctor, or a professor. But Jasmin could not give an answer.

"I have often searched into my past life," he said, "but I have never yet found the day when I began my career of rhyming."{2}