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INTRODUCTION

EUGÈNE LABICHE was born in Paris in 1815. He drifted from the study of law into literature, and at the age of twenty-three produced his first play. Between 1838 and his retirement in 1876 he produced, chiefly in collaboration with other playwrights, more than one hundred and fifty comedies or farces. In his closing years he received many honors at the hands of his countrymen. His works were published in ten volumes, and were received much more favorably than the modest Labiche ever expected that they would be. In 1880 he was elected to the French Academy, although again with characteristic modesty, not unmingled with humor, he said that it was doubtful whether he would have voted for his own election. Labiche died in 1888. The plays by which his reputation lives form a very small fraction of his writings. We may name in this connection apart from the present play, which is his most famous production, also *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, *La Cagnotte*, *La Poudre aux Yeux*, and *La Grammaire*. Labiche is to be regarded as a fun-maker whose farces are not wholly dependent on grotesque situations. These naturally abound, but at his best the farce is leavened by wit and vivacity of dialogue and movement, nor is there lacking an adequate insight into the oddities of human character.

Édouard Martin, who collaborated with Labiche in *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon* (produced in 1860 and revived in 1879), was born in Paris in 1828, and died in 1866. It is probable that he did little more than consult with the main author as to certain details of the plot.