

MONSIEUR LE MAIRE.

In this country of ours, it is not always easy for the suitor to get his mistress's consent to marry him; even when that is obtained, mamma and papa will foolishly interfere; and, in short, a thousand things may occur to prove the truth of the saying, that the course of true love never does run smooth. But once it comes fairly to marriage, the difficulty is at an end. Everything then is as easy as lying. To get married in England is a very simple affair indeed, for there are several ways of tying the knot matrimonial, in order to meet the requirements of every taste, and the condition of every pocket. In the first place, a man may be married at his parish-church, by his parish-priest, and by his parish-clerk, either by licence or after due publication of banns on three successive Sundays, after the form and fashion of his forefathers; secondly, he may be married in any chapel or meeting-house belonging to persons of any religious persuasion whatsoever, provided it be duly registered for the purpose; and lastly, he may dispense with the religious ceremonial altogether—he may decline availing himself of the assistance of either priest or minister, and be married democratically at a registrar's office. In that part of the United Kingdom called Scotland, he may be married by a blacksmith, or anybody else; and in fact, so easy is the affair there, that it is more difficult to tell what does not constitute a marriage in Scotland than what does. In any case, there is not the least difficulty in getting the work speedily and efficiently performed: parsons, ministers, registrars, and blacksmiths, being ready enough at all times to earn their fees; and the law, in this case at least, cannot be said to insist on vexations and needless formalities. It throws no difficulties in the way which can try the patience of the most ardent lover, or risk the scaring away of the shyest of old bachelors.

It is not so, however, in France. There, if the law of marriage had been framed by the most rigid of the Malthusian philosophers, for the express purpose of deterring their countrymen from assuming the bonds and obligations of wedlock, it could not have more effectually answered the purpose. The number of certificates of birth, death, age, the consent of parents, if absent, &c., which must be produced before one can get married in France, is perfectly bewildering. It would really seem, that the lawyers, when discussing this part of their code, were labouring under a monomaniacal dread of bigamy. They have made it a matter of considerable difficulty to get married once; and as to having more than one wife at one and the same time à la Turque the thing in France must be impossible. Even when both parties are French bred and born, great delay and expense must often be, submitted to before the requirements of the law can be observed; but when one party is French, and the other is a foreigner, the difficulty is increased fourfold, and becomes, in the case of a stupid mayor—as in England—almost insurmountable. Now this was my own predicament. An Englishman marrying one of his own countrywomen in France, may be married in the chapel of the British embassy, and so avoid meddling with the French law altogether; but it is not so, if he would marry a Frenchwoman. In that case he must be married according to the law of France, which, recognising marriage as a civil contract only, ordains that such contract must be entered into before the municipal authorities of the district in which one of the contracting parties resides, or rather in which he or she has resided long enough to have acquired a domicile as regards marriage which is affected by six months' continued residence in one commune. In short, a foreigner can only be married in France to a French subject, according to French law—that is, before the civil officer, generally the mayor of the commune. In England, from the Lord Mayor of London downwards to the most insignificant borough corporate, mayors have little to do besides presiding over the gatherings together, either for jollity or palaver, of their fellow-citizens; but, in France, Monsieur le Maire is a vastly more notable personage; he is a government functionary, and chief-priest in the temple of Hymen.

For my own part, neither parental objections nor avuncular threatenings clouded my courtship. I was undisturbed alike by the cares attendant on the disposition of wealth, and the anxieties inseparable from poverty. I had made choice of a wife; and we had nothing to do but to be married as soon as we pleased. It was at this point, however, that all our difficulties commenced.

Paris has twelve mayors—one for each of the twelve arrondissements into which the city is divided—and marriage must be celebrated before the mayor of the arrondissement in which one of the parties is domiciled. When, therefore, both lady and gentleman are resident in the capital, there is generally a choice between two mayors; but as it happened that my domicile was in the same arrondissement as that of my intended wife, we had no choice but to be married by Monsieur le Maire of the third arrondissement, and that officer being both

very stupid and very tenacious of his opinion, we were actually compelled to have recourse to law before he could be made to perform his office.

The individual who filled the post of mayor of the third arrondissement of Paris at that period, was a retired lawyer, an ex-notaire, or avoué, or avocat, or something of that kind—just such a man as with us retires from his business or profession, when he has secured a competency, and gets himself put on the county bench, in order to add a little dignity to the *offium* he promises himself for the remainder of his days. In person, Monsieur le Maire was tall, thin, and what the French call *dry*; in manner, precise, somewhat pompous and cold. Add to this, that he had an overwhelming idea of his own merit, and was much prejudiced against everything English; and it was easy to see, that he would prove a very troublesome fellow to deal with, particularly if required to do anything out of the common routine of his office. I was not long in verifying the correctness of this my first impression, and that, too, although I had taken the precaution to get an introduction to the great man from a mutual acquaintance. He was a troublesome fellow to deal with, as the sequel will abundantly shew.

'Monsieur le Maire,' said I, on my first interview with him, with my very best bow, and in my very best French, with the Anglo-Parisian accent—'Monsieur le Maire, I am about to espouse a French lady, who is domiciled in the arrondissement which enjoys the advantage of being presided over by you; an advantage in which I have the happiness to participate; and I have availed myself of the kindness of our obliging friend to enable me to inquire of you personally what formalities it will be requisite for me to observe in the matter. I am quite aware, that the French law of marriage is very strict in the case of one of the contracting parties being a foreigner, but I feel sure (and here I made another of my very best bows) that I could not do better than apply to monsieur for advice and direction.'

'Monsieur,' replied the mayor in his stately way, but with great politeness, tickled, as I had hoped, by the flattery administered in my opening speech—as you are a foreigner, a British subject, and Mademoiselle *voire future* is a French woman, we shall require several pieces (certificates), which can only be obtained in your own country. I fear, therefore, that we shall be the cause of some expense, and what monsieur will probably deride as far more delay; and here Monsieur le Maire facetiously turned out his hands, shrugged up his shoulders, dropped the corners of his mouth, and raised his brows, in true Gallic fashion.

'The expense is of little moment, but delay will be inconvenient,' I stammered out with a faint attempt at a smile—for the delay of a month to a man about making a love-match, appears almost like an adjournment *sine die*.

'Monsieur is not married—there are no legal impediments to the step he is about to take?' 'Married!' I cried, laughing, in spite of my vexation at the threatened delay, at the gravity with which the question was put. 'I do not contemplate bigamy, Monsieur le Maire, and I am not aware of the existence of any legal impediment whatever. Pasy proceed.'

'No vous fâchez pas, monsieur. We must proceed with due caution, and, indeed, with more than our usual care, since monsieur is a foreigner.'

'Well, well, monsieur, I can easily prove that I am a single man; and, moreover, if you desire it; that I was never married in my life. What next?' 'In monsieur's major (of age)'

'I'm four-and-twenty in December.' It was now June.

'Then you are not of age. You are mineur quant au mariage (a minor as regards marriage). You cannot marry until you are twenty-five without consent of your parents. Are your parents living?'

'My mother, yes. My father died more than twenty years since.'

'Does Madame votre mère intend to be present at your marriage?'

'She does not.'

'Eh bien! monsieur,' said the mayor briskly, as if delighted at being able to give me this extra trouble, 'since you are a minor as regards marriage, I must have the written consent of Madame votre mère, properly attested by British authorities.'

'By what authorities?' I asked.

'Where does madame reside?—where is her domicile?'

'She resides chiefly in London.'

'Eh bien! the consent of madame must be attested by the Lor' Mayor de Londres!'

'The what?' said I, laughing heartily—the what?'

'By the Lor' Mayor—the Lor' Mayor de Londres.'

'Surely, Monsieur le Maire, you are joking. The Lord Mayor of London has nothing whatever to do with marriages. His lordship would laugh at me, if I were to apply to him on such a subject. Besides, even as a magistrate before whom my mother could make a declaration of her consent, the Lord Mayor is not the proper officer to apply to, inasmuch as he has no jurisdiction in that quarter of the capital in which she resides. You are asking me, therefore, to do what is impossible. I cannot comply with your request.'

'Then, monsieur,' said the mayor with the most provoking coolness, 'on ne vous mariera pas (we will not marry you).'

'Not marry me! Am I, then, to understand that no Englishman who is under five-and-twenty years of age can be married in France without the consent of his parents, certified by the Lord Mayor of London?'

'Just so, monsieur, if the parents reside in London. The Lor' Mayor—'

'The Lord Mayor,' I interrupted warmly, 'has nothing to do with it. Mayors in England are not like mayors in France. They—'

'Monsieur, I know my duty. A mayor is a mayor. I perfectly understand the nature of the function appertaining to that important office. Had I not done so, the government of his majesty would not have confided to my care one of the arrondissements of the capital. Besides, some years since, I passed a week or more in London, during which time I made your national institutions my serious study. Of course, I did not forget the Lor' Mayor de Londres; and, therefore, unless I have the consent of madame, certified by him, on ne vous mariera pas.'

'Very well, monsieur,' said I with a sigh, feeling quite unable to combat the logic I had just heard—'very well I must endeavour to satisfy you. Pray, go on.'

'In what diocese were you domiciled when last in England?' asked the mayor with the tone and manner of a judge or advocate examining a witness.

'In the diocese of London.'

'Which, I believe, is in the province of Canterbury.'

'It is,' I replied, wondering what would come next.

'Must not the banns of marriage in England be published on three successive Sundays at the parish-church of one of the parties?'

'Not if the marriage be by licence.'

'Eh bien!' cried the mayor with a look of triumph; 'since monsieur cannot have a licence here à Paris, and since his banns cannot be published à Londres, he must procure a certificate to the effect that banns may, under certain circumstances, be dispensed with, from Milor' Archevêque de Canterbury.'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed I, fairly losing my temper at the mention of this other millor to whom I was to be sent for permission to be married—'Nonsense! The archbishop of Canterbury has no more to do with this matter than the Lord Mayor of London. It is impossible—'

'Eh bien! monsieur,' said the mayor in a towering passion, 'on ne vous mariera pas! I will have both the pièces I have mentioned—that from the Lor' Mayor de Londres, and that from the Lor' Archevêque de Canterbury. Without them, I repeat, on ne vous mariera pas.'

Expostulation was vain. The mayor was not to be persuaded either that the conditions he insisted on were impossible of fulfilment, or that they were unnecessary. In vain our mutual acquaintance, who all this time had been plunged over head and ears in the *Débats*, endeavoured to bring him to reason—in vain I requested him to take counsel with his brother-official in the second arrondissement—that being the quarter where such marriages were most common. The unfortunate word 'Nonsense!' had sunk deep into his soul. He was deaf to all remonstrance; and ringing his bell, bowed us hastily, out, the last words I heard being, 'Lor' Mayor de Londres,' and 'On ne vous mariera pas.'

What was to be done! There was only one mayor in Paris who could marry me, and he would not, except on certain absurd conditions, which I believed it would be quite impossible to comply with. My best plan, of course, would have been to apply at once to a person competent to give me a legal opinion on the question; but lovers are apt to be impulsive,

and forgot to weigh *pros* and *cons*. A lover who reflects is but half in love. I was really in love—over head and ears—and, therefore, without any reflection at all, at once set out for England, without having any very clear idea of what I was going to do when I got there. We were then in the pre-railway period of the age; and depositing myself in one corner of the coupe of a diligence, I was soon rumbling along on my way to Boulogne. An hour after hour the 'convenience' cracked and bumped, and rolled along on the dreary road, I over and over again cursed the obstinacy and conceit of the Jack-in-office who had sent me far away from my bride, and compelled me to adjourn, perhaps for months, the realization of my hopes. Lover-like, I conjured up every possible misfortune which could grow out of this unhappy delay. I half-persuaded myself that something must happen to break off the affair altogether; and as to my excited imagination, the prospect before me grew blacker and blacker, the more and more heartily did I anathematize, in a choice compound of British and Gallic, the pig-headedness of Monsieur le Maire du troisième arrondissement. His eternal 'on ne vous mariera pas' incessantly haunted my ears. If I endeavoured to snatch a moment of repose, my sleep was troubled by frightful dreams, of which the mayor was the most prominent figure—the nightmare for ever standing between me and the girl I left behind me; and when roused from my spasmodic slumbers by the nasal whine of the professional beggar, who was following the lumbering vehicle up the hill his 'charite, s'il vous plait,' conveyed no meaning to my mind but that of 'on ne vous mariera pas.'

I need not say that I got no certificate from either Lor' Mayor or Lor' Archevêque de Canterbury; but being advised by a friend, who, not being in love, had all his senses about him, I armed myself with the consent of my surviving parent, attested by the police-magistrate of the district in which she resided. To this I added certificates of births and deaths without number, always excepting that of the birth of my father, which, as I had anticipated, I could not easily procure; and, so provided, set off on my return to Paris, in the full persuasion that I had done all, and more than all, that was really necessary. Not so, however, thought Monsieur le Maire. Fixing his double eyeglass across the sharp ridge of his long nose, he read every word of the various documents which I had been at so much pains to procure—the English originals, as well as the French translations of them, although of the former language he knew not a word—and then laying them down with great deliberation, he dexterously dropped his spectacles from off his proboscis by a sudden twitch of the nostril and wink of the eye, and said again very emphatically: 'Monsieur on ne vous mariera pas.'

'But, monsieur, consider the awkward position in which I am placed. I have proved to you by the signature of a London magistrate, duly attested by that of the British consul in Paris, that I have proved, in an equally satisfactory manner, that my father died more than twenty years since. In short, I have done all that is really necessary to render my marriage valid, as you may easily ascertain by consulting with your colleague in the arrondissement in which these mixed marriages are of the most frequent occurrence. Your persistence in your resolution places me in a position of great difficulty. If I have done all that the law requires—and permit me to say that I have—what more would you have me do?'

'What more?' monsieur, what more! Why I would have you procure the consent of Madame votre mère, attested by the Lor' Mayor de Londres; and also, I would have you procure a certificate from the Lor' Archevêque de Canterbury; to the effect, that your banns of marriage need not and cannot be published where you were last domiciled in England, if you should be married in France, without these two most important pieces, I repeat, on ne vous mariera pas.' So saying, and buttoning his coat over his shirt frill in a very decided cut-it-short kind of manner, Monsieur le Maire du troisième arrondissement rose from his seat, and once more formally bowed me out of his apartment.

I now determined on doing what I ought to have done at the outset, as soon as the difficulty arose—I determined on seeking legal advice; and I accordingly laid the case before a gentleman with whom I had a slight acquaintance, a deputy-procureur du roi. Having fully explained the position in which I stood—namely, the impossibility of getting married because the mayor refused to perform his office unless I complied with certain impossible conditions to which he obstinately clung, I stated, with great energy, my determination of proceeding at once to England, to get married in that free country, unless a way could be found of speedily bringing the mayor to reason. The good-natured lawyer laughed heartily at the recital of my troubles; but promised that he would soon get me put out of my misery. He was as good as his word. He forthwith proceeded to argue the point in the Palais de Justice—the Parisian Westminster Hall—before the parquet (court) of Monsieur le Procureur du roi; and having beaten the enemy on all points—having shown

both that such conditions and that they were imposed on the poor old mayor, in a very curt and formal ep. Procureur, requiring a proceed forthwith in the between Monsieur Dast Mademoiselle Chose, b in Paris. After this, b the French say, comme thing remained but u this, after a little becom dons. I enjoyed my re the mayor's clock, w quite as determined as us, and ordered him to tices or banns of mar office that very day.

And soon the happy first of them, for 3 days in France—that is devote two days from t to the business of gett is devoted to the legal authorities of the cou counting as the day on which you are legal matter-of-fact eye of th which you really are be not the day of the dr dancing, and weeping all the other doings, a wedding. Custom, g and revolutions, still have the priest's bless or's; and the second ding-day par excellente lettres and elaborate re sort of business affair, comparative quiet, t for the morrow, wh shrouded in her grac white flowers, is led t troops of friends and lics. It is certainly c the little hold whic their religion have re ty of the French peop authority alone shoul It may be that the leg too prosaic for a peop play, and so fond of t ther that be the caus tain. Fry few pe benediction of Monsi

The day at last ar make the woman of and in which, to us tormentor, the poor eat an immunity of of his oft-reiterated mariera pas.' Pan pointed, we came all short a time as it married. Placing o le Maire, at a table and accompanied by relatives, we listened clerk, while, with read over to us all the marriage. The ing himself with (tricoloured scarf, re of the respective rig persons, and put to a question. Lastly, t by the gentleman's lady, if not very di so to show that the le Maire declared, that we were marri

The Ministers respect the publi there is a very m administration of obtained last year ed so much by th we are now in gri nerve and taxing struggle to an Cabinet meets, w day, to superint operations of the

A great lord of at the Court of G day asked him i he replied, 'it u in the presence o

A Toast by A lin Festival, rec following sentence heartily respond 'The Painter— He beats the far carpenter with h sitting up tall lawyer and doct and beats the p the Don!