

There is, however, another side to the picture, which is best set forth in the Introduction to Henry Murger's *Vie de Bohème*, where the distinction between the false and true Bohemian is drawn with a clearness and truthfulness that can leave no doubt behind. Here and in the lives of himself and his companions we find no chimerical dreamings made an excuse for licence and idleness; dreams they had in plenty, but they were dreams of high ideals of work to be accomplished, not always, it is true, in the form demanded by the public caterer, but in that form in which the worker believed he could most honestly and forcibly convey his thought. Hack-work did not exist for them; the most trivial and commonplace demand was as conscientiously and laboriously toiled over as any labour of love. Their aim was an earnest effort at "art for art's sake." Nothing was trivial or insignificant, and no privation could not be braved in the struggle. Hunger, cold and disease were faced again and again, and the exit from the hospital was the entry anew on the same difficult path. None of them were educated, but even this apparently overwhelming obstacle was conquered. Murger spent many and many a wearisome night over the most uninteresting routine, laboriously overcoming his defects in style and grammar; Schaune, the Schaunard of *La Vie de Bohème*, worked at his toy-making until he hoarded enough to buy a piano, his Erard of 1782, and then, without the slightest knowledge of music, groped his way until he composed the famous "Symphony, on the Influence of Blue in Art"; Noël won his days of liberty by hard labour at lithography, and then as laboriously struggled at his tragedies and dramas which were never destined to meet the glare of the footlights; and so on through the circle.

If their effort has been styled a rebellion against conventionality it was only so in one sense,—against that conventionality of literary and social taste which they styled "bourgeois," a term which finds its best equivalent to English ears in Heine's "Philistinism."

The personal school died with the men themselves, and but few among them won individual fame, but their effort had its effect, and stamped the terms "Bohemia" and "Bohemianism" with a higher, purer value than had ever before been attached to them.

Murger's convictions were too honest and too deep-rooted not to direct his whole life, and no fair estimate of his work can be arrived at without the constant remembrance of his struggles against those surroundings which would have ground all endeavour out of a weaker or more selfish man, and which left their impress on all he produced.

His father, Claude Gabriel Murger, was a Savoyard and a soldier, who left the army after the disasters of 1815, and settled in Paris, where he married Henriette Tribou. Of the mother we know but little, except that she was extravagantly fond of her chubby, blue-eyed boy, who was born on March 27, 1822, and was christened Louis Henri Murger, on the day following in the church of Notre Dame de Lorette. We also know that, with the loving second-sight many mothers possess, she looked far beyond the poverty and meanness of their immediate surroundings, and saw a great and marvellous future for her darling. He was not destined to be a mere *concièrge* and tailor after the paternal model, but *un vrai monsieur*, well-dressed and handsome, winning other women's hearts like her own. He wandered far, far on a road that led away from those surroundings, but not towards the success of which his mother dreamed.

Even as a child he caught a glimpse of a brighter, fairer world, for in the great house in the *Rue des Trois Frères*, of which his father was *concièrge*, lived the families Garcia and Lablache, and the graceful Pauline Garcia, afterwards known to the world of song as the famous Malibran, gave the lad his first impulse towards something above his surroundings. His mother's love, the intimacy and his childish passion for that "Cousine Angèle," who appears as "Hélène" in *Les Buveurs d'Eau*, made the brightness and sunlight of his early youth, and long afterwards, turning from the miseries about him, his love revived with the New Year as he wrote:

We each of us have left behind us in the past
A time when both our lives sped gloriously and well;
I see it all again, but do you ever cast
A backward glance on youth, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

Those days have long since fled, and oftentimes we feel
The sweep of winged years that touch us with their spell,
But all our golden youth, with laughter's merry peal,
Has fled forever now, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

How eagerly we sped from opened school room door
To dance with flying feet and sing the *ritournelle*
"We'll seek no more the wood, the laurels bloom no more,"
We'll seek no more the wood; *O ma cousine Angèle*,

With kinder fate than mine your feet have never strayed
Afar from hearth and home; a mother's accents tell
The tale of sacred love, till you have learned by heart
What I have lost for aye, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

* All day the household work like some companion seems,
All night an angel fair guards carefully and well
Your slumbers from all harm, and only blessed dreams
Float down from heaven to you, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

In other years, as dawned each happy New Year's Day,
Had I but two brass *sous* wherewith to ring a knell,
With joyous heart my gift before you I would lay,
My gift of little cost: *O ma cousine Angèle*.

But since those joyous days, the Devil, as they say,
Is lodged within my purse, and, though with curses fell
I call on Plutus blind, he must be deaf to-day
For he will ne'er respond, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

And so to-day you'll have no present, dear, from me
No startling souvenir, nor costly bagatelle,
No gem with carvings quaint from some new Cellini
Not e'en a box of sweets, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

No gift at all! Save what a clinging grasp may leave,
Or else a cousin's kiss which you will ne'er repel,
And then these feeble rhymes which you'll forget this eve,
If not, to-morrow morn, *O ma cousine Angèle*.

His entrance to the larger world was made as is usual with most boys by his first day at school; a school of the most ordinary description, where, as his friend Noël says, he became master of a pretty enough handwriting, but by way of revenge acquired a most detestable vocabulary and a still worse style. When he was about fourteen it became necessary to decide his future, and the influence of his mother so far prevailed that he was entered as a clerk with a little *avoué* or attorney, instead of being apprenticed to a trade as his father wished. Here he fell in with Pierre and Emile Bisson, scapegraces enough in their way, but fortunately for Murger their way led towards that Royal Road of Art on which he was destined to travel so far.

Their friends were artists and Bohemians like themselves; he met with the two Desbrosses, Noël, Lebourg, a little later with Alexander Schaune and many others—and by a little judicious arrangement of his time when sent a message for the office could always spoil a little canvas in the Bissons' room if on the left bank, or a little paper in that of Lebourg on the right, and so taste the joys of a new and double existence. Whatever spur these surroundings may have been to his artistic impulse, as may readily be imagined, they did not add to his usefulness in the eyes of his patron, and before long his services were dispensed with. However, through the kindly offices of M. de Jouy, a neighbour and old Academician, he obtained the post of secretary to Count Tolstoi, in 1839 or 1840 at forty francs a month, double the amount of his former salary. Out of this he paid his father thirty francs for a garret and breakfast, but the remaining ten francs were sufficient to raise him to the position of a monied man with his new friends.

Schaune in his memoirs tells of a house-warming which was no doubt the original of *La cremaillière* in *La Vie de Bohème* to which the invitations ran,

"Monsieur and Madame Rodolphe, men of letters, beg you to do them the honour of dining with them to-morrow evening at five, sharp.

"N.B.—Plates will be provided."

The queen of the feast was the fair Alice, a model, who presided in the character of *La reine Margot*, arrayed in the famous satin robe of Schaunard's in which he is first presented to us, and which Murger says "had been forgotten one night after a masquerade by Folly, who proved herself worthy of her name by being taken in by the fallacious promises of Schaunard as the Marquis de Mondor, chinking in his pocket the seducing chimes of a dozen crowns punched from a metal plate and borrowed from the properties of a theatre."

Murger was announced as "Poet and Inventor of Luminous Adjectives," and throwing off his natural timidity entered so heartily into the spirit of the evening that, inspired by the smiles of Her Majesty, he began the following verses in her honour which are now published for the first time, and of which the following is a free translation:

* When Love with laughing Springtide trips
And April bends to kiss the brow,
The song is sweeter on the lips
Of her we love with rapture now.

The wind is sleeping in the glade
The sun is smiling on the thatch,
And twinkling through the dark wood's shade,
The gleam of snowy gowns we catch.

The heart no yearning hunger knows
E'en when by stroke of Fortune sear:—
Just add a little knot of rose
To deck the hat you wore last year.

Time passes like a streamlet fleet,—
I'd fain forget my heavy hours
Charmed by the music of your feet
Adown the pathway sweet with flowers.

I know by hiding places, fast
Immured by vines of lustre rare
Where all the miseries of the past
Fly with the laughter in the air.

The heart now sings in joyousness—
Come for we're in our fairest year;
And pray remember when you dress,
No pins about your bodice, Dear.

And bending o'er your shoulder, Love,
I'll show you where the shadows make
The willows and the elms above,
Meet with the aspen in the lake.

Your smile has just a shade of care,
But kneeling there at close of day,
The *Angelus* chimes out for prayer
While down the vale the blue-bells away.

And should December bold essay
To bind us in his exile drear,
We'll keep our garret flowering gay
In dreaming of the coming year.

And that the sweetness now that gleams,
May ne'er be ravished from our hold,
We'll bind it firmly to our dreams,
With Love's undying thread of gold.

This was the beginning of his Bohemian existence, pleasant enough so far, making an agreeable break in his daily routine, furnishing a strong and healthy stimulus to his ambition and moulding his thought and aims. But through a most unfortunate attachment to that "Marie" who forms