

"ICI ON PARLE FRANCAIS"

A FARCE

IN

ONE ACT

BY

THOMAS J. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF

*I've Written to Browne—The Belle and the Boor—Ruth Oakley,
&c. &c. &c.*



THOMAS H A I L E S LACY,
89, STRAND,
(Opposite Southampton Street, Covent Garden Market
LONDON.

" ICI ON PARLE FRANCAIS."

*First Performed at the New Royal Adelphi Theatre,
Monday, 9th of May, 1859.*

CHARACTERS.

MAJOR REGULUS RATTAN	Mr. CHAS. SELBY.
VICTOR DUBOIS.....	Mr. BILLINGTON.
MR. SPRIGGINS.....	Mr. J. L. TOOLE.
MRS. SPRIGGINS.....	Miss ARDEN.
ANGELINA, <i>their Daughter</i>	Miss LAIDLAW.
JULIA, <i>Wife of Major Rattan</i>	Mrs. BILLINGTON.
ANNA MARIA, <i>a Maid of "All-work".</i>	Miss KATE KELLY.

SCENE—A Fashionable Watering Place.

TIME—Present Day.

COSTUMES.

MAJOR.—Undress military coat buttoned up to the chin, a profusion of moustachios and whiskers.

SPRIGGINS.—Blue tail coat, light trousers, and coloured waistcoat.

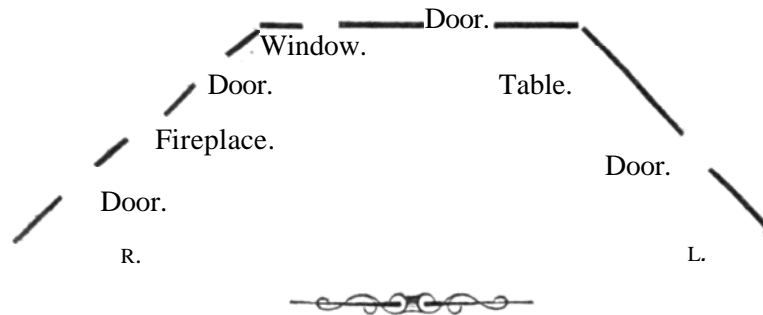
DUBOIS.—Fancy travelling suit, moustachios and imperial, narrow-brimmed French hat.

Mrs. SPRIGGINS AND ANGELINA.— Neat morning dresses.

Mrs. RATTAN.—Travelling dress—bonnet, mantilla, &c.

ANNA MARIA.—Housemaid's working dress—cap and apron.

ICI ON PARLE FRANCAIS.



SCENE.—A Parlour, in total disorder. Door at back—two doors, R., and one L.—a window, with ample curtains—table, chairs, &c.—on a table, L., there stands a glass vase, containing water, and in which flowers are standing—on the wall, various pictures are suspended.

At the rising of the curtain ANGELINA is discovered, sewing rings on some curtains—ANNA MARIA is engaged in dusting chairs violently.

ANNA. (*dusting*) There—and there—and there ! Oh, if ever I have a servant, won't I serve her out for this!

SPRIGGINS. (*outside door R., calling*) Anna Maria!

ANNA. Yes, sir!

SPRIGGINS. (*without*) Bring me those window curtains—I'll put them up myself.

ANGEL. Why, pa, I haven't half finished sewing the rings on !

MRS. SPRIGGINS. (*outside, L., calling*) Anna Maria!

ANNA. (*dusting*) Yes, ma'am.

MRS. S. (*without*) Come and help me nail down the stair carpets.

ANNA. (*aside*) What a bother it is, to be sure—I shall never get this tiresome dusting done !

SPRIGGINS. (R.) Anna Maria!

MRS. SPRIGGINS. (L.) Anna Maria!

ANNA. (*bawling*) Now, then, which is it to be ? You don't expect me to go two ways at once, surely !

ANGEL. Oh dear—oh dear ! This scheme of pa's will wear us all out. How sorry I am that he ever took it into his head to let lodgings!

Enter MRS. SPRIGGINS, L.

MRS. S. Well, thank goodness the bedrooms are ready. Why, Anna Maria, what have you been about? I declare, the parlour is not finished yet!

ANNA. Please mum, I arn't got fifty pair o' hands. I really must have a boy from the work'us to help me!

MRS. S. (*languidly*) For my part, I declare I'm ready to faint!

ANNA. Faint! I've been a faintin' ever since five this mornin'!

Enter MR. SPRIGGINS, *door R. 3 E., with a double ladder over his shoulder.*

SPRIG. Now, then, will these curtains be ready to-day, or am I to expect them sometime *next week*?

ANGEL. Pa, I declare I can't work any faster.

MRS. S. (*in a dignified tone*) Remember, Mr. Spriggins, your daughter is not a hired needlewoman.

SPRIG. (*mildly*) Very true, my dear! That being the case I'll just fill up the time by dusting the pictures a bit. (*seizes duster, mounts ladder and dusts picture*)

ANNA. (*wiping her face with apron*) I declare I can't stand it no longer! (*throws herself back into an armchair, R.*) I 'spose I've a right to breathe as well as other people.

MRS. S. Anna Maria! You lazy, dawdling creature, go and take the rest of our things up to the top of the house.

ANNA. (*aside*) There she goes again! A pretty notion! They're all going to live up in the garret—just to make every farthing they can by letting the rest o' the house! Mean-spirited, covetous creatures!

MRS. S. Well, I must say, Mr. Spriggins, it's excessively disagreeable, for a lady like myself, remotely connected with the noble family of the Fitz-Pentonvilles to leave my comfortable apartments, and live up in a wretched attic!

ANGEL. And to be condemned to dress in a dark little closet, no bigger than a cupboard.

ANNA. (*at door*) And to have to sleep in a willanous back kitchen—all among the nasty rats and black beetles. It's a shame, it is! *Exit, C. door to L.*

MRS. S. (*to ANGELINA*) And all to gratify your papa's absurd propensity for speculation.

SPRIG. (*coming down ladder*) Speculation, Mrs. Spriggins—and a very promising speculation it is, too! Here's the bathing season coming on—a tremendous influx of visitors arriving—no

end of distinguished foreigners expected! Why, bless your heart, lodgings will be at a premium!—so I'm determined to make hay while the sun shines—and sublet every square inch of deal board we can possibly dispense with! I'll wager we shall reap a golden harvest. And I tell you what, Mrs. Spriggins, to compensate for any little inconvenience you may have to put up with, I intend to take you and Angelina up to town, and treat you to the—(*hesitating*) a—a—to the British Museum and National Gallery.

ANGEL. (*pensively*) I'd much sooner you'd take us to Paris, Pa. (*wishing*) Heigh ho!

MRS. S. There she is again with her Paris! Ever since we allowed her to spend a month with her aunt in Paris, she has thought of nothing else.

ANGEL. (*somewhat confused*) The curtains are quite ready now, pa. (*lays them on sofa*)

SPRIG. That's right, my dear,—now arrange the flower pots so as to impart an air of botanical elegance to the apartment. (*ANGELINA arranges flower pots, &c.*) By the bye, my dear, (*to his wife, producing book from his pocket*) now that we've a moment to spare, you may as well hear me my French lesson.

ANGEL. French, indeed! the idea of a man at your time of life beginning to learn French!

SPRIG. How very blind some females are to be sure—don't you perceive, Mrs. Spriggins, that I'm laying myself out to catch lodgers among foreigners of distinction, people who hardly know the difference between a franc and a sovereign, and who, therefore, will agree to pay whatever I think proper to ask them. Are you not aware, madam, that I've got "Lodgings to Let" "ICI ON PARLE FRANCAIS," in large type, stuck in my parlour window. I am, therefore, preparing myself for emergencies, by studying that politest of languages, on a remarkably expeditious system, entitled, "French before Breakfast," a system which renders the aid of a master totally superfluous, and enables the student to speak with Parisian purity, in rather less than no time. You'd be astonished at the progress I have made already! (*with an atrociously bad pronunciation*) "*Bongjore mounseer; commong vouz portez vous, a-a-donnez moi du pain, passez moi la moutarde.*" (*exultingly*) By Jove! they'll be enraptured on hearing their native tongue spoken with such extraordinary fluency, and I shall double their rent in consequence. (*bell rings at C.*) Bless my soul, there's a ring! I dare say it's somebody to look at the apartments. Dear, dear! here's a confusion!—quick, quick! put

these chairs in order. (*great bustle and running about*) Angelina, make your escape with this work basket—run!

Exit ANGELINA, R. 1 E., with basket.

Enter ANNA MARIA showing in VICTOR and MRS MAJOR RATTAN, C. from L.

ANNA. (*sulkily*) Please, sir, it's sum 'un to look at the lodgings!

Exit ANNA MARIA, C. to L.

SPRIG. (*aside*) Hat and pantaloons evidently foreign. (*rubbing his hands*) My "Ici on Parle Francais" has evidently done the business. Now for a little "French before breakfast." (*after a great deal of bowing and scraping*) Ahem ! Monsieur and Madame, venez pore apartemong! (*aside to his wife*) You know one feels a little awkward just at first.

VICTOR. *Quels apartemens avez vous á louer monsieur?*

SPRIG. (*utterly dumfounded*) Eh ?

MRS. S. (*aside to her husband*) Go on! why don't you answer ?

SPRIG. You were pleased to observe ?

VICTOR. *Quels apartemens avez vous á louer?*

SPRIG. Dear me! how very extraordinary, I don't remember meeting with anything of the sort in "French before Breakfast." (*turns over leaves of his book*)

MRS. S. (*aside to SPRIGGINS*) Why don't you say something?

SPRIG. (*confused*) A—a—he pronounces so very indistinctly that a—a—I have some slight difficulty in making out what he says.

JULIA. (*to VICTOR*) This person evidently doesn't understand French.

VICTOR. (*to SPRIGGINS*) You no comprehend ?

SPRIG. (*hastily*) A—a—oui, oui, oui!

VICTOR. I to make observation—de little—annonce in de window—"Ici on parle Francais. "

SPRIG. French spoken here? oh, yes! oui, oui, oui! Ici on parle Francais—to be sure.

VICTOR. I tink it be von leetle hombogs, to attrape de etranger lodger. You no speak French at all, you stupid man.

SPRIG. (*astounded—to his wife*) What's he say ?

MRS. S. He says you're a stupid man, and he isn't far out either!

SPRIG. (*to VICTOR*) You see I—I'm just a little out of practice.

VICTOR. A leetle, parbleu! Yes, von vere large big leetle, you old hombogs.

SPRIG. (*aside*) Stop a bit, my fine fellow, I'll make you pay for your old hombogs, before I've done with you.

JULIA. I should require a sitting room and bed room.

SPRIG. The very thing, these two rooms on the right—(*obsequiously*)—we shall be delighted to accommodate you. We charge—a—a—four guineas a week, including attendance of the most zealous and devoted description, and—a—a—the view of the sea—a—a—la—la—ocean—comprenny ?

JULIA. Dear me, that's rather expensive.

SPRIG. Oh, dear, no! Apartments always fetch more when, like ours, they are situated exactly opposite the bathing machines.

VICTOR. (*aside*) De old hombogs, charge extra for de *perspectif*.

JULIA. (*to MRS. SPRIGGINS*) Well then, if you will have my luggage brought up, I will take the apartment at once. (*seats herself in a chair which VICTOR has handed her*)

MRS. S. (*with great stateliness*) I will give my servant the necessary instructions. *Exit C. to L.*

SPRIG. I'll run and draw up a little memorandum. (*aside*) Four guineas! What a fool I was not to ask more—I'm sure I might have had five—mounseer—au—au—*reservoir*.

Exit, R. D. 1 E.

JULIA. (*to VICTOR*) And now, monsieur, permit me to return you my heartfelt thanks for the trouble you have taken in my behalf, during the short time we have been acquainted.

VICTOR. De plaisir to serve von so charmante lady is its own recompense.

JULIA. How provoking that I should have been so unexpectedly separated from my husband at the refreshment station—how vexed he will be.

VICTOR. Yes, de poor man, I see him to run—to run—to run after de train, but he not can to run so fast as de locotnotif.

JULIA. What should I have done in this strange town without your polite assistance? I shall now just make a slight alteration in my dress, and go and wait at the station, until the next train arrives ; my husband will be sure to come down by it. (*crosses to R.*)

VICTOR. (*bowing with great politeness*) Then, madame, I have de honour to vish you von vere fine how do you do? (*going*) I go to walk all over de town in de hope to recontre von charmante demoiselle. (*sighing*) Helas! she live in dis town, and I not know vere. But I have intention to walk up and down all de principale street, and to knock—knock at all da door, until I retrouve mon Angelina, de objet de mon adoration.

JULIA. (*laughingly*) So then you are in love, monsieur.

VICTOR. (*ecstatically*) In love, *helas* ! I am in love all over de head, all over de ears, vith a beautiful young English demoiselle. I make *connaissance* with her in Paris at von leetle *soirée dansante*, three months ago, and ever since, her lovely image, it stick in my brain. *Helas*! she tell me that she live in Dipwell, and dat her name is Angelina—and so as I have had affair in London, I take de occasion as soon as he was arrangè, to come down here and to *cherche* for mon Angelina. (*bowing and preparing to withdraw*) *Adieu, madame.*

JULIA. (*laughing*) Farewell, monsieur! I can only wish you every possible success in your search. *Exit into room, R. 3 E.*

VICTOR. (*alone*) *Charmante petit femme, parole d'honneur, bue no comparison with mon Angelina, de objet de mon amour!*—but I must to cut my stick. (*goes up, C.*)

Enter SPRIGGINS, R. 1 E.,

SPRIG. Beg pardon, mounseer, but there's one little matter I quite forgot to mention—a—a—I always make it a rule to receive the first week's rent in advance—*comprenny* ?

VICTOR. (*calmly*) Verefore you say dat to me ?

SPRIG. Ah, I see! Your wife takes care of the purse— he, he, he! (*laughing*)

VICTOR. (*gravely*) Vife, sare, I not have sie honor to be dat lady's husband—I am her—her—vot you call—

SPRIG. (*puzzled*) Her, what you call!

VICTOR. Her—her—*parbleu*—her *connaissance* !

SPRIG. (*aside*) What the devil's that I wonder? I don't remember meeting with the expression in " French before breakfast;" (*turns over leaves of book*) however I suppose it's all right—I shall speak to the lady by and bye.

VICTOR. (*going*) It is von curious old *hombogs*!

Enter ANGELINA, R. 1 E.—VICTOR and ANGELINA mutually surprised at unexpectedly meeting each other, utter a simultaneous exclamation—" Oh."

VICTOR. (*starting*) *Ciel!*

ANGEL. (*starting*) Monsieur Victor! (*crosses to C.*)

SPRIG. What's the matter ?

ANGEL. (*endeavouring to conceal her emotion*) Nothing, pa, nothing—I—I merely came to—to look for my thimble. (*aside*) Monsieur Victor here!

VICTOR. (*aside*) Mon Angelina! can I for to believe my sentences. (*approaching her*) My dear mees—

SPRIG. (*not noticing their mutual surprise, and stepping in*

between them) Now, Angelina, lose no time—our preparations up stairs are not half completed.

ANGEL. Yes, pa. (*aside, looking at VICTOR*) I wonder, now, whether Monsieur Victor has come here on my account ? (*significantly*) I shall be down again presently. *Exit, R. 1. E.*

VICTOR. (*aside*) Helas! she is varnish! And so dis old hombogs is de fader of *mon Angelina*—ah! von *brilliante inspiration* it to strike my noddle. (*aloud*) Sare, I have make reflection in de interieur of myself, have you von oder apartment to let ?

SPRIG. Oui, monsieur, the little room on the left. (*crosses L.*) Three guineas a week.

VICTOR. (*gaily*) I take him dis vère moment. Ah, you vish money in advance! de tout mon coeur. I pay you von week tout-de-suite. (*producing purse*)

SPRIG. (*aside*) Tout-de-suite! confound it—he agrees to the three guineas at once—what a fool I was not to ask four. (*takes money—aloud*) You shall have a receipt directly.

VICTOR. Not necessaire—you are de fader of she — dat enough for me.

SPRIG. (*puzzled*) Fader-of-she !

VICTOR. Yes, oh, yes—I leave you pour le moment, (*embracing him tenderly*) Adieu, fader of she—adieu !

Exit into room, L.

SPRIG. (*puzzled*) Fader-of-she! can I have met with that expression in "French before breakfast?" (*turns over pages of his book as though looking for the expression*) I can't find it among the F's—but let me see now, four and three make seven—seven guineas a week! a very nice little addition to one's weekly income. My " Ici on parle Francais" certainly was a first-rate notion.

Enter MRS. SPRIGGINS, C. from L., followed by ANNA MARIA, who is brushing a boot.

MRS. S. Don't be impertinent, miss. What do you think, Mr. Spriggins, here's Anna Maria insisting upon having her wages raised.

SPRIG. (*horrified*) Wages, indeed ! what unprecedented presumption! (*bell rings.*)

ANNA. (*sulkily*) It 'ud take six maids o' all work to do the work o' this house!

SPRIG. Stuff and nonsense! a baby in arms might undertake the place ! (*bell rings*) There, Anna Maria, run ! there's our new lodger's bell.

ANNA. (*going*) Another person to wait on ! I declare if it arn't worse nor a regular treadmill! *Exit, R. 3 E.*

SPRIG. Well, Mrs. Spriggins, what do you say to my scheme now ? I've let the little bed-room for three guineas a week to the young Frenchman. I was a fool, was I—eh?

MRS. S. (*insinuatingly*) You'll make me a present of a new silk dress, won't you, ducky ?

SPRIG. (*with dignity*) I shall see, Mrs. S.—I shall see.

Re-enter ANNA MARIA, door R. 3 E, with a pair of ladies' boots.

ANNA. (*speaking off*) Yes, mum— you shall have 'em directly, mum. (*shuts door*) Here's a treat! more boots to black, and now the lady wants a basin o' gravy soup ; perhaps you expect me to get that ready, too!

MRS. S. Of course we do. Miss Impudence. (*ring heard, L.*)

SPRIG. Oh, there goes the Frenchman's bell—run, Anna Maria, and see what he wants.

VICTOR. (*partly opening his door, L., and passing a pair of Wellington boots through*) Will you have de obligeance to put de polishment upon my Duke de Wellingtons?

ANNA. (*sulkily taking boots*) What, another on 'em ?

VICTOR. (*as before*) And bring me von leetle tasse de cafe, and von beeftake aux pomme-de-terres!

ANNA. (*sarcastically*) Oho, a beefsteak o'pongdetare, eh? well I'm sure. (*folding her arms, and holding a pair of boots in each hand—crosses to C.*) And do you think I'm going to hexhaust myself in this here manner for a paltry eight pound a-year, and find my own tea and sugar?

MRS. S. (*scornfully*) Impertinent menial! of course we do !

ANNA. Then I solemnly vows I, won't do another individual thing, unless you raise my wages !

SPRIG. Unparalleled audacity ! but come, now, I'll see what I can do for you. I don't mind giving you an extra ten shillings.

ANNA. (*eagerly*) A week !

SPRIG. No, a year!

ANNA. (*contemptuously*) Not a bit of it! catch me knocking myself up for a parcel o' miserly wretches, as go and sleep up in a top garret just to make money by letting their own bed-rooms, and slaving the very life out of a poor unfortunate maid o' all work ! why, Uncle Tom's Cabin was a fool to it.

MRS. S. Insolent minx ! not another word.

ANNA. (*placing her arms a-kimbo*) Will you double my wages ?

SPRIG. } (*bawling*) No!

MRS. S. }

ANNA. Then liberty for ever ! I resigns my place—here, take your boots and polish 'em yourselves. (*laying one of the boots*

on SPRIGGINS'S arm, and the other on his wife's) Here's your apron and your brush ! (taking off apron, and giving it and the brush to MRS. SPRIGGINS) Take your property, and now go and get your lodger's lunch ready—the gravy soup and the coffee, and the beefsteak o' pongdetare—ha, ha, ha! what fun it will be to see missus a-doing the cooking, and master a-brushing the boots—ha, ha, ha ! *Exit, C. D. to L.*

(MR. and MRS. SPRIGGINS remain with the boots, brush, apron, &c, in their arms, contemplating each other in mute stupefaction.

SPRIG. Well, now, we *are* in a precious fix! I never thought the hussey really meant it. What the deuce are we to do? however, as far as our immediate requirements are concerned, I suppose there's no great mystery in broiling a beefsteak and making a cup of coffee ?

MRS. S. (*indignantly*) What, sir, do you suppose that I, a distant descendant of the Fitz-Pentonville's, will disgrace myself by meddling with frying-pans and gridirons ? Never!

SPRIG. (*submissively*) Well, my dear, then I'll attend to the culinary department—perhaps you wouldn't object just to take the dust off the lady's boots—*somebody* must do it, you know, we have let the apartments "attendance included."

MRS. S. (*angrily snatching boots and brush from her husband*) Mr. Spriggins, I'll never forgive you for subjecting a lady of my aristocratic descent to such shocking humiliation! (*begins to brush boots with evident disgust—a ring heard, R.—she approaches door, and inquires with a violent attempt at a gracious manner*) Did you please to ring, ma'am?

JULIA. (*within*) My boots, if you please; and send the servant to lace my stays.

MRS. S. There! she wants somebody to lace her stays! perhaps you think I'm going to turn lady's maid, too.

SPRIG. Dear me, what a fuss about a pair of stays! (*as if making a violent sacrifice, and crossing to R. D.*) I'll go and lace her stays!

MRS. S. (*hastily placing herself before the door*) I should like to catch you doing anything of the sort, you wicked old sinner!

SPRIG. Well, my dear, as I said before, *somebody* must do these little things.

MRS. S. (*in a tremendous fluster*) Mr. Spriggins, I consent on the present occasion to sacrifice my dignity, but I shall expect a handsome new silk dress, Mr. Spriggins. (*at door, tragically*) Heavens, to think that a Fitz-Pentonville should live to lace a lodger's stays! *Exit into room, R.3 E.—bell rings, L.*

SPRIG. (*alone*) Halloa! there goes the other bell. I suppose the Frenchman wants *his* stays laced. No, it's the boots he wants.

Well, I suppose I must just give 'em a sort of a rough polish, (*puts Anna Maria's apron on and begins brushing boots methodically--calmly soliloquising*) I'm not by any means what's called proud, not being a Fitz-Pentonville myself; but nevertheless, I'm fully prepared to admit that there are more fascinating occupations than boot blacking. (*ring heard at back*) Confound it, there's the street door bell! (*calling*) Anna Maria! dear, dear, I forgot the jade was gone. I almost wish I *had* doubled her wages. (*another violent ring heard—bawling*) Coming !

Exit at C. D., with apron on and boots in his hand—ringing continues at back.

Enter VICTOR from his room, L. At the same moment ANGELINA appears, door, R. 1 E.

ANGEL. (*not perceiving VICTOR*) If I could but see Monsieur Victor for a moment, and ascertain his motive for coming here.

VICTOR. (*calling, with his hand on the bell pull*) Domestique! —servante ! (*suddenly perceiving ANGELINA*) Ciel! sie objet de mon amour!—it was *not* von apparition !

ANGEL. (*confused*) You, sir, an inmate of our house!

VICTOR. (*rapturously*) Yes, charmante mees — my good angel—he condock me to your side !

ANGEL. (*coquettishly*) I thought you had forgotten me long ago.

VICTOR. (*still retaining his hold of the bell pull*) Forget you ! Oh, ma'amzelle, jamais! jamais! jamais !

(*every time he utters " jamais," he thumps himself on the chest with the hand which grasps the bell pull, not perceiving that by so doing he is also ringing the bell.*)

ANGEL. Take care, Monsieur Victor, you're ringing the bell! Ah, here's somebody coming!

(*ANGELINA disappears, R. 1 E., and VICTOR L. ; they slam their doors violently, at the same moment.*)

Re-enter SPRIGGINS, C. from L.

SPRIG. (*perceiving the two doors shut simultaneously*) Bless my soul! what a devil of a draught there is here.

Enter MAJOR REGULUS RATTAN, C. from L.—he wears undress military coat buttoned up to the chin, an enormous pair of moustachios, and speaks haughtily and gruffly.

MAJOR. (*angrily*) What do you mean, sir, by opening your street door, and leaving me standing on the step?

SPRIG. (*coolly, continuing to black boots*) Very sorry, but I heard a ring in this direction.

MAJOR. (*abruptly*) Are you the shoeblack of this establishment ?

SPRIG. (*indignantly*) Shoeblack !

MAJOR. Servant, then—*tacky*, if you prefer the epithet.

SPRIG. (*with offended dignity*) Not by *any* means, sir—not by *any* means! I'm merely performing the—a—a—the operation in which you now see me engaged out of a—a—politeness to my lodgers. (*knocks at Victor's door, L., and puts down boots, which VICTOR puts out one arm to take*) Mounseer! *la* Boots! (SPRIGGINS then returns to MAJOR, and majestically throwing off his apron, exclaims) No, sir, I am the proprietor of this establishment.

MAJOR. Then it's you who let these lodgings ?

SPRIG. Yes, but I'm as full as I care to be, under existing circumstances.

MAJOR. (*angrily*) Then what the devil do you mean by keeping your bill up? Do you think people climb up your infernally dark staircase for the mere pleasure of contemplating that unmeaning physiognomy of yours? (*abruptly*) who are your lodgers?

SPRIG. (*surprised*) A lady and gentleman.

MAJOR. (*hastily*) A lady and gentleman? what *sort* of a lady and gentleman?

SPRIG. (*with great dignity*) Sir, I am a free born British subject, and I really don't see that I am in any way compelled to answer the question. Besides, you really appear so unnecessarily excited that—

MAJOR. Excited! I should think I was. I've come all the way from the last refreshment station on an engine—an engine, sir, that I engaged at my own individual expense. By Jove, my eyes are full of coal dust now. Give me some water!

SPRIG. (*surprised*) Water!

MAJOR. Yes, to rinse the cinders out of my eyes!

SPRIG. Confound it ! the fellow's going to *refit* here!

MAJOR. (*perceiving a glass water jug on table, filled with flowers*) Aha, this will do!

(*takes out flowers—coolly throws them away—pours water into the palm of his hand, and bathes his eyes*)

SPRIG. (*alarmed*) Mind what you're about ! You're spilling the water over my new carpet.

MAJOR. (*coolly*) You can have it wiped up!

(*takes up the curtains that are laying on sofa, and dries his hands in them*)

SPRIG. (*in agony—roaring*) My new curtains! Do-o-n't I I—I'll fetch you a towel.

MAJOR. (*coolly throwing curtains away*) Quite unnecessary ! (*thumping down a chair in front of SPRIGGINS*) Sit down.

SPRIG. (*somewhat alarmed*) Thank you, I'm not at all fatigued.

MAJOR. (*imperatively*) Sit down, I say.

SPRIG. (*sitting down—aside*) I feel half inclined to send for a policeman.

MAJOR. (*sitting down*) Now then. Are you married or single ?

SPRIG. (*abruptly*) Married.

MAJOR. I'm glad of it. You'll be the better able to sympathise with me. I, unfortunately, am also married.

SPRIG. Really, sir, your conversation is fascinating in the extreme, but—

MAJOR. Don't interrupt me—I was on the point of informing you that I'm a retired Major, late of the Cape Coast Slashers.

SPRIG. (*aside*) He looks his profession !

MAJOR. Having got tired of Zulu Kaffirs, and wild beast hunts, I sold out, returned to England, and in an unguarded moment, recently married a lovely young lady—the daughter of a brother officer.

SPRIG. (*aside*) Now what the devil is all this to me ?

MAJOR. Well, sir, wishing to give my wife a treat, I resolved upon spending a month with her at the sea-side; we started this morning per express: in the same carriage was a young fellow, one of those infernal, insinuating, foreign-looking dogs! On reaching the refreshment station, my wife complains of hunger—I rush from the train, and purchase three bath buns; no sooner had my wife tasted one of them, than she informs me she's thirsty.

SPRIG. Well, there's nothing so very extraordinary in that!

MAJOR. Oh, you think so, do you? Just wait a moment before you give your opinion. Well, sir, forgetting that the ten minutes had already expired, I return to the refreshment room, and was just compounding for a glass of sherry and water, when—zum! zum! zum! off goes the train, with my wife and the young Frenchman !

SPRIG. (*starting*) The young Frenchman ?

MAJOR. Yes, sir—the young Frenchman. They hadn't exchanged a word the whole way—and yet they had connived together to deceive me ! (*angrily*) Don't you perceive, you old idiot, that my wife's need of refreshment was a mere pretext to get rid of me ?

SPRIG. (*aside—alarmed*) A young Frenchman! It strikes me forcibly I've let my lodgings to the identical pair.

MAJOR. (*violently*) But I'll find them!— (*rises*) and when I do, I'll reduce them to atoms ! I'll pulverise them to fine dust—I—I'll smash them like—

(*seizing the porcelain vase which stands on the table.*)

SPRIG. (*alarmed, and seizing him by the arm*) Gently, sir—that's real.

MAJOR. Pshaw ! how frightened you seem about a trumpery piece of earthenware! Well, sir—(*resuming his seat*) I have just received information that persons answering to their description have been seen to enter a house on this side, and in this part of the street. I—I therefore insist upon your producing your lodgers—your female lodger especially.

SPRIG. Really, sir, this is most extraordinary conduct!

MAJOR. (*roaring*) Produce your lodger, sir ! I'll not leave the house till I have closely inspected your female lodger!

(*thumps his chair violently against floor, and resumes his seat with a determined air*)

SPRIG. Confound it all! don't knock the house down !

MAJOR. (*roaring*) Produce your female lodger !

SPRIG. (*aside—trembling*) If it should prove to be the lady who arrived just now, we're all done for.

MAJOR. (*rising, and upsetting his chair*) You refuse to produce your female lodger ?

Enter MRS. SPRIGGINS, R. 3 E.

SPRIG. (*perceiving her*) Ah, here's my wife, by Jove!—a bright idea! (*coming to R.—aloud*) Sir—*this* is my female lodger!

MAJOR. What, that individual ?

MRS. S. (*aside—offended*) What does the fellow mean by individual, I wonder ?

SPRIG. (*hastily—aside to his wife*) Say it's you, or it's all up with us.

MRS. S. (*aside—alarmed*) What does he mean ?

MAJOR. Are you the female tenant of these apartments ?

SPRIG. (*twitching her dress behind*) Say yes.

MRS. S. (*bewildered*) Y-e-e-s!

MAJOR. (*to SPRIGGINS*) Then what the devil did you mean by talking to me of a *young* couple ? (*pointing to MRS. SPRIGGINS*) Is this your notion of juvenility ?

MRS. S. (*highly incensed*) The impolite ruffian !

MAJOR. The sight of you, madam, has appeased my suspicions as far as this house is concerned. (*comes to C.*) I shall try next door, and then return to the White Hart Hotel. (re-

lapsing into fury) But as to those two, if ever I catch them, I --I--I'll--

(as he is going, he runs against a chair, which he kicks violently to the back of the stage, and exit, C. D. to L., furiously.

MRS. S. *(disdainfully)* And now, Mr. Spriggins, perhaps you'll inform me *who* this person is ?

SPRIG. Who he is? Why, it strikes me, he's either the Wild Man of the Woods, or the King of the Cannibal Islands! But there's no time to lose, he'll be back again if we don't look out ! *(knocking hastily at Julia's door, R. 3 E., and calling)* Hallo! Mrs. What's-your-name ! I must speak with you immediately!

Enter JULIA, from room, R. 3 E.

JULIA. With me, sir ?

SPRIG. Yes, madam—it's really too bad of you to expose a respectable man like myself, the father of a family, to the chance of being devoured alive by a roaring Ojibbeway, like your husband.

JULIA. My husband!

ANGELINA *at this moment appears at door, R. 1 E., and assumes a listening attitude.*

SPRIG. Yes, madam! Your husband, from whom it appears you have surreptitiously escaped, under cover of three Bath buns, and a glass of sherry and water.

JULIA. My husband you say has been here ? Oh, why did you not tell me ?

SPRIG. Because I knew better, madam—because he threatened to murder you and the young Frenchman, the partner of your flight.

ANGEL. *(aside)* What do I hear ? The partner of her flight! How dreadful! *Disappears hastily.*

JULIA. *(indignantly)* Flight, sir! How dare you insinuate such a thing ? Good heavens ! what a fearful position to be placed in ! And should my husband, naturally so jealous, attribute our accidental separation to premeditated design ! I'll hasten to him—and explain all! Where is he staying ?

SPRIG. Let me see—he said he had put up at the White Hart Hotel, at the corner of the next street.

JULIA. *(re-entering room)* I'll put on my bonnet, and seek him immediately. *Exit, R. 3 E.*

MRS. S. Well, Mr. Spriggins, a pretty mess you've brought us into by this absurd scheme of yours! This comes of pretending you can speak French, and sticking up a palpable falsehood in your parlour window!

SPRIG. (*distracted*) Don't bother me, Mrs. Spriggins! Have you forgotten that the Frenchman's waiting for his coffee all this time ? (*entreatingly*) Now go and make the kettle boil—do now—there's a ducky!

MRS. S. (*tragically*) Shades of my noble ancestors! behold not the degradation of your luckless descendant! *Exit, C. to L.*

Re-enter JULIA, *from room, R. 3 E., with her bonnet and shawl on—her bonnet is trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons.*

JULIA. (*eagerly*) The hotel at the corner, you said, sir ?

SPRIG. Yes, ma'am, I'll come down to the door, and show you where it is. (*aside*) There'll be murder done if that Cape Coast Slasher returns and finds her here ! (*aloud*) This way, ma'am—this way. *Exeunt, C. D. to L.*

The moment they are gone, ANGELINA rushes in, R. 1 E., and throws herself, in a state of great dejection, into an armchair.

ANGEL. Can I believe my senses? Monsieur Victor has run away with a married woman! How frightful ! (*produces her pocket handkerchief*)

Enter VICTOR, L.

VICTOR. Enfin! they are all gone ! Ah, de objet de mon adoration ! My dear mees —

ANGEL. (*indignantly*) Leave me, sir—your conduct is shameful—infamous!

VICTOR. (*astonished*) Misericorde! vat have I did ?

ANGEL. I have overheard all, sir ! Can you deny that you came here this morning with a lady—a married lady, sir—with whom you had run away ?

VICTOR. Charmante, mees, ma parole d'honneur—I see her for de first time dis morning in de railavay ! (*tragically placing his hand on his heart*) On de honneur of von Frenchman, ma'amselle, I love but von lady in dis vide world, and dat is your charmante self. I swear it by dis leetle hand!

Kneeling and kissing her hand—as he is doing so, SPRIGGINS enters at back, C. from L., with coffee pot and cup, and on perceiving the tableau before him, utters a shout of surprise.

SPRIG. Hallo! What's all this?

ANGEL. (*tragically*) Heavens ! my pa !

VICTOR. Ventrebleu! dat old hombogs again !

SPRIG. (*uttering a cry of pain*) Confound the coffee pot! I've burnt my fingers ! (*puts coffee pot and tray on table*) I say, mounseer, what—a—a—what *la* devil were you doing at my daughter's feet? Explain, sir, what was your motive for assuming that *shoemaker's* attitude ?

VICTOR. (*with much solemnity*) Sare, se immortal *Shak-es-peare* to say, "Brevity is se soul of wits." I have de honour to ask de hand of your female shild in marriage !

SPRIG. (*astonished*) The devil you have !

VICTOR. Yes—she love me, and I love she.

SPRIG. What, in five minutes ? I must put a stop to all this! I insist upon your leaving my apartments instantly!

VICTOR. Sare, I shall do nothing of de kind. I have pay for von veek, and parbleu, for von veek I vill remain—so you must permission me to drink my cafe in tranquillite. (*aside*) De old hombogs! he tink he to see some green!

(*seats himself at table—pours himself out a cup of coffee, which he proceeds to drink with the greatest calmness—he is so situated that his face is turned away from the door at back*)

SPRIG. (*in a tremendous passion*) I—I shall go mad with rage!—and to think that I've brought it all upon myself through that infernal " Ici on Parle Francais! "

Re-enter MAJOR REGULUS RATTAN, violently, C. from L.

MAJOR. I knew the rascal was deceiving me!

SPRIG. (*aside*) Mercy upon us! Here's the roaring Objibbe-way come back again!

VICTOR. (*aside*) Ma foi! de husband of de leetle voyageuse.

MAJOR. (*to SPRIGGINS—not perceiving VICTOR*) And so, sir, you thought you'd make an ass of me, did you ? But allow me to inform you, that it's not to be done, sir—it's not to be done ! As I was repassing this wretched old house of yours, I happened to look up at the bed-room window—and through it, I perceived, lying on the dressing table, an article of costume which confirms my suspicions that my wife is at this very moment in your house.

VICTOR. (*aside*) My opinion is, dat sie fellow is tree sheets in sie wind-mill!

MAJOR. (*to SPRIGGINS*) Sir, I am naturally of a mild disposition ! Up to the present, I flatter myself I have been calmness itself!—but have a care, sir! Dare to exasperate my natural placidity by further prevarication, and I—I—(*in a tremendous fury*) Damme, I'll pound you to a jelly! (*laying hold of him by the collar*) My wife, sir—hand her over this instant!

SPRIG. (*breaking from him*) Let go, sir, you're rumpling my front!

MAJOR. You won't? Then I'll find her myself.

(*rushes to door, R. 3 E.—kicks it open violently—crash, and exit, R.*)

SPRIG. (*dismayed*) The fellow has broken my lock! To think that wild Indians should be allowed to roam about in this manner! The police are really of no use at all!

Re-enter MAJOR, R. 3 E., with a lady's bonnet in his hand

MAJOR. It's remarkably strange!—I've looked under the bed, and in all the cupboards, but no Mrs. Major Rattan.

SPRIG. Haven't I been telling you so for the last quarter of an hour?

MAJOR. (*crushing bonnet in his hand*) And yet, this infernal bonnet is a proof that she must be concealed somewhere about these dingy premises! (*punches in the crown of the bonnet*)

SPRIG. Why, confound the fellow! that's my wife's new Sunday bonnet! She forgot to remove it with her other things!

MAJOR. Your wife's! Then why the devil do you allow your wife to wear cherry-coloured ribbons, like Mrs. Major Rattan? (*angrily claps bonnet on SPRIGGIN'S head*) Once more I say, where is she?

SPRIG. (*violently alarmed*) She's a—a—a—(*stammering*) she's g-o-o-ne out!

MAJOR. (*in a voice of thunder*) Gone out! Then she *has* been here?

SPRIG. (*doggedly*) Well, then—yes—she has! She's just gone to the White Hart Hotel—a—a—in the hope of finding you there.

MAJOR. Rascally letter of unlettable lodgings! you're deceiving me again! Here's another apartment—I dare say she's concealed there!

(is about to enter Victor's room, L., when VICTOR rises and places himself between the MAJOR and the door)

VICTOR. Sap-r-r-ris-ti! You take me for von nincompoop, sare! No von shall walk into my own particular apartment.

MAJOR. (*with a tremendous start*) Fire and fury! that accursed young frog-eater! (*roaring*) Where's my wife, sir?

VICTOR. (*calmly*) Sare, I not know!

MAJOR. It's false, sir—you bribed the guard to start without me.

VICTOR. You tell von lie, sare!

MAJOR. Rascal! hand me over Mrs. Regulus Rattan!

VICTOR. (*throwing himself into a burlesque boxing attitude*) Sare, I vill *box your eye!*

SPRIG. (*in a violent state of alarm*) Good gracious! there'll be murder done! Dear gentlemen, if you are determined to cut one another's throats, don't do it over my new carpet!

MAJOR. (*to VICTOR*) Sir, you shall give me satisfaction on the spot. I never travel without my pistols !

(*producing pistols from his pocket, and presenting one to VICTOR*)

VICTOR. (*in a furious rage*) Sare, you are one *enragè ros-bif bull dog* !

MAJOR. Insolent puppy ! You shall receive my fire across this table, in the American style ! Old What's-his-name shall be second to both of us.

(*VICTOR and MAJOR place themselves one on each side of the table*)

SPRIG. (*wringing his hands*) Oh, dear—oh, dear! a duel across my best bit of mahogany! (*rushing between them—roaring*) Gentlemen—gentlemen! this isn't Chalk Farm !

MAJOR. Now, then, sir, are you ready?

SPRIG. (*in a paroxysm of fear*) Murder ! fire ! police!

MAJOR. Keep still, you old jackanapes, or—(*suddenly looking in the direction of the window*) Hallo! can I believe my eyes?
(*runs violently to window, and opens it.*)

Enter MRS. SFRIGGINS, C. from L.

MRS. S. Why, what on earth is the meaning of all this noise?

MAJOR. (*looking out of window*) Zounds and confusion! if there isn't my wife looking in at a bonnet shop ! By Jupiter, she's coming here ! (*shuts down window violently, and breaks a pane of glass*)

SPRIG. (*despairingly*) There goes half a crown's worth.

MAJOR. Now, then, I shall discover the truth at last. I'll conceal myself behind these window curtains, and mark me—if one of you, by word or sign intimate that I am in the room—(*with calm ferocity*) I—I'll blow his brains out. (*conceals himself behind curtain—he occasionally clicks the lock of a pistol, as a reminder.*)

MRS. S. (*alarmed*) Mercy on us ! what a ferocious monster.

SPRIG. (*dolefully*) If I'm not laid up after all this, it's a pity ! Oh, what a fool I was ever to let lodgings—and what an idiot I was to stick up " Ici on Parle Francais! "

Enter JULIA, C. from L.

JULIA. Dear me, how very vexatious; my husband appears merely to have stopped a few minutes at the hotel, and then to have gone out no one knows where. (*observing their silence and constraint*) But what's the matter with you all ? What do you all mean by staring at one another in this way.

SPRIG. (*confused*) I—I—I—don't feel exactly the thing.

JULIA. Has anything happened during my absence? (*still*)

strict silence—to SPRIGGINS) Has my husband been here again? (*no one answers*) Have either of you seen him, I say?

SPRIG. No!

MRS. S. No!

VICTOR. No!

JULIA. So much the better, (*to VICTOR*) for if he had found you here, monsieur, there's no knowing what might have happened.

MAJOR. (*who repeatedly pops his head from behind curtains—aside*) So, she was anxious on the fellow's account; fire and fury!

JULIA. (*continuing*) My poor husband is so dreadfully jealous. (*to MRS. SPRIGGINS*) If he had even seen the friendly shake of the hand which your husband gave me just now at the door—

SPRIG. (*horribly alarmed*) It's no such thing! I—I—I didn't give you a friendly anything! (*aside—writhing*) I'm certain the monster is taking deliberate aim at me between the shoulders.

JULIA. (*appears surprised at SPRIGGINS' manner, but continues*) I'm sure you, monsieur, (*addressing VICTOR*) must have noticed how fiercely he glared at you in the train, every time you happened to look my way. (*VICTOR says nothing, but nods his head violently*) I do believe—ha, ha, ha! I do believe he was jealous of you—of you who confess that you are dying in love with the young lady you met at a ball in Paris.

MAJOR. (*aside, popping his head from between curtains*) A young lady—ball—Paris?

JULIA. (*continuing*) A young lady to whom you must indeed be deeply attached, since you have journeyed to this town for the sole purpose of seeking after her.

MAJOR. (*aside*) What's that she says? (*rushes violently towards VICTOR, and as he does so, drags down curtains*)

JULIA. (*extremely astonished*) My husband!

MRS. S. } (*in agony*) The curtains!

SPRIG. }

MAJOR. (*stumbling over curtains*) Confound your curtains! (*throws them away—to VICTOR eagerly*) Is it really true that you are in love with somebody else?

VICTOR. Vat you mean, sare?

SPRIG. To be sure he is—the somebody in question happens to be my daughter.

MAJOR. Your daughter? why, you never told me you had a daughter! Produce her! produce your daughter, sir!

Enter ANGELINA, R. 1 E., during the last words.

SPRIG. Here she comes!

MAJOR. Hem ! Ah ! nice looking girl, not in the least like her father. (*to ANGELINA—impressively*) Young woman, is this seductive foreigner in love with you?

ANGEL. (*glancing archly at VICTOR*) At any rate, he says so!

VICTOR. (*rapturously approaching her*) And he mean it, too—and once more, (*turning to SPRIGGINS*) my dear old gentlemen, I pray you to accord to me se hand of your charmante female shild ; my father, he vere rich—Dubois et Compagnie, Rue Saint Lazare, Paris.

MAJOR. (*hastily*) Dubois and Co., Rue St. Lazare—bless my soul—know the firm well—got a house out at the Cape! (*aside*) By Jove then, I've been making an ass of myself all this time ! (*abruptly*) Take her, young man—she's yours! (*handing ANGELINA to VICTOR—pathetically*) Bless you, my children !

SPRIG. (*hastily*) Hallo! there—not quite so fast—as I'm only the young lady's father, allow me to have some share in the matter ! Mrs. S. and I must talk the matter over, and if, upon inquiry, I find Mr. Dubois' description of himself to be correct, I see no reason why we shouldn't accept him as our son-in-law.

VICTOR. (*kissing ANGELINA'S hand*) Oh, bonheur !

Enter ANNA MARIA, C. from L., with bonnet and shawl on.

ANNA. (*with great dignity*) Please to pay me my wages, and to examine my box, for my cousin, the policeman, has called to fetch it away.

SPRIG. My good girl, we'll see about all that presently—Mrs. Spriggins, you were perfectly right—If ever I speculate again, I'll take precious good care it shan't be on my own premises, and, for the future, my only method of "letting lodgings," will be to "let lodgings alone!"

ANNA. (*eagerly*) Let lodgings alone! then I resumes my place. (*takes off bonnet and shawl*)

SPRIG. Thankee! (*continuing*) And as for French, my dear, I give up all idea of it, whether before or after breakfast, for although my pretensions to that language have brought me a son-in-law, I am firmly convinced I shall never have it in my power conscientiously to say—(*tapping himself on the forehead*)

" ICI ON PARLE FRANCAIS !"

ANNA. MRS.S. SPRIG. ANGEL. VICTOR. JULIA. MAJOR.
R. L.

CURTAIN.