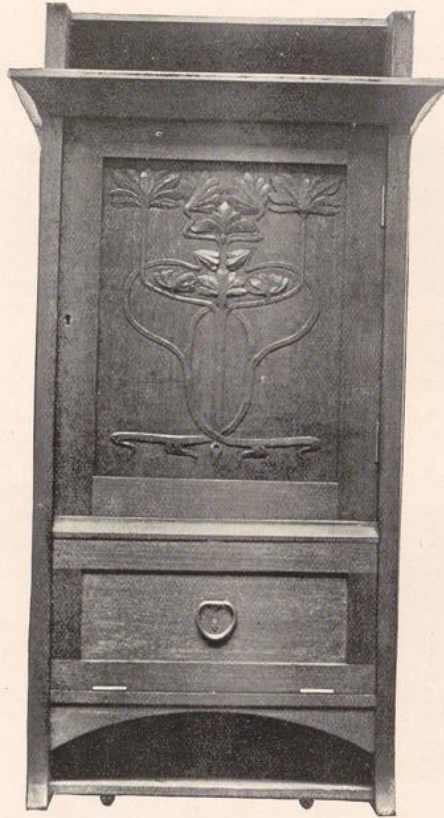




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A French Caricaturist: Louis Morin. By Henry Boucher.

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SMOKER'S CABINET BY W. STEVENSON

his genius. Some of his most seductive gifts were inspired by the brilliant illustrators of that period: Marillier, Saint-Aubin, Gravelot, Eisen, Debucourt and others. The Italians, too, had a certain influence over Morin, particularly Tiepolo, Longhi and Canaletto, who appealed to him strongly and with the happiest results. In fact, he neglected none of the sources whence he might derive inspiration; and thus, without any slavish imitation, he developed the manner and the style which characterise his most delicate and beautiful art.

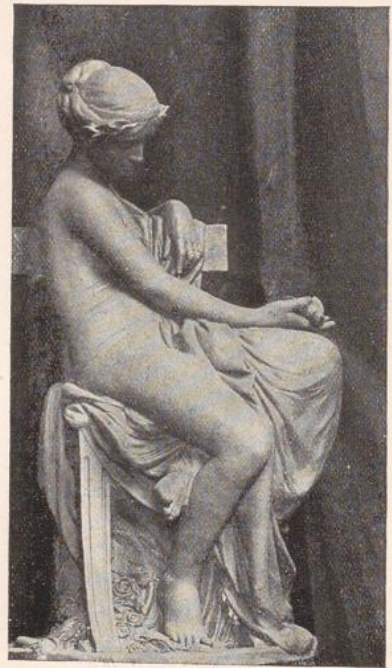
Far from confining himself to one art, or to one particular groove thereof, Morin tried his gifted hand in all directions. Above all else, Morin is an illustrator, that is certain; and I shall have more to say on that point presently. But he began with architecture, then turned his attention to sculpture (as witness his delicate and charming piece *Le Moineau de Lesbie*, his *Bacchante*, and his bronze portraits); he next showed that etching had no terrors for him; nor the little pastel stick, wielded with a fanciful grace which was far from ordinary. Needless to add, he knows how to paint, and that is the least of all. Morin is a most amusing and

A FRENCH CARICATURIST: LOUIS MORIN. BY HENRY BOUCHER.

ONE phrase, and that used in its most manifest sense, suffices to describe the subject of this article: Louis Morin is an artist. In him we find all the exceptional qualities, so rare in these days, which go to make up the true artist.

The original and quite personal nature of his work causes one something like surprise at this century-end, for there is that about it which would suggest that the author was even now carrying on the tradition of the *maitres galants* of the eighteenth century, but in the spirit of the present day.

Morin is incontestably the direct descendant of the incomparable and glorious masters, chief among whom for all time are Watteau, Fragonard and Chardin. Yet not to them alone does he owe all



"LE MOINEAU DE LESBIE" BY LOUIS MORIN

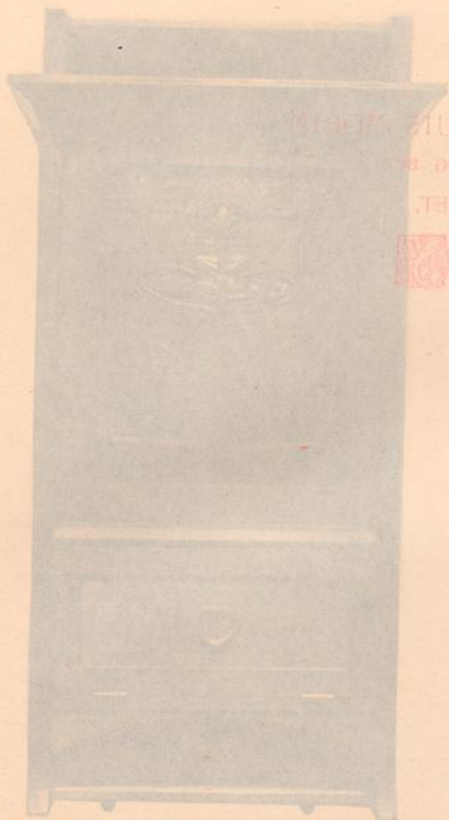
PORTRAIT OF LOUIS MORIN

FROM A DRAWING BY

JULES CHERET.



Louis Morin



SMOKER'S CABINET BY W. STEVENSON

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"LE FERMIER DE JOUY" ILLUSTRATION FOR THE "FIGARO ILLUSTRÉ"

BY LOUIS MORIN

subtle *ombriste*. His shadow pictures, seen more than once at the "Chat Noir," were a delight to those best qualified to judge. Also he has turned to caricature, and handled it with genuine humour. Lastly, and this is not the least of his merits, he possesses a clever, vivid, amusing pen, and amid his sparkling lines of prose he will dash off little illustrations which speak for themselves and need no interpreter.

It would be a grave error to suppose that all these resources, all these manifestations of great talent, find expression hastily and off-hand. Morin is too cultured for that, and far too conscientious. While he observes and depicts life in its lighter aspects, he never strays beyond the limits of truth and reason, nor loses sight of the true significance of his subject. There can be no pettiness in art when it is treated thus. Morin understands full well, and has well exemplified, the sound truth that treatment in art is purely relative.

In order, then, to see the nature and the scope of Morin's art, let us proceed to examine his work as concisely as we may

Louis Morin was born in Paris in 1855. His father, formerly tutor in one of the great Neapolitan families, took his boy a long way on the road of knowledge. After his death the son completed his education by two years of study at Versailles and at Stanislas—the two most miserable years of his life, Morin declares! Then, approaching art—much against the wish of his family—from its severest side, he applied himself to architecture, which proved to be a roundabout way of reaching that which he felt germinating within him. The family opposition deprived him of a master; indeed, he had the rare advantage of escaping the influence of any one teacher in particular, and at the same time of having the benefit of instruction from them all—not the teachers of class-room or studio, but the great mute Masters whose lessons are to be had every day for nothing in our museums and galleries. He learned to study, too, in Nature's lovely book, in the streets and fields, and amid the rich profusion of the libraries.

Starting in this fashion, it was harder for Morin than for most men to make a good beginning.

Louis Morin

The supple fancifulness of his pencil, however, stood him in good stead, and enabled him to turn out caricatures or droll stories which were eagerly taken by the illustrated papers, especially "La Caricature" and "Le Chat Noir." But Morin had larger views, and longed for more scope. He paid several visits to an old relative in Brittany, and became acquainted with the country and its inhabitants, while falling a victim to the fascination of this most impressive district. The effect was speedily manifest, whereas in others the same scenery produced the poorest and most perfunctory results. An amusing little story was the outcome of these visits. It was entitled "Jeannik" (1883), and the author embellished it with 87 drawings which gave an excellent idea of the Breton types of the 18th century.

Already the young artist had shown a marked partiality for that age of grace. He put his whole self into "Jeannik"; and let him perfect his methods, alter his composition, how he will, character and the personality are evident to all beholders. Next, in another volume, he attempts the picturesque and draws many amusing costumes. He records, in his ingenious way, the history of a family throughout two centuries, from the time of Louis XIII. to the Wars of the Republic, under the unpicturesque style of "Le Cabaret du Puits-

sans-vin" (95 drawings, 1885), and contrived to infuse so much vitality and general merit into the work that the French Académie had to recognise the effort by "crowning" it.

Morin cannot be content with mere studio work; he must needs go out, and see for himself.

A great longing to explore the vast domain of art has long possessed him, so with an old friend and rare travelling companion, Léon B—, he starts for Italy. The impression he received was rapid, but very sure. Florence, that inexhaustible mine of highest art, took him captive at once; but the grandeur of Rome failed to impress him much: its heaviness seemed to weigh him down. Naples pleased and intoxicated him, while Venice filled the young artist with wonder, and assumed complete possession of him. How could it be otherwise? For he who is not impressed by Venice is assuredly a confirmed dullard.

The results of this journey (1885) found delightful expression in "Les Amours de Gilles" (1889), a story of a bygone age, wherein we meet all the figures of Italian comedy. Morin depicts their amorous intrigues, shows us the dissolute nobles, the equally *légères* ladies of the time; now tickles us with broadly comic scenes, now touches us with the love-sickness of Columbine, the interest of it all being increased and stimulated by his exquisite



DESIGN FOR A PANTOMIME CAR FOR A CARNIVAL PROCESSION

BY LOUIS MORIN

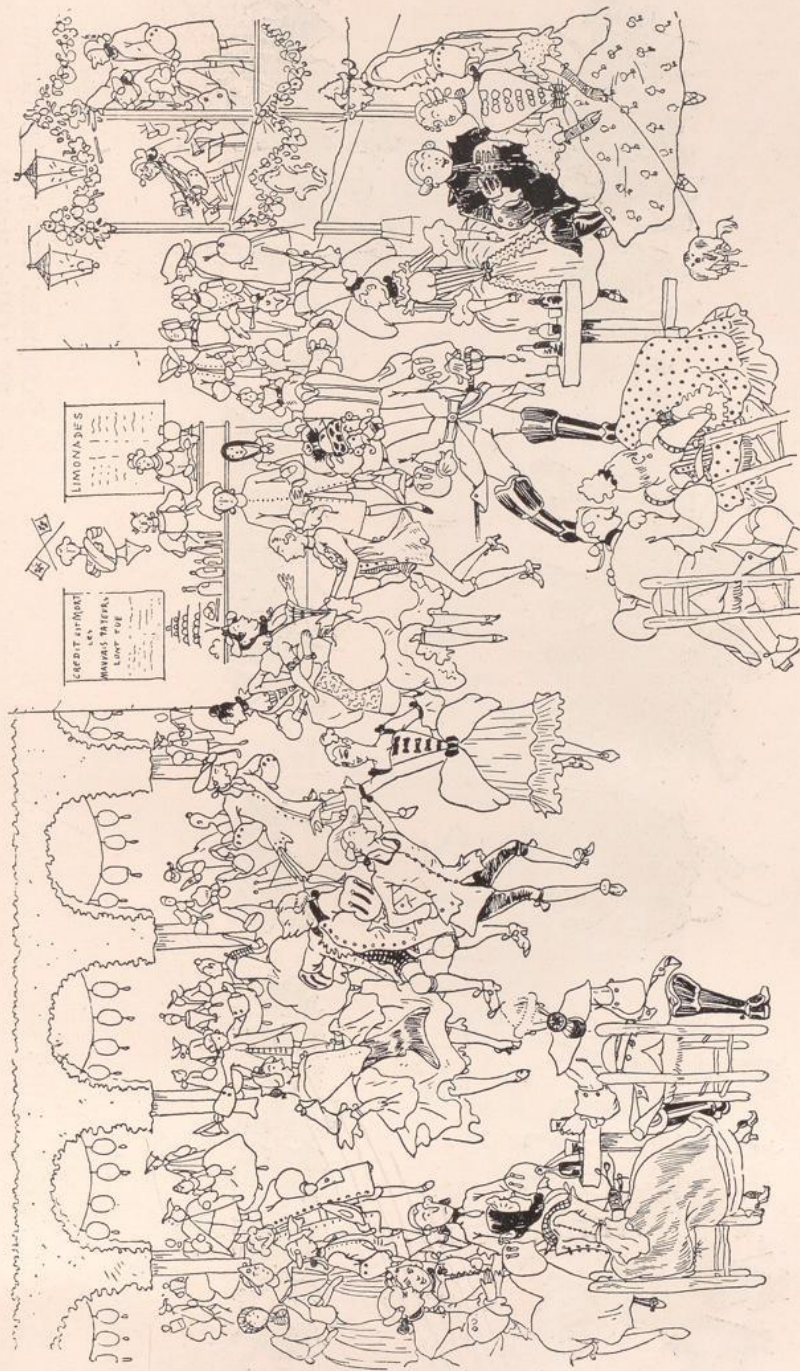


ILLUSTRATION FOR THE "FIGARO"
ILLUSTRÉ" BY LOUIS MORIN



OMBRES DU MUSÉE GREVIN
BY LOUIS MORIN



OMBRES DU CHAT NOIR
"CARNAVAL DE VENISE"
BY LOUIS MORIN

Louis Morin

drawings—light, graceful, piquant—in a word, Venetian: drawings such as one would have expected from none but a real child of the city of the Doges.

This volume, containing 178 drawings (the number had originally been fixed at 125) is certainly the most complete revelation Morin has given us of his gifts, both literary and pictorial. Never has he attained a higher degree of fancy and grace, *verve* and wit. Whatever he may do in the future, with added knowledge, he will never again display in so spontaneous a profusion the great gifts called forth in this delightful book by the seductions of his Venetian environment.

In order that there might be no misconception as to his intentions, Morin classed the three works to which I have alluded under the general title of "Histoires d'autrefois," thus reserving for a future date the ideas he had formed on our life of to-day.

While fascinating their elders, Morin has not neglected the children. He loves them, and delights to invent fairy-tales to excite their little brains. "La légende de Robert-le-Diable" (1886), a

quarto album, containing 53 drawings, was composed for their benefit, while "Le Cabaret du Puits-sans-vin" was also in a way intended for young people. Subsequently he illustrated "Les Aventures de Pikepikicornegramme" and "Dansons la Capucine," by Arsène Alexandre.

With all this fine achievement to his credit Morin is far from being neglected by the more enlightened of our publishers, who eagerly demand his invaluable aid. It is all to the honour of M. Decaux that he should have contrived to keep the writer-artist almost continuously employed. For example, Morin is regularly entrusted by him with numerous drawings for his sumptuous magazine, the "Revue des Lettres et des Arts," to the pages of which one must turn to form an idea of Morin's versatility and knowledge.

Jules Chéret, Willette, Rivière, and Caran d'Ache, among other artists of the highest rank, were quick to appreciate Morin's gifts, and Félix Buhot has long been one of his strongest supporters. Chéret and Morin fraternised speedily, and a deep friendship soon sprang up between



"LE FERMIER DE JOUY" ILLUSTRATION FOR THE "FIGARO ILLUSTRÉ"

BY LOUIS MORIN

Louis Morin

them. Morin was also a friend of Jules Chéret's brother Joseph, the admirable artist in clay, who died prematurely to the intense regret of all who knew him.

In 1889 Morin took his annual holiday in Brittany with two friends, being joined afterwards by Jules Chéret. First they spent a few days at Beg-Meil, travelling thence through old Armorique, drinking deep of all the enchanting and picturesque scenery around, and profiting largely by the lesson that magic land offers to all who have eyes to see. It was a fine holiday, and produced an abundant harvest of rare impressions.

The following year the same little party found themselves in their favourite spot, Venice, and Chéret had to be initiated into the mysteries of that marvel of life and art. Afterwards, however, the constant round of work prevented Morin from indulging in these salutary and instructive excursions. It was about this period he succumbed to the fascinations of the pastel—a happy circumstance to which we owe many lovely works. Moreover thanks to the influence of certain art publishers, notably Conquet and Rouquette, it became the fashion among our bibliophiles, or bibliomaniacs, to demand that Morin should put pen-drawings or water-colours in the margins of their treasures, in order to make them altogether unique. Many a library contains examples of the precious work thus produced by Louis Morin.

In 1890, the "Chat Noir" being then at its zenith, Salis invited Morin to produce some shadow-pictures. The result was seen the same year in his *Carnaval de Venise* (produced in collaboration with Maurice Vaucaire), *Pierrot Pornographe* (1892), *Le Roi débarque* (1894), and Richepin's *L'honnête Gendarme* (1896)—a series of little scenes remarkable for humour and biting criticism, wrapt up in the airiest guise. In 1891, other *ombres* by Morin, styled *Au Dahomey* were presented by the artist to the Musée Grévin.

Still Morin stuck to his pen and his pencil, and began a fresh series with *Vieille Idylle*, a set of delicate original etchings published by Conquet. These were followed by *Le Petit Chien de la Marquise* (Théophile Gautier), *Les Cerisettes* (1892), a light treatise on the little *ouvrières* of Paris; Charles Nodier's *Le Dernier chapitre de mon roman*; the *Vingt masques* of M. Vaucaire, and the *Dimanches Parisiens*, a fine study by Morin, enhanced by Lepère's tasteful wood-blocks. All this time Morin had kept up his connection with the "Revue Illustrée," the "Figaro Illustré," and the "Saint-Nicolas," and to the last-named



ILLUSTRATION FOR THE "FIGARO ILLUSTRÉ"
BY LOUIS MORIN

Louis Morin



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BY LOUIS MORIN

periodical fell the good luck to publish Louis Morin's last work, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, a wonderful story for children, full of drawings in the artist's best and most condensed manner.

How could such a man remain indifferent to the artistic displays of costume such as the "Courrier Français" balls, the *quaf'arts* revels,

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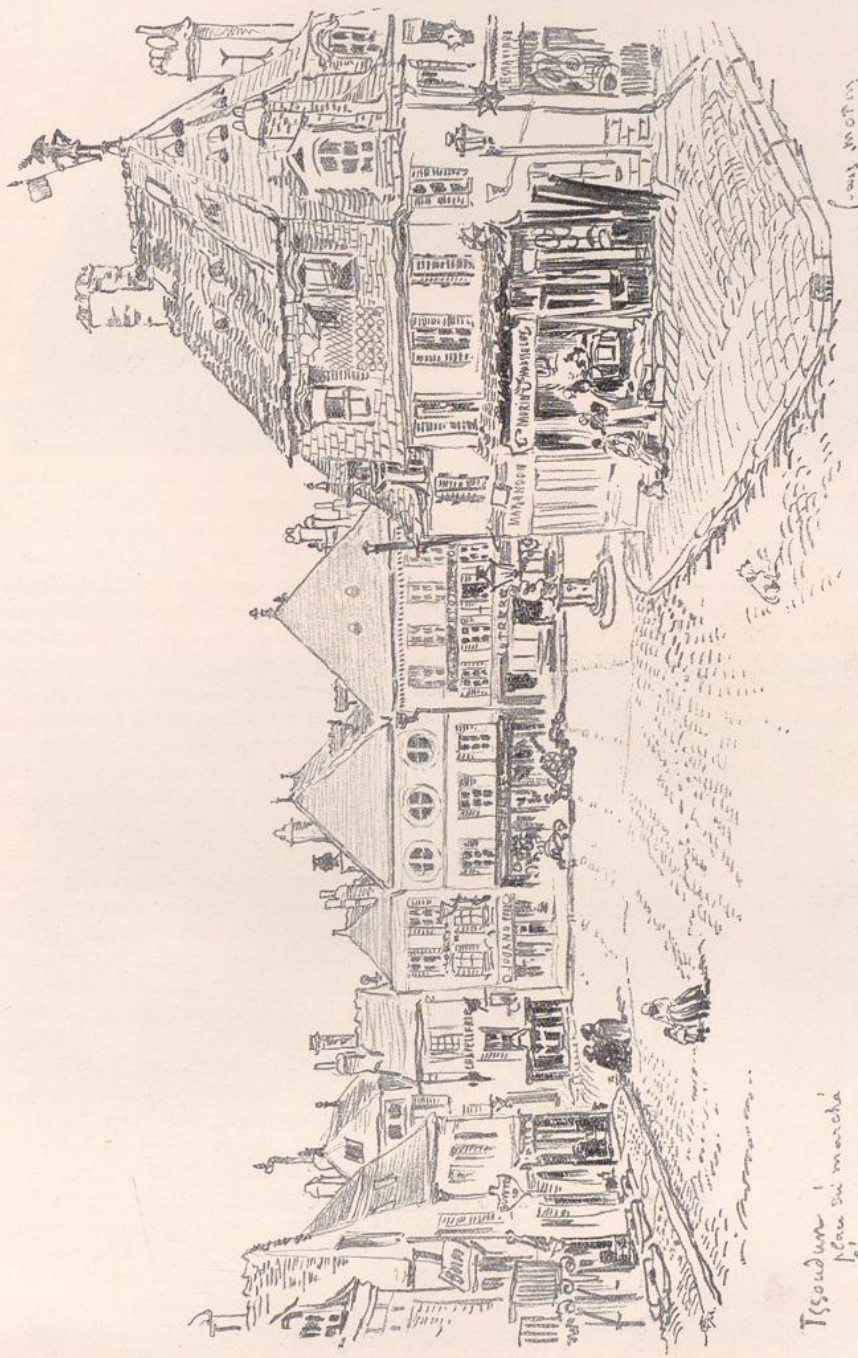
ILLUSTRATION FOR THE "FIGARO ILLUSTRÉ"

BY LOUIS MORIN

and the carnival fêtes and cavalcades? He did not remain indifferent; for spectacles of this kind appealed strongly to him. His ideas thereon are to be seen in his penultimate volume "Les Carnavals Parisiens," a sound bit of critical work, an educational book, even, wherein Morin by his drawings showed in well-formulated style his sense of what these things are and what they should be.

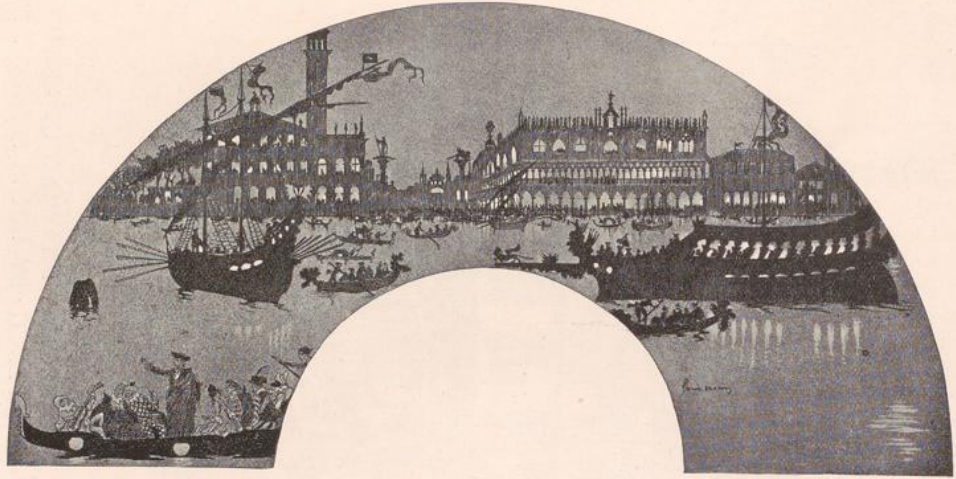
For some months past Morin has been putting his whole energy into a *Scène de réception à la Malmaison à l'époque de Madame Bonaparte*, intended for the Musée Grévin. Under his artistic guidance we may confidently expect to have a perfect and an authentic picture of the period.

Within the limited space at my disposal it is impossible to criticise Morin's work as closely as I could desire; but, by way of conclusion to this cursory



FROM A DRAWING IN LEAD
PENCIL BY LOUIS MORIN

Tisoidun
Plan de marche
avec figures



OMBRES DU CHAT NOIR. "CARNAVAL DE VENISE"

BY LOUIS MORIN

sketch, I will attempt succinctly to sum up his career.

Louis Morin is in everything and before everything a synthetist; he fixes an epoch, reveals a *milieu* far more effectually than an individual personage; he is also what I will term an "un-realist," and to him may justly be applied the felicitous criticism passed by Walter Pater on Watteau in his "Portraits Imaginaires." He describes him as "... sketching scenes *from nature*, but with a sort of grace, and a *marvellous gift of omission* with regard to vulgar reality. . . ." Moreover, Morin's synthetic characteristics find expression in divers ways—now graceful, now amusing, now pathetic, now broadly comic, or even strongly grotesque; with charming ease and certainty he will touch even the most risky subject, yet never degenerate into mere triviality, of which he has a profound horror. As for bad or sickly art, he makes no attempt to hide his opinion thereon in his fore-word to "Les Carnavals Parisiens." "The land of Rabelais, and Callot and Molière and La Fontaine, and Watteau and Fragonard and Gautier has not become so completely subjugated by Germany as to be indifferent to gaiety and grace and colour and brightness and wit and good sense—to say nothing of that touch of folly indispensable to every reasonable being, etc." The fact is that in the matter of art and criticism he has not been content to remain with Winkelman and Victor Cousin!

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Far from it. No art formula finds him indifferent or unappreciative. While he has closely followed, and still closely follows, the work of all our illustrators,* he has not been sparing in his admiration for foreign draughtsmen of note—such as Menzel, Rops, Abbey, Vièrge, and others—always showing a marked preference for those in whose work lifelike gesture and personality are conspicuous, and in which the method employed is honest and significant.

The judgment I have thus inadequately expressed will, I feel sure, speedily receive general sanction, for about the time these lines appear in print the firm of Ollendorff will be offering to the public "Les Confidences d'une Aieule" by Abel Hermant, and Doucet's "Douze Pantomimes," both adorned by Morin's pencil, and will also be inviting "M. Tout le Monde" to visit the galleries in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, and judge for himself of the many and the real merits of this most delicate artist. They deserve to be proclaimed aloud and universally, to compensate for the feebleness of the praise I have been attempting to bestow; but will "Mr. Everybody," whose sagacity in matters of this sort is occasionally open to doubt, be capable of appreciating these said merits?

HENRI BOUCHER.

* A volume of criticism by Morin on certain of his contemporaries, entitled "Quelques artistes de ce temps" has been published.