

**LA GRAMMAIRE:  
COMÉDIE  
EN UN ACTE**

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La Grammaire: Comédie en Un Acte by Eugène Labiche

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# LA GRAMMAIRE

COMÉDIE EN UN ACTE

PAR

EUGÈNE LABICHE

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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## A WORD TO THE STUDENT.

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You will probably read "La Grammaire," if at all, quite early in your course. It will be, perhaps, the first piece of dramatic composition which you will read in French. If such is the case, a few general hints upon the reading and translation of plays may be helpful.

You must keep in mind first of all that these plays were not written to be read, but to be acted. Certainly M. Labiche had no thought that "La Grammaire" would ever be laboriously thumbed and plodded through by classes of American students. He intended that his little comedy should be intensely funny; and so it is, but much of the fun was to be put into it by the actors. This part must all be imagined by the reader. As you read the lines you must picture to yourself the various actors made up for their parts, reciting them and performing the stage directions indicated—and doubtless many others not indicated.

Again, as most of the humor lies in the characters depicted, it can be completely appreciated only as you enter fully into the spirit of the various parts. To enable you to do this, a word of description of each one will be given, so that you may know what to expect from him.

Caboussat is a provincial bourgeois with more ambition than culture. This is a favorite type in French comedy. His chief purposes, as represented in the play, are to achieve political distinction and to conceal his ignorance. The lat-

ter he has thus far been able to do, and has even gained a reputation for learning, thanks to the aid of his talented daughter. Poitrinas is a rural pedant. He has a confirmed but ludicrous predilection for exhuming Roman antiquities, and an unconcealed disgust for ignorance, even when it happens to be in his own family. Machut is the typical country-veterinary, whose importance in the play is quite secondary. Jean, the servant, has the failings characteristic of the members of his class. He needs no introduction to persons familiar with their ways. Blanche gives us a glimpse of the French middle-class miss at the interesting period between boarding school and marriage — devoted, obedient, self-effacing, and unsophisticated. Like all of Labiche's female characters, she is somewhat colorless.

It must be kept in mind, too, that a play is all dialogue, and so the language is the language of conversation. In a play, likewise, such as "La Grammaire," which deals with bourgeois and provincial characters and servants, even this conversational language is not like that which you would hear from university professors or at a gathering in a literary drawing room. It is good French, but it is exceedingly colloquial and idiomatic. The student should try to render this colloquial character, so far as possible, in English. Jean's speeches, when translated, should sound like those of a servant. Caboussat should talk like an ignorant village magistrate with his eye on the legislature, Poitrinas like a rural pundit, and Blanche like a boarding-school girl.

Lastly, a word in regard to the interjections. Like all the Latin nations, the French give vent to their emotions through interjections much more readily than the colder Anglo-Saxons. In a situation where an American would employ a whole sentence — albeit perhaps exclamatory — a Frenchman needs only a single explosive monosyllable. In French, therefore, the interjections are numerous and hard to put

into English. Words, too, like *Mon Dieu ! Diable !* etc., which literally translated become the most shocking profanity, are in French utterly colorless and mild. Here again you must try to catch the spirit of the situation, and to render, not word by word, but thought by thought, feeling by feeling. Often the meaning of an exclamation is best rendered by the inflection of the voice, and the word used is of secondary importance.

HERMAN S. PIATT.

URBANA, ILL., April, 1899.



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LA GRAMMAIRE.

## PERSONNAGES.

FRANÇOIS CABOUSSAT, ancien négociant.

POITRINAS, président de l'Académie d'Étampes.

MACHUT, vétérinaire.

JEAN, domestique de Caboussat.

BLANCHE, fille de Caboussat.

La scène se passe à Arpajon, chez Caboussat.

# LA GRAMMAIRE.

## ACTE PREMIER.

Un salon de campagne, avec trois balcons ouvertes sur un jardin. Portes latérales au premier plan. A gauche, près de la porte, un buffet. A droite, sur le devant de la scène, une table. Au fond, une autre table, sur laquelle se trouvent des tasses.

### SCÈNE PREMIÈRE.

JEAN, puis MACHUT, puis BLANCHE. (Au lever du rideau, Jean range de la vaisselle devant un buffet qui se trouve à gauche, au premier plan.)

JEAN.

L'ennui de la vaisselle<sup>1</sup> quand on l'a rangée, c'est qu'il faut la déranger. (Un saladier lui échappe des mains et se casse.)

MACHUT, entrant.

Paf !<sup>2</sup>

JEAN.

Sacrebleu !<sup>3</sup> le saladier doré !

MACHUT.

Tu travailles bien, toi !<sup>4</sup>

JEAN.

Ah ! ce n'est que le vétérinaire ! . . . Vous m'avez fait peur.

MACHUT.

Qu'est-ce que va dire monsieur Caboussat, ton maître, en voyant cette fabrique de castagnettes ?<sup>5</sup>