

[*L'Humanité*]

THE BENEFACTOR'S REVENGE

BY RODOLPHE BRINGER

BEAUFORT L'ARTHUR is a little peaceful town whose name has been absent from history since the Hundred Years' War. It was during those troublous times that the British burned the castle. The heaped stones of the round tower, in which a colony of owls long has nested, bear witness to the glories of these other days. I say this on the authority of a descriptive pamphlet which I bought at the local bookseller's. It being my duty as a respectable tourist to visit the ruins, I did so, and when the pilgrimage was over, I spent the rest of the afternoon wandering about the cobblestoned and smelly streets watching the fun of ragged children, old folk warming their heads in the sun, big, solid fellows quietly smoking their pipes — all of them with the air of knowing where their daily bread was coming from.

Presently, I came out upon a little square in which something genuinely odd attracted my attention. The something was a splendid pedestal, doubtless built to support the statue of some proud personage. And this pedestal, beneath its plane trees, seemed to me to be old, very old, tarnished by many winters and cooked by many summers, spotted with lichen and gnawed by moss. It was clear that the pedestal had been long exposed to the seasons.

The pedestal, therefore, was not attending the coming arrival of some glorious son of Beaufort l'Arthur. Was it intended simply as an encouragement for the school children?

I walked over to the pedestal, and to my great astonishment discovered on it a bronze tablet bearing the words:

To our benefactor

ALCIDÉ BENISTAN

FROM A GRATEFUL BEAUFORT L'ARTHUR

'So defaced was the inscription, that it was with difficulty that I read it. What could it all mean? Here was a pedestal which had waited thirty years for its statue. Had the bronze foundry been negligent or had the statue been entrusted to a languid sculptor?

Such were my thoughts when a voice behind me cackled,

'So it puzzles you, does it?'

I turned. An old man stood close by, a tidy, comfortable looking old fellow, the very type of the small proprietor who returns to his birthplace to spend the money he made in the city. I saluted him respectfully. He smiled, and said:

'Monsieur is a stranger? Ah it's a shocking story, the story of that monument! The municipality really should have that pedestal taken away.'

And leading me to a bench under the plane trees, the old man began:

'Benistan, having amassed a comfortable fortune in the manufacture of gold beaters' skins, purchased the Château des Ormeaux, the big house you see from the railroad station. He moved in, and began to share in the life of the town. As you may imagine, his wish was to be mayor of Beaufort l'Arthur. He ran for office, and failing of election, never quite forgave us.

'A month or two later, wishing to improve the vista from his château, he had the notion of buying an old shed in which the firemen of Beaufort l'Arthur kept their engine. He not only offered a fancy price for the shed but also promised to replace it with a building which should be the very flower of fire stations. But the municipality refused his offer, and built a big ugly schoolhouse on the site of

the station. It quite ruined the prospect from the Château des Ormeaux.

'Well, the poor man had a nervous crisis, so bad a one that he died of it eight months later.

'The funeral was a magnificent one, but the townsfolk did not attend it. Benistan, you see, was mistrusted because of his Tory attitude. The good that he had done was forgotten.

'Imagine the general stupefaction when it was learned that Benistan had left the enormous sum of three million francs to the municipality! It was given on condition that Beaufort l'Arthur should undertake to nourish and sustain all the poor, without distinction of age, sex, or nationality, who lived within its boundaries.

'At once the popularity of Benistan rose to unheard of heights. He had been cruelly misjudged. He was a man for the ages! He was a philanthropist! In order to soothe away the unpleasant memory of its bickerings, the municipality decided to erect a monument to Benistan's glorious memory. In the enthusiasm of the moment, the pedestal was rushed to completion.'

'Ah — they were a bit hasty.'

'Beaufort l'Arthur, monsieur, was then an honest, hard-working town within whose borders *la misère* was unknown. But since the day on which the clauses of Benistan's will were proclaimed abroad, tramps, vagabonds, rogues, and Apaches have never ceased pouring through our gates. In six months our population had doubled. All the scamps in France were at hand to enjoy the legacy. They robbed houses, held up travelers; they made our peaceful neighborhood a veritable *forêt de Bondy*. Terrified, all the good folk began to leave the town. Now the only ones left are those who, like myself, own property here. If I were only a little younger, I too —

'Too late we understood the dark

ways of our benefactor. If he can see what is going on in Beaufort l'Arthur, Alcide Benistan must be laughing. He has had a royal revenge.

'You see now why the pedestal has no statue. A statue to that man? Never!'

And having finished his story, the old man saluted, and walked away. Night, you see, was falling, and he did not care to run the risk of meeting a fellow citizen in the dark!

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M. BRIEUX'S AMERICANS

BY ROBERT DE FLERS

M. BRIEUX'S *Les Américains Chez Nous*, is more than a study of individual Frenchmen and Americans, it is a study of the contact between the two peoples. He tells the truth about both groups with the vigorous honesty which characterizes both his character and his work, and he ends by showing that the differences between French folk and their cousins from over the sea are neither very numerous nor profound. The *dénouement*, in which antagonisms are relaxed, and the necessary concessions made, is a very excellent lesson for us all.

M. Brieux has given all his characters certain clear-cut and precise traits, some of them intended for satiric purposes, to be sure, but since M. Brieux's satire spares nobody, and its bite is always followed by a healing phrase, the fun is fair enough. He seems to be saying to his conflicting characters — 'Learn to respect, to like — get married, above all, try to understand.' The great difficulty in a play of this kind is the danger that the social and moral lesson may overwhelm the action, and that greater heed may be paid to the ideas presented than to the characters. But