

BRIGHTER
FRENCH



by

Harry
Thompson
RUSSELL

PHAETON

BRIGHTER FRENCH

*Colloquial
and Idiomatic, for*
BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE
(who already know some)



Compiled by their loving Servant
Harry Thompson Russell

with original 1927 illustrations by Eric Fraser



BRIGHTER FRENCH

FOR BRIGHT YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO ALREADY KNOW SOME

by

Harry Thompson Russell
[H—T—R—]

BRIGHTER FRENCH SERIES : VOLUME I

PHAETON
PUBLISHING LTD.
Dublin

THE SEARCH FOR H—T—R—
HARRY THOMPSON RUSSELL

BRIGHTER FRENCH

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A DRAWING OF a scantily-clad 1920s nightclub dancer and a promise of '*colloquial and idiomatic French for Bright Young People (who already know some)*' were on the jacket. Inside was text that was racy and politically incorrect, but flawless in grammar and subtlety of usage.

It was a volume that could have been produced only in the age of cocktails and jazz, and the original 1927 edition of *Brighter French* had the look of a time-travelling flapper—still partying—when the publishers spotted it in a stack of dry, academic texts at a university book sale.

Should you ever need to say in French:

True, I've never seen her spit in the cups or blow her nose on the table napkins, but she looks just the kind that would—

or

He did indeed do a cure at Vichy, but it seems he persisted in mixing the beneficent water with whiskey. So, there was no improvement, but rather the reverse—

or (included for the virtuous purpose of illustrating the historical present tense)

He comes back one day and is quite aghast to find she has very calmly taken on another fellow—this is the only text that will help you.

It was a book that had to be republished,

but there was one big problem: who was the author? In the original edition, the author's name was given mysteriously only as 'H-T-R-', with address 'London' in 1927 (and 'Montpellier' in a follow-up book published in 1932).

It emerged that the publishers were not the first to wonder about the identity of the author. In 1927, when *Brighter French* first came out, there had been much speculation about who H-T-R- was. By 1932 the still mysterious author was acknowledging (in idiomatic French, of course) that the racy style of his books had given rise to the impression (mistaken, he insisted) that H-T-R- was a rake:

C'est une légende erronée, quoique *au demeurant* assez flatteuse !

—This idea, though possibly flattering, is quite incorrect.

Half a century later, his identity remained the subject of conjecture. In 1980, for instance, *Teach Yourself French* (36th impression) referred in its Preface to '...that brilliant anonymous volume *Brighter French*...' (before adding regretfully that, by then, it might only be found in libraries).

So who was H-T-R- and what had become of him? Before his identity was established, a lot of helpful people had become as curious as the publishers.

The search started in the British Library,

which was able to provide his full name: Harry (or Henry) Thompson Russell, born 1875. The library had no other information about him however, and did not know the date or the place of his death.

The publishers of the original edition (Geoffrey Bles, Pall Mall) had long ago been taken over by Harper Collins, who helpfully looked into their records, but had no information to offer.

The name, Harry Russell, made the search more difficult. The British Isles are filled with men of that name (many of them born in the same year as H-T-R-).

The search then turned to Montpellier and the *département* of Hérault, where obliging officials (and householders) looked through their archives, but no official record of Harry could be found. An ingenious suggestion however by the British Consul, Norman Paget, brought the search to Strathclyde University, where archivist Margaret Harrison found a letter written by H-T-R- among the papers of Sir Patrick Geddes. Dated 1931, it was an acceptance of a job offered to him by Geddes to teach French at the Scots College in Montpellier. Unfortunately, this job would not last long. Geddes was to die the following year, and his *Collège des Écossais* would die with him.

The Montpellier trail had gone cold, so the search turned back to the British Library, where

ERIC FRASER

IF EVER a jacket illustration gave lie to the maxim that one shouldn't judge a book by its cover, it is Eric Fraser's wonderful depiction of the trying-hard dancing girl which appeared on the cover of *Brighter French* in 1927. No drawing ever has captured more successfully the raw exuberance of the 1920s Paris nightclub, or could better herald the style, gaiety, and 'Gallic salt' of the text. Yet the life of this quiet, hard-working family man, who was one of the most admired and in-demand illustrators of the twentieth century, was far removed from that world. 'There would be no stories of wild nights in Montparnasse or Montmartre,' writes Alec Davis in *The Graphic Work of Eric Fraser*.¹



Much of Eric Fraser's work is well known, such as his illustrations for the *Radio Times*, his iconic 'Mr Therm' (used for over 30 years by the gas industry), his London Underground railway posters, his stamp designs for the GPO, etc. Unusually for an illustrator, he received much fan mail. He produced book covers and illustrations for the Folio Society and the Limited Editions Club of America, and was always (as in *Brighter*

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The above illustrations were commissioned for the original 1927 edition of *Brighter French*—with the exception of the two marked *, which are additional Fraser illustrations of the period.

[Sources and dates of the drawings included in the foregoing biography of Eric Fraser are on page 291]

FOREWORD [of 1927]

by
H—T—R—

IN THESE HARD DAYS our accomplishments need to be taken seriously. Nobody, for example, plays a violin in public unless he does it extraordinarily well. But nobody *need* play a violin, whereas no one knows when he (or she) may *have to* speak French...with humiliation as the penalty of shortcomings.

In good society, more than ever before, knowledge of French is a tremendous asset, besides being a lasting intellectual joy. A smattering will not do. 'School-French' will not do.

How are the Bright Young People to learn the real French of everyday life? The best way, of course, is by constant intercourse with French-speaking social equals. But this takes time, and Bright Young People are busy.

This little volume aims at filling a gap obvious to all would-be learners. It is mainly a collection of sayings and phrases, some few original but mostly culled from current French literature, avoiding the trite and the stilted, dealing with the spoken language of the dinner-table, the boudoir, the theatre, race-course, promenade-deck, stables, garage, etc. It is believed that even

those who know quite a lot of French can read it with advantage. If some of the anecdotes are flavoured with Gallic salt, it is not to be expected that the Bright Young People will complain. Nor yet their Seniors. The volume is not meant for '*la jeune personne*,' but for those who can safely imbibe worldly wisdom together with knowledge of the most subtle of languages.

In the French text, *italics* are used to direct attention to nice points of gender, mood, tense, or agreement. There is no attempt to labour the teaching of syntax, of which a sound understanding is assumed.

The English text must be taken as furnishing 'equivalents' rather than 'translations'; indeed, in many cases wide departures will be found, intended to emphasise the fact that French people naturally *think* quite differently about things, and therefore express themselves differently. The first essential to fluent speech is *to learn to think as a Frenchman thinks*. It will not do to formulate mentally, in English, what one wants to say, and then utter a 'translation.'

That the results of his work may interest and amuse, as well as instruct, is the hope of the Compiler.

H—T—R—

LONDON,

September 1927

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*BRIGHTER
FRENCH*





'American in Paris,' pen-and-ink by Eric Fraser,
first published in the BBC *Radio Times* 24 July 1931

PART I

A PRELIMINARY CANTER

UN PETIT GALOP

ON LOVE, LIFE, DRINK, CRIME & GAMBLING—
SUR L'AMOUR, LA VIE, L'ALCOOL, LES DÉLITS & LE JEU

AN ATTEMPT to make you *think* as a French
person thinks. You can open it anywhere,
and learn something.

PROPOS DE TABLE

(ET, AU BESOIN, D'AUTRES MEUBLES)

1. —*De quoi* est-il mort ?
—On ne sait pas. D'ailleurs on ne savait non plus de quoi il vivait.
2. Ma chérie, écoute, voilà Charlot qui affirme qu'en dansant la vierge a plus de raideur dans la jambe que la femme mariée, et l'épouse fidèle que la femme adultère !
3. Certes, je ne l'ai jamais vue cracher dans les tasses ni se moucher dans les serviettes, mais elle *a bien une tête à le faire*.
4. *Premier soldat*— Le théâtre ne va encore pas trop mal. Ma sœur joue *dans une revue* et elle *se fait* presque *la solde totale* d'un colonel.
Deuxième soldat— Mais qu'est-ce qu'en dit la femme du colonel ?
5. Il a bien fait une cure à Vichy, mais il paraît qu'il s'obstinait à *couper* cette eau bienfaisante *avec* du whiskey. Ainsi, aucune amélioration, mais au contraire.
6. À New York, chacun porte sous son *frac* une gourde de whiskey.
7. On boit aussi des mixtures frelatées.

TABLE TALK

(SUITABLE ALSO, IF NECESSARY, TO OTHER ARTICLES OF FURNITURE)

1. —What did he die of?
—Nobody knows. But then nobody knew what he lived on, either.
2. My dear, just listen, here's Charlie declaring that, in dancing, a virgin is stiffer in the leg than a married woman, and a faithful spouse stiffer than the other sort!
3. True, I've never seen her spit in the cups or blow her nose on the table napkins, but she looks just the kind that would.
4. *First Soldier*— The theatre doesn't do too badly. My sister is playing in a revue just now, and she pockets pretty well all of a colonel's pay.
Second Soldier— But what does the colonel's wife say about it?
5. He did indeed do a cure at Vichy, but it seems he persisted in mixing the beneficent water with whiskey. So, there was no improvement, but rather the reverse.
6. In New York, everyone carries a whiskey-flask under his evening coat.
7. Also, they drink adulterated mixtures.



PART II

A FEW LITTLE STORIES QUELQUES PETITES HISTOIRES

MANY A Bright Young Person's fortune is made by his (or her) ability to trot out a good story at the right moment. But be sure it is the right moment—and pass on quickly.

POTINS

GOSSIP

SURPRIS AU TÉLÉPHONE

OVERHEARD ON THE TELEPHONE

VOIX N° 1 (*empressée*)— Allô ! Allô ! C'est vous, Germaine ?

VOIX N° 2 (*allègre*)— Oui, Monsieur !

VOIX N° 1 (*suffisante*)— Bon ! Germaine, vous direz à Madame qu'elle m'attende pour dîner, et que je resterai coucher.

VOIX N° 2 (*respectueuse*)— Bien, Monsieur (*insinuante*)... *De la part de qui*, Monsieur ?

VOICE NO. 1 (*eagerly*)— Hallo ! Hallo ! Is that you, Germaine ?

VOICE NO. 2 (*brightly*)— Yes, Monsieur !

VOICE NO. 1— Right ! Germaine, kindly tell Madame to expect me to dinner, and say that I shall be staying the night.

VOICE NO. 2 (*respectfully*)— Very well, Monsieur... (*insinuatingly*)— What name shall I say, Monsieur ? (*Lit.* On behalf of whom ?)*

**De la part de...* Very generally used when delivering a message, personally or by telephone etc., for another party. (*Je viens de la part de — ; je parle de la part de —.*)

LA POLICE PRIVÉE

PRIVATE DETECTIVES

Un de mes amis *s'avisa* un jour de *faire pister* la tendre demoiselle qu'il a *mise dans ses meubles*. Il reçut le rapport suivant :

A friend of mine took it into his head one day to have the loving little lady, that he had provided a flat for, watched. He received the following report:

« La dame n'a pas semblé devoir sortir, mais la femme de chambre, suivie, a acheté deux kilos de pêches, qui ne semblaient pas destinées à une seule personne. »

'The lady does not seem to have had occasion to go out, but her maid, who was followed, bought two kilos of peaches, which would not seem to have been intended for one person only.'



CHEZ LE GRAND COUTURIER—AT THE COUTURE HOUSE

PART III

A LITTLE TRIP TO PARIS LA PASSADE À PARIS

MERELY AN EXCUSE for introducing you to a few more 'words' ... the powder being, so to speak, concealed in something like jam.

LA PASSADE À PARIS

PREMIER ACTE

Le 21 avril 1927. Chez Lui. Fumoir d'un joli cagibi à Mayfair. 22 h. 30. Luxe discret, rien de superflu. Grands fauteuils en cuir. Divan. Coussins. Un bon feu répand une illumination suffisante. Gramophone. Cigare. Cigarette.

ELLE (*grave, après avoir arrêté Galli-Curci en pleine course*).— Mon ami, le moment est venu de penser aux choses sérieuses.

LUI (*inquiet*).— Mais à quoi, donc ? Tu n'ès pas par hasard...

ELLE (*ferme*).— Je n'ai plus rien à me mettre !

LUI (*soulagé*).— Ah-h !

ELLE (*toujours ferme*).— Je redis. Voilà mai qui s'abat sur nous—et je n'ai plus rien à me mettre !

LUI (*sceptique mais indulgent, comme il sied*).— À d'autres ! *Je te vois venir* avec cette histoire-là ! Alors, ça c'est Paris, hein ?

ELLE (*extasiée*).— Tu l'as dit, chéri ! Nous partirons après-demain. Le temps de me concilier la famille... qui devient encombrante comme toujours à cette saison... de régler mon passeport...

A LITTLE TRIP TO PARIS

ACT I

21st April, 1927. The smoking-room of a jolly little nook in Mayfair. Time 10.30 p.m. A discreet luxury, with nothing superfluous about it. Big leather armchairs. A divan. Cushions. A nice fire provides sufficient illumination. A gramophone. A cigar. A cigarette.

SHE (*solemnly, having checked Galli-Curci in full career*).— My dear, the time has come to think of serious matters.

HE (*uneasily*).— Why, think of what? You aren't by chance...

SHE (*firmly*).— I haven't a rag to my back!

HE (*relieved*).— Ah-h!

SHE (*still firmly*).— I repeat. Here is May coming on us—and I haven't a rag to my back!

HE (*sceptical, but suitably indulgent*).— Tell that to the Marines! I can see through you and your tale! So, it's Paris, I suppose?

SHE (*delightedly*).— You've said it, darling! We'll start the day after to-morrow. Just time enough to make my peace with the family, which is becoming a nuisance as it always does at this time of year...and to fix up my passport...



Ses parents tiennent à le faire médecin.
—His parents want him to be a doctor.

[Autobiographical pen-and-ink by Eric Fraser,
first published in *Commercial Art* magazine, 1926]

PART IV
TWO WONDERFUL VERBS
DEUX VERBES MERVEILLEUX

FAIRE & PORTER

HERE WE REVERT to the task of trying to make you think like a Frenchman. The two simple verbs *FAIRE* and *PORTER*, with their innumerable applications, are veritable key-words. Have at them, then! But don't try to absorb it *all* at one sitting, or you may get mental indigestion. We offer you 210 specimens illustrating *FAIRE*, with 30-odd for *PORTER*... and probably some have still eluded us!



UN (UNE) TURFISTE, UN PARIEUR, UN BOOKMAKER.

— A RACEGOER, A PUNTER, A BOOKMAKER.

PART VII

AT THE RACES,
POLICE & FIRE BRIGADE
& MOTORING (OF 1927)

AUX COURSES,
POLICE & POMPIERS
& L'AUTOMOBILISME (DE 1927)

IF YOU'RE AT ALL CAREFUL, you won't get involved with the Police. If you're at all lucky you won't trouble the Fire Brigade. (But it's just as well to know something about them.) And, being Bright Young People, you will certainly handle a car, and go to the Races. Here you will find something about these matters.

AUX COURSES

—*Avez-vous* quelque chose?

—Je crois que *Charlot* a *toutes les chances* de gagner.

—J'ai *déniché* un joli *coup de deux* ; un vingt contre un *sur* un dix contre un.

—Tu as *fait* quelque chose?

—Oui, dans la troisième, pour les *trois ans*, cette jument de Victor. Il n'y a rien pour la battre.

—Tu aurais dû me dire que tu avais un *tuyau* !

—*J'y suis* pour mille francs *gagnant* et mille francs *placé*.

—On a fait un *essai sur* deux mille mètres. Elle est *en pleine forme*, splendide de condition, elle est imbattable.

—Le poulain de Rolland a *manqué le départ* !

—Tiens ! C'est un *faux départ* ! On a cassé les *rubans* !

—En effet, ta jument *emmène le peloton bon train* !

—Mais, c'est la *pouliche* de Bernard qui tient la corde ! C'est un walk-over pour elle !

(En un mot comme en cent, *Charlot* finit le dernier ; la jument de Victor s'assit dans l'herbe, la pouliche de Bernard resta *dans les choux*.)

AT THE RACES

—Do you know anything (have you anything good)?

—I think *Charlot* has every chance of winning.

—I've unearthed a nice double; a 20-to-1 and a 10-to-1.

—Have you backed anything?

—Yes, in the third (race), for 3-year-olds, that mare of Victor's. There's nothing to beat her.

—You might have told me you had a tip!

—I'm on for 1,000 francs to win and 1,000 francs for a place.

—They've had a trial over 2,000 metres. She is in top form, and splendid condition, she can't be beaten.

—Rolland's colt has been left at the post!

—Hold on! It's a false start! They've broken the tapes!

—Indeed, your mare is leading the field at a fine pace!

—But that filly of Bernard's has got on the rails! It's a walk-over for her!

(To cut a long story short, *Charlot* finished last; Victor's mare 'sat in the grass,' Bernard's filly was down the course (in the cabbage-

The London Gazette.

Published by Authority.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1907.

BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES.

Notice is hereby given, in pursuance of section 49 (3) of the Diseases of Animals Act, 1894, that the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries have made the following Orders:—

Date.	Subject.
1907.	
9th November	An imported dog belonging to Captain H. T. Russell.
18th November	Dipping of sheep on certain premises in the parish of Kilmuir, Inverness-shire.

Copies of these Orders may be obtained at 4, Whitehall Place, London, S.W.

PART IX

CORRESPONDENCE, TITLES & STYLES

LA CORRESPONDANCE, TITRES & QUALITÉS

YOU ARE CERTAIN to have to write letters and send telegrams. If your path lies in high places, you will want to address the Great Ones correctly. Here you will find something about these matters.

Il est à vous, ce chien ? Alors il est *bon pour* la fourrière.
—Is this dog yours? Then he'll have to go to the pound.



10. ISSUES OF GENDER AND PERSON.

The titles and styles of *Majesté*, *Altesse*, *Éminence*, *Excellence*, *Grâce*, etc., being *feminine in gender*, it follows that pronouns and adjectives used in connection with them must also be feminine, besides agreeing in number. Furthermore, contrary to the English construction, verbs in clauses relating to the title, etc., must be in the *third person*. Thus:

— Si Vos Excellences, *toutes* surprises qu'*elles* soient d'avoir entendu cette nouvelle, veulent bien s'informer de l'affaire, *elles* trouveront que...

— If Your Excellencies, surprised though *you* may be at having heard this news, are good enough to enquire into the matter, *you* will find that...

11. NAVAL AND MILITARY RANKS.

(Note that in French *rank* is not *rang*, but *grade*.) The principal combatant ranks are:

Amiral (<i>pl.</i> amiraux).	(Full) Admiral.
Vice-amiral (<i>pl.</i> vice-amiraux).	Vice-Admiral.
Contre-amiral (<i>pl.</i> contre-amiraux).	Rear-Admiral.
Capitaine de vaisseau.	(Senior) Captain.
Capitaine de frégate.	(Junior) Captain.
Lieutenant de vaisseau.	(Senior) Lieutenant.
Lieutenant de frégate.	(Junior) Lieutenant.
Enseigne.	Midshipman.
Maréchal de France.	Field-Marshal.
Général.	(Full) General.
Général de division.	Lieutenant-General.
Général de brigade.	Major-General.
Colonel.	(Full) Colonel.
Lieutenant-Colonel (<i>pl.</i> -s-s).	Lieutenant-Colonel.
Commandant (chef d'escadron, de batterie, de bataillon).	Major (Squadron, Battery, Battalion Commander).
Capitaine.	Captain.
Lieutenant.	Lieutenant.
Sous-lieutenant.	2 nd Lieutenant.

BRIGHTER FRENCH

‘The pill of tuition conveyed in the jam of entertainment,’ was how the author described this classic language book.

1927:

‘One’s only fear is that a complete absorption of its contents might result in the “Bright Young People (who already know some)” knowing a trifle too much!’ — *John o’London’s Weekly*

1980:

‘...that brilliant anonymous volume *Brighter French* reveal(s) very clearly the idiomatic raciness of the French language and the essential humanity of those that speak it.’
— Preface to *Teach Yourself French* (36th impression)

2010:

‘...regarded as one of the best French language learning guides ever written.’
— *Wiltshire Times*

2010:

‘Great fun’ — *Books Ireland*

A witty guide to sophisticated French (by a remarkable author who concealed his identity for decades) —

1. 'What did he die of?' — 'Nobody knows.
But then nobody knew what he lived on, either.'
1. « *De quoi est-il mort ?*
— On ne sait pas.
D'ailleurs on ne savait non plus de quoi il vivait. »



53. 'One moment, Monsieur ... I can't see you. I'm in my chemise.'
— 'Take your time, my dear, I'll wait till you take it off.'
53. « *Un instant, Monsieur... je ne peux pas vous recevoir. Je suis en chemise.*
— *Prenez tout votre temps, chère amie, j'attendrai que vous l'ayez retiré.* »

'... that brilliant anonymous volume *Brighter French* reveal(s) very clearly the idiomatic raciness of the French language and the essential humanity of those that speak it.'

— Preface to *Teach Yourself French*, 1980
(36th impression)

'Great fun' — *Books Ireland*, 2010

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