When he was an old man M. Henri Béraldi loved showing his books and prints to younger collectors. It gave him an opportunity to illustrate the principles by which he had built his celebrated collection, piece by piece. He had never accepted anything less, he would say, than “le plus beau, le plus rare, le plus pur.”

One can imagine him on such occasions, his clothes cut with the precise elegance of an earlier decade, his dry fingers lingering over each thing he touched, his shrewd eyes watching carefully for the moment to make the remark that was the key to everything in the portfolios, to everything in the bookcases, and, indeed, to everything in his life: “Le nombre est peu, le choix est tout.”

Could there have been an overtone of sadness in his voice as he said these words? For he must have realized that with him a tradition was coming to a final rest. M. Béraldi was one of the last of the great French print collectors and bibliophiles. His life had been that of an amateur of the arts in a peculiarly Parisian sense of the phrase. His horizon had been France; Paris was the center and the heart of it. His books and articles had been models of scholarship, illuminated with the wit and urbanity of a Parisian. Every sentence had been turned out carefully, stamped with the finesse of a man who had never doubted his place in the world and who never for a moment underestimated his own language.

He remains as fixed in his time and place as a fly imbedded in a piece of smooth amber. He was a French gentleman of the Edwardian period, his culture, his taste, and his fine collections all crystallized by the leisure, the security, and the formality of the era that began before the turn of the century and ended on the eve of the first World War.

Henri Béraldi lived on beyond this Edwardian period. But for him it never ceased to exist. In the last year of his life he must often have gazed out over Paris from the room lined with those books and portfolios to which he had devoted that long lifetime. It would be revealing to know what he thought at such moments. Did he then, in 1931, sense the force of the winds that had swept across the boulevards of his world? Or was he too close to Paris, too much immured in its vanished way of life to see it with any eyes but those he had always turned on it?

In any case we can be grateful that he had had, at the turn of the century, the idea of ordering a pictorial record of the life he knew. It was planned to parallel the celebrated Monument du costume that the banker Eberts commissioned in the eighteenth century and for which Moreau le jeune, in some of his most brilliant, delicate, and delicious plates, drew for all time a record of the life of the French aristocracy in the sensual, careless years just before the cataclysm of the French Revolution.

It was undoubtedly with Eberts in mind that M. Béraldi asked Pierre Vidal to paint his series of water colors entitled Le Monument du costume, 1900-1910: La Vie mondaine à Paris. It is also, in a sense, a monument to Béraldi himself. He had planned to publish it in an edition de luxe. The drawings were all completed in 1913. The following year the war broke out, and the project was placed in brown morocco slipcases and shelved. Each of the seventy pictures in its neat Empire mat is now a window through which we can still see the Paris M. Béraldi loved, a city which, when he finally died, was peopled by elegant ghosts who had never thought to question their privileges, their way of life.

M. Béraldi’s choice of Pierre Vidal is understandable. Vidal was his friend and contemporary, having been born the year before Béraldi. He too outlived his time, dying in 1929. Both moved in the same Parisian milieu in which society and art agreeably met. In addi-
tion to being painter, etcher, and lithographer, Vidal was a bibliophile. He did illustrations for Japan paper editions of his friends' novels. He also tried his hand at writing. *Paris qui crie, Paris qui consomme,* and *La Vie des boulevards* all appeared in the 1890's, each with a text no less lively and topical than the drawings it accompanied.

Like Beraldi, Vidal was also a part of the end of a tradition; his work aspired to sparkle and finesse rather than to greatness. It stems from Moreau le jeune by way of Constantin Guys and Tissot. There is no hint of the sweeping vitality of Manet and Renoir and Degas. So far as Vidal was concerned the Impressionists might never have existed. The only trace one sees in his work of his first-rate contemporaries is an occasional line or angle that might have been borrowed from the Toulouse-Lautrec posters that were plastered all over Paris in the 1890's. But Vidal never caught their indelible, acid bite. However, although Vidal's work lacks depth, he was a gifted illustrator, charmingly and faithfully mirroring the limited world he chose to see.

Perhaps one of the clues to his point of view is the fact that he came from Tours. He saw Paris with the sharp, loving, dazzled eyes of the provincial who had become more Parisian than the Parisians themselves.

His drawing of himself shows him primarily as a man of the world of fashion. His sketch table is uncluttered, his monocle is fixed firmly in the eye, his clothes are immaculate. The dust, the creative disorder of the studio form no part of the picture. This man's real home was the boulevards and the faubourgs. He used himself as the subject of one of the most delightful of the water colors in the Monument du costume, the one called *Monsieur va au cercle.* The art nouveau furnishings of the dressing room are as revealing as the dandyish pose. The walls are covered with sporting pictures appropriate to the chic anglomania of the time. An aproned manservant stands in severe and respectful readiness, holding a stick and top hat. The mirror can only reflect satisfaction with the portrait of a French gentleman preparing for an evening with his fellow members at—might it even be the Jockey Club?

Vidal's Paris is all of a piece with this picture. He has made the illustrations for a Remembrance of Things Past—had it been written, possibly, by Pierre Louys or Maurice Dekobra rather than Proust.

We see his fellow Parisians driving and strolling in the Bois or on the Champs Élysées at the correct hours. The ladies carry toy terriers. The tall gentlemen who greet them have collies at their sides. And as we watch, the carriages and the horses yield place to the motoring veils and the long-coated elegances of le nouveau sport. A maid shakes a new boa out of its tissue paper as Madame prepares for a round of calls in Neuilly or Passy. Friends meet among the tiny pleated pink lampshades for l'heure du thé at the Ritz; or else one takes *le five o'clock* at the Topsic Tea Rooms on the Boulevard Haussman. Anything English is à la mode, reflecting the popularity of the plump visitor with the beard who had been so much more at home in Paris than he now was in Buckingham Palace. There are the races at Longchamps, steeplechasing at Auteuil. There is roller skating at the American Skating Rink on the Rue St. Didier. At the Palais de Glace the orchestra plays Waldteufel and Chabrier from behind a screen of potted palms. We catch glimpses of the tango at Rumpelmayer's, of the crowds at Luna Park, of diamonds and aigrettes on the staircase of the Opera. At Bagatelle the women sit in the grandstand in great feathered
hats chatting—what can they possibly be chat-
ting of?—while le polo goes on in the bright
green field below. And we are given a moment-
tary intimate glimpse of home life—le vrai bon-
heur—when the children are taken into the
salon to visit their parents before being whisked
upstairs again for their supper.

It was all security and understood leisure, an
existence in which at certain hours of the day
at the accepted places one could be certain of
meeting all the world one knew. And it was an
assured world where each amusement had its
appointed background and costume. But then
there was time for the endless meals, time for
the prearranged motoring parties, the rounds
of formal visits, time and servants for those
wonderful grandes toilettes. It seemed a per-
manent pattern. Could these Parisians have
suspected that life might ever be otherwise?

Toward the end of his Monument du cos-
tume Vidal takes us to the Grand Magasin.
The great hats move slowly up and down the
wide staircase. It is 1911, and suddenly we are
aware of the electric lights. They blaze behind
those figures like bright yellow flares, strange
and terrifying portents of those other lights
which, after another three years, would blaze
all around Paris and change that life forever.

A special exhibition entitled Edwardian Paris
will be shown through April 15 in the newly
opened Print Department Gallery. In addition
to Pierre Vidal’s water-color drawings for “Le
Monument du costume” other material related
to the time, sculpture, paintings, photographs,
and glass, is also being shown.
LEFT: tangoing at Rumpelmayer’s in 1913 at the height of the craze for the Argentine dance. Social life and recreation had become much more public since the first years of the century. RIGHT: the formal visit, two fashionable Parisians arriving for an “at home” in the suburbs
LEFT: Monsieur's dressing room, a portrait of the artist preparing for an evening at his club. Everything in this scene reflects the anglo-mania that colored Parisian “high life.” RIGHT: Madame's Grande Toilette, the final touches before a gala performance at the Opera.
**LEFT:** the Rue de la Paix at the turn of the century, when shopping was a leisurely social ritual. **RIGHT:** the Grand Magasin a decade later, the timesaving department store stocked with ready-made clothes, evidence of change in a way of life that soon would disappear forever.