AT A FRENCH CHÂTEAU

MIRIAM IRENE KIMBALL

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APPROACH TO THE CHÂTEAU DE SOISY.

AT A
FRENCH CHÂTEAU

BY

MIRIAM IRENE KIMBALL

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DEDICATED

TO

THE CHÂTEAU PEOPLE, AND MY TRAVELING COMPANIONS
OF THE SUMMER OF 1913.

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AT A FRENCH CHÂTEAU

CHAPTER I

The Arrival

It was a beautiful afternoon on the twenty-eighth of July that Billie and I arrived at the Château de Soisy. We had come by train from Paris to the little station of Evry-Petit-Bourg, and had then take a bus (of the springless kind) for Soisy-sous-Etiolles, in a short time arriving at the great iron gate of the Château.

We had no sooner come to the full stop than we noticed the warning at the entrance, PRENEZ GARDE AUX CHIENS, which we, at first, thought looked not hospitable, the more so, inasmuch as it was emphasized by a succession of discordant vocal notes from the wide throat

of the Danish Laura. However, we soon found we had nothing to fear; for, immediately we had been put down, the gardener and gatekeeper, whose lodge is at the left just inside the porte, smilingly swung open the gate, causing a bell attached to it to ring. The sound brought the housekeeper, Madame R., on the run, out to meet us. Then Madame at once told us such a lot of nice things (her looks indicated that; I did not catch the words), in a perfect rivulet of such fluent, babbling, gushing, gurgling, rippling articulations as no other than the French tongue can produce,—at the same time conducting us across the courtyard towards the Château.

Just inside the main entrance stood our sweet and charming Madame Williamson-de-Visme, with her eldest son, a little lad of five years, to bid us welcome. *Le petit garçon,* with true French hospitality, smilingly held up his little hand to shake, saying, as he did so, *"Soyez la bienvenue."* By this time we had come to feel that it was not necessary to beware even of the dog, for, as soon as she had become convinced that we were friends and not foes, Laura had peace-

THE BROAD OPEN LAWN, BORDERED BY GRAND OLD TREES.

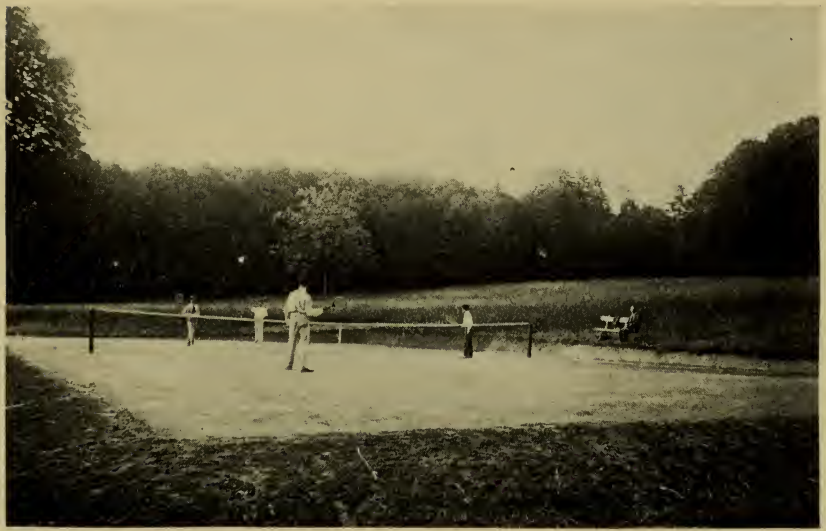
ably followed us from the gate to the steps, evidently having adopted us into the family and feeling bound thenceforth to protect us. Laura, although a most valuable watch dog, never makes the mistake of showing any hostility towards those who really belong at the Château.

We were immediately shown to our rooms, the way leading up two flights of winding stairs, through narrow halls with stone floors, a step upward, a few steps forward, then a step downward, a turn to the left, then to the right, etc. until we had literally wound our way to our *chambres à coucher.*

At first I scarcely noticed my room, or whether I had bed, mirror, or washbowl; for the open casement disclosed so charming a view, and the winds brought such sweet sound and breath from the neighborly trees, that for the moment my attention was engrossed. As soon as I had entered the door, I could see the broad open lawn, bordered by grand old trees, stretching away up a slight rise towards what I concluded must be some sort of playground, for in that direction it was quite evident some young men were enjoying a game.

(My guess, that it was tennis, afterward proved to be correct). At the left, peeping from beneath a clump of trees, showed an ancient fountain basin, now out of use. The few steps necessary to bring me to my window disclosed in the foreground near the inner façade of the Château two large beds of begonias, then at their best, which gave color to the scene. But better than the lawn, the trees, the flowers, and the breath of perfume, better than the rustling of leaves and the song of birds, was the sight of a bevy of lovely girls, an animated group, sitting in the shade of a fine old tree, gleefully and enthusiastically conversing in the French tongue, though perhaps in some cases with a rather American manner.

A second look around my room revealed the fact that I had everything needful for my comfort. I felt at home at once; and, after unpacking *mes effets* and arranging them in convenient order, I sought out Billie (he had not made quite so many turnings as I had), for I wanted him to explore with me the mysteries of this new delight. He was not so enthusiastic as I, scarcely hopeful, I thought.



THE TENNIS GROUND.

"Auntie," said he, "I don't believe I shall want to stay here more than a day or two. I think I shall go on to London, do the place in three or four days, and then see if I can't get an earlier sailing for America."

"Why?" I questioned.

"Well, I don't feel at home here," he replied, as though that he do so were the all important matter to be considered. "I don't like my room. It's awfully small, has no bath, no electric light—not even gas. Besides, I can't speak a word of French, and they won't let you talk anything else here. How am I ever going to make them know what I want? How am I going to get enough to eat? That's what I'd like to know."

"There, there!" I answered. "Don't worry. I'll help you at meals, and you'll know how to speak some French for yourself before many days. And think of it, Billie! We're in an old, old Château built in 1650, and"—

"What do I care about that?" he growled.

Paying no heed to the interruption, I went on. "It isn't a hotel. It isn't a boarding-house even. It's just a lovely old French home; and the less it is like anything that I

have ever seen, the better I shall like it. Electric lights! not for me! I hope we shall use the candles or those funny old oil lamps we have in our rooms. Why, I'm just wild with delight over it all, even before I've seen anything scarcely."

The only response I received was a deep-toned, "Curses!"

Nevertheless, Billie condescended to take a walk with me in the Château park, a small portion of which I had seen from my window. And such a walk as it was,—under the grandest of old trees, along beautiful shady ways, by winding by-paths bordered with box hedges, leading up to little secluded bowers, again to descend into the main path. Then there was everywhere the glossiest of ivy, climbing tree trunks and stone walls, mantling the ground; water, melodiously trickling through cement troughs to seek some pool; high stone walls, hard-looking stone benches, and mysterious-looking little stone houses, close to the formidable stone walls. What were all these tiny stone buildings, and to what would they lead? To each and every one I said mentally, "I'll see you again."

ALONG BEAUTIFUL SHADY WAYS.

We had just come to an open space looking out on the tennis ground when we met Monsieur Williamson-de-Visme, with cordiality written all over his face. After greeting us kindly, he explained some of the customs of the house. We were to have our *petit déjeuner* (little breakfast) about eight o'clock; our *déjeuner* (or real breakfast) at twelve; tea at four; and *dîner* (dinner) at seven. It was at that moment time for afternoon tea, and we went into the large *salle à manger* for our first meal at the Château. It consisted of jelly sandwiches and tea, the sandwiches set on the table in large baskets, one at each end of the table. This I found to be the customary afternoon tea.

Then I went on a long walk into the country with the housekeeper and some of the girls, to whom I had been introduced at tea. (Billie did not care to go; he could walk in the country most anywhere.) I think I was not over and above entertaining that afternoon; but as Madame R. never lacks for words, the conversation did not lag. However, I did the best I could with my limited vocabulary and laughed with the rest. In the

laugh French and Anglo Saxon meet on common ground, for the laugh is the same in all languages. Everybody understands that either you are pleased or else you wish people to think that you are pleased. Not so with language. I confess to having had considerable sympathy with Billie one day at dinner, when, throwing to the winds all restraint, he blurted out to the pretty *demoiselle* at his side, "I'll take your word for it, you probably know what you are talking about; but really I don't grasp you." On our return we met some of the young men just coming back from a swim in the Seine, Billie among them. He was, to all appearance, getting interested.

The 6:30 bell had just rung and we went in to dress for dinner. When the dinner bell sounded at 7:00, we went to the big salon, where we were introduced to those of the family whom we had not already met. Everybody was cordial. As soon as all had assembled, Madame W. arose and led the way to the *salle à manger*. Fourteen persons sat down at the long table, most of them young men and women of the prep school and college age, Monsieur and Madame W. occupying the

places at the center of the long sides. There were two serving maids. One passed the food first to Madame W. and then along to the right until she had served half way around the table. The other served Monsieur W. and then to his right until she came around to where Madame sat. The first course was soup; the second, most delicious creamed stringed beans; the third, some sort of roast; and the fourth, cake and jam, the cake cut in narrow strips and piled up on the plates in the manner of a cob house. Everything except the soup was served twice, the maids always carrying the dishes back to the kitchen to be kept hot for the second serving and returning only on the stroke of the hostess's bell.

All who could took a lively part in the conversation. I observed then, as I observed afterward, that the chief business of the meal seemed to be of a social nature, the eating secondary. No one expressed any pleasure or any displeasure in what was passed him. Indeed, I might have felt that the eating meant nothing to them were it not for the fact that most of them helped themselves twice of each course offered, and rather bounteously, if

mechanically, never, however, letting helping or eating interfere with the flow of conversation.

There were two decanters of wine on the table, and six or eight water bottles distributed at equal intervals. For the latter of these I was truly thankful, as it is not always easy to get water to drink while traveling in Europe; and one is conspicuous rather for not drinking wine than for drinking it. But whether you drank it or not was apparently not observed at the Château. Indeed, Madame W. told me afterward that neither Monsieur W. nor herself care for wine, and that much less wine is drunk in France in families of the better class than formerly.

I went to my room early that night with the thought that we had been sufficiently welcomed. More than that we had passed the initiation and now belonged. Billie was to study French conversation and I to experience real French home life of the better sort, and more or less intimately study country life and customs away from "gay Paris."

I felt positive that we had come to the right place and that both Billie and I should there

THE KIOSQUE.

find content and happiness. There was harmony in the atmosphere, a harmony that could be plainly felt. "It is the atmosphere of love, if I mistake not," thought I; "and what is that but the atmosphere of God, for 'God is Love.'" This, my first impression, was not a false one, for time brought the proof of its truth.

CHAPTER II

In the Home

The *petit déjeuner* at the Château consists of bread and butter, *confiture* (jam), and chocolate or coffee,—though I believe the coffee used in Europe is commonly a kind of chicory roasted, but often, especially in France, very palatable. The Scotch lad in our midst, I am sure, sighed for his porridge. As for myself, a glass of ice-water, a cup of real coffee with cream, and a doughnut or two would have suited all right; but then,—one does not expect an American breakfast in France, and, in truth, one would not wish it. It is better to take "the little breakfast" for what it is, just an earnest of that to come. Amends will be made at the déjeuner.

I made the tour of the park with Madame W., just after breakfast, my first morning at

THE GARDEN GATE.

the Château. We took the turn to the left, which leads past the aviary, now the home of two lone pheasants; the *lavoir,* where the family washings are done; and the *kiosque,* a picturesque little round summer house with thatched roof,—diverging a bit now and then to follow a winding path or to rest for a little on one of the old stone seats. Passing the tennis grounds and *la balançoire du cèdre* (cedar swing), with its fair occupant, we came around to the garden gate, almost having made the circuit back to the Château. The faithful Laura was there, either to guard the gate or to wait for the coming of Ernest, the gardener, of whom she is a constant companion.

We stepped inside the garden, a large and flourishing one, teeming with all sorts of fruits and vegetables. The main walk, which passes through the center of the garden its entire length, is cut by two ancient fountain basins, and bordered on both sides by apple trees, then laden with half-grown fruit. None of these trees were more than a foot and a half high, for, instead of being allowed to shoot up into the air, they had been trained to run

along trellises, thus forming a sort of hedge as a border to the path. "Trees of this kind bear much more fruit," said Madame W., "when thus trained."

"Certainly there is no difficulty in gathering it," I answered; "ladders are unnecessary and fruit is not injured by being shaken from the tree."

After the garden, we called at the drying house and then for some time we watched the nine fat ducks as they waddled or swam about, with their incessant *quoi? quoi?* good French as far as it goes, though comprising a vocabulary rather limited in scope.

As we emerged into the court at the front of the Château, we met Billie. "I wish, *ma chère Tante,*" said he, "that you would telegraph to London for my trunk, and have it hurried right along. I think I'll stay awhile, and I want my tennis shoes and racquet." Billie was beginning to feel at home. He was also beginning to speak French.

"Very well, Billie," I responded, "we may as well go around to Monsieur W.'s office at once and attend to it," this with considerable alacrity on my part, for I was relieved to

A BIT OF THE GARDEN.

know that I shouldn't have to waste any more of my hitherto non-persuasive powers on Billie, to get him to see things as I saw them.

It was at that time a half hour before *déjeuner,* and a maid emerged from the dining-room and rang a bell suspended on the house just outside the door.

"Quite an idea, having that on the outside of the house; you can hear it all over the park," remarked Billie, evidently no longer sighing for modern hotel conveniences.

"Yes, isn't it?" I answered, "but that means that we must get ready for *déjeuner.*"

"It sure does; and a welcome sound it is. I'm as hungry as a bear, Auntie, in spite of the fact that I have been eating crackers and cheese nearly all the forenoon. But say, Auntie! You can get dandy little cream cheeses just across from the gate, in that funny little store where they sell everything most."

Twenty minutes later we were both in the salon waiting the second ringing of the bell, and Madame W.'s summons to the *salle à manger* as at dinner the night before. (These formalities are dispensed with at the *petit déjeuner* and afternoon tea, when the Château

people may straggle in at any time during the hour.)

The *déjeuner* we found to be almost as hearty a meal as the *dîner*. Soup is not served, but almost always hot meats, a vegetable, and either fruit or pudding as a dessert. Cold meat is quite as apt to be served at *dîner* as at *déjeuner*.

When the Monsieur and Madame were not too much occupied with their various duties, they frequently chatted with me; at which times I gleaned many interesting facts about French home life, as well as concerning the history of the Château. I learn that French women make good wives. Certainly if Madame is a fair type of the French woman, this is undoubtedly so. In the managing of her home she is ideal. Everything is well ordered, but simply. There seems to be plenty of time for everything. To be sure, the servants, as a rule, are kept busy but apparently never hurried. The strenuous life is unknown at the Château; but rather is the rule laid down by the young husband here observed. "Lora," said he, "we'll do the housework, but we won't let the housework do us."

THE MAIN WALK OF THE GARDEN.

"But why should French girls make exceptionally good wives?" I inquired of Madame.

"Because," she answered, "they are early taught that they are to be homemakers, and are reared with that idea constantly in mind. They are taught also that woman should wait upon man, and in every way be regardful of his needs and desires."

"To an American mind it would seem that such a training has both its advantages and its disadvantages," I remarked.

"Yes," was the response, "it has, though I believe the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. I know all about both from my own experience. As a young girl, I was never allowed to forget that it was my duty to make myself useful to my brothers as well as to my father. That was the old conservative idea," she went on, "though in these later days it is being somewhat modified among the better class; and there, at least, woman's position is less onerous than formerly."

"And yet, I have heard that the French woman rules the home; is it not so?" I questioned.

"To a considerable extent, yes," she replied. "She is held there in the greatest respect; but the good housewife does not consider any service she may pay her lord as burdensome, rather it is her pleasure. In fact," she continued, "the family ties are very strong among the French; and all the members of the family are very loyal to each other. Children have great respect for their elders. *Grandpère* and *Grandmère* are objects of the greatest reverence."

"French children," says Monsieur W. "are not spoiled. They are expected to be obedient, and as a rule to entertain themselves."

It is quite noticeable that French children are not loaded down with toys, as are so many American children. Spending money just for the sake of spending money and having something to do is unknown in their little world.

"Too many ready-made toys are not good for the little ones," Monsieur W. remarked one day. "Having to find their own material, makes them self-reliant and stimulates originality and invention."

His two little sons, René and Eric, are good illustrations of the successful working out of

A DELIGHTFUL FAMILY CIRCLE.

his method. Having been fed at their little table (they never eat with the older people), they will play contentedly about the place for hours at a time, with perhaps a box cover, a few stones and a stick, making all sorts of combinations to express different ideas, and apparently enjoying to the utmost their little conceits. I was called one day by René to help him drive his beetle horse into a paste-board-box-cover barn, at a time when the horse was proving too spirited for his little master to manage. Might not American parents here gain a useful hint?

As soon as you enter the Château gate, you may feel yourself a member of this delightful family circle. In a word, you have entered a School Home, with all that phrase implies, and are entitled to the freedom and privileges of home. A School Home, it is indeed, over which Monsieur W. and his good *femme,* of the much respected family *de Visme,* preside. It is the home atmosphere that makes it a home, and the fact that you are being taught the French language and the French life every minute of your stay that makes it a School Home.

There are no definite study rooms, no definite recitation rooms. You may seek out your own little spot to do your conning, be it the lazily-swinging hammock, a strong limb of the old cedar, the mud hut in close covert under the garden wall, or a shady spot in the park where you may lie, stretched at full length on your steamer rug, as secure from all intrusion as high stone walls can make you, and where only "day's garish eye" can penetrate. The life at the Château is in a large sense an outdoor life. Almost any time of a summer forenoon, one may see about the park a student and a teacher here, a student and a teacher there, enjoying, yes, enjoying a lesson, wherever fancy may prompt. Madame W. is, perhaps, teaching Billie the French vowels; and Mademoiselle J., the Scotch lad the conjugations. The frequent peals of laughter evidence the fact that both teacher and student are having a good time. Why not?

I commented to Monsieur W. on the general delectable atmosphere and asked, "What are your ideals for the home that are so happy

OUTDOOR LIFE.

in their results? There is, apparently, no urging, no driving, no drudgery."

Monsieur smiled as he answered, "With us duty is pleasure."

"It seems to be so with students as well as with instructors," I remarked.

"Yes," he added; "and why should it be irksome to anyone? God's work is already done, and it is a perfect work. All we have to do is to unfold and make manifest this perfect idea in ourselves and in others, happily, lovingly, freely, God working with us to that end."

"He is exemplifying the Scripture, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden light,'" I thought, as he left me. "Truly, God has created man in His own image and likeness; the work is done. But no one of us is manifesting that likeness in its perfection; yet, to that extent that we have that mind in us that was also in Christ Jesus can we unfold in our consciousness the ideal."

I could have no reasonable doubt about that. And Monsieur was not only working out his own problem according to this rule, but was giving the helping hand to all his household.

I had often noticed that Monsieur never seemed to question the desire nor the ability of his pupils to learn; and I have no doubt that his faith in them inspired a faith in themselves.

And yet this man who loves his Bible and makes it the guide of his life, has no objection to checkers, chess, or tennis on Sundays,—games that are not wrong in themselves and therefore may be allowed. Such doctrine would have scandalized our Puritan fathers. I doubt, however, if anyone at the Château would have the face to practice any unkindness, indulge in petty gossip, or use coarse or profane language. Apparently, though, there is perfect freedom of action. Boys and girls mingle freely, indulging ofttimes in playful pranks, but with perfect propriety. It seems that life is sweet and wholesome at the Château perforce.

Many visitors come to the Château. The most frequent ones during my stay were two lads, Pierre and Robert L., perfect types of the well-bred French boys, manly and courteous. The L. family, although residing in Paris, regularly spend a portion of the sum-

PLAYFUL PRANKS.

mer in Soisy-sous-Etiolles, the father fishing in the Seine the greater part of the time for the pure love of the sport, and the others of the family enjoying the country life after the manner of summer pleasure seekers in walking on country roads, calling, etc. The lads certainly contribute no small part to the instruction of the young people. They manifestly find great delight in taking such fellows as Billie and the Chicago lad in tow and guiding them through the mazes of the tongue in which they themselves are so glib. They play and frolic freely with the boys, and whether at tennis or in a rough-and-tumble wrestling match the French tongue is always voluble, and constant repetition of the same sound soon leaves its impress.

Often the sister drops in, a sweet and charming demoiselle, very entertaining even if one doesn't comprehend all she says. She is remarkably pretty, with merry laughing eyes, and talks with her hands in such an animated manner that you quite understand her—at least you don't misunderstand her—even if you can't catch what her tongue is saying. Anyway you catch the spirit, and after all

that is more important than mere words; and you feel that she and you are good friends, as you walk about the park with her arm in arm, laughing and chatting.

One afternoon *Maman* and *Grandpère* came with the young people. Then *tout le monde* had tea in the park just back of the Château; and a right merry time it was,—*Grandpère Maman, Demoiselle,* and our boys talking all at once, or, in such quick response to each other, that it seemed that way. Added the fluency of Madame R. and the rest, the air was literally filled with words in the most rollicking effusion. The tea over, Demoiselle sang for a bit to us in the salon, and then they departed, Pierre, at the gate, gracefully kissing the hand of Monsieur, of whom he is very fond.

Pierre and Robert are not the only voluntary assistants to the teaching force; for, in fact, each one of the household contributes his or her part. The housekeeper is most kind and painstaking in helping you along. To her, to teach French is to know no English, and she utterly refuses to understand anything but her native tongue. Aileen, the maid, who came

TOUT LE MONDE HAD TEA IN THE PARK.

daily to tidy my room, never made any response to my "Come," but would stand rapping till I called out "*Entrez,*" no matter how long I kept her waiting. Even René and Eric do not hesitate to add their part by making corrections when one does not use the right word. The first sound of the morning, the *quoi? quoi?* (what? what?), under my window, reminded me that I must begin the day with French—French—and nothing but French. The glow worm, that lived in an oleander urn upon one of the posts of the *perron* (piazza), sent out its little light every evening; and when Mademoiselle J. was pleased to wear it in her bosom, it still shone on, apparently always willing, whether at home or abroad, to add its tiny part toward enlightening the world.

Only secondary to the teaching propensity is the social. Scotland, England, France, Switzerland, and America are jolly good friends together. Charming Juliette, an American girl, smiles on all, not forgetting her little Roméo, who holds up a flower from underneath her balcony. Hens, chickens, rabbits, and a turtle live happily together; and

when, one day, I enter the hen yard to take a picture, a kind *poulette* picks from my skirt the little clinging seeds known as beggars' lice, clucking socially as she does so. In truth, sociability is in the atmosphere; it is contagious. Before a week had passed, Billie had so far caught the spirit that almost anytime during the day he could be seen gargoyling from his third-story window to bid "*Bon jour, Monsieur!*" or "*Bon jour, Madame!*" or "*Bon jour, Mademoiselle!*" or "*Bon jour, tout le monde!*" with quite a *chez-moi* air.

The evening is, however, the time of greatest sociability. As soon as dinner is over, all go out on the long *perron* for a half hour of sheer nonsense. There Billie was in his element; and nobody disputed his right to be. Indeed, he was encouraged rather than otherwise. He always seemed to be able to strike a responsive chord in Madame R.; and when one day, bowing very low, he accosted her with a "*Voulez vous danser avec moi?*" he found her ready. Back and forth on the long *perron* she gaily and spiritedly danced with him; and, taking up as much of the refrain to his accompani-

SCOTLAND, ENGLAND, FRANCE, SWITZERLAND,
AND AMERICA.

ment as she could manage, as gaily and spiritedly sang with him, "It's a bear, it's a bear, it's a bear. There!" much to our amusement, until Billie had worked off a little of his seventeen-year-old energy and was ready to stop. After the visit on the *perron,* there is usually a promenade, the favorite one at this time down to the Seine, that being only a short walk.

On the return, all, perhaps, sit for a time on the stone steps at the entrance to wait for the *facteur* (mail-carrier) and then go to the salon to read letters, where, if the evening is chill, a cheerful fire is kindled in the wide hospitable grate. Checkers, chess, and backgammon furnish entertainment for those who enjoy the games, until Monsieur W. is ready to conclude the evening with a short musical program, in which both guests and host take part. The songs are commonly in the French or Italian tongue. For that reason, when one night Monsieur W., who has a rare voice and delivery, sang so feelingly some of the choicest of our American songs, it seemed as if a breath from the homeland had been wafted across

the sea; and how sweet a breath it was! I could readily see that I was not even in the smallest degree being weaned from my native tongue. In fact, the more I heard the French, the more I loved my English, strange as it may seem.

When it is bed time at the Château, there is a general hand-shaking and kind wishes of "*bon soir.*" Then you grope your way through the long, narrow, dark halls to your *chambres à coucher,*—yes, grope, for the halls are not lighted, and your lamps are in your rooms to be lighted by you when you enter.

I shall never forget the night I lost my way when going to bed. I had gone up ahead of the others, and was absent-mindedly feeling my way along, when all at once it occurred to me that I had no idea where I was. I had taken steps upward and steps downward, turnings to right, and turnings to left, I thought; but, of the steps and turnings I had lost my count. As I was the only one on the third floor, there was not a gleam of light from underneath anyone's door and practically no light through the hall casements, as it was such a night as

CHARMING JULIETTE AND HER ROMÉO.

" when the dragon womb
Of stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom
And makes one blot of all the air."

Had I gone past Billie's door? I rather thought so but was not certain. Finally I discovered that I was face to face with some steep stairs leading upward. I had a dim recollection of such a flight of steps, that I had walked past many times in going to and from my room. Somehow they had never made any impression on me before. These, I thought, were just one turn from my room, so I went on until I found myself up against a bare blank wall. That was puzzling. I was just deliberating whether my wiser course were to turn around and go back or to proceed on my uncertain way, when I heard Mademoiselle J. coming up the stairs. Although she spoke no English, and I couldn't for the moment find the French for *light* or *match,* she understood my *lampe* and came to my rescue. I was only one turn from my own door.

Notwithstanding this occurrence, I slept soundly and peacefully; and when morning

had come and I had again shaken hands with *tout le monde* at *café au lait,* I felt that another day was properly begun—a day of uninterrupted harmony in which love would be the dominant note.

THE LONG PERRON.

CHAPTER III

The Château's History

Just inside the hall entrance to the Château hangs a wooden tablet, on which is written in white paint the following:—

Rene Mesmet	1729
.....	
Bien National	1789
Delore	1793
Taignay	1811
Wolf	1821
Kemnis	1829
Creux	1844
Haime	1861
Bruslon	1879
Eric Besnard	1898

Such are the names of some of the owners of the Château, the last, Eric Besnard, being

that of the present one. It is a curious coincidence that the two little sons of Monsieur W., René and Eric, bear the Christian names of the first and last persons recorded on the tablet. The names of proprietors from 1650 to 1729, when René Mesmet came into possession, and from his time to 1789, I had no available means of ascertaining. But this we know, that in 1789 the then owner, whoever he may have been, fled the fury of the Revolution; and the property was confiscated by the French government. The *Bien National* held possession for four years, when the property was sold to Monsieur Delore.

The fugitive, it is said, left a buried treasure. Whether this is in the great dining-room chimney, as clairvoyants have stated, or elsewhere, seems to be the great query. One thing is certain, there are so many places it might be, that it would be like hunting for error in absolute truth to try to recover it and probably about as hopeless a task, and might involve the razing of the entire fine old Château with still no treasure in sight. One thing nobody seems to doubt, and that is that there is such treasure somewhere. At one time, when it was

RENÉ AND ERIC.

necessary to upholster anew some of the big salon chairs, several pieces of silver were found hidden in the luxurious depth of their padding.

Madame W. took me walking one afternoon through a long narrow lane just outside the park wall, the lane opening up into a bushy field immediately back of the Château grounds. It is here that a former proprietor, believing he had located the exact spot, once dug for the hidden treasure. (This field was once a part of the Château park, sold by the owner in a time of financial distress.) The anxious searcher found no gold, and a flat stone now covers the grave of his buried hopes. Nearby, however, is an interesting little stone house, doorless now, so that through the opening we could see a descending stone stairway. I explored, however, no farther than one step downward, finding the way blocked up by earth, stones and water. This little building is thought to have been a means of exit from one of the three underground passages known to have existed in the dark days preceding the Revolution. The exits from the others are supposed to have been several miles out, this

probably having been the nearest one. The Château entrances to these underground passages are now closed, and the secret of their location is unknown; but mysterious-looking places in the cellar wall are now believed to have been the means of departure for the poor fellows who long ago found home stripped of its protection and the very unsafest place for them to stay. How much they deserved it, it is hard to tell. These, I say, are supposed to have been the entrances; but as for that matter, secret doors almost anywhere in the double walls of the Château might easily have admitted an average-sized man and been his means of ingress to the subterranean passages below. These walls, both the outside and those between rooms, have oftentimes a thickness quite sufficient for this purpose, and are often utilized for deep closets and cupboards, the doors fitting into the walls and often papered like the room so that, when closed, their presence is scarcely perceptible.

The oldest portion of the Château de Soisy was commenced in 1650. At least twice since then important additions have been made to the Château, to say nothing of the small of-

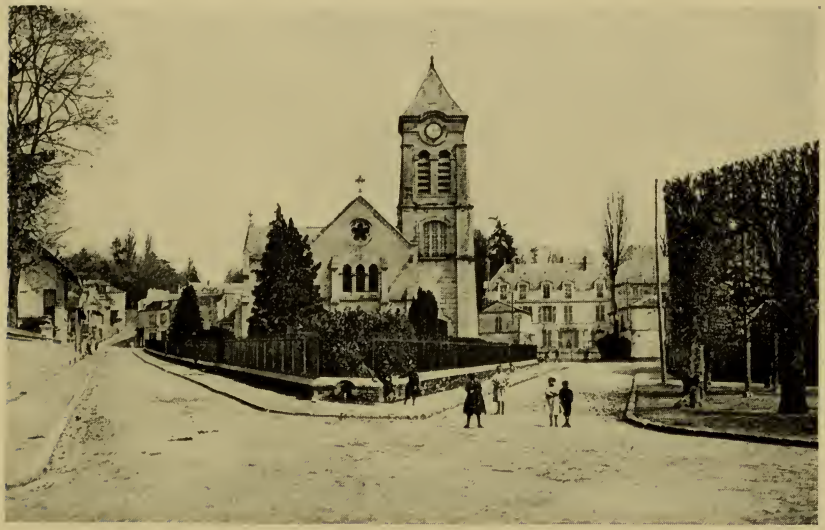
INNER FAÇADE OF THE CHÂTEAU.

fices, that have sprung up like mushrooms close to the vine-laden walls, to meet the needs, or fancied needs, of different generations. The building, as it now stands, has the appearance of two houses of very different architecture grown together, both gray with age, the whole a picturesque old pile, in fact " a goodly dwelling and a rich." It is three stories high, and constructed of stone smoothly plastered over. The oldest part includes the kitchen, the long dining-room, the main hallway and two salons (but not the large one) on the ground floor, and many chambers above. One notable feature is the very great number of outside doors. Practically every room on the ground floor has one; and the dining-room, which extends the entire width of the building, has two, one on each side. Curiosity prompted me to walk around the building and count them, with the result that I discovered sixteen. These are nearly all double doors, the outer ones heavy wooden shutters. Double doors also are in many instances between rooms, the intervening space being often wide enough so that one may stand therein in perfect comfort with both doors closed.

The present-day billiard room was once used as a chapel, where marriages and baptisms were solemnized, the audience sitting in the big salon, which opens out of it. This was at a time when, because of religious persecution, it was unsafe to perform such ceremonies in the church.

Around this fascinating old pile there are twelve acres of park, including the garden, the whole surrounded by a high stone wall, the only opening being the great iron gateway at the front.

Such is the fine old estate, now owned by Monsieur Eric Besnard, a Parisian lawyer, and leased by Monsieur Williamson-de-Visme for his School Home. For a few years past the place has been allowed sadly to run down, either from lack of funds or lack of interest; and, except for a few weeks in summer, no one lived at the Château save the care-taker and his family and the indispensable Laura, until the coming of the good people whose chief business in life is to be good and to do good, and whose greatest remuneration is in being happy and in giving happiness. Now, literally waste places are beginning to bloom;



NOTRE DAME DE SOISY-SOUS-ETIOLLES.

and every day bestows its gift of general improvement. Ernest, the care-taker, is gratified to see the return of its one-time thriving aspect, and for that end cheerfully works from early morning until it is time to make fast the gate for the night.

Just outside the Château gate is the Church of Notre Dame de Soisy-sous-Etiolles. A tablet at the entrance gives the information that *la Chapelle de la Ste Vierge* was constructed in 1653. It is interesting to note that this was but three years after the Château building was commenced. I entered the church one day, an interesting place on the whole, to seek for the chapel, as that portion of the church is supposed to have belonged with the Château estate in the early days. I had no difficulty in finding the part which enshrines the image of the Virgin Mary; and when I discovered its style of architecture and composition, though very different from that of the rest of the edifice, to be identical with that of the Château, even to the hexagonally-shaped red stones comprising the floor, I did not doubt the truth of the claim.

CHAPTER IV

At the Lavoir

To me by no means one of the least interesting places in the Château park was the *lavoir* (wash-house) ; and by no means one of the least interesting of the people who were often seen there was the *blanchisseuse* (washer-woman.) Hence, I was a frequent visitor at the *lavoir* on washing days.

The *lavoir* is a novel, old, one-room stone house, completely open on one side and without doors and windows. Its most notable feature, partly under cover of the house and partly in the open, is a huge square tank, about three feet deep, with cement sides and bottom, in effect, a great sunken wash-tub, in which the family washings are done. Entirely around the top of this is a cement shelving about a foot wide, sloping inward. It is upon these sloping sides that the clothes are soaped,

THE LAVOIR.

squeezed, slapped, and brushed until they come out white and clean. Through a large iron pipe a stream of water is continually flowing into this tank, the outlet being a cement trough leading to a channel, which winds across the park to the duck pond. This constant changing of the water keeps the pool comparatively clear; and here the washing, sudsing, and rinsing is done, all at the same time. Back of the tank is a flat stove, on which a great boiler rests; and in this the clothes are boiled.

So much for the place. As for the humble woman that graced it, she was not much to look at, with her baggy blouse, generous apron, clumsy wooden shoes, and stringy black hair, to no great extent confined by her small comb and single hairpin; but she always gave me a welcome whenever I was pleased to make her a call and so, I felt, amply made up for an uninteresting exterior in sociability.

For equipment our *blanchisseuse* has a paddle, a scrub brush, and a big bar of soap four or five inches through. Then she kneels in what looks like a wooden box with top and one end removed, the sides sloping as in the

body of a Roman chariot, the whole much resembling one. The bottom of this is padded with hay to make a cushion for the knees. Once in her box, she leans over and puts the soiled garment into the water; the cleansing process is begun. Then she lays the garment on the sloping side of the tank, soaps it thoroughly, rolls it up, and gives it a few slaps with her paddle to cause the soap to penetrate to all parts, squeezes it, then unrolls it, lays it out flat, and, after dipping her brush into the water, brushes it on both sides, gives it a parting dip in the water, and then lays it aside for a time to repeat the process on the other garments. I watched her for a long time one day while she was washing the towels; and it is surprising how the dirt disappeared under this process. It seemed to me that the clothes would need no boiling after that, but she seemed to think otherwise.

Afterward I did not hesitate to give her my blouses and skirts to launder, though she took them home with her and, perhaps, soaped, and slapped and brushed them on a big flat stone on the banks of the Seine, sousing them up and down in the limpid waters of that

ON THE BANKS OF THE SEINE.

river, which serves as a common wash-tub to the peasant women who live along its borders. At all events they came back looking white and clean; and I might truthfully say, as the husband said to his wife, who proudly brought to his notice some exquisitely hemmed napkins of her own handiwork, "They wouldn't have been done better if I had done them myself."

La blanchisseuse and I had frequent visits. Somehow I was able to understand her better than I could some of the good people at the Chateau, perhaps because the vocabulary at her command was not large and more nearly fitted my own, which contained only the commonest of words. One day, when she was particularly communicative, I asked her what she was kneeling in.

"*Une boîte a laver*" (a washing-box), she answered. Interpreted, this is the conversation that followed:

"Your method of washing is very interesting," I said.

"Oh, yes," she responded; "you do not wash this way in America?"

"No."

"You wash at a tub?"

"Yes."

"And standing up!" a look of real commiseration on her face.

"Yes."

"It must be very difficult," she sighed, with a shake of the head.

"And do you wash out here during the winter?" I questioned.

"Certainly."

"But isn't it too cold?"

"Oh, no, it is quite comfortable."

It was evident that she was not envying us our set tubs and running hot and cold water; she was quite satisfied with her way of washing. Truly I doubt if my lady of the palace is more at ease in her boudoir than is my lady of the *lavoir,* when she kneels in her Roman chariot to run down the grime and dirt of the Château's washing with the prancing steeds, Soap, Brush, and Paddle. Begging the Bishop's pardon for the change in gender,—

"*Her* hair, French-like, stares on *her* frighted head,
One lock, Amazon-like, dishevelled."

The last time I visited her, I asked her if

I might take her *photographie.* She smiled and immediately posed, her paddle raised as though she were about to use it. I was sorry to have the picture a failure, but such it was.

Ma blanchisseuse is not the only one who uses the pool. I was surprised to learn that both girls and boys at the Château are accustomed to take a plunge now and then when the water is clear, Mademoiselle J. often taking one in the early morning before the *petit déjeuner.* I did not try it; but Billie said that the water was not cold. I did, however, try the *boîte a laver* and found it not uncomfortable. Billie said he thought I would make quite a respectable-looking washer-woman, and took a snap-shot of me, as I knelt, that I might, as he said, see myself as others saw me. I intended to try my hand at washing there; but when I was ready, I found that Ernest had drawn off the water in order to clean the tank and at the same time flood the duck pond. Thus my purpose was thwarted, and I suppose I shall have to remain *the lady of the wash-tub* and not *of the lavoir* all my mortal days. Well, it is not wise to be too ambitious.

CHAPTER V

Ernest and His Family

Speaking of Ernest, reminds me of Monsieur W's. remarks concerning him. "Ernest," said he, "is a servant of the old régime, loyal and faithful. One of the evil results of the Revolution," he added, "was to make the servant element faithless and insolent. Many of the domestics now think themselves not only as good as their employers but vastly superior, with the result that they study to see how little work they can do and just when and where they may defraud their masters." (My experience in a Paris hotel shortly before had prepared me to credit this statement.)

But this is surely not the case with Ernest, for a more cheerful, courteous, valuable, and dependable man about the place could hardly be imagined. He works incessantly. One

ABOUT HIS ACCUSTOMED DUTIES.

may see him almost any time during the day in his long apron, " the sign of his profession," about his accustomed duties. In the early morning he is feeding the ducks, beating rugs, picking up dry twigs and piling them up for future use in kindling fires (for nothing is wasted here), or sweeping the paths or court-yard with his besom broom, that everything may have a tidy appearance.

I often felt inclined to visit the garden after the *petit déjeuner,* when everything looked its freshest and best. I liked to saunter leisurely down the main path between the apple-tree hedges, past the one-time fountains, over to the decrepit old well-house, and thence, perhaps, to wander aimlessly around in the narrow footpaths till I came to the old green-house, close to the gate, with the rose bushes on one side and the tangles of vegetables and flowers on the other,—everywhere enjoying the fragance that pervaded the atmosphere, and delighting in the evidences all around, that the old garden, with all else, has taken a new lease of life and is likely to bloom and to bear fruitage for ages to come.

Usually I would find Ernest there, bend-

ing his back over vegetable or flower beds, but always ready with his "*Bon jour, mademoiselle,*" with perhaps a bit more by way of greeting or information, which I did not always understand. Cheerily this faithful man keeps at his work from early morning till the Château people are all in for the night, and it is time to make fast the shutters and doors and lock the big iron gateway. This done, Ernest right there in his lodge, and Laura in her kennel close by, one feels that, "Our castle's strength might laugh a siege to scorn," at least any that might threaten the Château. people of to-day.

Dwelling with him in his lodge, is his smiling, good-natured wife, head cook at the Château, and two little sons, the latter almost invariably in high-necked, long-sleeved black aprons, the common garb for boys of school age, whether in school or at play. The little lads are evidently being reared as befitting boys of their station, for one frequently sees them raking up the park, picking up potatoes, carrying baskets of vegetables to the kitchen, or sitting on a bench just outside the kitchen door, breaking up string beans, or in some

TAKEN INTO THE QUEER-LOOKING BOX.

other way helping their busy mother in preparing the delectable foods for the table.

They are always polite, never failing to doff their wide-brimmed straw hats and make very low bows when they meet one. They are very fond of having their *photographies* taken, and expectantly strike an attitude whenever they see one near with an open kodak, keeping perfectly quiet until they learn whether or not one has designs upon them. René and Eric, too, are willing to be taken into the queer little box; but immediately thereafter they want to look into your kodak to see what you have there. The latter wish to investigate, to understand; the former take the act on trust, and no further trouble their little heads about it.

I could not help contrasting the lot of this humble man of all work with that of the scores of servants of the palmy days of yore. And, yet I much doubt if the one-time porter in all his livery was as happy as the man of to-day who, with his be-aproned family, makes his home in the tiny stone lodge by the gateway.

CHAPTER VI

Favorite Walks

Everybody at the Château walks—or rather *promenades;* and there are many interesting ways that one may take. Of course there is always the tour of the park; but the Château people do not by any means confine themselves to that. In shade hats and with cane in hand, they love to take long tramps on country roads, often not for the purpose of reaching any place in particular, but for the mere pleasure of walking.

The favorite short walk is down to the River Seine, to reach which one passes the old church and then takes almost a bee line through a most magnificent avenue of interlocking trees, the giant size of many of them testifying to a growth of centuries. The first glance into this ever lessening vista is a surprise and joy. With reverence you enter the

TO THE RIVER SEINE.

shadowy depths of this great natural cathedral, and softly tread its nave and choir toward the heaven lighted chancel at the farther end. No vehicles except baby carriages are permitted in this avenue: and almost any time during a pleasant day you may see little family groups about the stone benches which line the way, enjoying the cool shade of the trees, Maman often knitting or employing her hands in some similar way while she entertains baby in his chariot near by, or watches the older children as they play about her knees.

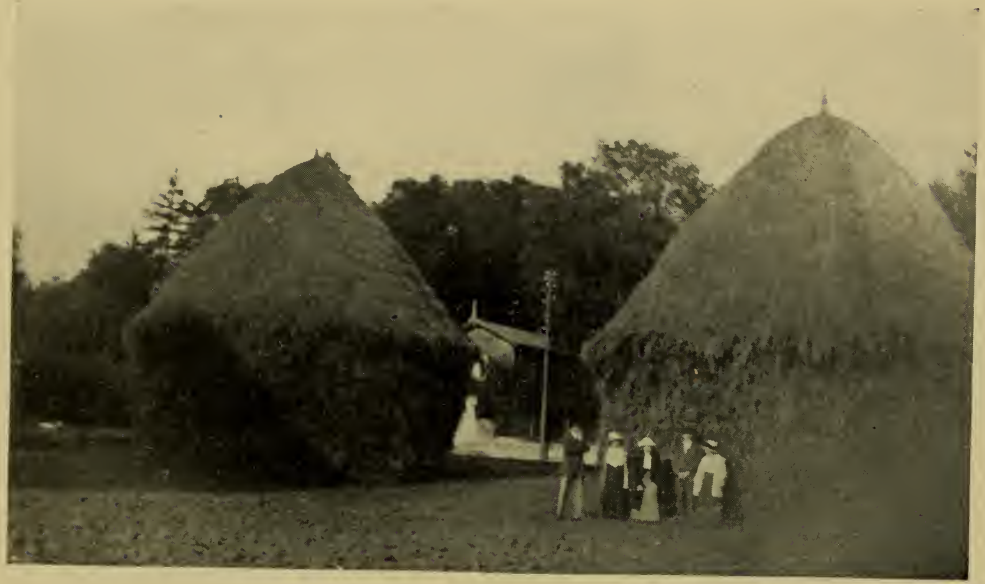
As you emerge at the lock in the river, you may see other groups lolling upon the river banks, with their picnic baskets, awaiting, perhaps, the hungry coming of father, brother, or son, from among the numbers that are fishing from their boats all along the river. These fishermen surely do know how to take life leisurely for many of them sit in their boats and fish all day long, Waltons, as far as their love for the sport is concerned, and "compleat anglers," indeed, without any reservation whatsoever. Where no family parties await them on the river banks, they have their bags and baskets of lunch along with them so

that there may be no interruption to their piscatory occupation until the waning day compels it.

Then you may walk along the beautiful river, miles if you wish, in narrow hard-beaten paths, through green fields, past house-boat bathing places, discovering, perhaps, on the opposite bank some imposing château "bosomed high in tufted trees," at last abruptly leaving the river to go home by other picturesque avenues almost equal to the one by which you came.

It is much to the credit of the French people that even in such small villages as Soisy-sous-Etiolles, they expend much care on the beautifying of public roads and parks, where the poor as well as the rich may freely go, and which in a sense they may call their own.

Then there is the tour at random, or tour of discovery. Mademoiselle L. from Arkansas and I started out on one of this kind one afternoon, neither of us having any definite goal in view, and for a time walking aimlessly about the little village, picturesque in the usual old-world quaintness, but possessing



STACKS OF WHEAT BY THE ROADSIDE.

little that is remarkable. Finally we strayed off into a country road for no particular reason only that we had never been that way before and had no idea where the road would lead us. We followed this some distance out; and it was not long before we were convinced that we had made a happy choice, for we found the road to run parallel to the Seine, with orchard after orchard of fruit-laden trees on the one side and a row of modern châteaus on the other.

Châteaus, as I understand the term, were formerly fortified country-seats, or castles; as Burke puts it "The strong châteaus, those feudal fortresses;" but the present day châteaus are simply palatial country houses, with extensive parks enclosed, as formerly, by high stone walls. Such were those along our way. Here and there through the iron gateways we could catch brief glimpses of splendid palaces, velvet lawns, and flower beds bright with bloom; but for the most part the high walls shut off the view.

Having gone as far out as we cared to, we descended through a narrow lane to the river and then followed the beaten path along the

stream in the direction of home, pausing now and then to watch the fishermen at their patient angling, or the women gleaners in their wooden shoes, gathering the left-over straws of wheat into their ample aprons, while babes amused themselves on heaps of straw near by. We noted with pleasure the attractive appearance of the huts along the way, for however mean the hut or however scanty the plot of ground, the occupants had found time to attend to their embellishment, as was evidenced by the brilliantly-colored flower-beds, trailing vines wherever there was anything to which they might cling, and the potted plants on window-sill and door-step. Arriving at the lock, we made our way through the famous avenue of which mention has been made, past the Church of the Notre Dame to the Château gate.

The favorite long walk, is, perhaps, to the Forest of Senart. You must go some distance before reaching the woodland, a part of the way along fields of waving wheat, thickly besprinkled with scarlet poppies; and, as you walk, you pluck the spears of ripened grain, as was done by the disciples of old, and eat the

CARREFOUR DU CHÊNE.

sweet kernels. You see the peasants in their wooden shoes cutting the grain with their little sickles, or gathering it into heaps; and as you approach nearer the forest, you become aware that Scotland does not have a monopoly of heather, for here the roadsides are thickly bordered with its purplish-pink blossoms. As you advance, the road becomes more wooded and picturesque; and when you are fairly in the forest, a short walk brings you to the *Carrefour du Chêne,* where a huge oak marks the crossing of the roads.

This is a good place for pedestrians to rest, and we took advantage of the opportunity offered before going on. I had been reading Robert Louis Stevenson's "Inland Voyages" and was now ready to agree with him that "Surely of all smells in the world the smell of many trees is the sweetest and most fortifying." A sign at one of the less frequented roads warned us of a *Chassée Réservé* in that direction; and we turned our backs on the hunting reservation to follow one of the main roads, which forms almost a right angle with the way by which we had entered the wood.

But the *Chassée Réservé* reminded us forc-

ibly that we were walking in the famous Forest of Senart, once a much frequented hunting-ground of Louis XV and the place where Madame d' Etiolles (Madame de Pompadour) first attracted his attention.

The story goes that the young and beautiful Madame d' Etiolles promised eternal fidelity to her husband unless the king should fall in love with her. Lenorman d' Etiolles took this as a huge joke at the time for it was not at all probable that his majesty would do so. D' Etiolles owned an abandoned château in the forest of Senart; and when Madame learned that the king frequently hunted in the forest, she persuaded her husband to have the château repaired and newly furnished, that they might spend their summers there, claiming that her physicians had recommended a change of air for her. Suspecting nothing, the indulgent husband had the château decorated and furnished in the most splendid style. Once installed in her palatial residence, Madame had made to order three or four carriages of fairy-like lightness and graceful form. As she had hoped, she often met the king when on her drives, but at first he paid no attention to her.

BREAKING UP STONE.

She was not to be repelled, however, and redoubled her efforts to make herself attractive in the eyes of the royal sportsman,—at one time in an azure robe, seated in a rose-colored phæton, at another, in a robe of rose, in a phæton of pale blue. All these wiles were not without affect, and soon she had a speaking acquaintance, which in time ripened into an infatuation that for twenty years made her the king's favorite at the Court of Versailles.

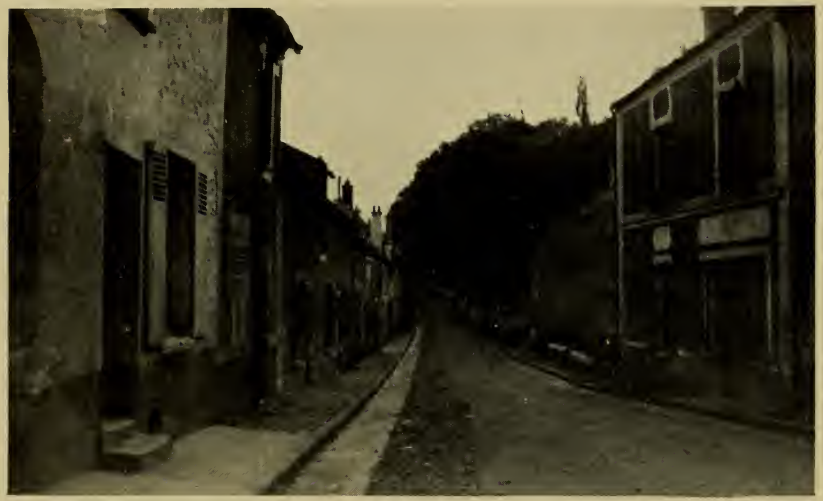
Musing on the singular life of this woman, the ruling passion of whose heart was ambition, I followed along the road toward Etiolles, making at length a sharp turn toward the right into a less frequented way terminating in a path which leads back to the place at which we had entered the forest. Then instead of returning the way by which we had come, we took a path to the right, which leads away from the big trees and beaten path to where blackberries grow thick and luscious, and dainty pink flowers peep here and there from the green grass. Then we came out upon a red-stone quarry where two poor fellows in stripes running horizontally

were breaking up stone for use in building roads, with a groan at every stroke.

Thence we returned the shortest way by country roads and rural lanes back to little Soisy-sous-Etiolles.

Soisy-sous-Etiolles (Soisy *under* or *below* Etiolles.) As one might infer from the name, the village of Etiolles is situated *above* Soisy; and up the hill a party of us walked one afternoon to seek out the quaint little town at the edge of the Forest of Senart, of which the family d' Etiolles was once the life. For some distance we followed the high wall that marks the boundary, on one side, of the park which once surrounded the splendid château where Madame Pompadour, by private theatricals in which she performed the most brilliant parts, sought to gain the admiration of her king.

This great park is now used as a hunting-ground by its owner, who, on purchasing it, at once consigned it to the spoiler, pulling down the fine old château and selling off pictures and furniture, it is said, enough to cover the cost to him of the whole estate. The old stone seats now in the park of the



A QUAINT AND TIME-WORN STREET.

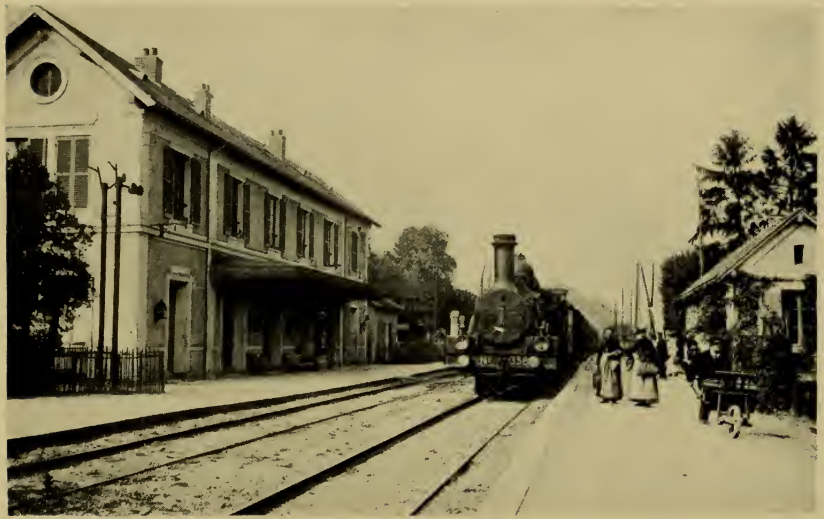
Château de Soisy once rested in the park of Madame Pompadour. The last to make his home in the Etiolles château was Count Walewski, son of Napoleon I.

A short walk up a quaint and time-worn street brought us to the church of Etiolles, the objective point of our pilgrimage. This ancient church has some especially interesting old paintings, perhaps the most notable one of Jesus, and the Holy Virgin in an attitude of adoration. This was presented to the church by the Emperor Napoleon III. Another of perhaps second merit is that given by Madame Walewski.

Here the old church stands, in a sense, a monument to former grandeur; but the glory of Etiolles has departed. Visitors come occasionally to roam about for a little in town and forest, the greatest interest of which centers in the strange and eventful career of the woman who was, for a portion of the eighteenth century, virtually premier of France. The Council of Ministers met in her boudoir, and there most important matters of state were settled. There generals, ministers, and ambassadors were chosen or rejected, according to

her caprice. But not only in the heavenly city must "mighty potentates and dynastics lay down their honors," but everywhere and under all circumstances. The fickle monarch, having become tired of his long-time favorite, Madame de Pompadour spent her last days a disappointed and disconsolate creature, without admiration or sympathy. What a pity that a woman of her marvelous ability could not have learned early that not only "has evil no standing in good society" but that it has no stability in any society; and so have left a stainless record of good and great works.

The walks that I have mentioned are not by any means the only ones of interest about Soisy-sous-Etiolles. Evry and Petit-Bourg are characteristic French country towns, quaint and picturesque, and within easy walking distance of the Chateau, as is also Corbeil, of which I shall tell in the next chapter; but those of which I have written are perhaps the favorite ones of the Chateau people.



THE STATION OF EVRY-PETIT-BOURG.

CHAPTER VII

Market Day at Corbeil

Tuesdays and Fridays are market days at Corbeil; and on those days people from all the country round hurry thither to do their marketing, some of them walking quite considerable distances. I went one Tuesday morning with Madame R., having arisen an hour earlier and taken my *café au lait* somewhat hurriedly, to do so. We walked to the station of Evry-Petit-Bourg, a distance of two kilométres, to take the train and went at what I should call a brisk trot (Madame R. is a good walker). There we found dozens of other women, with baskets and mesh bags, also going to market.

Among them was our little Paris friend, Mademoiselle L., accompanied by her *Maman* and a maid. Mademoiselle was most charm-

ing to me that day, and entertained me in her best manner. I was getting somewhat accustomed to the French tongue and could now understand, perhaps, a tithe of what she said to me. I was conscious at one time that she was inquiring about Billie and expressing the opinion that he was a *bon garçon* and *très amusant,* in which I quite agreed with her; but what he was doing that morning and why he didn't come to market I was unable to tell her. I thought very likely, though, that, having eaten his *petit déjeuner,* he was employing himself before study time in the very practical way of hectoring the girls. But I was not worried, for I knew that should he be inclined to carry his pranks beyond the bounds of decorum, Mademoiselle J. would quell him (or try to) with the little English that she knew (or thought she knew) which consisted solely of the phrase "fresche keed!" always with an exclamation mark after it, should one wish to write it.

It was a matter of only a few minutes when we were at Corbeil, quite a good-sized village; and a short walk brought us to the market, a place long to be remembered but not easily

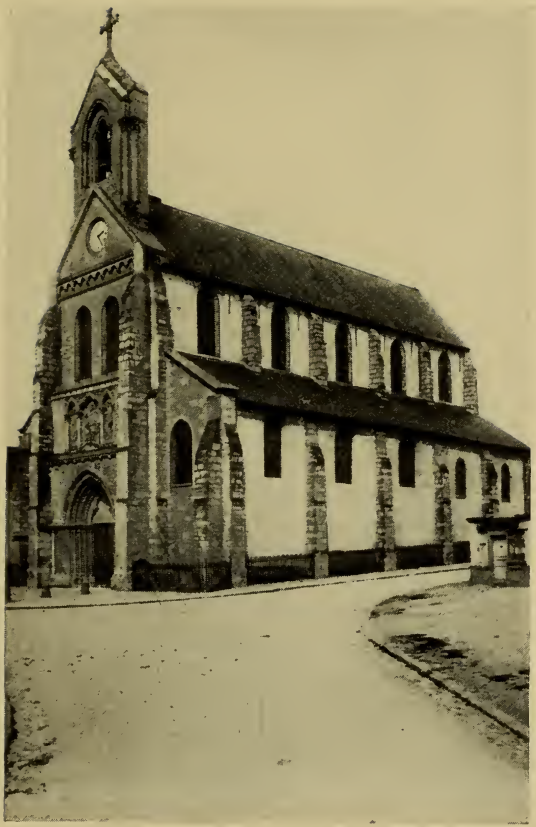
EVERYTHING WAS THERE FOR SALE.

described. *Tout le monde* was there, from the bediamoned lady to the bedraggled scrub-woman, some buying some selling. There spread out along a wide square for several rods was what one might at a first glance call a department store, but he finds that the different departments are so many distinct shops. Everything was there for sale: patent medicines and wooden shoes, fresh fish and Sunday hats, cheese and canary birds, cabbages and neckties, all in a conglomerate mass. If anything was lacking, I did not discover what. The market-place at Buda-Pesth does not outdo the market-place of Corbeil, either in variety of articles on sale, or in representative types of the people of the country.

After the housekeeper had bought some cakes and a big fish, and I had taken a few pictures, we two walked down to the Seine to see the fishermen in their boats and then past the *Grand Moulin de Corbeil,* one of the most important grist mills in France, to the impressive and interesting old church of St. Germain. This magnificent religious monument dates back to the 9th century and was founded by M. Haymon, the first count of Corbeil. It

is situated in the ancient cloister of Saint-Spire, which we entered through a fine old-gateway of the 12th century.

Madame R. left her big fish, done up at full length in a newspaper, in a recess between an outer and an inner door. Then we entered, and I was soon aware that the interior is quite as interesting as the exterior of the church. At the entrance there is a long list of the names of all priests who have had the church in charge since its founding. Another one records the names of prominent benefactors of the church, among them several kings, for this church was a very important one up to the time of the Revolution and had special attention from some of the sovereigns. Notable among them was Louis IX, a zealous crusader of the 13th century, afterward canonized as St. Louis. This saintly king, it is said, purchased from Baldwin, Emperor of Constantinople, the *Crown of Thorns* and a fragment of the *True Cross,* paying a large sum of money for them. That he might have a suitable house in which to enshrine such valuable objects, he had built the *Sainte Chappelle,* that beautiful chapel in Paris, so admired for its



THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. GERMAIN.

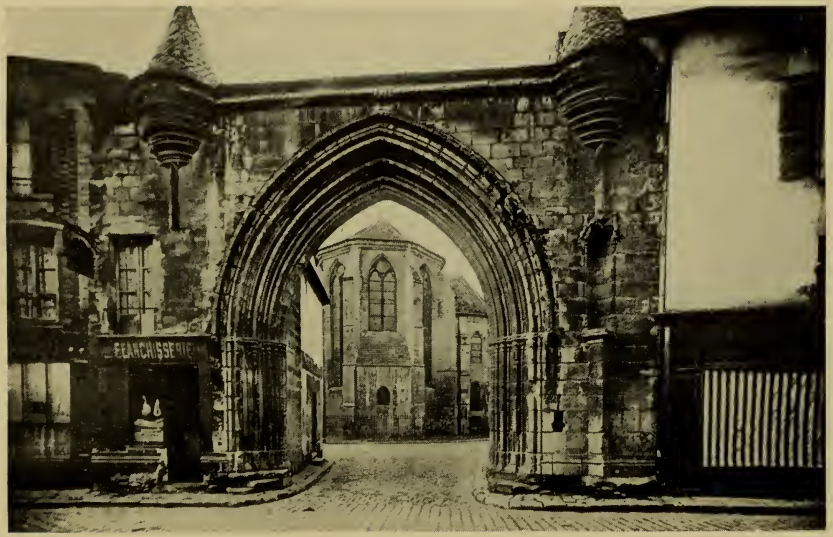
magnificent windows, by all lovers of the beautiful. To these sacred relics was added later the skull of St. Louis himself, in a golden reliquary; and in this chapel they remained until they were transferred to the Notre Dame for greater safety.

There are other important names upon this list besides that of Louis IX, and other interesting objects in the church besides the lists. Among the latter may be mentioned the beautiful stained-glass windows, the fine altar, the beautiful statue of Joan of Arc, and that which is, perhaps, in the eyes of the church of most importance, the tomb of the first Count of Corbeil.

Having remained in the church as long as we wished, we recovered the odorous fish and went back to the station, though it was some minutes before train time. This gave us a good opportunity to watch the women and children as they came straggling back, weighted down with butter, cheese, potatoes, enormous cabbages, great joints of meat, etc. I wondered that some of them were able to bear their burdens; but all looked happy and satisfied as they took with us seats in the third-

class coaches and were whizzed back to Evry-Petit-Bourg.

The long string of cheerful burden bearers was both novel and picturesque, as it trailed away from the station of Evry-Petit-Bourg along the shady roadway and over the long bridge to Etiolles or Soisy-sous-Etiolles, each link in the animated chain, no doubt, anticipating the feasting on the delectable food stuffs bought at *la marché de Corbeil.* We were no exceptions, and had our fish and cakes for dinner.



A FINE OLD GATEWAY OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER VIII

Barnum's Great Cinéma

We were thrown into great excitement one night at dinner when the blowing of a horn and at the same time the ringing of the gate bell heralded the information that something of importance was about to take place. Ernest went on the run and soon returned with a flyer, announcing that the great success, " Barnum's Cinéma," had arrived in town and that a performance would be given that evening, one representation only. That being the case, we could not afford to miss it, and we decided then and there to go *en masse.* We went early so as to get good seats, our Paris friends joining us on the way. We entered the hall, which was a very small one, its only furniture consisting of two rows of long benches, perhaps six or seven in a row. Having purchased our tickets, we appropriated to our use the three

benches farthest back on the left. These seats were upholstered in black oilcloth, while others had either no covering at all or one of a very dirty and ragged coarse red-and-white cotton. The bare benches certainly did not have an inviting appearance, and the red and white were impossible; so for the time and place we felt that we had made a good choice.

As yet we were the only spectators, and we now took time to examine the flimsy little slips of paper that served as tickets. To our surprise we found that some of our party had paid one-half franc, some three-fourths of a franc, some a franc, and Billie and I one franc and a half each, the ticket-seller having added in lead pencil the necessary figures to make our little yellow slips of paper of sufficient value. However, we were allowed to sit together on the oil-cloth-covered seats, whatever the price of our tickets; and others, who came later, apparently had the like privilege of choosing of what was left, the latest comers sitting on the floor and leaning up against the bare, blank walls. I did not exactly understand their system; but it was evident that those traveling show-people were not at all particular what

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you paid or what seats you occupied. There was one advanage, however, Billie and I had the satisfaction of knowing that we held reserved-seat tickets (there were none better), though we sat one on each side of Madame R. who had purchased a third class *billet.* The tickets were not demanded and I still have mine among my valued souvenirs.

Our early arrival at the show gave us an excellent opportunity to watch the country people come trooping in. They came by families, and having finally deposited themselves, awaited with expectant faces, the beginning of the great moving-picture show. There were blowzed peasants, young and old, in their coarse blue frocks and trousers, and clattering wooden sabots; fat, almost toothless and altogether corsetless old women, in their loose blouses, tied down by their coarse blue aprons; young women of generous figures, some of them rather good-looking, with babes in arms; frowzy-headed little girls, with front locks tightly braided, with perhaps a tiny, tiny bit of narrow ribbon by way of ornament; boys of all shapes and sizes, in their short socks, black cotton aprons, and wide-brimmed straw hats;

and, last but not least, coquettish rusticity, revelling in the companionship of her *bel amoureux,* though in the eyes of the world he must appear but an "unlettered hind." All the men, except those of our party, sat with their hats on, most of them vociferously puffing their tobacco throughout the entire performance. That they do otherwise seemed not to have been expected of them; and, as the women wore no hats, no polite invitation that they remove them was necessary. I have said that all the men except those of our party wore their hats during the performance, but that statement is not strictly true. I was pleased to see that our Ernest had not only doffed his apron but sat with head uncovered, thus showing himself a little higher in the social scale than the *gens de la campagne.*

While the people were gathering, the operator, a dark, fat, greasy-looking individual, proudly marched up and down the aisles, smiling blandly upon his audience, with the air of one who is about to give them a great treat, which he is confident, must meet with their unqualified approval. His very attitude proclaimed in unmistakable words, "I would do

anything for you." Perhaps it was this attitude that gave Billie the assurance necessary to slip to the casement and swing it open, thinking that a breath of pure air would be quite agreeable and perhaps blow out a little of the smoke. But, behold! a change now comes o'er the man. With the intensest of excitement he leaps to the spot, with a "No, no, Monsieur! No, no, Monsieur!" and on the instant everything is made fast again. The windows *must not* be open, for there are rogues and rascals outside who might look in and get the show for nothing.

As for the show, well, it was quite like those given in America, no better, not much worse. There were the ascension of aviators, cosmopolitan dances, Biblical representations, elopements of fond lovers, with tyrannical parents, and the mischievous city kids, who go to grandfather's farm to give their parents a rest, spill the ink on the parlor carpet, steal the jam, overturn milk pans, make bonfires of the haystacks, and let out all the live stock.

The operator seemed to think that the pictures needed a great deal of explication and kept up a flow of talk very amusing, both to

those who understood and to those who partly understood. More than that he gave his opinion of what was being enacted before the eyes, and made jocular remarks concerning the deeds done on the screen, especially when they chanced to be all about love and the *bel amoureux,* all of which were highly appreciated by the audience. In fact, it was as responsive an audience as one often sees. Like Sir Roger de Coverly, they took the situations seriously and applauded where they approved, and talked over the scenes presented as though they were a part of real life. In fact all through the performance they discoursed with each other audibly.

One novel feature was an intermission of ten or fifteen minutes when the performance was about half accomplished. At this time a man smoking a cigarette passed through the hall selling little favors done up in twisted papers and loudly bawling out an urgent invitation for people to buy. It was then that I noticed for the first time our *blanchisseuse* in clean blouse and apron, looking radiantly happy. Then, too, that there might be no cessation of entertainment, a ruddy-faced old rustic,

in clumsy wooden shoes, took it upon himself to get merry and jump over one of the benches. A roar of laughter rewarded the old chap for his pains. The Château party ate French lemon drops and peppermints from paper bags, and breathed deeply of the fresh air that was then entering, for during the recess there was no objection to open doors and windows.

The show lasted something over two hours. Even the franc-and-a-half people had had their money's worth. Disregarding the Cinéma, the real enjoyment had come from seeing the peasant class at a show. That was a novel experience and worth the price. As I went out the door, the ticket-seller said to me, *"C'est bon, n'est-ce pas, Madame?"* And I answered, *"Oui, Madame, très amusant,"* using the same phrase that Mademoiselle L. had used in speaking of Billie. This seemed to give such entire satisfaction that I couldn't help feeling quite a bit of pride in my proficiency in the French tongue.

Outside we found the whole village silent and asleep, wrapped in opaque night. The streets are not lighted in Soisy-sous-Etiolles.

Not even the "long, levelled rule of streaming light" from "some clay habitation" was visible, for here the people use their lamps only when absolutely necessary. Too, it was raining, and the paved streets slippery. How Monsieur J. ever guided us back to the Château is a mystery, but in due time we arrived safe and sound.

THE DELIGHTFUL OLD CHÂTEAU.

CHAPTER IX

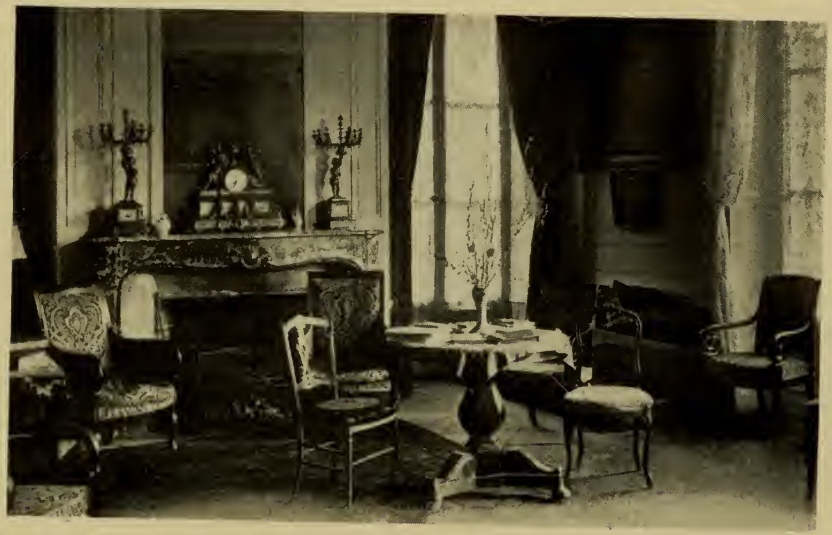
Day Dreams

The time was drawing near when I must leave the delightful old Château. I sat one morning in a secluded spot in the park on one of the old Pompadour stone benches. Overhead arched a tall graceful tree, a chapel, as it were, to one of God's great cathedrals, the drowsy, shadowed, silent park. Behind me was the ivy-mantled stone wall, like a high screen of the most perfect tracery. A dreamy place, indeed; and I so far gave myself up to its subtle influence as to muse upon the evidences all about of a former life now passed from mortal ken. How much of it had been real and lasting, the work of God; and how much of it false and fleeting, the vain imagination of mortal man?

I had just come from the one-time stable, with its two quaint stalls, above which are the

names *Roméo* and *Brillant,* incased in small wooden frames. "Two pet steeds of the long ago, perhaps," I muse; and, letting fancy have its free course, I behold two splendid bays, with arched necks, straight supple limbs, flowing manes and tails, fiery eyes. Richly caparisoned are they and mounted by *le seigneur et la dame* of other days. Gaily prancing, they make the tour of the Château park, emerging through the arch by the duck pond into the court. Then they dart through the iron gateway, swung open by the liveried porter, and take the road toward the Forest of Senart, there perhaps to give their riders a chance to admire the brilliant Madame Pompadour in her fairy phæton, or to get a fleeting glimpse of the royal sportsman and his train.

Is the rider the tall man of the great painting in heavy frame, which hangs in the *petit salon,* who stands as he has stood for many years, with hat and cane in hand, tall and straight, and grave? It would be difficult, indeed, to imagine that stiff, dignified individual as gaily cantering through field and forest (his protrait represents him as too unbending for



A CORNER OF THE GRAND SALON.

that). Rather must our *Seigneur* of the picture tread the ways of his own beautiful park with slow, measured pace, standing for one brief moment to watch the gold fish in sparkling fountain, but with gray unsmiling eyes, himself a shadow then as he is now. Is his name upon the tablet just inside the door? If so, which one is it? Or is his name missing on the slate, and he, perhaps, the refugee, whose name is lost and treasure hid? Or was the man of the portrait of older family, farther removed, perhaps one hundred years prior to the Revolution, who had lived and loved and passed on far anterior to the memory of the man who fled the fury of the Revolution days?

And what of his companion? Does either of the fine portraits in the grand salon, the one of the dark lady or the one of the fair, in long straight bodice and fine laces, bear a resemblance to her? Whose fingers fashioned the queer picture hanging on the opposite side of the room, a large bouquet of flowers, made apparently of long paper beads set on end in some glutinous substance, after the manner of a mosaic? And what about the old hob-nailed chest, that rests at the top of the first flight of

stairs, the trunk that I pass every time I go to or from my room, once used as a linen chest and bearing the initials, H. H. M. E. B.? Whose deft fingers neatly stitched the meters and meters of fine linen to fashion the garments that were once considered so necessary a part of *ma demoiselle's* trousseau?

And what about the little dog whose master placed a tablet in the park to perpetuate his memory, and asks the passerby to pause and behold the place where his pet sleeps. *" Ce n'était qu' un chien blanc "* (It was only a little white dog) he tells us, but he knows not where another such can be found, so brave, affectionate and good. And the great cedar, overshadowing its resting place, a cedar of Lebanon, brought by the great French botanist, Monsieur de Jussieu, cradled in a hat as an infant many years ago, from far off Palestine. This one-time infant is now an aged man, but still blessing the earth with his shade and supporting on a strong arm *la balançoire* for René and Eric as he no doubt did for the Château children of other days.

The old stone basins, many in number, of the one-time magnificent fountains! Will their

THE ONE-TIME INFANT NOW AN AGED MAN.

stagnant waters erelong be supplanted by the bright and sparkling? Will their fountains once again spurt up toward heaven, to fall in diamond drops on scores of glittering gold fish, that dart to and fro in the font?

Why not? Love is there and love restores. Already a marvelous work has been done towards cleansing and beautifying the Château grounds, so sadly run down for want of care. We can confidently assert that never again will the place witness the pomp and splendor of its ancient pride; but what of that, if the beauty of holiness shall there rest, it is far better.

Like Washington Irving, in the Shakespeare land, we have "been surrounded with fancied beings, with mere airy nothings," conjured up by drowsy place and drowsy time. But awake we now, and henceforth

We cease to look behind and look before,
With hope and faith, the faith that maketh whole;
The Château's better days are at the door,
Vive le Château de Soisy under Etiolles!

CHAPTER X

The Departure

It was with genuine regret that I left the Château. I had there spent ideal hours far from the herd of sight-seers that throng the city ways. I had been free to roam among rural haunts, taking my own time, following my own bent, experiencing the joy of mere living and keeping holiday in peace. I had found the old town charmingly picturesque, a fair type of the little French village. Monsieur and Madame had been most kind and had taken much pains to make my stay a happy one. I had become fond of the people—French, Swiss, Scotch, English, and American. I had met those that are worth while. I had come to love the children. I had seen things to me new and interesting. Incidentally I had acquired an addition to my French vocabulary. Moreover, the annual fête was about to take

FOR A GOOD TIME AND A HOLIDAY.

place, the first preparation of which was the setting up of a merry-go-round. Vans dotted the country roads all around on the way to contribute their part toward the great occasion. Soon everybody would be out for a good time and a holiday.

I must miss the fête, but I had already gained much. Best of all I had gained that for which I had come, something of a knowledge of peasant life, and an intimate acquaintance with the ideal French home. In addition, I had become somewhat acquainted with the Parisian French and admired them.

"You cannot know French people by visiting Paris in summer," said Monsieur W. "In fact, there are no Parisians in the city during the hot weather; they have gone into the country. Then Paris is given up for the season to hotel keepers, shop keepers, and tourists; and the commercial spirit is dominant. You cannot see Paris in summer."

I could readily believe this. The dark, black-eyed, portly proprietor of my hotel in Paris, a short time before, had been most polite to me, even obsequious in his attentiveness to my wants; but when I came to settle my

bill, I learned a characteristic trick of the trade. When I had looked over my bill of one hundred and forty-five francs, I discovered that he had made one charge twice. When I called his attention to it, he drew his pencil through the item with a careless "so," as if it were almost too trivial a matter to speak of, though he was charging me five francs too much. It was the custom he told me for his guests to pay their tips through the office, one-tenth of the bill. I acquiesced; it would be much less trouble.

He reckoned it up, fourteen francs. "Call it fifteen," he said, "that will be quite all right," with the air of one who is generously throwing off instead of adding an extra franc.

There was an illustration of the commercial spirit, which Monsieur W. had mentioned. Surely there could be no greater contrast than that between my hotel proprietor and our Paris friends who were spending the summer at Soisy-sous-Etiolles. A small party of us from the Château had one day been up to Etiolles. On returning we went past the home of the L. family. The young mademoiselle's greetings to us from an upper window

KINDLY WISHED US *AU REVOIR.*

brought Madame to the doorway. Thereupon there was nothing to do but that we should come in to rest. Up a few steps to a landing-place, then down again as many, and we found ourselves in a trim garden. There under the shelter of *un berceau de verdure* (arbor) we must have refreshments (it was then time for afternoon tea); and then no blossom in the garden was too choice to be plucked to make up the generous bouquets for us to take home.

On the day of my departure two American friends, Mr. F. and Mrs. W., traveling companions earlier in the season, came out from Paris to call. I was to go with them back to the great city for a short stay, and thence to Belgium and England for some automobile trips among the out-of-the-way places as far as possible from the beaten path. Yes, we were soon to leave the land of *les poulets et les salades,* for the land of many tea rooms and good Lipton tea. And—after that—America.

I took my last look around with my friends. Together we roamed the shadowy alleys of the park, seeking out the familiar haunts: the steedless stalls, the aviary, the *lavoir,* the *kiosque,* the *balançoire du cèdre,* the duck

pond, and the garden with its smell of plants and trees. While we were doing so, that the review might be complete, a biplane skimmed the air above the Château park as it had done almost every day during my stay.

Then Madame W. joined us at tea in the *salle à manger* (we had come in too late to take our refection with the others). How I should miss the social meal, of which Monsieur was the autocrat, and where Madame presided so charmingly, with the quiet dignity characteristic of one "to the manner born." I had liked to hear her gentle and musical *là, là!* That is always heard in France, but it never to me sounded the same from other lips.

"There is the great treasure chimney, of which I told you, if indeed the treasure is there," I said to my friends, pointing at the same time to the great fireplace.

"It looks innocent enough," Mr. F. answered; "but, then, you can't always tell by the face of a thing what is behind the face."

"You are right," I said, "but the chimney is not the only thing about here that refuses to be communicative. The queer little houses that line the walls are not telling us all that

QUITE AT HOME.

they know. Indeed, some of them are now little more than gray, sombre sentinels in stone, guarding the mystery of their past with jealous care."

Tea over, we went out on the *perron* to wait for the bus that should take us to the station of Evry-Petit-Bourg. Madame W. went with us, and there kindly wished us *"au revoir,"* and a *"bon voyage"* to the homeland.

But where, you ask, was Billie. O, no, he was not lost; he simply wanted to stay a few weeks longer at the Château. He would arrange for a later sailing and, without fail, be back in America in time to enter school. About the last I saw of him he was hanging over the *balançoire* limb of the old cedar, hectoring Mademoiselle Marjorie (who sat in the swing below) with a long dry twig. He had come to feel *quite* at home.

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