



The Project Gutenberg eBook of Barbara in Brittany, by E. A. Gillie

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Cover artwork

"The farmer would spare you those, madam."
"The farmer would spare you those, madam."

BARBARA IN BRITTANY

E. A. Gillie

Title page artwork
Title page artwork

Illustrated by FRANK ADAMS

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**TO
MAISIE, MARGARET, AND CUTHBERT,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF SEPTEMBER 1905.**

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover artwork

"The farmer would spare you those, madam." . . . *Frontispiece*

Title page artwork

"Barbara was reading a guide book on Brittany."

"She glanced over her shoulder at the sea."

"They surprised Denys by suddenly joining him."

Barbara in Brittany.

CHAPTER I.

AUNT ANNE.

Barbara entered the nursery with rather a worried look on her face. "Aunt Anne is coming to-morrow, children," she announced.

"To-morrow!" exclaimed a fair-haired boy, rising from the window-seat. "Oh, I say, Barbe, that's really rather hard lines—in the holidays, too."

"Just as we were preparing to have a really exciting time," sighed Frances, who was her brother's close companion and ally.

"I know it's a little hard," Barbara said consolingly, sitting down beside them and taking one of the twins on her lap, while the other leaned up against her. "But you will all try to be good and nice to her, won't you? She went away with a bad opinion of us last time, and it worries mother. Besides, we mustn't forget that she was father's sister."

"I can't think how she ever came to be," sighed Frances. "She's so dreadfully particular, and we always seem naughtier when she's here. But we'll make an effort, Barbara."

"And you won't run away as soon as she speaks to you, Lucy?" Barbara went on, looking at the little girl in her lap. "It's rude, you know. You must try to talk nicely when she wants you to."

"Yes;" and the child nodded. "Only she does seem to make a lot of concussions when she comes."

"You mean discussions," Donald corrected. "You shouldn't use words you don't understand, Lucy. But I must say I agree with you; I know she always raises my corruption."

"What!" gasped Barbara.

"Raises my corruption," repeated her brother; "that's a good old Scottish expression that I've just found in a book, and it means—'makes you angry.'"

"Well, don't use it before Aunt Anne, there's a dear," Barbara urged, getting up. "She thinks we use quite enough queer expressions as it is."

"I'll speak like a regular infant prodigy. But surely you're not going yet? You've just come!"

"I must help to get things ready for Aunt Anne," Barbara said gaily, for she had recovered her spirits since procuring the children's promise of good behaviour. "I'll come to you later."

"Barbara is really rather an angel," remarked Donald after she had gone. "It's not many sisters would slave in the house, instead of having another maid, to let a fellow go to a decent school."

"You're quoting mother," Frances replied, hanging out of the window in a dangerous position; "but, of course, it's true. If I only had time I'd write a fascinating romance about her."

"I'll read every page of it and buy a hundred copies," her brother promised gallantly; but, as he knew that there was nothing Frances hated more than writing, he felt pretty safe. "Of course," he pursued, "Aunt Anne thinks mother spoils us. I don't quite think that—it's just that she's so nice and sympathetic with us when we're naughty, and Aunt Anne doesn't understand that. But still, to please Barbe, and as we've promised, we must try to be respectable and good this time. Remember, twins!"

The twins were not noted for long memories, but their intentions were good, and the first day of Aunt Anne's visit passed very well, the children remembering to rub their feet on the mat, shut the door softly, and not fidget at meals. But the exertion seemed too much for them, and the second day began rather boisterously, and did not improve as it went on. After lunch, when the twins came into the drawing-room, Lucy drew a footstool near her aunt, and sat down meekly upon it, thinking that the sooner Aunt Anne began to talk the sooner it would be over.

Aunt Anne was feeling almost as much embarrassed by the presence of so many children as they were by that of their aunt, but her sense of duty was strong, and she began to make conversation with the one nearest her—who happened to be Lucy.

"What are you doing in lessons now, Lucy?"

Lucy looked solemn.

"Chiefly history," she said.

Frances laughed.

"It's only stories," she exclaimed, "that Barbara tells her and Dick."

"It's history," repeated Lucy indignantly; "isn't it, Dick? It's all about England."

"I should have thought writing was more suitable for a little girl like you."

Frances opened her mouth to retort, but caught a warning glance from Barbara and subsided. Then conversation languished and Lucy looked across longingly at her sister, to see if she had done her duty. But not being able to catch her eye, she sighed, and supposing she had not yet fulfilled her part, cast about in her mind for something else to say.

"Do you live far from here?" she began suddenly, staring at her aunt.

"Quite a long way," Miss Britton replied. "In Wales—perhaps you know where that is?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Lucy, rising in her excitement. "It's where the ancient Britons were sent. Barbara told us about them. Oh, please Aunt Anne, aren't you an ancient Briton?"

Aunt Anne smiled grimly.

"No, I am not. They lived in quite the olden times, and were clothed in skins."

"But are you sure?" pressed the child. "It's just the skins seem wanting. They were driven into Wales, and surely you're a Briton and come from the olden times. You're really quite ancient aren't you, Aunt Anne?"

Barbara was thankful her aunt laughed, but she was not so glad that Donald and Frances found their laughter so irrepressible that they had to resort to the sofa-cushions; and when the twins were dismissed a little later by Mrs. Britton, she was rather relieved to see them follow. But from that moment the spirit of hilarity seemed to have fallen upon all the children, and Barbara looked regretfully at the falling rain and wondered how she should keep them occupied for the rest of the day—for it was just the beginning of the holidays, when they were usually allowed a good deal of liberty.

She knew by the noise that presently sounded from upstairs that they had begun "hide-and-peek," and she read disapproval of the uproar in her aunt's face, and went upstairs to suggest something else. The children good-temperedly betook themselves to "soap bubbles," Frances consenting to fetch the tray "to keep things tidy" if Donald would take it back; and Barbara left them, congratulating herself that they were safely settled over something quiet.

It was, therefore, surely an evil fate that made Aunt Anne begin to go upstairs later in the afternoon, just as Donald was descending rapidly with the tray—not in his hand.

"I *am* so sorry," he said, getting up in dismay after his rapid slide. "What a comfort I didn't knock you over; but it's so much the quickest way of bringing a tray down. I—— Have you ever tried it?"

If he had not been considerably agitated he would not have asked such a foolish question, and perhaps if Aunt Anne had really not got a severe fright she would not have been so much annoyed. But as it was, she stalked past him without saying a word and went up to her room.

"There!" he said ruefully, "I've done it, and I really did mean to be good."

The incident subdued them all considerably, and Barbara hoped that now they might get to the end of the visit without any further mishaps. But next morning at breakfast that hope was banished, for her aunt came downstairs with such an expression of annoyance upon her face, that every one knew something really unpleasant was coming.

"Is anything wrong?" Mrs. Britton asked anxiously. "Did you not sleep well—or—surely the children did not—annoy you in any way?" Visions of apple-pie beds were floating before her mind, although the children's looks of innocence somewhat reassured her on that point.

"Some one has annoyed me considerably," Aunt Anne said coldly, "by interfering with my clothes. When I came to put on my blue blouse this morning, I found that every other one of the silver buttons had been cut off."

There was a gasp of astonishment, and Barbara was just about to scorn the notion that any of the children could have been concerned in the matter, when her eyes fell on Dick's face. Miss Britton was looking in the same direction.

"I should think that little boy knows something about it," she said.

"Dick!" Mrs. Britton exclaimed, for he was usually the least apt of the three to get into mischief.

"Dick, what did you do it for? Tell us why you did it?" Barbara questioned eagerly, and the little boy was just about to reply when Miss Britton spoke again.

"I should think he had no reason at all except wanton mischief. Perhaps he used the buttons for marbles; there cannot be any real reason for such a silly deed, though he may make one up. Well, why did you do it?"

Barbara saw the obstinate expression that they dreaded creeping over the little boy's face at her aunt's words, and knew that now they would probably get nothing satisfactory from him; but she was not quite prepared for the answer that came so defiantly.

"I did it for ornament, of course."

There was silence for a moment; then Mrs. Britton sent the little boy to the nursery to stay there till he was sent for.

"I *am* so sorry, Anne," she said in distress. "I cannot think what has made him do it."

"It is just the result of your upbringing. I always said you were absurdly indulgent to the children."

Then, because Barbara was sure that Dick had had some other reason that would perhaps have explained his action, and because she saw tears in her mother's eyes, and knew how lonely and tired she often felt, and how anxious about the welfare of the children and the care of the house, she turned wrathfully upon her aunt.

"You have no right to criticise mother like that, Aunt Anne, and, of course, she knows a great deal more about bringing up children than you do. If you had not interfered, Dick would have given the proper reason, and, certainly, if we do what we shouldn't it's *our* fault, not mother's."

At this there were confirmatory nods from the children, who continued to gaze in startled, but admiring, astonishment at Barbara, whose politeness was usually their example, and whom they hardly recognised in this new role. They awaited—they knew not what—from their aunt, but except for a horrified cry of "Barbara!" from Mrs. Britton, the girl's outburst was received in silence, her aunt merely shrugging her shoulders and continuing her breakfast. The children finished theirs in uncomfortable silence, then slipped quietly away.

"Well!" Donald said ruefully, when Frances and he had climbed into the apple-tree where they usually discussed matters of importance. "She did look fine, didn't she? But I'm afraid she's done it now. Aunt will clear out soon enough, I should think, and Barbe will just be as sorry as can be to have flared out like that at a guest, and father's sister too."

In that last supposition Donald was quite right, for Mrs. Britton needed to say nothing to make Barbara feel very much ashamed of herself. But in his conclusion about his aunt he was quite wrong, for, to the children's astonishment, Miss Britton showed no signs of speedy departure. Indeed, later in the day, the children felt honesty demanded they must own her to be "rather a brick," for she accepted Barbara's apology with good grace, and said that though, of course, she had been rude, she would not deny that there had been some provocation, and that if Barbara could find out anything more from Dick, she would be glad to hear of it.

It was then, after much manoeuvring, that the girl got to the truth of the matter, which Dick related with tears. He had taken the buttons for mother, he said. When he was out with her the other day they had looked for quite a long time at some beautiful silver ones, and when he asked his mother why she did

not buy them, she had said she had not enough money just then. They were very like the kind on Aunt Anne's blouse, and having noticed that she did not use half of them to button it up, Dick had not seen any reason why they should be left on—although he had meant to tell her what he had done immediately after breakfast.

Miss Britton accepted the explanation, and said she thought there was no need for the culprit to be punished this time, and she hoped he would have more sense soon. But about Barbara she had something of more importance to communicate.

"In my opinion," she said, in a manner that inferred she expected her advice to be taken, "the girl is much too young to have finished her education—boys or no boys—and I am thinking of sending her to France for a time, to learn more of the language and see something of the world. It is not good for a girl of her age to have so much responsibility."

Now, it had been Barbara's dream to go abroad, but after the first gasp of delight and astonishment she grew grave, and said she was afraid she could not leave her mother and the children.

"Fiddlesticks!" Aunt Anne replied, without allowing Mrs. Britton time to speak. "You are far too young, my dear, to imagine yourself of such importance in the world. I will send a good old-fashioned nurse that I know of to take your place, and it will be good for the children to have a stricter regime than yours has been for a while."

Even if Aunt Anne had been accustomed to have her words disregarded—which she was not—Mrs. Britton would not have needed much persuasion to make her fall in with the proposal, for she had often grieved in private over the fact that, since her husband's death, Barbara's education had had to suffer that Donald's might advance. And now, though she wondered how she would get on without her eldest daughter, she was only too thankful to have such an opportunity thrown in her way.

"I cannot think why I never interfered before," Miss Britton said, "but it is better late than never, and we will have as little delay now as possible."

In a few days the children were all as busy as bees helping to get Barbara ready. They assisted in choosing her new frocks and hats, and the style of

making; and poor Miss Smith, who came to sew for her, was nearly distracted by their popping in every now and then to see how she was getting on. Even Donald, who hated talking about "girls' fashions," bought a paper, because he saw it had a pattern of a blouse advertised, and he thought it might be useful.

The family were very curious to hear with whom she was going to France and where she was going to be, for Aunt Anne had undertaken to make all the arrangements, and it certainly was a slight shock to the children when she wrote to say she had made up her mind to go herself for a fortnight to Paris before sending Barbara off to Brittany, where she had found a "most suitable place" for her in the house of two maiden ladies who took in people wanting to learn French.

Donald whistled when Mrs. Britton read that out.

"Fancy a fortnight with Aunt Anne, and then the two maiden ladies. Jiggers!" (that was a favourite expression of his)—"you'll be worried out of your life, Barbe."

The worst of it was, that Aunt Anne, who had not been abroad for many years, said she was going to let Barbara manage the journey and the sight-seeing in Paris, and sent her a guide-book to read up everything of interest. She said she was doing this to give her niece experience and prepare her for being by herself later on; but Donald declared she wanted to see "what kind of stuff" she was made of, and that if Barbara did not do things well, she would scoff at her greatly for thinking she could manage a house and children while she could not succeed in finding her way about France.

"But I know the old lady, and we'll just show her you're *our* sister, and before we've done you'll know that guide-book from cover to cover," he assured her.

They had only a week left, for Aunt Anne was very rapid in her decisions and plans; but they studied the guide-book morning, noon, and night. It was most instructive holiday work, Donald said, and when Barbara had not time to read it, Frances and he read for her and poured their knowledge into her ears at meal-times.

They learned what coloured omnibus went to the different parts of Paris, and on what days different buildings were open, and by the end of the week they all felt they could "personally conduct" tours all over Paris.

It was rather hard when the last day came, because they knew that the house would seem horribly empty without Barbara. The two little ones were on the verge of crying all the afternoon, and Frances had to be very stern, while Donald rose to flights of wit hitherto undreamed of, to keep up every one's spirits.

Of course the two elder ones knew it would be hardest on them after Barbara left, because some of her responsibility would fall on their shoulders. But they were quite determined she should have a cheerful "send-off" next morning, so they bribed the children with promises of sweets if they did not cry, and they succeeded in giving her quite a hilarious good-bye at the station.

After the train had gone, however, and they turned homewards, Frances felt that if she had not promised Barbara to help her mother she would have hidden herself in the attic and cried, although that would have been so "horribly babyish" for a girl of twelve that she knew she would have felt ashamed of herself afterwards; though perhaps, her pillow could have told tales of a grief confided to it that the gay-hearted Frances did not usually indulge in.

CHAPTER II.

NO. 14 RUE ST. SUPLICE.

Meanwhile, Barbara and her aunt pursued their journey, and in due time arrived at Newhaven, where the first thing they were told was that the tide was unusually low at Dieppe, which would prevent them entering that harbour, and therefore they were not going to leave Newhaven for another hour and a half. Aunt Anne gazed in indignation upon their informant, and declared it was scandalous that a boat, timed to leave at a certain hour, should be so irregular and unpunctual; whereupon the captain, shrugging his shoulders, said that the lady should complain to the moon about the tides rather than to him.

They managed to fill in the time very well with lunch, however, and after a little grumbling, Aunt Anne resigned herself to Fate, though she was glad enough when they finally steamed out of the harbour. Miss Britton was not a very good sailor, and in preparation for "the voyage," as she called the crossing,

had accumulated great stores of knowledge as to how to treat seasickness. She established herself on the upper deck, let down a deck-chair as low as it would go, and replacing her hat by a weird little Tam o' Shanter, covered her eyes with a handkerchief.

"To avoid seasickness, Barbara," she said, "you must lie as flat as possible, keep the eyes closed, and breathe in correspondence with the ship's motion—though," she added, "I really cannot tell at present which is its motion; perhaps there will be more when we get farther out."

Barbara chuckled, but deferred making similar preparations until the motion *was* more defined, for she was much too interested in what was going on around her to close her eyes to it all.

Aunt Anne asked her at intervals if it was getting rougher, but though her niece assured her there were no signs of such a thing, she did not venture to sit up until they were quite near Dieppe.

"Oh, aunt!" Barbara exclaimed joyfully, "just look at all the officials in their high-peaked hats. Don't they look nice, so Frenchy and foreign!"

"You would hardly expect them to look *English*," Aunt Anne returned drily, and began to gather together her belongings preparatory to leaving the boat.

"It is some time since I have been in France, Barbara," she exclaimed, "having been quite contented with our own beautiful land; but I remember it was best to be very quick in going to the train so as to get good seats. Follow me closely, child."

Barbara obediently did as she was told, and having got safely through the troubles of the *douane*, they chose their carriage and proceeded to arrange their possessions.

"My umbrella!" Aunt Anne cried suddenly, looking anxiously on the racks and under the seat. "Barbara, I must have left it on the boat; why did you not remind me? You must just run back for it now—but don't let the train go without you. Run, child, run!"

Barbara obediently hurried away, and after a halting and somewhat lengthy explanation on the quay, was allowed to go on board again, and spied the

missing umbrella on the deck. When she returned, the train had been moved higher up, and she could not distinguish the carriage anywhere. The guard was already beginning to wave the signal, and Barbara felt she was a lost passenger, when a dark, stout little man dashed up to her and seized her by the arm.

"Par ici, par ici," he cried, "votre maman vous attend, mademoiselle," and they flew down the platform with the guard shouting warnings behind them. They were barely in time, and Barbara sank panting into her seat.

"Fancy!" Aunt Anne cried indignantly—"fancy getting lost like that! It just shows that you are not fit to look after children when you cannot manage an umbrella!"

Barbara was too breathless to reply and too much amused, perhaps, really to mind. The country was pretty enough, but it soon began to grow dusk, and they wondered when they would arrive in Paris. The train was due at 7.30, but there did not seem to be the least chance of getting in at that hour, for, late as they already were, they continued to lose time on the way. The little Frenchman was their only companion, and he did not seem to know much English.

However, between his shreds of that language and Barbara's scanty French she managed to find out that they would not arrive in Paris until midnight. Aunt Anne expressed her annoyance in no measured terms, but he merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled, until she collapsed into a corner speechless with disgust. He left them at Rouen, and Barbara, watching her aunt sleeping in a corner, wondered what they would do when they finally did arrive at the station. But, as soon as the lights of the *Gare de Lazare* showed through the darkness, Miss Britton began to bestir herself, and, when the train stopped, marched boldly out of the carriage as if she had been in Paris dozens of times.

In a little while they were seated in a *fiacre*, going along through brightly-lighted streets, feeling very satisfied that they were actually nearing their destination. But their content did not last long, for soon leaving the lighted thoroughfares, they turned into a dark road with high walls on either side, and just a lamp now and then. It really seemed rather lonely, and they both began to feel uncomfortable and to wonder if they were being taken to the wrong place. Stories of mysterious disappearances began to flit through Barbara's brain, and she started when Aunt Anne said in a very emphatic tone, "He looked a very nice cabman, quite respectable and honest."

"Yes," Barbara said meekly, though she had hardly noticed him.

"I knew it was some distance from the station, of course."

"Yes," Barbara replied once more, and added, "of course," as Miss Britton began to look rather fierce.

"It was a little stupid of you not to think of proposing to stay in the station hotel while I was collecting the wraps," she went on rather sharply, and Barbara was trying to think of something soothing to say, when the cab drew up suddenly and they were both precipitated on to the hat-boxes on the other seat.

Barbara put her hat straight and looked out of the window. It certainly seemed to be a funny place to which they had come. The houses were high and narrow, and the one they had stopped at had a dirty archway without a single light; but, as the driver showed no intention of getting down and ringing, Barbara stepped out and groped about for a bell or a knocker of some kind. Then the cabman, pointing with his whip up the archway, said, "Numero quatorze, par là." The girl did not much relish going into the darkness by herself, for she was sure there must be some mistake. But she was afraid that, if Miss Britton got out too, the man might drive away and leave them, so she begged her aunt to remain in the cab while she went into the archway to make inquiries. After some groping she found a bell-rope, and rang three times without receiving any answer. She was just about to ring again, when she heard stealthy steps approaching the door, and the next moment it was opened, disclosing to her frightened gaze a dirty-looking man, wearing a red nightcap, and carrying a candle in his hand.

Barbara recoiled a step, for though she had been sure there was some mistake she had not expected anything as bad as this. However, she managed to gasp out, "Madame Belvoir's?" and was intensely relieved to see the fellow shake his head. But he leered at her so horribly that she waited to make no more inquiries, but turned and fled back to the *fiacre*.

"This is not the right place," she pouted, "and I'm thankful it isn't—there's *such* a horrid man."

"A man! But she was a widow," Aunt Anne said vaguely; and her niece could not help laughing, for if that *were* the case there might have been brothers or sons.

But the cabman was getting very impatient, and it was not an easy matter to argue with him, for when they insisted that this could not be 14 Rue St. Sulpice, he merely shook his head and persisted that it was. Then suddenly a light seemed to break upon him, and he asked, "14 Rue St. Sulpice, Courcelles?"

Barbara shook her head violently, and said, "Non, non, Neuilly." Whereupon with much grumbling and torrents of words that, perhaps, it was as well she did not understand, he whipped up his horse, and she had hardly time to scramble into the cab before they swung off.

They were very glad to leave the neighbourhood, for they saw the red nightcap peeping out at the end of the archway, and it seemed as if there were more friends of the same kind in the rear.

"It is *most* absurd for the man to think *we* should have been staying here. I think he must be mad."

"Yes," returned Barbara, not knowing what else to say, and they continued to rumble over more cobble stones and down dark roads, till they finally stopped in a dimly-lighted street, which, however, was broad and clean, with fairly large houses on either side.

Barbara got out with some misgivings, wondering what their fate would be this time. She had to ring several times as before; but as there was no dark archway, and the cab was close by, she had not the same fear. When the door opened, she could distinguish nothing at first, but presently espied a little woman, in a *white* nightcap, holding a candle.

"Dear me!" she thought, "candles and nightcaps seem to be the fashion here;" but aloud, merely asked politely for Madame Belvoir, hoping that she was not speaking to the lady in question. Before the *portière* (for it was she) could answer, a bright light shone out at the far end of the passage, and a girl came hurrying down, saying, "Madame Belvoir? Mais oui, entrez, entrez. C'est Mademoiselle Britton, n'est-ce pas?"

Mademoiselle Britton was not a little relieved, and so, I am sure, was her poor aunt, who came hurrying out of the cab, and was so glad to get rid of it that she paid the ten francs the man demanded without a murmur.

The French girl explained in broken English that her mother greatly regretted

being absent, having been called away suddenly to an uncle who was ill, but that she and her sister would do their utmost to make Miss Britton comfortable.

By that time they had reached the end of the passage and were led into a comfortable room, where another girl was waiting. Tea was ready for them too, and Barbara thought she had never appreciated it more. She tried to explain the reason of their late arrival, and told some of their adventures; but, although both the French girls listened politely and smiled and nodded, Barbara thought that neither of them understood much of what she said. However, she did not mind that, and presently they led the way upstairs to a room that was a haven of delight to the wanderers. The windows opened on to a garden whence the scent of lilac floated, and the whole room—down to the hearth-brush, which charmed Barbara—was decorated in blue.

With the memory of that other Rue St. Sulpice still fresh in their minds, their present quarters indeed seemed delightful; and Barbara declared she could have fallen upon the necks of both girls and kissed them.

"A quite unnecessary and most impertinent proceeding," Aunt Anne replied curtly. "They will much prefer pounds, shillings, and pence to embraces," and Barbara thought that after all she was probably right.

CHAPTER III.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

It was very nice to waken the next morning and find the sunshine streaming in at the windows.

Barbara was ready to be charmed with everything, from the pretty little maid in the mob cap, who carried in the breakfast, to the crisp rolls and coffee. Both of the travellers were quite rested, and eager to begin sight-seeing, and Miss Britton left the choice of place to her niece. The latter diligently scanned the guide-book as she took her breakfast, and kept calling out fresh suggestions every few moments; but, finally, they determined on the Louvre as most worthy of their

first visit.

I do not know whether it was the experience of the night before, but Aunt Anne seemed to have a fixed idea that Paris was full of thieves, and before starting out she made the most careful preparations for encountering pickpockets. She sewed some of her money into a little bag inside her dress, put some more into a pocket in her underskirt, and said that Barbara might pay for things in general, as it would teach her the use of French money. She herself kept only a few centimes in a shabby purse in her dress pocket, "to disappoint any thief who took it."

As soon as the *fiacre* stopped in the court of the Louvre, they were besieged by several disreputable and seedy-looking men wanting to act as guides through the galleries. Partly to get rid of the rest, partly because they thought it might be easier, they engaged the tidiest-looking one who seemed to know most English, and, feeling rather pleased with themselves, entered the first gallery. Of course, Barbara wished to begin by seeing those pictures which she had heard most about; but the guide had a particular way of his own of taking people round, and did not like any interference.

Indeed, he did not even like to let them stay longer than a few seconds at each picture, and kept chattering the whole time, till at last they grew annoyed, and Aunt Anne told him they would do the rest by themselves. But it took some time to get rid of him, and then he went sulkily, complaining that they had not given him enough, though Barbara felt sure he had really got twice as much as was his due.

They enjoyed themselves very much without him, and saw a great deal before lunch-time.

At the end of the meal, when Aunt Anne was going to take out her purse to use the centimes in it for a tip for the waiter, she discovered her preparations had not been in vain, and that the purse really had been stolen. Perhaps, on the whole, she was rather glad, for she turned to Barbara in triumph.

"There now, Barbara," she said, "if I had had my other purse in my pocket, it would have been just the same, and now whoever has it will be properly disappointed!"

They did not return to Neuilly until the evening, where they met the rest of

the pension at dinner. Besides two brothers of the Belvoir family, there were a number of French visitors and one English family, to whom Miss Britton and her niece took an immediate dislike. The father, who, they were told, was a solicitor whose health had broken down, was greedy and vulgar, and his son and daughter were pale, frightened-looking creatures, who took no part in the gay conversation which the French kept up.

After dinner, when every one else went into the salon for music, the solicitor and his children retired to their rooms, which Mademoiselle Belvoir and her brothers seemed to resent. The former confided to Barbara, in very quaint English, that they had never had such people in their house before, and Aunt Anne, who overheard the remark, shook her head sagely.

"I would not trust them, Mademoiselle" (Miss Britton was English from the sole of her foot to the tip of her tongue). "They seem unpleasant, and I have a great power for reading faces." At which Mademoiselle Belvoir murmured something about wishing her mother were back.

However, the evening was a pleasant one, though Barbara was so tired that she was hardly an intelligent listener to the music provided, and fell asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

She was, therefore, a little surprised when she awoke suddenly two hours later for apparently no reason at all. She had been dreaming about something exciting, and lay trying to remember what it was, when an eerie feeling stole over her, and it seemed as if she heard breathing—which was not her aunt's—close beside her. She did not dare to move for a moment. Then she turned her head very gently, and between the two windows near the recess she was sure she saw a dark figure. The longer she watched the surer she became, and she knew it could not be her aunt, whom she heard breathing quietly in the other bed.

It was certainly a horrible sensation, and all the unpleasant stories she had ever read crowded into her mind. At first she could not think what to do, but at last made up her mind to go across the room to Miss Britton's bed and tell her.

Yawning, and pretending to wake up gradually, though all the time she felt as if she had been lying there for hours, she called out, "Aunt Anne, I can't sleep, so I'm coming into your bed."

Miss Britton awoke at once—she was a light sleeper—and at first I think she

imagined her niece was mad.

"If you can't sleep in your own bed," she said, "I'm quite sure you won't sleep in mine, for it's not big enough for two."

But Barbara persisted, and at last her aunt gave way. "Well," she said at last, rather crossly, "be quick if you are coming. I don't want to be kept awake all night."

The truth was, it seemed so horrible to cross the room close to that black figure—as she would have to do—that Barbara lingered a moment, screwing up her courage. It was hard, certainly, to walk slowly across, for she thought she should not run, feeling all the time as if two hands would catch hold of her in the darkness. She was very glad to creep in beside her aunt, and at first could not do anything but lie and listen to that lady's grumblings. Then warning her not to scream, she whispered very softly that there was a man beside the window. Miss Britton took it wonderfully coolly, and after the first start said nothing for a few minutes. Then she remarked in loud, cheerful tones, "Well, child, as you are not sleepy, let us talk about our plans for to-morrow."

They talked a long time, hoping that the man would give it up and go; but still the black figure stood there motionless.

At last Barbara, who could bear it no longer, said "Oh, aunt, since we can't sleep let us put on the light and read up things in the guide-book."

At that moment she heard a rustle behind, and saw the man try to get into the recess; but the trunks were there, and meeting that obstruction, he turned and made a quick dash to the French window, and was out in a moment, whereupon Aunt Anne and Barbara sat up in bed and screamed. Then the girl leaped to the electric light, and her aunt to the bell, and in a few moments the maids and the Misses Belvoir came running in.

"He's gone!" cried Barbara, looking out of the window and feeling quite brave now that so many people had arrived. "He's gone, and it was too dark to see his face."

Aunt Anne, meanwhile, explained, as well as she could, what had happened, and the Misses Belvoir looked so frightened and worried that Barbara felt she must be a dreadful nuisance. But they were very nice and extremely apologetic,

declaring that such a thing had never happened before, and that the police should be told in the morning, and their brothers would search the garden at once and sit outside their door all night if Miss Britton liked. But Aunt Anne, who had delightful common-sense, said briskly—

"Nonsense; whoever it was, he will be too frightened to think of coming back to-night, so just go to your beds, and let us get to ours." And she pushed them gently out. They continued to murmur apologies after the door was shut; but Aunt Anne paid not the least heed.

"Now, my dear," she said, turning to Barbara, "I am sure you know that what I said to them is quite true, and that our friend will not return to-night. So be sensible, and go back to bed, and we will talk about it all in the morning."

Of course, Barbara did as she was told, and, though she was sure she would never get to sleep, strange to say, in a very little while she was dreaming peacefully, and did not waken till late next morning.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN BLUE GLASSES.

The nocturnal adventure caused quite an excitement in the house, and very little else was talked of at lunch-time. Aunt Anne had asked Mademoiselle Belvoir if she would rather nothing was said about the affair; but the girl said it was impossible to keep it quiet, as several people had heard the bustle in the night, and were anxious to know all about it. So Miss Britton found that she and her niece were objects of general interest, and they both struggled nobly to describe the adventure intelligibly to the others, though Barbara knew that she got horribly mixed in her French tenses, and was not quite sure whether she understood all the questions the French people put to her. The solicitor annoyed her most—he was so superior.

"Why did you not rush upon the fellow and scream for help?" he said.

"I was far too frightened to do anything of the kind," Barbara answered indignantly. "I would never have dared to fling myself upon a dark figure like that. If I had seen him, I shouldn't have minded so much."

"So you did not see his face?" said the solicitor.

"Of course I didn't," and Barbara spoke rather crossly. "If I had, I should have gone and described him to the police the first thing this morning."

She felt inclined to add that it was a pity he could not inculcate his own children with some of his apparent courage, for they both seemed far more frightened than interested in the story, and the son's eyes looked as if they would jump out of his head. Perhaps the poor youth was scolded for his timidity afterwards, for when Barbara passed their room in going upstairs to get ready to go out, she heard the father speaking in very stern tones, and the boy murmuring piteously, "Oh, father! oh, father!"

Miss Britton was in a hurry to get out; but, as often happens, it proved a case of "more haste, less speed," for they had just got into the street when Barbara remembered she had left her purse behind, and had to run back for it.

What was her astonishment on opening the bedroom door to see the solicitor's son standing near the window. She had come upstairs very softly, and he had not heard her till she was in the room; then he turned round suddenly, and sprang back with a face filled with terror.

"What *are* you doing here?" she exclaimed in astonishment, and at first he could not answer for fright.

"I—I—came to look at the place where the man was last night," he gasped at last, "and to see how he could get out of the window."

"Well, I think your curiosity has run away with your politeness," Barbara said. "You might have seen from the garden that the balcony is quite close enough to the tree for any one to get out easily. Is there anything else you would like to examine?"

She need hardly have asked, for he had hurried round to the door before she had half finished speaking, and, only murmuring, "I'm sorry," fled precipitately. She was really rather sorry for him; he looked so abjectly miserable.

Nevertheless, she took the precaution of locking the door and putting the key under the mat. She went downstairs more slowly than she had come up, for the boy's visit had made her feel rather queer.

The way he shrank back into the window when she came in had reminded her so much of the manner in which the black figure had acted in the night, and she felt there was something uncanny about the whole thing. However, she made up her mind to say nothing to her aunt just then in case of spoiling her afternoon's pleasure, but she was quite determined to make some rather pointed remarks to the solicitor that evening when no one else was listening, and see how he took them.

Unfortunately, however, she had no opportunity of doing so, for when they went down to dinner, none of the solicitor's family were visible, and Mademoiselle Belvoir remarked that they had all gone out to the theatre, and would not be back till late. The remarks, Barbara supposed, must be postponed till the morrow; but, alas! she never had a chance of making them, for early on the morrow the whole house learned that the solicitor, with his son and daughter, had gone, with apparently no intention of returning.

Mademoiselle Belvoir and her brother had waited up till long after the time they should have returned, and then the brother had hurried to the *préfecture* to report the matter. He had been growing very suspicious of late, as the solicitor had not paid anything for three weeks: "Waiting for his cheque-book, which had been mislaid," he had said. But the suspicions had been acted on too late, and his mother was cheated out of ever so much money. Every one was highly indignant, and Miss Britton and her niece really felt very grieved that they should have been *British* subjects who had behaved so badly.

Aunt Anne said she almost felt as if she ought to pay for them and save the honour of their country, but Barbara thought that would be too quixotic. At first Mademoiselle Belvoir thought there might be something inside the man's trunks that would repay them a little for the money lost; but, on being opened, there proved to be nothing but a few old clothes, and Mademoiselle and her brothers remembered that the boy had often gone out carrying parcels, which they used to laugh at.

When all this was being discussed, Barbara thought she might as well tell about finding the boy in her room, and she mentioned her suspicions that he and

the nocturnal visitor were one and the same person, and found to her surprise that the Belvoirs had thought the same. Poor things! Barbara was heartily sorry for them, for it was an unpleasant occurrence to happen in a *pension*, and might make a difference to them in future, apart from the fact that they could hear nothing of the lost money, nor yet of the runaways.

Barbara felt that hitherto her adventures in France had been quite like a story-book, and knew that when her brother Donald heard of them he would be making all kind of wonderful plans for the discovery of the miscreants.

"He would fancy himself an amateur detective at once," she said to her aunt. Whereupon that lady returned grimly she would gladly become a detective for the time being if she thought there was any chance of finding the wretches, but that such people usually hid their tracks too well. Nevertheless, Barbara noticed that she eyed her fellow-men with great suspicion, and one day she persisted in pursuing a stout gentleman with blue glasses, whom she declared was the solicitor in disguise, till he noticed them and began to be nervously agitated.

"I'm sure it isn't he, aunt," Barbara whispered, after they had followed him successfully from Notre Dame to St. Etienne, and from there to Napoleon's Tomb. "He speaks French—I heard him. Besides, he is too stout for the solicitor."

"He may be padded," Aunt Anne said wisely. "People of that kind can do anything. There is something in his walk that assures me it *is* he, and I *must* see him without his spectacles."

Barbara followed rather unwillingly, though she could not help thinking with amusement how the family would laugh when she wrote and described her aunt in the role of a detective. She was not to be very successful, however, for, as they were sauntering after him down one of the galleries of the Museum, the blue-spectacled gentleman suddenly turned round, and in a torrent of French asked to what pleasure he owed Madame's close interest, which, if continued, would cause him to call up a *gendarme*. "If you think to steal from me, I am far too well prepared for that," he concluded.

"Steal!" Aunt Anne echoed indignantly. "We are certainly not thieves, sir, whatever *you* may be." Barbara was thankful that apparently his knowledge of English was so slight that he did not understand the remark. It was not without

difficulty that she prevailed upon her aunt to pass on and cease the wordy argument, which, she pointed out, was not of much good, as neither understood the other's language sufficiently well to answer to the point.

"We shall have all the visitors in the Museum round us soon," she urged, with an apprehensive glance at the people who were curiously drawing near, "and shall perhaps be turned out for making a disturbance."

"Then I should go at once to the English ambassador," Aunt Anne said with dignity. "But, as I have now seen his eyes and am assured he is *not* the man we want, we can pass on," and with a stately bow, and the remark that if he annoyed her in future she would feel compelled to complain, she moved away, Barbara following, crimson with mingled amusement and vexation.

CHAPTER V.

GOOD-BYE TO PARIS.

The days in Paris flew past far too quickly for Barbara, who enjoyed everything to the full.

As she came to know her aunt better, and got accustomed to her dry manner and rather exact ways, she found her to be a really good companion, not altogether lacking in humour, and having untiring energy in sight-seeing and a keen sympathy with Barbara's delight in what was new.

Perhaps Miss Britton, too, was gaining more pleasure from the trip than she had expected, for up till now she had seen her niece only as one a little sobered by responsibility and the constraint of her own presence. Whatever the cause, it was certain that during the past fortnight Miss Britton had felt the days of her youth nearer her than for some time, and it was with mutual regret that they reached the last day of their stay in Paris.

They were sitting together on the balcony, with the bees very busy in the lilac-bush near them, and the doves murmuring to each other at the end of the

garden. Barbara was reading a guide-book on Brittany, and Miss Britton, with her knitting in her hands, was listening to bits the girl read aloud, and watching a little frown grow between the eyebrows. It was curious how the frown between the dark brows reminded her of her dead brother; and after a moment she laid down her knitting.

"Barbara was reading a guide book on Brittany."

"Barbara was reading a guide book on Brittany."

"You may think it a little unkind, Barbara," she began, "that I am not coming with you to see what kind of place it is to which you are going, but I think it is good for a girl to learn to be independent and self-reliant. I made careful inquiries, and the people seem to be very good at teaching French—they used to live in Paris—and they are quite respectable. Of course, you may not find everything just as you like it, and if it is really unpleasant, you can write me, and I shall arrange for you to return here. But Paris would be more distracting for you to live in, and in a week or two far too hot to be pleasant.

"Besides, I should like you really to *study* the language, so that you may profit by your stay in France, as well as enjoy it. If I stayed with you you would never talk French all the time." She stopped a moment, and took a stitch or two in her knitting, then added in a tone quite different from her usual quick, precise way, "Your father was a splendidly straight, strong man—in body and mind. Try to be like him in every way. He would have wished his eldest daughter to be sensible and courageous."

Barbara flushed with pleasure at the praise of her father. She had never heard her aunt mention him before, and she leaned forward eagerly, "Thank you, Aunt Anne—I want to be like him."

She would gladly have kissed her, but the family habit of reserve was strong upon her.

"Let me see," continued her aunt, "can you ride?"

Barbara laughed.

"I used to ride Topsy—the Shetland, you know—long ago, but father sold him."

Her eyes followed her aunt's across the garden and the end of the street, to the distant glimpse of the Bois de Boulogne, where riders passed at frequent intervals, and her eyes glowed. "Doesn't it look jolly?" she said. "I used to love it."

Aunt Anne nodded.

"I used to ride in my youth, and your father rode beautifully before he was married, and when he could afford to keep a horse. He would like you to have done so too, I think. If there is any place where you can learn in St. Servan, you may. It will be a good change from your studies."

"Oh, aunt!" and this time reserve was thrown to the winds, and Barbara most heartily embraced her. "Oh, how perfectly splendid of you! It has always been my dream to ride properly, but I never, never thought it would come true."

"Dreams do not often," Miss Britton returned, with a scarcely audible sigh; then she gathered up her soft white wool. "There is the first bell, child, and we have not changed for dinner. Come, be quick."

The next morning a heavily-laden cab passed from the Rue St. Sulpice through the gates into the city. Miss Britton, finding that a friend of the Belvoirs was going almost the whole way to St. Servan, had arranged for Barbara to go under her care. But it was with very regretful eyes that the girl watched the train, bearing her aunt away, leave the station, and she was rather a silent traveller when, later in the morning, she was herself *en route* for St. Servan.

Not so her companion, however, a most talkative personage, who was hardly quiet five minutes consecutively. She poured forth all sorts of confidences about her family and friends, and seemed quite satisfied if Barbara merely nodded and murmured, "*Comme c'est interessant!*" though she did not understand nearly all her companion said. The latter pointed out places of interest in passing, and finally, with an effusive good-bye, got out at the station before St. Servan.

As the train neared its destination, Barbara looked anxiously to see what the town was like, and her disappointment was great at the first glimpse of the place. When the family had looked up the Encyclopaedia for a description of St. Servan, it seemed to be that of a small, old-fashioned place, and Barbara had pictured it little more than a village with a picturesque beach. Instead of that, she saw many houses, some tall chimneys, and quays with ships lying alongside. It would have cheered her had she known that the station was really a considerable distance from the town, and in the ugliest part of it; but that she did not find out till later.

Outside the station were many vociferous cab-drivers offering to take her anywhere she liked, and, choosing the one whose horse seemed best cared for,

she inquired if he knew where the house of Mademoiselle Loiré, Rue Calvados, was. Grinning broadly he bade her step in, and presently they were rolling and bumping along rough cobble-stoned streets. Barbara had further imagined, from the description of the house that Mademoiselle Loiré had sent them, that it was a villa standing by itself, and was rather surprised when the *fiacre*, after climbing a very steep street, stopped at a door and deposited herself and her trunks before it. Almost before she rang the bell she heard hurried steps, and the door was opened by some one whom she imagined might be the housekeeper.

"Is Mademoiselle Loiré in?" she inquired of the thin and severe-looking woman with hair parted tightly in the middle.

"I am Mademoiselle Loiré," she replied stiffly in French, "and you, I suppose, are Miss Britton! I am sorry there was no one at the station to meet you, but we did not expect you so soon."

"Did you not get my post-card?" Barbara asked.

"I could not possibly do that," Mademoiselle Loiré returned reprovably; "it was posted in Paris far too late for *that*. However, perhaps you will now come into the *salon*," and Barbara followed meekly into a room looking out upon the garden, and very full of all kinds of things. She had hardly got in before she heard a bustle on the stairs, which was followed by the entrance of Mademoiselle Thérèse Loiré. Her face was not so long nor her hair so tightly drawn back as her sister's, and she came forward with a rush, smiling broadly, but, somehow, Barbara felt she would like the prim sister better.

After asking many questions about the journey they took her to her room, and Barbara's heart sank a little. The house seemed dark and cold after that in Neuilly, and her bedroom was paved with red brick, as was the custom in those parts in old houses.

The dining-room—smelling somewhat of damp—was a long, low room leading straight into the garden, and the whole effect was rather depressing. At supper-time, Barbara was made acquainted with the rest of the household, which consisted of an adopted niece—a plump girl of about seventeen, with very red cheeks and a very small waist—and two boys about twelve, who were boarding with the Loirés so that they might go to the Lycée[1] in the town. After supper, Mademoiselle Thérèse explained that they usually went for a walk with the

widower and his children who lived next door.

"Poor things!" she said, "they knew nobody when they came to the town, and a widower in France is so shut off from companionship that we thought we must be kind to them. They have not a woman in the house except a charer, who comes in the first thing in the morning."

Barbara, with a chuckle over the "charer," went to put on her hat, and on coming into the dining-room again, found the widower and his sons already there. Something in the shape of the back of the elder man seemed familiar to her, and on his turning round to greet her, she recognised her little friend of the train on their first arrival in France. The recognition was mutual, and before she had time to speak he rushed forward and poured forth a torrent of French, while Mademoiselle Thérèse clamoured for an explanation, which he finally gave her.

At last he had to stop for want of breath, and Barbara had time to look at his sons—boys of twelve and sixteen—who seemed a great care to him. All the three, father and sons, wore cloaks with hoods to them, which they called *capucines*, and as there was very little difference in their heights, they made rather a quaint trio. Barbara was glad to see him again, however, for it seemed to bring her aunt nearer.

It amused her considerably to notice how Mademoiselle Thérèse flew from one party to another, during the whole of the walk, evidently feeling that she was the chaperon of each individual. She started out beside the widower, but soon interrupted his conversation by dashing off to give a word of warning to the boys, and what was supposed to be a word of encouragement to Barbara, who was walking with Marie, the niece, and the widower's eldest son.

It did not make much difference to them, for Jean and Marie seemed to have plenty to say; and after addressing a few careless remarks to Barbara, to which, perhaps, she did not pay much attention, the latter heard her say to her companion, "Bah! there is nothing to be made of her; let us continue;" and she was glad they left her alone that first evening, for she was not in the mood for talking.

[1] Public school.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REVOLT OF TWO.

The days that followed were not as pleasant to Barbara as those she had spent in Paris, for though St. Malo, just across the river, fascinated her, she did not care much for St. Servant, and the people did not prove congenial to her—especially Mademoiselle Thérèse. Though she seemed to be a clever teacher, Barbara could never be sure that she was speaking the truth, and in writing home she described her as "rather a humbug."

"Most English people," she told Barbara shortly after her arrival, "pronounce French badly because their mouths are shaped differently from ours, but *yours*, Miss Britton, is just right, therefore your accent is already wonderfully good."

The girl laughed; the family had never been in the habit of flattering one another, and she did not appreciate it as much as Mademoiselle Thérèse had meant she should. Indeed, Barbara wished that the lady would be less suave to her and more uniform in temper towards the rest of the household, who sometimes, she shrewdly surmised, suffered considerably from the younger sister's irascibility.

She had just been in St. Servan ten days, when she had an example of what she described in a letter home as a "stage quarrel" between the Mademoiselles Loiré. It began at second *déjeuner* over some trivial point in the education of Marie, about whom they were very apt to be jealous. Their voices gradually rose higher and higher, the remarks made being anything but complimentary, till finally Mademoiselle Loiré leaped from her seat, saying she would not stay there to be insulted, and darted upstairs. Her sister promptly followed, continuing her argument as she went, but arriving too late at the study door, which was bolted on the inside by the fugitive.

After various fruitless attempts to make herself heard, Mademoiselle Thérèse returned to the dining-room, and after a few words of politeness to Barbara, began once more on the subject of dispute, this time with Marie, her niece.

Apparently the latter took a leaf out of her aunt's book, for after speaking noisily for a few minutes, she said *she* would not be insulted either, and followed her upstairs. Thereupon Mademoiselle Thérèse's anger knew no bounds, and finding that Marie had taken refuge beside her aunt in the study, she began to beat a lively tattoo upon the door.

The two boys, full of curiosity, followed to see what was going on, so Barbara was left in solitary grandeur, with the ruins of an omelette before her, and she, "having hunger," went on stolidly with her meal. She was, in truth, a little disgusted with the whole affair, and was not sorry to escape to her room before Mademoiselle Thérèse returned. They were making such a noise below that it was useless to attempt to do any work, and she was just thinking of going out for a walk, when her door burst open and in rushed Mademoiselle Loiré, dragging Marie with her.

"Keep her with you," she panted; "she says she will kill my sister. Keep her with you while I go down and argue with Thérèse."

Barbara looked sharply at the girl, and it seemed to her that though she kept murmuring, "I'll kill her I—I'll kill her!" half her anger was merely assumed, and that there was no necessity for alarm.

"How can they be so silly and theatrical?" she muttered. Then, glancing round the room to see if there were anything she could give her, she noticed a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts, and her eyes twinkled. It was not exactly the same thing as *sal volatile*, of course, but at any rate it would keep the girl quiet, so, pouring out a large glassful, she bade Marie drink it. The latter obeyed meekly, and for some time was reduced to silence by want of breath.

"I shall certainly throw myself into the sea," she gasped at last.

"Well, you will certainly be more foolish than I thought you were, if you do," Barbara returned calmly. "Indeed, I can't think what all this fuss is about."

Marie stared. "Why, it's to show Aunt Thérèse that she must not tyrannise over us like that," she said. "I told her I was going to throw myself into the sea, and as she believes it, it is almost the same thing."

Barbara shrugged her shoulders.

"A very comfortable way of doing things in cold weather," she remarked; "but I want a little quiet now, and I think you had better have some too."

The French girl, somewhat overawed by the other's coolness, relapsed into silence, and when the sounds downstairs seemed quieter Barbara got up, and said she was going out for a walk. She found on descending, however, that the "argument" had only been transferred to mademoiselle's workroom, where a very funny sight met her eyes when she looked in.

The poor little widower, whom apparently the two sisters had fetched to arbitrate between them, stood looking fearfully embarrassed in the middle of the room, turning apologetically from one to the other. He never got any further than the first few words, however, as they brought a torrent of explanation from both his hearers, each giving him dozens of reasons why the other was wrong.

Marie, who watched for a moment or two, could not help joining in; and Barbara, very tired of it all, left them to fight it out by themselves, and went away by the winding streets to the look-out station, where she sat down and watched the sun shining on the beautiful old walls of St. Malo. She had only been once in that town with Mademoiselle Thérèse, but the ramparts and the old houses had fascinated her, and if she had been allowed, she would have crossed the little moving bridge daily.

When she returned, the house seemed quiet again, for which she was very thankful, and, mounting to her room, she prepared the French lesson which was usually given her at that time.

But when Mademoiselle Thérèse came up, she spent most of the time in bewailing the ingratitude of one's fellow mortals, especially near relations, and wondering if Marie were really going to drown herself, and when her sister would unlock her door and come out of the room.

Supper was rather a doleful meal, and immediately after it mademoiselle went to look for her niece, who had not returned. Barbara laughed a little scornfully at her fears, and even when she came back with the news that Marie was not concealed next door, as she had thought, refused to believe that the girl was not hiding somewhere else.

"But where could she be except next door?" mademoiselle questioned; "and when I went to ask, Monsieur Dubois was seated with his sons having supper,

and no signs of the truant. He had seen or heard nothing of her, he said."

Barbara wondered which had been deceived, and whether the widower himself was deceived or deceiver, but, giving up the attempt to decide the question, retired to bed, advising mademoiselle to do the same, feeling some curiosity, but no anxiety, as to Marie's fate. She had not been in bed very long when she heard some one move stealthily downstairs and enter the dining-room. Mademoiselle Thérèse, she knew, had locked all the doors and gone to her bedroom, which was in the front of the house, and she immediately guessed that it must be something to do with Marie.

"The plot thickens," she said to herself, stealing to the window, which looked out upon the garden. There, to her amazement, she saw Mademoiselle Loiré emerging laboriously from the dining-room window. She saw her in the moonlight creep down the garden towards the wall at the end, but what happened after that she could only guess at, as the trees cast a shadow which hid the lady from view.

"The lady or the tiger?" she said, laughing, as she peered into the shades of the trees, and about five minutes later was rewarded by seeing two figures hurry back and enter the house by the same way that Mademoiselle Loiré had got out.

"Marie!" she thought triumphantly, wondering in what part of the garden she had been hidden, as there was no gate in the direction from which she had come. She lay awake for a little while, meditating on the vagaries of the family she had fallen into, and then fell so soundly asleep that she was surprised to find it broad daylight when she awoke, and to see Marie sitting on the end of her bed, smiling beamingly upon her.

"So you're back?" Barbara inquired with a yawn. "I hope you didn't find it too cold in the garden last night."

"You saw us, then?" giggled Marie. "But you don't know where I came from, do you? Nor does Aunt Thérèse. I'll tell you now; such an exciting time I've had—just like a story-book heroine."

"Penny novelette heroine," murmured Barbara, but her visitor was too full of her adventure to notice the remark.

"As you know, I told Aunt Thérèse I should drown myself," she began

complacently; "but, of course, such was not my intention."

"Of course not," interpolated Barbara drily.

"Instead, I confided my plan to Aunt Marie, then slipped out into the street, and thence to our friends next door."

"The widower's?" exclaimed the English girl in surprise.

"The very same. I explained to him my project for giving my aunt a wholesome lesson; and he, with true chivalry, invited me to sup with them—he saw I was spent with hunger."

Barbara, looking at the plump, rosy face of her companion, which had assumed a tragic air, stifled a laugh, and the girl continued.

"I spent a pleasant time, and was just finishing my repast when the bell rang. 'My aunt!' I cried. 'Hide me from her wrath, Monsieur.' 'The coal-cellar,' he replied, after a moment's stern thought. In one second I had disappeared—I was no more—and when my aunt entered she found him at supper with his sons. When she had gone I returned, and we spent the evening cheerfully in mutual congratulation. At nightfall, when we considered all was secure, Aunt Marie came into the garden, placed a ladder against the wall, and I passed from one garden into the other and regained our room securely. I think Aunt Thérèse suspected nothing—Monsieur Dubois is such a beautiful deceiver."

"Well, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself," Barbara said hotly. "Apart from the meanness and deceitfulness of it all, you have behaved most childishly, and I shall always think less of Monsieur Dubois for his untruthfulness."

"Untruthfulness!" Marie returned in an offended tone. "He acted most chivalrously; but you English have such barbarous ideas about chivalry."

For a moment Barbara felt tempted to get up and shake the girl, then came to the conclusion that it would be waste of time and energy to argue with an individual whose ideas were so hopelessly dissimilar to her own.

"I'm going to get up now," she said shortly. "I'll be glad if you would go."

"But don't you want to know what we are going to do now?" queried Marie, a little astonished that her companion should not show more interest in such an exciting adventure. "Our campaign has only begun. We will make Aunt Thérèse capitulate before we have done. After all, she is the younger. We intend to stay in our rooms without descending until she promises to ask pardon for her insults, and say no more of the matter; and we will go out nightly to get air—carefully avoiding meeting her—and will buy ourselves sausages and chocolate, and so live until she sees how wrong she has been."

She ended with great pride, feeling that at length she must have made an impression on this prosaic English girl, and was much disconcerted when Barbara broke into laughter, crying, "Oh, you goose; how can you be so silly!"

Marie rose with hurt dignity. "You have no feeling for romance," she said. "Your horizon is most commonplace." Then, struck by a sudden fear, she added, "But you surely will not be unpleasant enough to tell Aunt Thérèse what I have confided to you? I trusted you."

"No," Barbara said, a little unwillingly, "I won't tell her; but I wish you had left me out of the matter entirely, for I certainly cannot lie to her." And with that Marie had to be content.

CHAPTER VII.

A WILD DRIVE.

The uncomfortable "campaign," as Marie had called it, continued for some days, and Barbara was in the unpleasant condition of having both parties confide in her. At the end of that time, however, it seemed as if the dainties that sustained the two upstairs began to pall upon them, as housekeeping evidently did on Mademoiselle Thérèse, and Barbara saw signs of a truce.

This was doubtless hastened by the news that an old family friend was coming with his wife and daughter on the next Sunday afternoon, and, as Mademoiselle Thérèse explained, they must keep up appearances. He was a

lawyer who lived at Dol, and from the preparations that were made, Barbara saw that they thought a great deal of him, for there was such baking and cooking as had never been since her arrival. The salad even was adorned with rose leaves, and looked charming, while the Mesdemoiselles Loiré clothed themselves in their best garments.

They all sat in state in the drawing-room as the hour for the arrival of the visitors approached, trying to look as if they had never heard of soufflet or mayonnaise salad, and Barbara, who had been called upon to taste each of the dishes in turn and give an opinion on their worth, almost felt as if she never wished to hear of such things again. About twelve o'clock a *fiacre* stopped at the door, and a few minutes later the visitors were announced—father, mother, and daughter.

Barbara was agreeably surprised—as indeed she often was by the Loirés' friends—to find that they were so nice. The mother and daughter were both very fashionably dressed, but simple and frank, the father, however, being most attractive to Barbara. He was clever and amusing, and contradicted Mademoiselle Thérèse in such an audacious way, that had it been any one else, she would have retired to her bedroom offended for a week. The visit passed most successfully, Mademoiselle Loiré's cooking being quite as much appreciated as she had expected, and when the visitors said good-bye, Barbara left the sisters congratulating themselves on their success.

A few days later the final word was added to the truce between the sisters by Mademoiselle Thérèse proposing that *she* should stay at home and look after the house, while her sister took Barbara and Marie for a visit to Cancale, whose beauties, Mademoiselle Thérèse assured Barbara, had a world-wide renown.

But the elder sister, though obviously pleased by the suggestion, thought she would rather "Thérèse" went, while she stayed in St. Servan and paid a few calls that she was desirous of making.

After much discussion it was so determined, and the following day Mademoiselle Thérèse, with the two girls, set off after lunch by the train. The ride was a pleasant one, and the magnificent view of the Bay of Cancale with the Mont St. Michel in the distance delighted Barbara's heart. She much preferred the quaint little fishing village, La Houle, nestling at the foot of the cliffs, to the more fashionable quarter of the town; but Mademoiselle Thérèse, who was bent

on "seeing the fashions of the visitors," led the way with energy to the hotel half way up the cliff. It was certainly gay enough there, and the Frenchwoman explained to her pupil "that if one noticed the costumes at seaside resorts it often saved buying fashion-books."

They sat on the terrace, mademoiselle and Marie dividing their attention between a stout lady, in a gorgeous toilet of purple trimmed with blue, and oysters, which, the Frenchwoman assured Barbara, were "one of the beauties of the place." But the latter contented herself with tea, wondering idly, as she drank it, why the beverage so often tasted of stewed hay. After their refreshment they strolled round the town, and then sat upon the promenade, watching the sun travel slowly down the sky towards the sea-line.

Suddenly mademoiselle remembered the time, and, looking at her watch, declared they had but a few minutes in which to get to the train, and that they must run if they wished to catch it. Off they started, mademoiselle panting in the rear, calling upon the girls to wait, and gasping out that it would be of no use to arrive without her. They were extremely glad on arriving at the terminus to see that they had still a minute or two to spare.

"We are in time for the train?" mademoiselle asked of a *gendarme* standing near the station house.

The man stared at her.

"Certainly, madame," he said at last; "but would it not be as well to come here in the morning?"

"In the morning!" she echoed. "You foolish fellow! We want to go by this train—it should be here now—it leaves at 7.30."

"Ah!" the man said, and he seemed to understand. "I fear you have lost *that* train by several days; it went last Sunday."

"What!" screamed mademoiselle. "How dare you mock me! I will report you."

"That must be as madame wishes," returned the man with horrible calmness; "but the train madame wishes to get only runs on Sundays, and, therefore, she must wait several days for the next. If any other train will do, there is one in the

morning at 9.30."

Barbara wanted to laugh, but consideration—or fear—of Mademoiselle Thérèse—kept her quiet, and they stood gazing at one another in sorrowful silence. A ten-mile walk at 7.30 in the evening, unless with very choice companions, is not an unmitigated pleasure, especially when one has been walking during the day. However, there was nothing for it but to walk, as a conveyance, if obtainable, would have been too expensive for Mademoiselle Thérèse's economical ideas.

They declared at first that it was a lovely evening, and began to cheer their way by sprightly conversation, but a mile or two of dusty highroad told upon them, and silence fell with the darkness. It was a particularly hot evening too, and great heat, as every one knows, frequently tends to irritation, so perhaps their silence was judicious. Mademoiselle Thérèse kept murmuring at intervals that it really was most annoying, as her sister would have been expecting them much earlier, and would be so vexed. Perhaps visions of a second retirement, which no "family friend" would come to relieve, floated before her eyes.

More than half the distance had been covered when they heard the sound of wheels behind them.

"A carriage!" cried mademoiselle, roused to sudden energy, "they *must* give us a lift," and drawing up by the side of the road, they waited anxiously to know their fate. It was fairly dark by this time, and they could not distinguish things clearly, but they saw a big horse, with a light, open cart behind. When mademoiselle first began to speak, the driver took not the least notice, but after going a few yards, pursued by her with praiseworthy diligence and surprising vigour, he pulled up and pointed to the seat behind, the place beside him being already filled by a trunk.

The wanderers scrambled in joyfully, greatly pleased with their good luck, and it was not until they were in their places, and near the man, that they discovered he had been drinking freely and was not as clear-headed as he might have been. If there had been time they would all have got out again, but he whipped up so quickly that there was no chance. He continued to whip up, moreover, till they were going at a most break-neck speed.

Mademoiselle, clinging madly to the side of the cart, begged him in the midst

of her gasps and exclamations to let them descend; but the more she begged and the more desperate she became, the better pleased he seemed, and it really looked as if they might all be thrown into the ditch. Then mademoiselle, who was always rather nervous about driving, broke into shrill screams, with Marie joining in at intervals—Gilpin's flight was nothing to it—and the cart jolted and swayed so that calm expostulation was impossible.

A lesson in rough-riding to a beginner could not have proved a more disjuncting experience, and the man, chuckling over the loudly-expressed fear of his companions, drove on. Fortunately, there were not many turns, and the road was fairly wide all the way; but once Barbara felt the hedge brush her face, and Marie's handkerchief, which she had been using to mop up her tears, was borne away a few minutes later by the bushes on the opposite side of the road.

The only thing that could be said in favour of the drive was that they covered the ground with great speed, and the thought occurred to Barbara that it would be by no means pleasant to enter the streets of St. Servan with their present driver and two screaming women, as, apart from other considerations, they might meet the policeman, and the encounter would be unpleasant.

She told mademoiselle and Marie that if they did not want to be killed or locked up in the *préfecture*, they must jump off the back of the cart while going up the hill outside the town. The horse, after its wild career, would calm down on the incline, besides which, a fall in the road would be preferable to being thrown through a shop window.

It took very forcible language to make Mademoiselle Thérèse face present terror rather than await the future; but, when the horse really did slow down to a walk, and the two girls had reached the ground in safety, she made a mighty effort, and floundered out in a heap upon the road, making so much noise that Barbara was afraid the man would realise they were gone, and insist upon their getting in again.

But he whipped up at that moment, and the noise of the cart drowned the dolorous complaints. The girls soothed their companion by assuring her that in ten minutes they would be home, when, most assuredly, her sister's heart would be moved to pity by their sorry plight and the tale of their adventures.

Just as they arrived at their own door they met Mademoiselle Loiré hurrying

up, and her sister, thinking she was coming to look for them, and not knowing the reception she might get, fell upon her neck, pouring forth with incoherent sobs and explanations the tale of their woes.

Mademoiselle Loiré was most sympathetic and unreproachful, and, having dried her sister's tears, led her into the house, where the whole party sat down to cake and cider, under the influence of which Mademoiselle Thérèse quite recovered, and retold their adventures, Barbara realising for the first time, as she listened, what heroines they had been!

Their screaming advance along the highroad became a journey, where they sat grimly, with set teeth, listening to the curses of a madman, and bowing their heads to escape having them cut off repeatedly by the branches of trees.

Their ignominious exit from the cart on the hill became a desperate leap into the darkness, when the vehicle was advancing at full gallop; and when Barbara finally rose to say good-night, she felt as if they had all been princesses in a fairy-tale, in which, alas! there had been no prince.

She learned two things on the morrow—not counting the conviction that riding at a gallop in a cart made one desperately stiff. The first was from Marie, who told her that Mademoiselle Loiré's forbearance with their late return, and her intense sympathy with their adventures, probably arose from the fact that she had just been returning from her own expedition when she met the wanderers, and had been filled with very similar fears concerning her reception as those which had filled her sister's heart.

The other fact, which Barbara read aloud to Mademoiselle Thérèse from the newspaper, was that Jean Malet had been apprehended for furious driving at a late hour the previous night, and would have to pay a heavy fine.

"How he had come safely through the streets at such speed," said the journalist, "was a miracle. Fortunately, there was no one in the cart but himself."

"Fortunately, indeed, there was not," remarked Barbara, folding up the paper.

CHAPTER VIII.

MONT ST. MICHEL.

The following day Barbara was taken to a confirmation service at a Roman Catholic church in the town, for one of Marie's younger brothers was coming from the country to be confirmed. Barbara watched the service curiously, feeling rather as if she were in a dream. The bishop entered the church with much pomp, adorned in wonderful lace and embroidered vestments. His progress up the aisle was slow, for there were many mothers and sisters with little children, whom they presented to him for his blessing, and he patiently stopped beside each, giving them his ring to kiss.

He was waited on by the clergy of the church and some from the country round, and these latter amused Barbara not a little, for they carried their rochets in newspapers, or in shabby brown bags, which they left in corners of the seats, while they slipped on their rochets in full view of every one. Then the boys, accompanied by their godfathers, the girls by their godmothers, filed slowly up to the bishop, who blessed each in turn. On leaving him they passed in front of two priests, the first attended by a boy bearing a basket of cotton-wool pellets dipped in oil, the second by a boy with a basket of towels.

The first priest rubbed the forehead of each child with oil, and the next one dried it. After which they went singing to their places.

The ceremony was a very long one, and Barbara was not very sorry when it was over. She grew weary before the close, and was glad when they made their way home, accompanied by Marie's father—the Loirés' half-brother—and the little boy. The former was a farmer in the country, and Barbara thought he was much pleasanter to look upon than either his daughter or sisters.

Mademoiselle Loiré had provided him at lunch with his favourite dish—shrimps—and Barbara could hardly eat anything herself, being completely fascinated with watching him. He had helped himself pretty liberally, and, to her amazement, began to eat them with lightning speed. He bent fairly low over his plate, resting an elbow on each side, and, putting in the whole shrimp with his left hand, almost immediately seemed to take out the head and tail with the other, working with machine-like regularity. It was an accomplishment that Barbara was sure would bring him in a lot of money at a show, and she began to picture

to herself a large advertisement, "Instantaneous Shrimp-eater," and the products that might arise therefrom.

When he had almost demolished the dish of shrimps he stopped, looked a little regretfully at the *débris* on his plate, then straightened himself in his chair, and began to take an interest in what was going on around him. He smiled benignly on his sisters, teased his daughter, and looked with shy curiosity at Barbara, to whom he did not dare to address any remarks until nearly the end of lunch. Then he said very slowly, and in a loud voice as if speaking to a deaf person, "Has the English mademoiselle visited the Mont St. Michel yet?"

Barbara shook her head.

"It is a pleasure for the future, I hope," she said.

"But certainly, of course, she must go there," he said, still speaking laboriously. Then after that effort, as if exhausted, he relapsed into silence.

But Mademoiselle Thérèse pursued the idea, and before the meal was over had fixed a day in the following week for the excursion. As her sister had already been at the Mont more than once, it was decided she should remain with Marie, so that the pleasant task of accompanying Barbara fell, as usual, to Mademoiselle Thérèse. At the last moment the numbers were increased by the little widower, who suddenly made up his mind to join them, with his eldest son.

"It is long since I have been," he declared, "and it is part of the education of Jean to see the wonders of his native land. Therefore, mademoiselle, if you permit us, we will join you to-morrow. It will be doubly pleasant for us to go in the company of one so learned."

Mademoiselle Thérèse could not help bowing at such a compliment, but it is doubtful whether she really appreciated the widower's proposal. The little man was quite capable of contradicting information she might give Barbara if he thought it incorrect, and when he was there she could not keep the conversation entirely in her own hands.

By the girl's most earnest request, she had agreed to stay the night at the Mont, and they started off in highest spirits by an early morning train.

Her two companions poured into Barbara's ears a full historical account of

Mont St. Michel, sometimes agreeing, sometimes contradicting each other, and the girl was glad that, when at last the long stretch of weird and lonely sandflats was reached, they seemed to have exhausted their eloquence.

"But where is the sea?" she asked in surprise. "I thought you said the sea would be all round it."

Mademoiselle Thérèse looked a little uncomfortable.

"Yes, the sea—of course. I expected the tide would be high. It ought to be up, I am sure. You told me too that the tide would be high," and she turned so quickly upon the widower that he jumped nervously.

"Yes, of course, that is to say—you told me the tide should be high at present, and I said I did not doubt it since you said it; but I heard some one remarking a few minutes ago that it would be up to-morrow."

"Never mind," Barbara interposed, for she saw signs of a fresh discussion. "It will be all the nicer to see it rise, I am sure." And, fortunately, the widower and Mademoiselle Thérèse agreed with her.

The train, crowded with visitors, puffed slowly towards St. Michel, and Barbara watched the dim outline of gray stone become clearer, till the full beauty of the Abbaye and the Merveille burst upon her sight.

"St. Michael and All Angels," she murmured, looking up towards the golden figure of the archangel on the top of the Abbaye. "He looks as if guarding the place; but what cruel things went on below him."

"Shocking tragedies!" mademoiselle assured her, having heard the last words. "Shocking tragedies! But let us be quick and get out, or else we shall not arrive in time for the first lunch. Now you are going to taste Madame Poulard's omelettes—a food ambrosial. You will wonder! They alone are worth coming to the Mont St. Michel for."

They hurried out over the wooden gangway that led from the train lines to the gate at the foot of the Mont, and entered the strange-stepped streets, and marvelled at the houses clinging to the rock. They were welcomed into the inn by Madame Poulard herself, who, resting for a moment at the doorway from her labours in the kitchen, stood smiling upon all comers.

Barbara looked with interest at the long, low dining-room, whose walls bore tokens of the visits of so many famous men and women, and at whose table there usually gathered folk from so many different nations.

"There is an Englishman!" she said eagerly to Mademoiselle Thérèse, for it seemed quite a long time since she had seen one of her countrymen so near.

"But, yes, of course," mademoiselle answered, shrugging her shoulders. "What did you expect? They go everywhere," and she turned her attention to her plate. "One must be fortified by a good meal," she said in a solemn whisper to Barbara as they rose, "to prepare one for the blood-curdling tales we are about to hear while seeing over the Abbaye."

And though the girl allowed something for exaggeration, it was quite true that, after hearing the stories, and seeing the pictures of those who had perished in the dungeons, she felt very eerie when being taken through them. In the damp darkness she seemed to realise the terror that imprisonment there must have held, and she thought she could almost hear the moans of the victims and the scraping of the rats, who were waiting—for the end.

"Oh!" she cried, drawing a long breath when they once more emerged into the open air. "You seem hardly able to breathe down there even for a little while—and for years——" She shuddered. "How could they bear it?"

"One learns to bear everything in this life," Mademoiselle Thérèse replied sententiously, shaking her head and looking as if she knew what it was to suffer acutely. "One is set on earth to learn to 'suffer and grow strong,' as one of your English poets says."

Barbara turned away impatiently, and felt she could gladly have shaken her companion.

"One wants to come to a place like this with nice companions or alone," she thought, and it was this feeling that drove her out on to the ramparts that evening after dinner. She was feeling happy at having successfully escaped from the noisy room downstairs, and thankful to the game of cards that had beguiled Mademoiselle Thérèse's attention from her, when she heard footsteps close beside her, and, turning round, saw Jean Dubois.

"Whatever do you want here?" she said a little irritably; then, hearing his

humble answer that he had just come to enjoy the view, felt ashamed of herself, and tried to be pleasant.

"Do you know," she said, suddenly determining to share an idea with him to make up for her former rudeness, "we have seen Mont St. Michel from every side but one—and that is the sea side. I should like to see it every way, wouldn't you? I have just made a little plan, and that is to get up early to-morrow morning, and go out across the sand till I can see it."

"Mademoiselle!" the boy exclaimed. "But is it safe? The sands are treacherous, and many have been buried in them."

"Yes; I know, but there are lots of footsteps going across them in all directions, and I saw some people out there to-day. If I follow the footprints it will be safe, for where many can go surely one may."

It took some time for Jean to grow accustomed to the idea, and he drew his *capucine* a little closer round him, as if the thought of such an adventure chilled him; then he laid his hand on Barbara's arm.

"I, too," he said, "will see the view from that side. Mademoiselle Barbara, I will come with you."

"But your father? Would he approve, do you think?"

"But assuredly," Jean said hastily; "he wishes me to get an entire idea of Mont St. Michel—to be permeated, in fact. It is to be an educational visit, he said."

"Very well, then. But we must be very early and very quiet, so that we may not disturb mademoiselle. I am not confiding in her, you understand. Can you be ready at half-past five, so that we may be back before coffee?"

"Assuredly—at half-past five I shall be on the terrace," and Jean's cheeks actually glowed at the thought of the adventure. "There was so much romance in it," he thought, and pictured how nice it would be telling the story to Marie afterwards.

Barbara herself was very gleeful, for it was nice to be able to act without wondering whether she was showing the younger ones a good example or not.

She felt almost as if she were back at school, and that feeling was intensified by the little cubicle bedrooms with which the visitors at Madame Poulard's were provided. She had been a little anxious as to whether she would awaken at the right hour, but found, on opening her eyes next morning, that she had plenty of time to spare.

She dressed noiselessly, for mademoiselle was sleeping in the next room, and she did not want to rouse her, and stole down the passage and into the terrace, where Jean was waiting for her. They were early risers at Mont St. Michel, and the servants looked with some curiosity, mingled perhaps with disapproval, at the couple, but they recognised the girl as being English, and of course there was no accounting for what any of that nation did! It was a lovely morning, and Barbara, picking her way over the rocks, hummed gaily to herself, for it was an excursion after her own heart.

Jean cast rather a doubtful eye from the rocks to the waste of sand in front of them, but, seeing his companion did not hesitate, he could not either, and stepped out boldly beside her.

"You see," Barbara explained, "it is really perfectly hard here, and we will keep quite close to the footsteps that lead right out to that other rock out there."

"But you are surely not going as far as that?" he inquired anxiously. "We should never be back in time for coffee."

"I don't think so," Barbara returned gaily; "but we'll see how we get on."

When once Jean saw that the ground was perfectly sound beneath their feet, and that the footprints went on unwaveringly, he felt reassured, and really began to enjoy himself. They turned round every now and then to look back at the Mont, but decided each time that they had not got quite far enough away to get a really good effect.

"You know," said Jean, some of his fears returning after a time, "one usually has guides—people who know the sands—to take one out so far. I trod on a very soft place just now."

"Keep near the footprints then," Barbara answered. "The tide hasn't been up yet, and the sands can't surely change in the night-time. Just a little farther, and then we will stop."

They stopped a few minutes later, and both declared that the view was well worth the walk, the only thing that Barbara regretted being that it was too damp to sit down and enjoy it at their ease.

"It *would* have been nice to get as far as Tombelaine," the girl said at last, turning from St. Michel to take another look at the rocky islet farther out; "but I suppose we really must be going home again now."

Jean did not answer her. He had turned with her towards the rock; then his eyes had wandered round the horizon, and had remained fixed in such a stare that the girl wondered what he saw.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "What is it you are seeing, Jean?"

"The sea," he gasped, his face becoming ashen. "Mademoiselle—the tide—it advances—we will be caught."

Barbara looked across the long stretch of gray sand till her eyes found the moving line of water.

"It is nearer," she said slowly; "but of course it always comes in every day."

"Yes—but—to-day—I had forgotten—it is to be high tide—all round the Mont. Did you not hear them say so?"

"Yes," Barbara owned; "I remember quite well now. But let us hurry—it is a long way off yet. We have plenty of time." She spoke consolingly, for Jean's face was blanched and she saw he was trembling.

"But, mademoiselle, you do not understand. Did you not hear them telling us also that the tide advances so rapidly that it catches the quickest horse? Oh, I wish we had told some one of this journey—that some one had seen us. They would have warned us. We should have been safe."

It was then for the first time that the thought of danger entered Barbara's head, and she took her companion's hand.

"Let us run, then. Quick!" she said. "We are not such a very long way off."

Jean hesitated only a moment, his eyes, as if fascinated, still on the water;

then he turned his face towards the Mont, and sped over the sand more fleetly than Barbara would have believed possible to him—so fleetly, indeed, that he began to leave the girl, who was swift of foot, behind.

She glanced over her shoulder at the sea, which certainly was drawing in very rapidly, licking over the sand greedily, then forward at St. Michel, and fell to a walk. She knew she could not run the whole distance for it was not easy going on the sand, especially when an eye had always to be kept on the guiding footprints.

"She glanced over her shoulder at the sea."
"She glanced over her shoulder at the sea."

It was some little time before Jean really realised she was not close behind him; then he stopped running and waited for her.

"Go on," she shouted. "Don't wait for me, I can catch you up later."

"But it is impossible for me to leave you," he called back on regaining his breath. "But, oh! run if you can, for the water comes very near."

One more fleeting glance behind and Barbara broke into a run again, though her breath came in gasps.

"They are seeing us from the Mont," panted Jean. "They have come out to watch the tide rise. Give me your hand. Do not stop! Do not stop!"

Barbara felt that, do as she would, her breath could hold out no longer, and she slackened her pace to a walk once more. Then a great shout went up from the people on the ramparts, and they began waving their hands and handkerchiefs wildly. To them the two figures seemed to be moving so slowly and the great sea behind so terribly fast. Barbara could hear its swish, swish, near enough now, and she felt Jean's hand tremble in her own. "Run yourself," she said, dropping it. "Run, and I'll follow."

But he merely shook his head. To speak was waste of breath, and he meant his to last him till he reached the rocks.

He pulled the girl into a trot again, and they plodded on heavily. It was impossible for him to speak now, but he pointed at the rocks below St. Michel where two men were scrambling down, and Barbara understood that they were coming to aid.

The sea was very close—horribly close—when two fishermen met the couple, and, taking Barbara's hands on either side, pulled her on, while Jean panted a little way behind. The watching crowd above had been still with fear until they saw the rocks reached; then they shouted again and again, while the many who had scrambled down part of the way hastened forward to see who the adventurous couple were, and to give a helping hand if necessary.

One of the first to reach them was the little widower, his cravate loose, his hat off, and tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Jean!" he wailed. "What have I done that you should treat me so? What would your sainted mother say were she to see you thus?"

But neither Jean nor Barbara was capable of saying a word, and though the fishermen were urgently assuring the girl that she was not safe yet, that they must go round the rocks to the gate on the other side, she remained sitting doubled up on a rock, feeling that her breath would never come into her body again.

"Let her rest a moment," suggested one wiser than the rest. "She cannot move till she breathes. There is yet time enough. Loosen her collar, and let her breathe."

The sea was gurgling at the foot of the rocks when Barbara regained her breath sufficiently to move, and she was glad enough to have strong arms to help her on her way.

Jean and his father reached the gate first, and, therefore, Mademoiselle Thérèse had already exhausted a little of her energy before Barbara appeared. But she was about to fling herself in tears upon the girl's neck when a bystander interposed.

"Let her breathe," he said. "Let her go to the inn and get nourishment." And Barbara, the centre of an eager, excited French crowd, was thankful, indeed, to shelter herself within Madame Poulard's hospitable walls.

"We will probably have to stay here a week till she recovers"—Mademoiselle Thérèse had a sympathetic audience—"she is of delicate constitution;" and the good lady was perhaps a little disappointed when Barbara declared herself perfectly able to go home in the afternoon as had been arranged.

"What should prevent us?" she asked, when after a rest and something to eat she came down to the terrace. "It was only a long race, and a fright which I quite deserved."

"Yes, indeed, a fright!" and the Frenchwoman threw up her hands. "Such fear as I felt when I came out to see the tide and saw you fleeing before it. Your aunt!

—Your mother!—My charge! Such visions fled before my eyes. But *never, never, never* will I trust you with Jean any more," and she cast a vengeful look at the widower and his son, who were seated a little farther off.

"But it wasn't his fault at all," the girl explained. "On the contrary, I proposed it, and he joined me out of kindness. He pulled me along, too, over the sand. Oh, indeed, you must not be angry with Jean."

"It was very deceptive of him not to tell me—or his father. Then we could both have come with you—or explained to you that the tide rose early to-day. We heard it was to come early when you were out last night. They say," she went on, shaking her head, "if it had been an equinoctial tide, that neither of you would have escaped—there would have been no shadow of a hope for either—you would both have been drowned out there in the damp, wet sand."

Mademoiselle Thérèse showing signs of weeping again, Barbara hastened to comfort her, assuring her that she would never again go out alone to see St. Michel from that side, which she thought was a perfectly safe promise to make. But her companion shook her head mournfully, declaring that it would be a very long time before she brought any of her pupils to Mont St. Michel again.

"They might really get caught next time," she said, and Barbara knew it was no good to point out that probably there would never be another pupil who was quite so silly as she had been.

"Nevertheless," the girl said to herself, looking back at the grand, gray pile from the train, "except for the fright I gave them, it was worth it all—worth it all, dear St. Michel, to see you from out there." And Jean, looking pensively out of the window, was thinking that since it was safely over, the adventure was one which any youth might be proud to tell to his companions, and which few were fortunate or brave enough to have experienced.

CHAPTER IX.

MADemoiselle VIRÉ.

"The Loirés' chief virtues are their friends," Barbara had written home, and it was always a surprise to her to find that they knew so many nice people. A few days after the adventurous visit to Mont St. Michel she made the acquaintance of one whom she learned to love dearly, and about whom there hung a halo of romance that charmed the girl.

"Her story is known to me," Mademoiselle Thérèse explained on the way to her house, "and I will tell it you—in confidence, of course." She paused a moment to impress Barbara and to arrange her thoughts, for she dearly loved a romantic tale, and would add garnishing by the way if she did not consider it had enough.

"She is the daughter of a professor," she began presently. "They used to live in Rouen—gray, beautiful, many-churched Rouen." The lady glanced sideways at her companion to see if her rhetoric were impressive enough, and Barbara waited gravely for her to continue, though wondering if mademoiselle had ever read *The Lady of Shalott*.

"An officer in one of the regiments stationed in the quaint old town," pursued mademoiselle, "saw the professor's fair young daughter, and fell rapturously in love with her. Whereupon they became betrothed."

Barbara frowned a little. The setting of the story was too ornate, and seemed almost barbarous.

"And then?" she asked impatiently.

"Then—ah, then!" sighed the story-teller, who thought she was making a great impression—"then the sorrow came. As soon as his family knew, they were grievously angry, furiously wrathful, because she had no *dot*; and when she heard of their fury and wrath she nobly refused to marry him until he gained their consent. 'Never,' she cried" (and it was obvious that here mademoiselle was relying on her own invention), "'never will I marry thee against thy parents' wish.'"

She paused, and drew a long breath before proceeding. "A short time after this, the regiment of her lover was ordered out to India, in which pestiferous country he took a malicious fever and expired. She has no relatives left now, though so frail and delicate, but lives with an old maid in a very small domicile. She is cultivated to an extreme, and is so fond of music that, though her house is

too small to admit of the pianoforte entering by the door, she had it introduced by the window of the *salon*, which had to be unbricked—the window, I mean. She has, moreover, three violins—one of which belonged to her ever-to-be-lamented fiancé—and, though she is too frail to stand, she will sit, when her health permits, and make music for hours together."

Mademoiselle Thérèse uttered the last words on the threshold of the house, and Barbara did not know whether to laugh or to cry at such a story being told in such a way. The door was opened by the old maid, Jeannette, who wore a quaint mob cap and spotless apron, and who followed the visitors into the room, and, having introduced them to her mistress, seated herself in one corner and took up her knitting as "company," Mademoiselle Thérèse whispered to Barbara.

The latter thought she had never before seen such a charming old lady as Mademoiselle Viré, who now rose to greet them, and she wondered how any one who had known her in the "many-churched Rouen days" could have parted from her.

She talked for a little while to Mademoiselle Thérèse, then turned gently to Barbara.

"Do you play, mademoiselle?"

"A little," the girl returned hesitatingly; "not enough, I'm afraid, to give great pleasure."

But Mademoiselle Viré rose with flushed cheeks.

"Ah! then, will you do me the kindness to play some accompaniments? That is one of the few things my good Jeannette cannot do for me," and almost before Barbara realised it she was sitting on a high-backed chair before the piano in the little *salon*, while Mademoiselle Viré sought eagerly for her music.

The room was so small that, with Mademoiselle Thérèse and the maid Jeannette—who seemed to be expected to follow her mistress—there seemed hardly room to move in it, and Barbara was all the more nervous by the nearness of her audience.

It certainly was rather anxious work, for though the little lady was charmingly courteous, she would not allow a passage played wrongly to go

without correction. "I think we were not quite together there—were we?" she would say. "May we play it through again?" and Barbara would blush up to her hair, for she knew the violinist had played *her* part perfectly. She enjoyed it, though, in spite of her nervousness, and was sorry when it was time to go.

"You will come again, I hope?" her hostess asked. "You have given me a happy time." Then turning eagerly to Jeannette, she added, "Did I play well today, Jeannette?"

The quaint old maid rose at once from her seat at the door, and came across the room to put her mistress's cap straight.

"Madame played better than I have ever heard her," she replied.

Barbara had been so pleased with everything that she went again a few days later by herself, and this time was led into the garden, which, like the house, was very small, but full of roses and other sweet-smelling things. Madame—for Barbara noticed that most people seemed to call her so—was busy watering her flowers, and had on big gloves and an apron. When she saw the girl coming, she came forward to welcome her, saying, with a deprecatory movement towards her apron—

"But this apron!—These gloves! Had I known it was you, mademoiselle, I should have changed them and made myself seemly. Why did you not warn me, Jeannette?"

"Madame should not work in the garden and heat herself," the old woman said doggedly; "she should let me do that."

But madame laughed gaily.

"Oh, but my flowers know when I water them, and could not bear to have me leave them altogether to others." Then, in explanation to her visitor, "It is an old quarrel between Jeannette and me. Is it not, my friend? Now I am hot and thirsty. Will you bring us some of your good wine, Jeannette?"

They were sitting in a little bower almost covered with roses, and Barbara felt as if she must be in a pretty dream, when the maid came back bearing two slender-stemmed wine-glasses and a musty bottle covered with cobwebs.

"It is very old indeed," madame explained.

"Jeannette and I made it, when we were young, from the walnuts in our garden in Rouen."

Having filled both glasses, she raised her own, and said, with a graceful bow, "Your health, mademoiselle," and after taking a sip she turned to Jeannette, repeating, "Your health, Jeannette." Whereupon the old woman curtsied wonderfully low considering her stiff knees.

Barbara did not like the wine very much, but she would have drunk several glasses to please her hostess, though, fortunately, she was not asked to do so. They had a long talk, and the old lady related many interesting tales about the life in Rouen and in Paris, where she had often been, so that the time sped all too quickly for the girl. When she got home she found two visitors, who were sitting under the trees in the garden waiting to have tea. One was an English girl of about fourteen, whom Barbara thought looked both unhappy and sulky. The other was one of the ladies whose school she was at.

"This is Alice Meynell," Mademoiselle Thérèse said with some fervour, "and, Alice, *this* is a fellow-countrywoman of your own." But the introduction did not seem to make the girl any happier, and she hardly spoke all tea-time, though Marie did her best to carry on a conversation. When she had returned to work with Mademoiselle Loiré, the business of entertainment fell to Barbara, who proposed a walk round the garden.

At first the visitor did not seem to care for the idea, but when the mistress with her suggested it was too hot to walk about, she immediately jumped up and said there was nothing she would like better. There seemed to be few subjects that interested her; but when, almost in desperation, Barbara asked how she liked France, she suddenly burst forth into speech.

"I hate it," she cried viciously. "I detest it and the people I am with, who never let me out of their sight. 'Spies,' I call them—'spies,' not teachers. They even come with me to church—one of them at least—and I feel as if I were in prison."

"But surely there is no harm in their coming to church with you?" Barbara said. "Besides, in France, you know, they have such strict ideas about chaperones that it's quite natural for them to be careful. Mademoiselle Thérèse goes almost

everywhere with me, and I am a good deal older than you are."

"But they're *not* Protestants—I'm sure they're not," the girl returned hotly. "They shouldn't come to church with me; they only pretend. Besides, they don't follow the other girls about nearly as carefully. The worst of it is that I have to stay here for the holidays, too."

She seemed very miserable about it, and Barbara thought it might relieve her to confide in some one, and, after a little skilful questioning, the whole story came out.

Her mother was dead, and her father in the West Indies, and though she wrote him often and fully about everything, she never got any answers to her questions, so that she was sure people opened her letters and put in different news. She was afraid the same thing was done with her father's letters to her, because once something was said by mistake that could have been learned only by reading the news intended for her eyes alone.

"He never saw the place," the girl continued. "He took me to my aunt in England, who promised to find me a school. She thought the whole business a nuisance, and was only too glad to find a place quickly where they'd keep me for the holidays too. She never asks me to go to England—not that I would if she wanted me to."

There were angry tears in the girl's eyes, and Barbara thought the case really did seem rather a hard one, though it was clear her companion had been spoiled at home, and had probably had her own way before coming to school.

"It does sound rather horrid," Barbara agreed, "and three years must seem a long time; but it will go at last, you know."

The girl shook her head.

"Too slowly, far too slowly—it just crawls. I never have any one to talk things over with, either, you see, for I can't trust the French girls; they carry tales, I know. Even now—look how she watches me; she longs to know what I'm saying."

Barbara looked round, and it was true that the visitor seemed more interested in watching them than in Mademoiselle Thérèse's conversation; and, directly she

caught Barbara's eye, she got up hastily and said they must go. Alice Meynell immediately relapsed into sulkiness again; but, just as she was saying good-bye, she managed to whisper—

"I shall run away soon. I know I can't stand it much longer."

The others were too near for Barbara to do more than give her a warm squeeze of the hand; but she watched the girl out of sight, feeling very sorry for her. If she had lived a free-and-easy life on her father's plantation, never having known a mother's care, it was no wonder that she should be a little wild and find her present life irksome.

"She looks quite equal to doing something desperate," Barbara thought, as she turned to go in to supper. "I must try to see her again soon, for who knows what mad ideas a girl of only fifteen may take into her head!"

CHAPTER X.

THE "AMERICAN PRETENDER."

"An invitation has come from Monsieur Dubois to visit them at Dol," Mademoiselle Thérèse exclaimed with pride, on opening her letters one morning. "It is really particularly kind and nice of him. He includes *you*," she added, turning to Barbara.

The girl had to think a few moments before remembering that Monsieur Dubois was the "family friend" for whose sake the sisters had sunk their grievances, and then she was genuinely pleased at the invitation.

"Now, which of us shall go?" mademoiselle proceeded. "It is clear we cannot *all* do so," and she looked inquiringly at her sister.

"Marie and I are *much* too busy to accept invitations right and left like that," Mademoiselle Loiré replied loftily. "For people like you and Mademoiselle Barbara, who have plenty of leisure, it will be a very suitable excursion, I

imagine."

Barbara looked a little anxiously at the younger sister, fearing she might be stirred up to wrath by the veiled slur on her character; but probably she was pleased enough to be the one to go, whatever excuse Mademoiselle Loiré chose to give. Indeed, her mood had been wonderfully amicable for several days. "Let me see," she said, looking meditatively at Barbara. "You have been longing to ride *something* ever since you came here, and since you have not been able to find a horse, how would it do to hire a bicycle, and come only so far in the train with me and ride the rest of the way?"

Barbara's eyes shone. This *was* a concession on Mademoiselle Thérèse's part, for she had hitherto apparently been most unwilling for the girl to be out of her sight for any length of time, and had assured her that there was no possibility of getting riding lessons in the neighbourhood. What had brought her to make this proposal now Barbara could not imagine.

"That would be a perfectly lovely plan," she cried. "You are an angel to think of it, mademoiselle." At which remark the lady in question was much flattered.

The next morning they started in gay spirits, Mademoiselle Thérèse arrayed in her best, which always produced a feeling of wonderment in Barbara. The lady certainly had not a Frenchwoman's usual taste, and her choice of colours was not always happy, though she herself was blissfully content about her appearance.

"I am glad you put on that pretty watch and chain," she said approvingly to her companion, when they were in the train. "I always try to make an impression when I go to Dol, for Madame Dubois is a *very* fashionable lady."

She stroked down her mauve skirt complacently, and Barbara thought that she could not fail to make an impression of some kind. She was entertained as they went along, by stories about the cleverness and position of the lawyer, and the charms of his wife, and the delights of his daughter, till Barbara felt quite nervous at the idea of meeting such an amount of goodness, fashion, and wit in its own house.

Mademoiselle Thérèse allowed herself just a little time to give directions as to the route the girl was to take on leaving her, and Barbara repeated the turnings she had to take again and again till there seemed no possibility of making a

mistake.

"After the first short distance you reach the highroad," mademoiselle called after her as she left the carriage, "so I have no fear about allowing you to go; it is a well-trodden highroad, too, and not many kilometres."

"I shall be all right, thank you," Barbara said gleefully, thinking how nice it was to escape into the fresh, sunny air after the close third-class carriage. "There is no sea to catch me *this* time, you know."

Mademoiselle shook her finger at her. "Naughty, naughty! to remind me of that terrible time—it almost makes me fear to let you go." At which Barbara mounted hastily, in case she should be called back, although the train had begun to move.

"Repeat your directions," her companion shrieked after her, and the girl, with a laugh, murmured to herself, "Turn to the right, then the left, by a large house, then through a narrow lane, and *voilà* the high-road!" She had no doubt at all about knowing them perfectly. Unfortunately for her calculations, when she came to the turning-point there were *two* lanes leading off right and left, and on this point Mademoiselle Thérèse had given her no instructions. There was nobody near to ask. So, after considering them both, she decided to take the one that looked widest. After all, if it were wrong, she could easily turn back.

She had gone but a little way, however, when she saw another cyclist approaching, and, thinking that here was a chance to find out if she were right before going any farther, she jumped off her machine and stood waiting. When the new-comer was quite close to her she noticed that he was not a very prepossessing individual, and remembered that she had been warned in foreign countries always to look at people before speaking to them. But it was too late then. So making the best of it, she asked boldly which was the nearest way to Dol. The man stared at her for a moment, then said she should go straight on, and would soon arrive at the highroad.

"But I will conduct you so far if you like, madame," he added.

Barbara had seen him looking rather intently at her watch and chain, however, and began to feel a little uneasy.

"Oh, no, thank you," she rejoined hastily. "I can manage very well myself,"

and, springing on to her bicycle, set off at a good speed. He stood in the road for a few minutes as if meditating; but, when she looked back at the corner, she saw that he had mounted too, and was coming down the road after her. There might be no harm in that; but it did not add to her happiness; and the watch and chain, which had been Aunt Anne's last gift to her, seemed to weigh heavily upon her neck.

There was no thought now of turning; but, though she pedalled her hardest, she could not see any signs of a highroad in front of her, and was sure she must have taken the wrong lane. Indeed, to her dismay, when she got a little farther down the road, it narrowed still more and ran through a wood. She was quite sure now that the man was chasing her, and wondered if she would ever get to Dol at all. It seemed to be her fate to be chased by something on her excursions, and she was not quite sure whether she preferred escaping on her own feet or a bicycle.

At first he did not gain upon her much, and, if she had had her own machine, and had been in good training, perhaps she might have outdistanced him; but there did not appear to be much chance of that at present. She was thankful to see a sharp descent in front of her, and let herself go at a break-neck speed; but, unfortunately, there was an equally steep hill to climb on the other side, and she would have to get off and walk.

She was just making up her mind to turn round and brave it out, and keep her watch—if possible—when she saw something on the grass by the roadside, a little ahead of her, that made her heart leap with relief and pleasure—namely, a puff of smoke, and a figure clad in a brown tweed suit. She was sure, even after a mere hurried glance, that the owner of the suit must be English, for it bore the stamp of an English tailor, and the breeze bore her unmistakable whiffs of "Harris."

She did not wait a moment, but leaped from her bicycle and sank down panting on the grass near, alarming the stranger—who had been nearly asleep—considerably. He jerked himself into a sitting position, and burned himself with his cigarette.

"Who the dickens——" he began; then hastily took off his cap and begged the girl's pardon, to which she could not reply for breathlessness. But he seemed to understand what was needed at once, for, after a swift glance from her to the

man who was close at hand now, he said in loud, cheerful tones—

"Ah! Here you are at last. I am glad you caught me up. We'll just have a little rest, then go calmly on our way. You should not ride so quickly on a hot day."

The man was abreast of them now, and looked very hard at both as he passed, but did not stop, and Barbara heaved a long sigh of relief.

"I'm so very sorry," she said at last. "Please understand I am not in the habit of leaping down beside people like that, only I've had this watch and chain such a very short time, and I was so afraid he'd take them."

"And how do you know that they will be any safer with me?" he asked, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes.

"Because I saw you were an Englishman, of course," she rejoined calmly.

The young man laughed.

"Pardon me, you are wrong, for I am an American."

Barbara's cheeks could hardly grow more flushed, but she felt uncomfortably hot.

"I am so sorry," she stammered, getting up hurriedly; "I really thought it was an Englishman, and felt—at home, you know."

"Please continue to think so if it makes you any happier; and—I think you had better stay a little longer before going on—the fellow might be waiting farther down the road."

Barbara subsided again. She had no desire to have any further encounter with the French cyclist.

Meanwhile, the stranger had taken one or two rapid glances at her, and the surprise on his face grew. "Where are the rest of the party?" he asked presently.

"The rest of the party has gone on by train," and Barbara laughed. "Poor party, it would be so horribly alarmed if it could see me now. I always seem to be alarming it."

"I don't wonder, if it is always as careless as on the present occasion. Whatever possessed he, she, or it, to let you come along by yourself like this? It was most culpably careless."

"Oh, no, indeed. It is what I have been begging for since I came to Brittany—indeed it is. She gave me *most* careful directions as to what turnings to take"—and Barbara repeated them merrily—"it was only that I was silly enough to take the wrong one. And now I really must be getting on, or poor Mademoiselle Thérèse will be distracted. Please, does this road lead to Dol?"

"Dol?" he repeated quickly. "Yes, certainly. I am just going there, and—and intend to pass the night in the place. I'm on a walking tour, and—if you don't mind walking—I know there's a short cut that would be almost as quick as cycling; the high road is a good distance off yet."

Barbara hesitated. The fear of meeting any more tramps was strong upon her, and her present companion had a frank, honest face, and steady gray eyes.

"I don't want Mademoiselle Thérèse to be frightened by being any later than necessary," she said doubtfully.

"I really think this will be as quick as the other road—if you will trust me," he returned. And Barbara yielded.

It certainly was a very pretty way, leading across the fields and through a beech wood, and they managed to lift the bicycle over the gates without any difficulty. The girl was a little surprised by the unerring manner in which her companion seemed to go forward without even once consulting a map; but when she complimented him on the fact he looked a little uncomfortable, and assured her that he had an excellent head for "direction."

It was very nice meeting some one who was "almost an Englishman," and they talked gaily all the time, till the square tower of Dol Cathedral came into view—one of the grandest, her guide assured her, that he had seen in Brittany. They had just entered the outskirts of the town when they passed a little *auberge*, where the innkeeper was standing at the door. He stared very hard at them, then lifted his hat, and cried with surprise, "Back again, monsieur; why, I thought you were half way to St. Malo by this time."

Then the truth struck Barbara in a flash, and she had only to look at her

companion's face to know she was right.

"You were going the other way," she cried—"of course you were—and you turned back on my account. No wonder you knew your way through the wood!"

He gave an embarrassed laugh. "I'm sorry—I really did not mean to deceive you exactly. I *have* a good head for 'direction.'"

"And you came all that long way back with me I It was good of you. I really _____"

But he interrupted her. "Please don't give me thanks when I don't deserve them. This town is such a quaint old place I am quite glad to spend the night here. And—I really think you ought not to go hither and thither without the rest of the party—I don't think your aunt would like it. The house you want is straight ahead." Then he took off his cap and turned away, and Barbara never remembered, until he had gone, that though he had seen her name on the label on her bicycle she did not know his.

She christened him, therefore, the "American Pretender," firstly, because he looked like an Englishman, and secondly, because he pretended to be going where he was not. After all, she was not very much behind her time, and, fortunately, Mademoiselle Thérèse had been so interested in the lawyer's conversation that she had not worried about her. Barbara did not speak of her encounter with the cyclist, but merely said she had got out of her way a little, and had found a kind American who had helped her to find it; which explanation quite satisfied "the party."

The lawyer's château, as it was called, seemed to Barbara to be very like what French houses must have been long ago, and she imagined grand ladies of the Empire time sweeping up the long flight of steps to the terrace, and across the polished floors. The *salon*, with its thick terra-cotta paper, and gilded chairs set in stiff rows along the walls, fascinated her too, and she half expected the lady of the house to come in, clad in heavy brocade of ancient pattern. But everything about the lady of the house was very modern, and Barbara thought Mademoiselle Thérèse's garments had never looked so ugly. The girl enjoyed sitting down to a meal which was really well served, and she found that the lawyer, though clever, was by no means alarming, and that his wife made a very charming hostess.

Mademoiselle Thérèse was radiating pride and triumph at having been able to introduce her charge into such a "distinguished" family, and as each dish was brought upon the table, she shot a glance across at Barbara as much as to say, "See what we can do!—these are *my* friends!"

Poor Mademoiselle Thérèse! After all, when she enjoyed such things so much, it was a pity, Barbara thought, that she could not have them at home.

She was enjoying, too, discussing various matters with the lawyer, for discussion was to her like the very breath of life.

"She will discuss with the cat if there is no one else by," her sister had once said dryly, "and will argue with Death when he comes to fetch her."

At present the topic was schools, and Barbara and Madame Dubois sat quietly by, listening.

"I am not learned," madame whispered to the girl, with a little shrug, "and I know that nothing she can say will shake my husband's opinion—therefore, I let her speak."

Mademoiselle was very anxious that his little girl should go to school, and was pointing out the advantages of such education to the lawyer.

The latter smiled incredulously. "Would you have me send her to the convent school, where they use the same-knife and fork all the week round, and wash them only once a week?" he asked contemptuously.

"No," mademoiselle agreed. "As you know, Marie used to be there, and learned very little—nothing much, except to sew. No, I would not send her to the convent school. But there are others. A young English friend of mine, now—Mademoiselle Barbara knows her too—she is at a very select establishment—just about six girls—and so well watched and cared for."

Barbara looked up quickly. She wondered if she dared interrupt and say she did not think it was such an ideal place, when the lawyer spoke before her.

"*Parbleu!*" he said with a laugh, "I should prefer the convent! There at least the religion is honest, but—with those ladies you mention—there is deceit. They pretend to be what they are not."

"Oh, but no!" Mademoiselle Thérèse exclaimed. "Why, they *are* Protestants."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Believe it if you will, my dear friend, but we lawyers know most things, and I know that what I say is true. When my little Hélène goes to school she shall not go to such. Meanwhile, I am content to keep her at home."

"So am I," murmured Madame Dubois. "Schools are such vulgar places, are they not?"

But Barbara, to whom the remark was addressed, was too much interested in this last piece of news to do more than answer shortly. For if what the lawyer said were true—and he did not seem a man likely to make mistakes—then Alice Meynell might really have sufficient cause to be miserable, and Barbara wondered when she would see her again, which was to be sooner than she expected.

CHAPTER XI.

BARBARA TURNS PLOTTER.

The day after her expedition to Dol, Barbara saw Alice Meynell again, and in rather a strange meeting-place—namely, the public bath-house. The house in which the Loirés lived was an old-fashioned one, and had no bath, and at first Barbara had looked with horror upon the bath-house. She had become more reconciled to it of late, and, as it was the only means of obtaining a hot bath, had tried to make the best of it. It was a funny little place, entered by a narrow passage, at one end of which there was a booking-office, and a swing door, where you could buy a "season-ticket," or pay for each visit separately.

On one side of the passage there were rows of little bathrooms, containing what Barbara thought the narrowest most uncomfortable baths imaginable. A boy in felt slippers ran up and down, turning on the water, and a woman sat working at a little table at one end—"to see you did not steal the towels,"

Barbara declared. It was here she met Alice Meynell, under the care of an old attendant, whom the girl said she knew was a spy sent to report everything she said or did.

"Mademoiselle, who came with me to call the other day, has taken a great dislike to you," Alice whispered hurriedly in passing; "and when I asked if I might go to see you again, said, 'No, it was such a pity to talk English when I was here to learn French.' I am *quite* determined to run away."

The boy announced that the bath was ready, and the old attendant, putting her watch on the table, said—

"Be quick, mademoiselle. Only twenty minutes, you know."

Before leaving the place, Barbara managed to get a moment's speech, in which she begged Alice not to do anything until they met again, and meanwhile she would try hard to think of some plan to make things easier; for the girl really looked very desperate, and Barbara had so often acted as the confidante of her own brother and sister that she was accustomed to playing the part of comforter.

It seemed to her that if Alice wanted to run away, she had better do it as well as possible, for the girl was wilful enough to try to carry out any wild plan she might conceive. Barbara thought of many things, but they all seemed silly or impossible, and finally got no further than making up her mind to meet Alice again at the bath-house.

The events of the afternoon, moreover, put her countrywoman out of her head for the time being, for she found what she had been longing for ever since she came—a riding-master.

Mademoiselle Thérèse had long talked of taking her across the bay to Dinard, to visit some friends there, but hitherto no suitable occasion had been found. The delights of a boot and shoe sale, of which mademoiselle had received notice, reminded her of her intentions of showing Barbara "that famous seaside resort," and after an early lunch they set out for Dinard.

"Business first," mademoiselle said on landing; "we will hasten to the sale, and when I have made my purchases we will stroll into the park, and then visit my friend."

"If you don't mind I will stay outside and watch the people," Barbara proposed, on reaching the shop and seeing the crowds inside. "I won't stray from just near the window, so you may leave me quite safely—and it looks so hot in there."

Her companion demurred for a moment, but finally agreed, and Barbara with relief turned round to watch the people passing to and fro.

Dinard seemed very gay and fashionable, she thought, and there was quite a number of English and Americans there. Surely in such a place one might find a riding-school. There was a row of *fiacres* quite close to the pavement, and, seized by this new idea, she hurried up to one of the drivers and asked him if he knew of any horses to be hired in the town.

She had feared her French might not be equal to the explanation, and was very glad when he understood, and still more pleased to hear that there was an excellent *manège*,^[1] which many people visited. After inquiring the name of the street, she returned to her shop window, longing for mademoiselle to come out. Her patience was nearly exhausted when that lady finally appeared, having bought nothing.

"I tried on a great many boots and some shoes," she explained, "and did not care for any. Indeed, I really did not need new ones; but I have seen samples of much of their stock."

In the midst of the intense satisfaction of this performance, the girl brought her news of a riding-school, which evidently was not very welcome to her companion. She had, as a matter of fact, known of the existence of such a place, but did not approve of "equestrian exercise for women"; moreover, she had pictured so much exertion to herself in connection with the idea of riding lessons, that she had been very undesirous of Barbara's beginning them, and had, therefore, not encouraged the idea. But the secret of the school being out, she resolved to make the best of it, and agreed to go round at once and see the place.

They had little difficulty in finding it, and were ushered into an office, where a very immaculate Frenchman received them, and inquired how he could serve them. On hearing their errand he smiled still more pleasantly, and in a few minutes everything was settled. Barbara was to come over twice a week and have lessons, and, if she cared, might begin that afternoon. The only drawback

was that she had no skirt, which, he assured her with a sweeping bow, he could easily remedy, for he had an almost new one on the premises, and would think it an honour to lend it to her.

He was politeness itself, and seemed not in the least damped by Mademoiselle Thérèse's evident gloom. He conducted her up to the gallery at one end of the school, and explained that she could watch every movement from that vantage-point.

"It will be almost as good as having a lesson yourself, madame," he said politely, twirling his fierce gray mustachios.

At the other end of the school was a large looking-glass, which he told Barbara was to enable the pupils to observe their deportment; but she noticed that he always stood in the middle of the ring, where he watched his own actions with great pleasure.

The girl thought it a little dull at first, for she had been given an amiable old horse who knew the words of command so well that the reins were almost useless, and who ambled along in a slow and peaceful manner. But Monsieur Pirenne was entirely satisfied with his pupil, and he assured her, "if she continued to make such stupendous progress in the next lesson, he would have the felicity of taking her out in the following one."

At this Mademoiselle Thérèse shook her head pensively.

"Then I must take a carriage and follow you," she said.

Barbara laughed.

"Oh, dear, mademoiselle, do think how impossible that would be," she explained, seeing the lady looked somewhat offended. "If we took to the fields how could you follow us in a carriage? No; just think how nice it will be to see so much of your friend while I am out."

This view of the case somewhat reconciled Mademoiselle Thérèse to the idea, though her contentment vanished when she found that the wind had increased considerably during the afternoon, and that the mouth of the river was beginning to look a little disturbed.

They stood on the end of the quay, waiting the arrival of the steamboat, and mademoiselle shook her head gloomily.

"It is not that I am a bad sailor, you know," she explained; "but, when there is much movement, it affects my nerves and makes me feel faint."

Barbara looked steadfastly out to sea. She did not want to hurt Mademoiselle Thérèse's feelings by openly showing her amusement.

"It is very unpleasant to have such delicate nerves," her companion continued; "but I was ever thus—from a child."

"But at this time of year we shall not often have a stormy passage," comforted Barbara.

At that moment a gust of wind, more sudden than usual, playfully caught Mademoiselle Thérèse's hat, and bore it over the quay into the water.

"My hat!" she shrieked. "Oh, save my hat!"

Barbara ran forward to the edge, but it had been carried too far for her to reach even with a stick or umbrella.

"My hat!" mademoiselle cried again, turning to the people on the pier, who were waiting for the ferry. "Rescue my hat—my *best* hat!"

At this stirring appeal several moved forward and looked smilingly at the doomed head-gear; and one kind little Frenchman stooped down and tried to catch it with the end of his stick, but failed. Mademoiselle grew desperate.

"If you cannot get the hat, get the hat-pins," she wailed. "They are silver-gilt—and presents. Four fine large hat-pins."

Then, seeing that several people were laughing, she grew angry.

"And you call yourselves *men*, and Frenchmen! Can none of you swim? Why do you stand there mocking?"

"It is such an ugly hat," an Englishman murmured near Barbara. "It would be a sin to save such an inartistic creation."

"But she will get another just as bad," Barbara said, with dancing eyes. "And—it is her best one!"

"Cowards!" mademoiselle cried again, leaning futilely over the quay. "I tell you, it is not only the hat, but the hat-pins. Oh! to see it drown before my eyes, and none brave enough to bring it back!"

This piece of rhetoric seemed to move one French youth, who slowly began to unlace his boots, though with what object one could not be quite sure.

"It is such a particularly ugly hat," the Englishman continued critically. "Those great roses like staring eyes on each side, with no regard for colour or anything else."

"But the colour won't be nearly so bright after this bath," Barbara suggested; then added persuasively, "And really, you know, she took a long time over it. Couldn't you reach it easily from that boat—the ferry is so near now, and it would drive her distracted to see the roses churned up by the paddle-wheels."

The Englishman looked from the agitated Frenchwoman to the blots of colour on the water, that were becoming pale and shapeless; then he moved lazily towards the boat. Just as he was getting into it he looked back at Barbara.

"She won't embrace me—will she?" he asked. "If so——"

"Oh, no," Barbara assured him. "Hand it up to her on the end of the oar."

"Well," he said, unshipping one, "it is against my conscience to save anything so hideous. But the fault lies with you, and as you will probably go on seeing it, you will have punishment enough."

A few minutes later Mademoiselle Thérèse received the sodden hat with rapture, anxiously counting over the hat-pins, while the French youth, with some relief, laced up his boot again.

"How noble!" mademoiselle exclaimed. "How kind! Your countryman too, Miss Barbara! Where is he that I may thank him?"

"If you linger you will miss the ferry," Barbara interposed. "See, here it is, mademoiselle," and her companion reluctantly turned from the pursuit of the

stranger to go on board, clasping her hat in triumph. Barbara thought, as she followed her, that if the fastidious rescuer had but seen her joy in her recovered treasure, he would have felt rewarded for his exertions in saving a thing so ugly.

[1] Riding-School.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

The next time Barbara went to the baths she chose the day and the hour at which Alice had told her she was usually taken, and was greatly pleased when she saw the girl waiting in the passage. But as soon as the old servant saw her she edged farther off with her charge, who lifted her eyebrows in a suggestive manner, as if to say, "You see, my spy has been warned." It seemed as if it would be impossible to hold any conversation at all, but, fortunately, they were put into adjoining cubicles, and Barbara found a crack, which she enlarged with her pocket-knife.

She felt as if she might be Guy Fawkes, or some such plotter from olden times, and wondered what he would have done if he really had been present. But having seen how difficult it was even to speak to Alice, she was afraid the girl would take things into her own hands and do something silly.

Probably it was this feeling of urgency that stimulated her, and the vague ideas which had been floating in her brain suddenly crystallised, and a plan took shape which she promptly communicated to Alice. The latter, she proposed, should go to Paris, to the pastor's family at Neuilly, Barbara lending her the necessary money, for the girl was only given a very little at a time. From Paris she could write to her father and explain things, without any danger of having the letter examined or altered.

The only, and certainly most important, difficulty in the carrying out of this plan was that there seemed no opportunity to escape except at night, and even then it would need great care to slip past Mademoiselle Eugénie, who slept at one end of the dormitory. Barbara did not like the night plan, because it would mean climbing out of the window and wandering about in the dark, or—supposing there were a train—travelling to Paris; and either alternative was too risky for a girl in a foreign country, who did not know her way about.

Gazing up at the ceiling in perplexity over this new hitch, Barbara discovered a way out of it, for there was a glazed window not so high but that Alice could manage to climb up, and if she got safely out (this was another inspiration), she was to run to the widower's house and hide there till the time for a train to Paris. Once safely in that city, Barbara felt it would be a weight lifted from her mind, for she really was not very happy at sharing in an enterprise which, even to her inexperience, seemed more fitted for some desperado than a sane English girl.

Having begun, however, she felt she must go through with it to the best of her ability, and undertook to write to Neuilly, to arrange with the widower's son, and to bribe the bath-boy to give the girl the only cubicle with a window. As a matter of fact, Barbara would have rather sent the girl to Mademoiselle Viré's, but the latter was so frail that the excitement might be injurious to her, and it was hardly fair to introduce such a whirlwind into her haven of peace.

She had an opportunity of speaking to Jean that very day, for he had offered to give her some lessons in photography, and she was going to have her first one in the afternoon. The boy was quite delighted with the thought of having something "to break the monotony of existence," and declared that it was an honour to share in any plan for the secure of the oppressed.

"We will inclose her in the photographic cupboard, mademoiselle," he said eagerly, "so that none can see her. Oh, we will manage well, I assure you."

Barbara sighed, fearing she was doing almost as mean a thing as Marie, and was very doubtful as to what her mother and Aunt Anne would say when they heard of the adventure.

"I shall go to the look-out station and blow away these mysteries," she said to herself, when the photography lesson was over; and the very sight and smell of the sea made her feel better. The steamer from Dinard had just unloaded its

passengers, and was steaming hurriedly back again with a fresh load, when among those who had landed she noticed one that seemed not altogether strange to her. She drew nearer, and was sure of it, and the visitor turning round at the same moment, the recognition was mutual. It was the "American Pretender."

"I was just going to ask where Mademoiselle Loiré lived," he said gaily, "with the intent of calling upon you. How obliging of you to be here when the steamboat arrived."

Barbara laughed.

"I often come here to look across at dear St. Malo, and get the breeze from the sea," she explained. "Besides, I like watching the ferries, they are so fussy—and the people in them too, sometimes. But how did you get here?"

"Not having met any more rash and runaway damsels whom I had to escort back to Dol, I succeeded in reaching St. Malo, and it is not unusual for visitors to go to Dinard and St. Servan from there. But, apart from that," he went on, "I found out something so interesting that I thought I must call and tell you—being in the neighbourhood."

"That was awfully nice of you," said Barbara gratefully, "and I'm so curious to hear. Please begin at once. You have plenty time to tell me before we reach the house, and mademoiselle must excuse me talking just a *little* English."

"I think the occasion justifies it," he agreed, smiling; then added apologetically, "I hope you won't mind it being a little personal. I told you I had come to Europe with my uncle, didn't I? My father left me to his care when I was quite a little chap, and he has been immensely good to me. We are great friends, and always share things—when we can. He could not share this walking tour because he had business in Paris, but I write him long screeds to keep him up in my movements. In answer to the letter about our Dol adventure, my uncle wrote back to say that he had known an English lady long ago called Miss Anne Britton, and he wondered if this were any relation—the name was rather uncommon."

The American paused, and looked at his companion.

"Please go on," she cried, "it is so very exciting, and surely it must have been Aunt Anne."

"He knew her so well," the young man continued slowly, "that—he asked her to marry him, and—she refused."

Barbara drew a long breath.

"Oh! Fancy Aunt Anne having a romantic story like that! I *should* like to write and ask her about it. But, of course, I can't; she might not like it." Then, turning quickly to the American, she added, "I suppose your uncle won't mind your having told me, will he?"

The young man flushed. "I hope not. He doesn't often speak of such things; and, though I knew there had been something of the kind, I didn't know her name. Of course——" He hesitated.

"Yes?" said Barbara.

"Of course, I know you will consider it a story to think about—and not to speak of. But I thought, as it was your aunt, it would interest you."

"It does. I'm very glad you told me, because it makes me understand Aunt Anne better, I think. Poor Aunt Anne! Although, perhaps, you think your uncle is the one to be sorriest for."

"I am going to join him in Paris to-morrow," he replied a little irrelevantly.

"To Paris! To-morrow!" echoed Barbara, the thought of Alice rushing into her mind. "Oh, I wonder—it would be much better—I wonder if you could do me a favour? It *would* be such a relief to tell an English person about it."

"An American," he corrected. "But perhaps that would do as well. I hope it is not another runaway bicycle?"

"But it just *is* another runaway expedition—though not a bicycle," said the girl, and thereupon poured into his ears the story of Alice Meynell and her woes.

At first he laughed, and said she was in danger of becoming quite an accomplished plotter; but, as the story went on, he grew grave.

"It is a mad idea, Miss Britton," he said. "I am sorry you are mixed up in the matter. Would it not have been better for you to write to the girl's father and tell

him all this?"

Barbara looked vexed.

"How silly of me!" she exclaimed. "Do you know, I never thought of that; and, of course, it would have been quite simple. It was foolish!"

"Never mind now," he said consolingly, seeing how downcast she looked. "I am sure it must have been difficult to decide; and now that the enterprise is fairly embarked on, we must carry it through as well as possible. I think the station here would be one of the first places they would send to when they found she had gone; but we can cycle to the next one and send the machines back by train—she will be so much sooner out of St. Servan."

Barbara agreed gratefully. She was glad that there would be no need for the dark cupboard, and felt much happier now that the immediate carrying out of the plan was in some one else's hands. So she fixed an approximate hour for the "Pretender" to be ready next day, and then said good-bye.

"I will postpone my call on Mademoiselle Loiré till another time," he remarked. "I only hope that nothing will prevent that terrible young lady of yours getting off to-morrow."

"I hope not," sighed Barbara. "She may not even manage to get to the baths at all. If so, we'll have to think of something else."

"*Komm Tag, komm Rat,*" he said cheerily, as he turned away. "Perhaps we may yet want the cupboard."

Barbara hoped not, although Jean was greatly disappointed when he heard of the alteration in the plans, and the only way the girl could console him was by telling him that, if ever she wanted to hide, she would remember the cupboard, which, she thought was a very safe promise!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

The following day was damp and dark, and the weather showed no signs of improving, which was depressing for those who had great plans afoot. Mademoiselle Thérèse thought Barbara was showing signs of madness when she proposed going to the baths, and was not a little annoyed when her disapproval failed to turn the girl from her purpose. Barbara had grave doubts about Alice being allowed to go, but she felt *she*, at least, must at all costs be there. She had time to remind the bath-boy of his bargain, and to promise him something extra when next she came, if he were true to his word, and was just ready to return home, when Alice arrived with the old maid. She succeeded in giving her a little piece of paper with some directions on it, but was able to say nothing; and, after a mere nod, left the bath-house.

She was very curious to see where the window by which the girl was to escape opened, and, going down the passage that ran along the side of the building, found that it opened into a yard, which seemed the storehouse for old rubbish—a safe enough place to alight in. When she returned to the street she saw the "Pretender" coming along, wheeling two bicycles; and her relief at seeing him was mingled with compunction at giving him such a lot of trouble.

It really was rather cool to drag a comparative stranger into such a matter, even if his good nature had prompted him to offer his assistance. But, somehow, the mere fact of his talking English had seemed to do away with the need of formal introduction, and the knowledge that his uncle had known Miss Britton in bygone days would be a certificate of respectability sufficient to satisfy her mother, she thought.

"I *am* so sorry it's wet," she said. "It makes it so much worse for you to be hanging about."

"It is hardly the day one would choose for a bicycle ride," he returned cheerfully; "but, like the conductors in Cook's Tours, I feel I have been chartered for the run, and weather must make no difference. But you should go straight home. It would be too conspicuous to have *two* people loitering about. I will let you know as soon as possible how things go, and if you don't hear till tomorrow, it will mean we are safely on our journey."

Barbara saw the wisdom of returning at once, but did so with reluctance, and,

finding that she was quite unable to give proper attention to her work, wrote a long letter home, relieving her mind by recounting the adventure in full. It was a good thing that the first plan—of hiding Alice in the neighbouring house—had not been carried out, for, about three quarters of an hour later, Mademoiselle Eugénie came hurrying up to see if the girl was with them, and on hearing she was not, at once proposed—with a suspicious glance at Barbara—that she should inquire at the next house.

She asked the girl no questions, however, perhaps guessing that if she did know anything she would not be very likely to tell. It was Mademoiselle Thérèse who, in the wildest state of excitement, questioned every one in the house, Barbara included, and the latter felt a little guilty when she replied that the last time she had seen the missing girl was in the baths.

Before very long the bellman was going round proclaiming her loss, and describing the exact clothes she wore; and Barbara was afraid, when she heard him, that there would soon be news of her; for she had been wearing the little black hat and coat that all the girls at Mademoiselle Eugénie's were dressed in. But the evening came, and apparently nothing had been heard of the truant. Mademoiselle Loiré and Marie did hardly any lessons, such was the general excitement in the house, but discussed, instead, the various possibilities in connection with the escape.

Perhaps there was a little triumph in the hearts of the two elder women, for they had always felt rather jealous that Mademoiselle Eugénie had more boarders than they, even although they did not lay any claim to being a school. They would have given a great deal to be able to read Barbara's thoughts, but she looked so very unapproachable that they shrugged their shoulders and resigned themselves, with what patience they could, to wait.

Barbara's anxiety was greatly relieved the next evening by letters which she received from both the "Pretender" and Alice. The first wrote briefly, and to the point. He said he had delivered the girl safely to the people at Neuilly, whom Alice had taken to, and that there seemed to be "good stuff" in her, too, for he had given her some very straight advice about making the best of things, which she had not resented. Further, that Barbara need have no more anxiety, as he had cabled to her father to get permission for her to stay at Neuilly, in case of any trouble arising when it was discovered where she was. Barbara folded up the letter with a sigh of relief that the matter had gone so well thus far, and opened

Alice's communication, which was largely made up of exclamation marks and dashes.

She was very enthusiastic about Neuilly, and was sure she would be quite happy there, and that the heat would only make her feel at home. She had smiled with delight at intervals all day, she said, when she thought of the rage of Mademoiselle Eugénie, and her futile efforts to trace her. She supposed a full description of her clothes had been given, but that would be no good, as the American had brought her a tweed cap and a cycling cape, and they had thrown her hat away by the roadside. She concluded by saying that Mr. Morton had been very kind, though he did not seem to have a very high opinion of her character, and had given her enough grandfatherly advice to last her a lifetime, and made her promise to write to Mademoiselle Eugénie.

Barbara tore up both letters, and then went out to visit Mademoiselle Viré, and relieved her mind by telling her all about it.

"It seems so deceptive and horrid to keep quiet when they are discussing things and wondering where she is," she concluded. "But she was to write to Mademoiselle Eugénie to-day, and I really don't feel inclined to tell her or the Loirés the share I had in it."

"I hardly think you need, my child," Mademoiselle Viré said, patting her on the shoulder. "Sometimes silence is wisest, and, of *course*, you tell your own people. I do not know, indeed, if I had been young like you, that I should not have done just the same; and perhaps, even if I had been Alice, I might have done as she did."

Barbara laughed, and shook her head. She could never imagine the elegant little Mademoiselle Viré conniving at anybody's escape, especially through a bath-house window! But it cheered her to think that the little lady was not shocked at the escapade; and she went back quite fortified, and ready for supper in the garden with the widower and his family, whom Mademoiselle Thérèse had been magnanimous enough to invite.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WAYSIDE INN.

It was wonderful how quickly the excitement about Alice Meynell died down. Mademoiselle Thérèse went to call upon her former instructress, who told her, with evident reluctance, that the girl had gone to Paris with a friend who had appeared unexpectedly, and her father wished her to remain there for the present.

"Of course," Mademoiselle Thérèse said, in retailing her visit, "she will wish to keep it quiet; such things are not a good advertisement, and they will speak of it no more. I think, indeed, that Mademoiselle Eugénie will call here no more. She suspects that we helped to make the child discontented. I am thankful that we have no such unpleasant matters in *our* establishment. We have always had an excellent reputation!" and the sisters congratulated each other for some time on the successful way in which they had always arranged matters for *their* boarders.

It was while her sister was still in this pleasant mood of self-satisfaction that Mademoiselle Loiré proposed to go to St. Sauveur (a little town about twelve miles away), and collect the rent from one or two houses they owned there. As Mademoiselle Thérèse talked English best, and had the care of the English visitors, she had most of the pleasant excursions, so that Barbara was quite glad to think the elder sister was now to have a turn. Marie always went to St. Sauveur with her aunt, as she had a cousin living in the town, with whom they usually dined in the evening; and an invitation was graciously given to Barbara to accompany them both.

The girl often thought, in making these excursions here and there, how nice it would have been could she have shared them with her mother and the children; and then she used to make up her mind more firmly than ever that she would begin teaching French directly she got home, so that some day she could help to give the pleasure to Frances that her aunt was giving to her.

Donald had written on one occasion, that in view of so many excursions he wondered when the work came in; to which she had replied that it was *all* work, as she had to talk French hard the whole time! And, indeed, a day never passed without her getting in her lesson and some grammatical work, though it sometimes had to come before breakfast or after supper.

On this occasion they were to start very early, as Mademoiselle Loiré explained that they would stop for a little while at a wayside inn, where an old nurse of theirs had settled down. It was therefore arranged to drive so far, and take the train the rest of the way, and Barbara, who had heard a great deal about "the carriage," pictured to herself a little pony and trap, and was looking forward to the drive immensely. What was her astonishment, therefore, when she saw drawn up before the door next day, a little spring cart with a brown donkey in it.

"The carriage!" she gasped, and hastily climbed into the cart lest Mademoiselle Loiré should see her face. They all three sat close together on the one backless seat, and drove off gaily, Mademoiselle Loiré "handling the ribbons," and all the little boys in the street shouting encouragement in the rear.

The donkey went along at an excellent, though somewhat erratic, pace, for every now and then he sprang forward with a lurch that was somewhat disconcerting to the occupants of the cart. The first time, indeed, that he did so, Barbara was quite unprepared, and, after clutching wildly at the side of the cart and missing it, she subsided into the straw at the back, from which she was extricated by her companions, amid much laughter.

"Would you prefer to sit between us?" Mademoiselle Loiré asked her, when she was once more reinstated in her position. "You would perhaps feel firmer?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Barbara hastily. "I will hold on to the side now, and be prepared."

"He does have rather a queer motion," Mademoiselle Loiré; remarked complacently; "but he's swift, and that is a great matter, and you soon get used to his leaps. I should think," she went on, looking at the donkey's long gray ears critically, "he would make a good jumper."

"I should think he might," replied Barbara, subduing her merriment. "I don't think our English donkeys jump much, as a rule; but the Brittany ones seem much more accomplished."

"Undoubtedly," her companion continued calmly. "My sister says when *she* was in England she tried to drive a donkey, and it backed the carriage into the ditch. They must be an inferior breed." To which remark Barbara was powerless to reply for the time being.

The drive was a very pretty one, and the donkey certainly deserved his driver's praises, for he brought them to the inn in good time. It was a quaint little place, standing close to the roadside, but, in spite of that fact, looking as if it were not greatly frequented. As they drove up, they saw an old woman sitting outside under a tree, reading a newspaper; but, on hearing the sound of wheels, she jumped up and ran to the gate. As soon as Mademoiselle Loiré had descended she flung herself upon her; and Barbara wondered how the latter, who was spare and thin, supported the substantial form of her nurse.

She had time to look about her, for her three companions were making a great hubbub, and, as they all spoke together, at the top of their voices, it took some minutes to understand what each was saying. Then Barbara was remembered and introduced, and for a moment she thought the nurse was going to embrace her too, and wondered if it would be worse than a rush at hockey; but, fortunately, she was spared the shock, and instead, was led with the others into a musty parlour.

"I am so pleased to see you," the landlady said, beaming upon them all, "for few people pass this way now the trams and the railway go the other route; and since my dear second husband died it has seemed quieter than ever." Here she shook her head dolefully, and dabbed her bright, black eyes, where Barbara could see no trace of tears.

"Sundays are the longest days," the woman went on, trying to make her hopelessly plump and cheery face look pathetic, "because I am so far away from church. But I read my little newspaper, and say my little prayer—and mention all your names in it" (which Barbara knew was impossible, as she had never heard hers before that morning)—"and think of my little priest."

Mademoiselle Loiré nodded to show she was listening, and Marie hastily stifled a yawn.

"I call him mine," the landlady explained, turning more particularly to Barbara, "because he married me the last time, and my second husband the first time."

Barbara thought of the guessing story about "A blind beggar had a son," and decided she would try to find out later exactly *whom* the priest had married, for the explanation was still going on.

"Of course, therefore, he took an interest in his death," and the widow's voice grew pathetic. "So he always keeps an eye on me, and sends me little holy newspapers, over which I always shed a tear. My second husband always loved his newspaper so—and his coffee."

The word coffee had a magical effect, and her face becoming wreathed in smiles again, she sprang to her feet in a wonderfully agile way, considering her size, and ran to a cupboard in the corner, calling loudly for a maid as she went.

"You must have thirst!" she exclaimed, "terrible thirst and hunger; but I will give you a sip of a favourite beverage of mine that will restore you instantly."

And she placed upon the table a black bottle, which proved to be full of cold coffee sweetened to such a degree that it resembled syrup. Poor Barbara! She was not very fond of hot coffee *unsweetened*, so that this cold concoction seemed to her most sickly. But she managed to drink the whole glassful, except a mouthful of extreme syrup at the end, though feeling afterwards that she could not bear even to look at coffee caramels for a very long time. They sat some time over the refreshments provided for them, and their donkey was stabled at the inn to await their return in the evening. Then bidding a temporary adieu to their hostess, they went on to the town by train.

Mademoiselle Loiré went at once to get her rent, which, she explained, always took her some time, "for the people were not good at paying," and left the girls to look at the church, which was a very old one. After they were joined by mademoiselle they strolled along to Marie's relations. The husband was a seller of cider, which, Marie explained to Barbara, was quite a different occupation from keeping an inn, and much more respectable. Both he and his wife were very hospitable and kind, and especially attentive to the "English miss."

It was quite a unique experience for her, for they dined behind a trellis-work at one end of the shop, and, during the whole of dinner, either the father or daughter was kept jumping up to serve the customers with cider. The son was present too, but no one would allow him to rise to serve anybody, for he was at college in Paris, and had taken one of the first prizes in France for literature. It

was quite touching to see how proud his parents and sister were of him, and he seemed to Barbara to be wonderfully unspoiled, considering the attention he received.

It seemed her fate to have strange food offered her that day, and when the first dish that appeared proved to be stewed eels, Barbara began to dread what the rest of the menu might reveal. Fortunately, there was nothing worse than beans boiled in cream, though it was with some relief that she saw the long meal draw to a close. Coffee and sweetmeats were served in a room upstairs, in which all the young man's prizes were kept, and which were displayed with most loving pride and reverence by the mother and sister, while the owner of them looked on rather bashfully from a corner.

The young man was one of the type of Frenchmen who wear their hair cut and brushed the wrong way, like a clothes-brush. Barbara was beginning to divide all Frenchmen into two classes according to their *frisure*: those that wore their hair brush-fashion, and those that had it long and oiled—sometimes curled. These latter sometimes allowed it to fall in locks upon their foreheads, tossing it back every now and then with an abstracted air and easy grace that fascinated Barbara. They were usually engaged in the Fine Arts, and she could never quite decide whether the hair had been the result of the profession, or vice versa.

After talking for some time, Barbara had her first lesson in *écarté*, which she welcomed gladly, as helping to keep her awake. Then the whole family escorted their visitors to the station, where they stood in a row and waved hats and hands for a long time after the train had left. It was getting rather late when they reached the little inn once more, and Barbara was thankful that she had the excuse of a substantial dinner to fall back upon when she was offered more of the landlady's "pleasant beverage."

When the good-byes had been said it was growing dark, and the girl, thinking of their last adventurous drive, wondered if Mademoiselle Loiré was any more reliable. However, after the first mile, she cast dignity aside, and begged to be allowed to sit down in the hay at the back of the cart and go to sleep, either the eel or her efforts to make herself agreeable having created an overpowering desire for slumber, and she was still dreaming peacefully when they drove into St. Servan, and rattled up the narrow street to their own door.

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRIKE.

It was now the beginning of August, and just "grilling," as Donald would have expressed it.

It seemed almost as difficult to Barbara to leave the sea as it is to get out of bed on a winter morning.

"It must be so very nice to be a mermaid—in summer," she said, looking back at the water, as she and Marie went up the beach one morning.

"Yes," returned Marie, "If they had short hair. It must take such a lot of combing."

Marie was not so enthusiastic about bathing as her companion. Perhaps her want of enthusiasm was due to the fact that she was not allowed to bathe every day, because "it took up so much time that might be devoted to her studies." At first Mademoiselle Thérèse had tried to persuade Barbara that it would be much better for her to go only once or twice a week too.

"There are so many English at the *plage*," she complained, "that I know you will talk with them; and it is a pity to come to France to learn the language and waste your time talking with English, whom you can meet in your own country."

"But I won't talk with them," Barbara had assured her. "You know how careful I have been always to speak French—even when I could hardly make myself understood."

The girl's eyes twinkled, for Mademoiselle Thérèse had a mania for speaking English whenever possible, and at first always used that language when with her pupil, until Barbara had asked her if she had got so accustomed to speaking English that it was more familiar to her than French! Since then, she only used English in public places, or when she thought English people were near.

"It is such a good advertisement," she explained complacently. "You never know what introductions it may make for you."

Barbara had used the same argument in favour of bathing every day, and had prevailed, though she had really been very particular about speaking French—not, I fear, from the desire of pleasing Mademoiselle Thérèse, but because of the thought of the home people, and what she meant to do for them.

"I can't understand how you can bear riding in this weather," Marie remarked, as they toiled slowly home in the sun. "It would kill me to jog up and down on a horse in a sun as hot as this."

"Not when you're accustomed to it," Barbara assured her. "You would want to do it everyday then. I'm going to ride to St. Lunaire this afternoon."

"Then Aunt Thérèse won't go for the walk after supper. What a happiness!" Marie cried, for Mademoiselle Loiré was not so strict as her sister.

The latter had grown quite reconciled to her journeys to Dinard now, and, as a matter of fact, was looking forward with regret to the time they must cease. She found the afternoons in the Casino Gardens with her friend very pleasant, and came back each time full of ideas for altering everybody's clothes.

This she was not permitted to do, however, for Mademoiselle Loiré had an unpleasant remembrance of similar plans on a previous occasion, which had resulted in many garments being unpicked, and then left in a dismembered condition until Marie and she had laboriously sewed them up again! This particular afternoon Mademoiselle Thérèse was in a very complacent mood, having just retrimmed her hat for the second time since its immersion, and feeling that it was wonderfully successful.

"If I had not been acquainted with the English language, and had so many pressing offers to teach it," she said, as they were walking up to the riding-school, "I should have made a wonderful success as a *modiste*. Indeed, I sometimes wonder if it might not have been less trying work."

"That would depend on the customers, wouldn't it?" Barbara returned; but did not hear her reply, for she had caught sight of Monsieur Pirenne at the *manège* door, and knew that he did not like to be kept waiting. Mademoiselle Thérèse always waited to see them mounted, feeling that thereby she ensured a certain

amount of safety on the ride; moreover, there was a ceremony about the matter that appealed to her.

Monsieur Pirenne always liked to mount Barbara in the street, and, before getting on to his own horse, he lingered a while to see that there were a few people present to witness the departure, for, like Mademoiselle Thérèse, he had a great feeling for effect. After seeing Barbara safely up, he glanced carelessly round, flicked a little dust from his elegantly-cut coat, twirled his mustachios, and leaped nimbly into the saddle, without the help of the stirrup.

A flutter of approval went round the bystanders, and Mademoiselle Thérèse called out a parting word of warning to Barbara—just to show she was connected with the couple—before they moved off. Their progress down the street was as picturesque as Monsieur Pirenne could make it; for whatever horse he might be on, he succeeded in making it caracole and curvet, saying at intervals, with a careless smile—

"Not *too* near, mademoiselle. Manon is not to be trusted."

"I believe he would do the same on a rocking-horse," Barbara had once written home; but she admired and liked him in spite of these little affectations—admired him for his skill in horsemanship, and liked him for his patience as a master.

This ride was one of the nicest she had yet had, as the road, being bordered for a great part of the way by the links, made capital going. It was when they had turned their faces homeward, and were just entering the town, that something very exciting happened. They had fallen into a walk, and Barbara was watching the people idly, when she recognised among the passers-by the face of the "solicitor" of Neuilly! She felt sure it was he, although he was just turning down a side street; and after the shock of surprise she followed her first impulse, and, putting her horse at a gallop, dashed after him.

Monsieur Pirenne, who was in the middle of saying something, received a great fright, and wondered whether she or her horse had gone mad. He followed her at once, calling after her anxiously, "Pull up, mademoiselle, pull up! You will be killed!"

The solicitor did not see her, but just before she reached him he stepped on to a passing tram and was whirled away, and before Barbara had decided whether

to pursue an electric tram or not, Monsieur Pirene had reached her side and seized her reins. He looked really frightened, and annoyed too, but when Barbara told him that the horse had only been running in accordance with the will of her mistress, he composed himself a little, merely remarking that it was hardly *comme il faut* to gallop in the streets like that.

"But, Monsieur Pirene," Barbara said eagerly, "I know you would have done the same if you had known the story;" and therewith she began to tell it to him. He was immensely interested, for there is nothing a Frenchman enjoys more than an adventure, and at the end of the tale he was almost as excited as she was.

"Could we trace him now?" he questioned eagerly. "But—I fear the chance is small—the description is so vague, and you did not even see the name on the tram, and we have no proofs. Yet, mademoiselle, if you will go to the *préfecture* with me, I will do my best."

But Barbara shook her head decidedly. The thought of police courts, especially French ones, alarmed her, and the warnings she had received to keep out of any more "complications" were still very fresh in her mind.

"I think I should rather not go to the *préfecture*, monsieur," she said quickly. "I do not think it would be any good either."

"I agree with you perfectly." And Monsieur Pirene bowed gallantly. "Therefore, shall we proceed on our way? Does mademoiselle regret that she did not catch him?" he asked, after a while.

"I am sorry he is not caught—but I am not sorry *I* did not catch him, though that seems rather contradictory, doesn't it?"

"By which mademoiselle means that she does not know what she would have done with one hand on the miscreant's collar, the other on the reins, and a crowd around her?" the Frenchman inquired politely.

"That's just it," laughed Barbara. "You have exactly described it—though I should be glad if *some one* caught him and made him give back the money."

"I will keep my eyes open on your behalf, and shall let you know if anything happens," he said sympathetically; and Barbara, remembering his kindness, did not like to remind him that, never having seen the man, he could not possibly be

of much service to her.

When Mademoiselle Thérèse heard that she had seen the solicitor again, she was almost as excited as Barbara had been, and at once proposed that they should spend the rest of the evening in Dinard, looking for him; and it was not until the girl pointed out that he might now be on his way to England, or a long way off in another direction, that she became reconciled to returning home.

Excitement seemed in the air that evening, and when they arrived at the St. Servan quay there were more idlers than usual. They wondered what was the cause, and when Mademoiselle Thérèse, with her customary desire to get at the bottom of everything, asked the reason, she was told that the strike among the timber-yard men, which had been threatened for some time, had begun that afternoon, and that work was suspended.

It was all the more astonishing because it had come so suddenly, and Barbara could hardly tear mademoiselle away from the spot until she suggested that those at home might not have heard of it yet, and that she might be the first to tell it to them. Hurrying through the town, they heard great shouting from the other side of the quay, which made mademoiselle nearly break into a run with eagerness. As it happened, however, the news had already spread to their street, and they found Mademoiselle Loiré equally anxious to tell the new-comers what *she* knew of the matter.

As it was the first strike for many years, the townspeople looked upon it with a strange mingling of pride and fear. It was stirred up by an agitator called Mars, and had broken out simultaneously in other ports too. More *gendarmes* were sent for in case of need, though Mademoiselle Loiré said it was hoped matters might be arranged amicably by a meeting between masters and men.

They were still discussing the subject, when a loud shouting was heard, and they all ran to a disused bedroom in the front of the house and looked out.

A crowd of men, marching in fours, were coming up the street, led by one beating a drum, and another carrying a dirty banner with "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" upon it. Barbara's eyes sparkled with excitement, and she felt almost as if she were back in the times of the Revolution, for they looked rather a fierce and vicious crew.

"They are some of the strikers," Mademoiselle Thérèse cried. "We must

withdraw our heads from the windows in case the men get annoyed with us for staring." But she promptly leaned still farther out, and began making loud remarks to her sister, on the disgracefulness of such behaviour.

"You will be heard," Mademoiselle Loiré returned, shaking her head at her sister. "You are a silly woman to say such things so loudly when the strikers are marching beneath."

But the remonstrance had no effect, and the sight of all the other windows in the street full of spectators encouraged and inspired Mademoiselle Thérèse, and made her long for fame and glory.

"It is ridiculous of the mayor to allow such things," she said loudly, with an evident desire to be heard. "The men should be sharply dealt with, and sent back to their work."

The result of her words was unexpected; for several of the crowd, annoyed at the little serious attention they had hitherto received, and worked up to considerable excitement, by the shouting and drumming began to pick up stones and fling them at the house. At first they were merely thrown *against* the house, then, the spirit of mischief increasing, they were sent with better aim, and one crashed through the window above Mademoiselle Thérèse's head.

"We shall all be killed!" shrieked her sister, "and just because of your meddling ways, Thérèse." But she called to deaf ears, for now Mademoiselle Thérèse, enjoying notoriety, kept popping her head in and out of the window, dodging the stones and shouting out threats and menaces, which were returned by the crowd, till at last Mademoiselle Loiré cried out pitifully that some one must go and fetch the widower.

"One man even might be a protection," she moaned, though how, and whether against her sister or the strikers, did not seem very clear to Barbara. But as that seemed to be Mademoiselle Loiré's one idea, and as Marie and the maid-servants were all crying in a corner, she thought she had better fetch him. Running downstairs and across the garden, she climbed over the wall by the wood pile, and boldly knocked at the widower's back door, thereby frightening him not a little. He came very cautiously along the passage, and inquired in rather shaky tones who was there.

As soon as Barbara had assured him that this was not an attack in the rear, he

flung open the door, and welcomed her most cordially. Barbara wondered where he had been not to have heard Mademoiselle Loiré's wailings, and suspected that perhaps he *had* heard them and had retired hastily in consequence! He certainly looked a little depressed when he received the message, which was to the effect that he should come and address the crowd from the Loirés' window, and bid it to proceed on its way.

"I think," he said pensively, after some moments' consideration, "that if I am to go at all, I had better go out by my own front door and speak to the crowd from the street. They will be more likely to listen to me there, than if they thought I was one of Mademoiselle Loiré's household."

"That is *very* brave of you, monsieur," Barbara said, and the little man swelled with pride. Perhaps it was the thought of the glorious part he was about to play before the whole street that upheld him, as he certainly was rather timid by nature.

"If *you* are going out to face that mob," said Jean, drawing himself up, "I will accompany you."

"Noble boy!" cried the little man, embracing him. "We will live or die together. Come!" And off they went, while Barbara hurried across the garden and over the wall again, not wishing to miss the spectacle in the street. But her dress caught in the wood, and, as it took her some time to disentangle it, the widower had finished his speech by the time she arrived at the window. But he seemed to have made an impression, for the crowd was beginning slowly to move on, urged by what persuasions or threats she could not discover, as the Loirés had not heard much either.

But as long as the strikers went, the ladies did not much mind how they had been persuaded, and when the last man had straggled out of sight, and the sound of the drum was dying away, both the sisters, followed by Marie, rushed downstairs and flung open the front door.

"Enter!" Mademoiselle Loiré cried. "Enter, our preserver—our rescuer!" and, as soon as he crossed the threshold, Mademoiselle Thérèse seized one hand and her sister the other, till Barbara wondered how the poor little man's arms remained on. Marie, meanwhile, did her part by the son, and, as they all spoke at once, there was almost as much noise in the house as previously there had been

outside.

"Our noble preserver, what do we not owe to you!" shouted Mademoiselle Thérèse, trying to drown her sister, who was speaking at his other ear.

"Facing the mob like a lion at bay—one man against a thousand!" Barbara knew there had not been a hundred, but supposed a poetical imagination must be allowed free play.

"He stood there as calmly as in church," Marie interpolated, though she knew that the widower never went there, "with a cool smile playing about his lips—it was a beautiful sight;" and Barbara regretted exceedingly that her dress had detained her so long that she had missed it.

Compliments continued to fly for some time, like butterflies in June; then, from sheer exhaustion, the sisters released him, and wiped their eyes from excess of emotion. Barbara was just assuring herself that the widower's arms *did* seem to be all right, when he turned round, and, seizing both her hands, began to shake them as violently as his had been shaken a few minutes before.

Barbara was much bewildered, not knowing what she had done to deserve this tribute, and wondering if the widower were doing it out of a spirit of revenge, and a desire to make somebody else's hands as tired as his own. But one glance at his glowing, kindly face dispelling that idea, Barbara concentrated all her attention on the best way to free herself, and avoid going through a similar ordeal with all the others, which, she began to fear, might be her fate.

She escaped it, however, for Mademoiselle Loiré had hastened away to bring up some wine from the cellar, in honour of the occasion, and they were all invited into the *salon* to drink to each other's healths before parting. The widower was called upon to give a speech, to which Mademoiselle Thérèse replied at some length, without being called upon; and it was getting quite late before the two "noble preservers" retired to their own home.

When they had gone, Mademoiselle Loiré suggested that all danger might not yet be past, and, as the men might return again later, she thought it would be wiser to make preparations. So the two frightened maid-servants being called in to assist, the shutters were closed before all the windows, and heavy furniture dragged in front of them. When this was done, and all the doors bolted and barred, Mademoiselle Thérèse proposed to take turns in sitting up and keeping

watch. Barbara promptly vetoed the motion, declaring she was going to bed at once, and, as no one else seemed inclined to take the part of sentinel, they all retired.

"I hope we may be spared to see the morning light," Mademoiselle Thérèse said solemnly. "I feel there is great risk in our going to bed in this manner."

"Then why don't you sit up, sister?" Mademoiselle Loiré said crossly, for the last hour or two had really been very tiring. But to this her sister did not deign to reply, and, taking up her candle, went up to bed. When Barbara gained the safe precincts of her own room she laughed long and heartily, and longed that Donald or Frances could have been there to see the meeting between rescuer and rescued.

In spite of their fears of evil they all spent a peaceful night, the only result of their careful barricading being that it made the servants cross, as they had to restore things to their places. The town was apparently quiet enough too—though Mademoiselle Thérèse would not allow any one to go out "in case of riot"—and when the additional *gendarmes* came in the evening there was little for them to do. It was supposed that the men and employers had come to some understanding, and that the strikers would soon return to their work.

"But, you see," Mademoiselle Thérèse said to Barbara, "how easily a revolution arises in our country. With a little more provocation there would have been barricades and the guillotine just as before."

"But while the widower and his son live so near us," Barbara replied, "we need surely have no fear."

And, though Mademoiselle Thérèse looked at her sharply, the girl's face was so sedate that the lady supposed she was treating the matter with seriousness.

CHAPTER XVI.

BARBARA PLAYS DETECTIVE.

The morning lesson was over, and Mademoiselle Thérèse had betaken herself to Barbara's couch, which the girl knew always meant that she was going to make her an indefinite visit, and tell her some long story. This time, it was about her visit to England and what she had done when teaching there; and, as Barbara had heard it all before more than once, it was a little difficult to show a proper interest in it.

"Yes," mademoiselle went on, "it was a time full of new experiences for me, by which I hope I profited. I got on extremely well with your countrywomen, too, and the girls all loved me, and, indeed, so did your countrymen, for I received a great many offers of marriage while there. I grew weary of refusing them, and was so afraid of hurting their feelings—but one cannot marry every one, can one?"

"Certainly not, mademoiselle," Barbara returned gravely. "It would be most unwise."

"That is just what I felt. Now, the German *fräulein*——"

Barbara sighed, wondering if it were the tenth or eleventh time she had heard the tale of the "German *fräulein*"; but before she had decided the point, there was a knock at the door, and the maid-servant brought up the message that mademoiselle was wanted below by a visitor.

She rose at once, shook out her skirt, and patted her hair.

"That is just the way," she said. "I am never allowed much time for rest. You would not believe how many people seek me to obtain my advice. I will return in a few minutes and finish my story."

When she had gone, Barbara looked longingly at the couch. It was *such* a hot day, and the lesson had been a long one; but she was afraid it was not much good to settle down with the promise of the story hanging over her head. The result proved she was right, for very soon Mademoiselle Thérèse came hurrying back again, full of smiles and importance. The landlady of the inn, *Au Jacques Cartier*, wished her to go there, she said, to act as interpreter between herself and an Englishman, who could speak hardly any French. Would Barbara like to come too?

Thinking it might be entertaining, Barbara got ready hastily and ran down to

join Mademoiselle Thérèse and the landlady, who had come in person "to better make clear matters."

"This Englishman and his son," she explained, as they went along, "have only been with us a day or two, but already we wish them to go, yet cannot make them understand. Of course, I do not wish to hurt his feelings, but now, in August, I could let the room twice over to people who would be much less trouble, and whom the other guests would like better."

"But what is wrong with these?" asked Mademoiselle Thérèse critically. "I must know all the affair or I cannot act in it."

She drew herself up very straight, and Barbara wondered if she were thinking of Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*.

"Well, this gentleman asked for a 'bath every morning,'" the landlady replied in an injured tone, "and after we procured for him a nice little washing-tub, with much trouble, he said it was too small."

"That is not sufficient reason to send him away;" and Mademoiselle Thérèse shook her head.

"No. But then he cannot understand what goes on at *table d'hôte*, and he and his son are such silent companions that it casts a gloom over the rest. Of course," with an apologetic glance at Barbara, "some Englishmen are very nice to have; but this one"—she shook her head as if the matter were quite beyond her—"this one I do not like, and perhaps without hurting his feelings, you, mademoiselle, could make quite clear to him that he must go."

By this time they had arrived at the hotel, which was close to the Rosalba Bathing Place, and overlooked that little bay. Barbara, thinking the interview would be a delicate one, and that she would but add to the unpleasantness of the situation, said she would wait in the orchard till she was called.

From it one could get a beautiful view across the River Rance, to the wooded slopes beside Dinard, and, finding a seat beneath a lime-tree, Barbara sat down. She had been there about a quarter of an hour, and was almost asleep, when she heard stealthy footsteps coming through the grass beside her, and the next moment her startled eyes fell upon the solicitor's son of Neuilly remembrance!

She got rather a fright at first, but he certainly got a much worse one; and before he had recovered it had flashed across her mind quite clearly that the man who was at that moment talking to Mademoiselle Thérèse, was the solicitor himself. Before she could move from her place, the son had cast himself down on his knees, and was begging her incoherently to spare him and his father—not to inform against them. The thought of going to prison, he said, would kill him, as it had his mother, as it nearly had his sister; and if she would spare them, he would take his father away at once.

To see the boy crying there like a child almost made Barbara give way and let things go as they liked; but then she remembered how meanly his father had cheated the people in Neuilly—a widow's family too—and what a life he seemed to have led his own wife and children; then, calling to mind his horrid manner and cruel, sensuous face, she steeled herself against him.

"I shall certainly inform against your father," she said gravely. "And I think the best thing that you and your sister can do, is to get away at once, before it is too late."

The boy wrung his hands. "My sister has gone already," he moaned, "to some Scotch relations—simple people—who said they would take her in if she would have nothing more to do with our father. But I could not go—there was money only for one."

Barbara looked at the pathetic figure before her, and suddenly forgot all her promises not to get entangled in any more plots or other dangerous enterprises, and almost before she realised what she was doing, she was scribbling a message in French on the back of an envelope.

From where they stood they could see the little house of Mademoiselle Viré, and the entrance to the lane in which it stood. Pointing out the roof of the house to her companion, she told him to run there with the note, and, if the people let him in, to wait until she came.

She felt it was a very bold, and perhaps an impertinent thing to do, but she was almost sure that Mademoiselle Viré would do as she asked. As soon as she saw him so far on his way, she ran to the inn, and went through to the kitchen, where a maid was cooking.

"Bring your master to me, as quickly as possible," the girl said peremptorily.

"You need not be afraid" she added, seeing that the woman—not unnaturally—looked upon her with suspicion. "I will touch nothing, and the quicker you come back the better I shall be pleased."

The maid eyed her doubtfully for a few minutes, then shrugged her shoulders and ran out of the room. Her master would, at least, be able to get rid of this obnoxious stranger, she thought. He came quickly enough, with an anxious expression on his rosy face, and Barbara had to tell the story twice or thrice before he seemed to understand. It was rather unpleasant work telling a foreigner about the evil deeds of a fellow-countryman, but it seemed the right thing to do, though the thought of it haunted the girl for some time.

When once the landlord understood matters, he acted very promptly, sending some one for the police, and then with a telegram to Neuilly. He said he had had his doubts all along, because the gentleman had seemed queer, and the people sleeping next him had complained that they were sure he beat his son, for they used to hear the boy crying.

The landlord then went down into the hall to wait until Mademoiselle Thérèse's interview was over, and Barbara, leaving a message to the effect that she had grown tired and had gone on, ran back to their house.

Having succeeded in entering unobserved, she got her purse and hurried off to Mademoiselle Viré.

The old maid looked at her with a mingling of relief and curiosity, but was much too polite to ask any questions.

"The young man is here," she said, and led the way into the little dining-room, where her mistress was sitting opposite the boy with a very puzzled face, but doing her best to make him take some wine and biscuit. Mademoiselle Viré had always appeared to Barbara as the most courteous woman she had ever met, and, in presence of the frightened, awkward youth, her gracious air impressed the girl more than ever.

Knowing that he could not understand French she told his story at once, and her listener never showed by a glance in his direction that he was the subject of conversation. They both came to the conclusion that the best thing he could do would be to go to St. Malo, and take the first boat to England. It left in the evening about seven, so that by next morning he would be safe at Southampton.

Then Barbara said, in the way she had been wont to advise Donald, "I think you should go straight to your sister, and take counsel with her as to what you should do. I will lend you money enough for what you need."

"You *are* kind," the boy said, with tears in his eyes. "I'll pay you back as soon as I get any money—as soon as ever I can, I do promise you—if only I get safely to England." He had such a pitiful, frightened way of looking over his shoulder, as if he expected to see his father behind him all the time, that Barbara's wrath against the man arose anew, and she felt she could not be sorry, whatever his punishment might be.

"Good-bye," she said kindly. "I must go away now. I think, when you arrive in England, you might write to Mademoiselle Viré, and say you arrived safely. I shall be anxious till I hear."

The boy almost embarrassed Barbara by the assurances of his gratitude, and she breathed more freely when she got into the open air.

"How glad I ought to be that Donald isn't like that," she thought, the remembrance of her frank, sturdy brother rising in vivid contrast in her mind.

When she got back, Mademoiselle Thérèse was enjoying herself thoroughly, recounting the adventure to her own household and to the widower and his sons whom she had called in to add to her audience. She described the whole scene most graphically and with much gesticulation, perhaps also with a little exaggeration.

"The anger of the man when he found he must accompany the officers was herculean," she said, casting up her eyes; "he stormed, he raged, he tore his hair" (Barbara remembered him as almost quite bald!), "he insisted that his son must come too."

"How mean!" the girl cried indignantly.

"But the son," mademoiselle paused, and looked round her audience—"the son," she concluded in a thrilling whisper, "had gone—fled—disappeared. One moment he was there, the next he was nowhere. Whereupon the papa was still more angry, and with hasty words gave an exact and particular description of him in every detail. 'He must be caught,' he shouted, 'he must keep me company.' Such a father!" Mademoiselle rolled her eyes wildly. "Such an inhuman monster

repelled me, and—I fled."

Barbara, feeling as if they should applaud, looked round vaguely to see if the others were thinking of beginning; but at that moment she was overpowered by Mademoiselle Thérèse suddenly flinging herself upon her and kissing her on both cheeks.

"This!" she said solemnly, holding Barbara with one hand and gesticulating with the other—"this is the one we must thank for the capture. She directed the landlord—her brains planned the arrest—*she* will appear against him in court."

"Oh, no!" Barbara cried in distress, "I really can't do that. They have telegraphed for Madame Belvoir's son from Neuilly—he will do. I really could not appear in court."

"But you can speak French quite well enough now—you need not mind about that; and it will be quite an event to appear in court. It is not *every* girl of your age who can do that."

Mademoiselle spoke almost enviously; but the idea was abhorrent to Barbara, who determined, if possible, to avoid such an ordeal.

The next afternoon they had a visit from one of Madame Belvoir's sons, who had come across to see what was to be done about the "solicitor." Barbara was very glad to see him, for it brought back remembrances of the first happy fortnight in Paris.

It was rather comforting to know, too, that the result of one of the plots she had been concerned in had been satisfactory, for the news about Alice was good. She was getting on well with French, and all the Belvoirs liked her very much. The "American gentleman" had been to see her twice, and her father had not only given her permission to stay, but had written to Mademoiselle Eugenie to that effect, and was coming over himself to see her.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEMORY AND A "MANOIR."

No amount of wishing on Barbara's part could do away with the necessity for her appearing in court, and the ordeal had to be gone through.

"If I were a novelist, now," she said ruefully to Mademoiselle Thérèse, "I might be able to make some use of it, but as I am just a plain, ordinary person _____"

Her chief consolation was that the boy had written saying he had joined his sister and that he "had never been so happy in his life." He was going to be a farmer, he said, and Barbara wondered why, of all occupations, he had fixed upon one that appeared to be so unsuitable; but, as a proof of his good intentions, poor boy, he had sent her ten shillings of the money she had lent him, and promised to forward the rest as soon as he could. It was some comfort also, as Mademoiselle Viré pointed out, that the man would be safely out of the way of doing further harm for the present.

Barbara quite agreed with her, but thought she would have felt the comfort more if some one else had played her part. But when the whole unpleasant business was over, and Barbara had vowed that nothing would ever prevail upon her to go into court again—even if it were to receive sentence herself—she sought out Mademoiselle Viré, with a proposal to do something to "take away the bad feeling."

"Make music," the little lady said. "That is, I think, the only thing I can offer you, my child. Music is very good for 'bad feelings.'"

"Yes, oh, yes, it is; but this is something I have been wanting for a long time, and now I feel it is the right time for it. *Dear Mademoiselle Viré*, will you come for a drive with me?"

A delicate flush coloured the old lady's cheeks, and Barbara watched her anxiously. She knew she was very poor, and could not afford to do such things for herself, and she was too frail to walk beyond the garden, but she also greatly feared that she might have made the offer in a way to hurt her friend's feelings.

The little lady did not answer for some time, then she looked into the eager face before her and smiled.

"If I said I would go, where could you get a carriage to take us?"

"Oh, I have found out all about that," the girl replied joyfully. "I shall not ask you to go in a donkey-cart, nor yet in a *fiacre*. I have found out quite a nice low chaise and a quiet pony that can be hired, and I will drive you myself."

It took only a little consideration after that, and then mademoiselle gave her consent to go next day if it were fine.

"If Jeannette would care to come," Barbara said, before leaving; and the old woman, who had been sitting very quietly in her corner while the arrangements were being made, looked at her mistress with a beaming face, and read her pleasure in the plan before she spoke.

"I am so glad you thought of her," Mademoiselle Viré whispered as she said good-bye to her visitor, "for though, of course, I should never have asked you to include her, yet she has been so patient and faithful in going through sorrows and labour with me, that it is but fair she should share my pleasures, and I should have felt grieved to leave her at home on such a day."

Barbara had one more invitation to give, which went rather against the grain, and that was to Mademoiselle Thérèse, whom she felt she could not leave out; but she was unfeignedly glad when the lady refused on the score of too much English correspondence.

The following day being gloriously fine, they started for the drive in great contentment, going by Mademoiselle Viré's choice towards La Guimorais, a little village some seven kilometres away on the coast. The pony was tractable and well behaved, and they rolled along slowly under the shady trees and past the old farms and cottages, Mademoiselle Viré's face alone, Barbara thought, being worth watching, while Jeannette sat opposite, her hands folded in her lap.

Just before reaching La Guimorais the road branched off towards a lonely *manoir*, empty now, and used by some farmer for a storehouse. Yet there was still a dignity about it that neither uncared-for garden nor ruined beauty could destroy.

"May we go close, quite close to it?" Mademoiselle Viré asked, and Barbara turning the pony's head into the lane, pulled up beside the high gray walls.

"The master once, the servant now, but still noble," the old lady whispered, as her eyes, wandering lovingly over it all, lingered at last upon a bush of roses near the gate. The flowers were almost wild, through neglect and lack of pruning, and not half so fine as many in the little lady's own garden; but Barbara, noticing the longing look, slipped out and gathered a handful.

"The farmer would spare you those, I think, madame, if it pleases you to have them."

"He would surely spare them to me," madame repeated, and buried her face in their fragrance. Then she laid them in her lap.

"Drive on, my dear, I have seen all I wish," she said. She was silent till they passed into the main road again. Then she said, with a backward look at the *manoir*—

"I once stayed there for a very happy summer with my father, and a well-beloved friend. They are both in Paradise now, and I hope, by God's good grace and the intercessions of our Lady, I am nearer them each year."

Her face was perfectly serene, but poor old Jeannette's was all puckered up, and the tears rolled heavily down her cheeks. As for Barbara, she did not speak for a time.

The village was a quaint little place, just a few houses dropped together beside the sea, which sang to them for ever.

"Let us not go in out of the clean, strong air," Mademoiselle Viré said, as they stopped in front of the inn. "May we drink tea at the door?"

They slipped the reins through a ring in the flags in front of the house, and sipped their tea, while the children of the place came and stared solemnly at the strangers.

They drove home in the evening sunlight between the orchards, where the apples hung heavy on the trees, Mademoiselle Viré talking in her happy way as usual, entertaining Barbara with tales of what she had seen and heard. But when they drew up at her door, and the girl helped her out, she looked anxiously into her friend's face. Had it been too tiring for her?

"You are thinking I may be tired!" the old lady said, smiling at her. "Then I will tell you, my dear. I am just tired enough to go to bed and have dreams, happy dreams. When one is so old, one is so near the end of memory, so near the beginning of realities, that the former ceases to be sad. I thank you for the pleasure you have given Jeannette and myself, it will last us long; and now, good-night."

She kissed her, and Barbara turned back to the pony chaise.

"For her sake," she said softly to herself, "one would like the realities to begin soon."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUNT ANNE AGAIN.

Barbara had not been so frequently at the bath-house of late, the sea proving more attractive, and she was therefore surprised one day on going there to find a new bath-boy. She missed her old plain-faced friend and wondered what had become of him. "Is he ill?" she asked at the office on her way out.

The woman pursed up her lips; "No, he is not ill," she said. "But we found that he was not of the character that we thought."

"But he had been with you some years," Barbara expostulated, for the boy had confided that fact to her.

"He had, but he had degenerated, we found."

A dreadful doubt seized Barbara that his dismissal might be due to the help he had given her in Alice's escape, and in that case she would be partly responsible for him.

"Will you kindly give me his address?" she said, turning back again to the office. The woman looked doubtful, and said she was not sure if she had it.

"I think if he has been with you several years, you must surely know where he lives," Barbara persisted; and seeing her determined look, the woman apparently thought it would be the quickest way to get rid of her, and did as she was asked. Barbara repeated the name of the street and the number once or twice as she went out, and wondered how she should begin to find her way there, though consoling herself by thinking it was not the first time she had hunted up unknown addresses successfully since she had come to France.

It was very hot, and for a moment she hesitated, wondering whether she would not put off her search till another time; then she decided it was her duty to look the boy up at once. Asking a kindly postman if he could direct her to the address, she found that the house was in one of the streets near the quays. Though rather a long way off, it was not difficult to find, and once found it was not easily forgotten, for the smells were mingled and many.

Barbara wandered down between the high old houses, looking at the numbers—when she could see them—and finally found the one she sought. She had not to wait long after knocking, and the door was opened by the bath-boy himself, who stared at her in astonishment.

"Ma'm'selle?" he said doubtfully, as if uncertain whether she were a messenger of ill omen or not.

"I have come to call," Barbara explained. "May I please come in?"

His face broadened into the familiar grin, and he shuffled down the passage before her, wearing the same heelless list slippers that had first attracted Barbara's attention to him in the bath-house. The room he took her into smelt fresh and clean, and indeed was half full of clean clothes of all descriptions.

"My mother is *blanchisseuse*," the boy said, lifting a heap of pinafores from a chair. "I am desolated that she is out."

"Yes. Guillaume, will you please tell me why you were sent away from the bath-house?"

Guillaume looked uncomfortable, and moved his foot in and out of his slipper.

"Why, ma'm'selle—I was dismissed. They said it was my character, but that is

quite good. I do not drink, nor lie, nor steal; my mother was always a good bringer up."

"Then was it because of helping the English lady to escape? Was it that, Guillaume?" The boy swung his slipper dexterously to and fro on his bare toes.

"It was doubtless that, ma'm'selle, for it was after the visit of the lady she belonged to that I was dismissed. My mother warned me at the time. 'It is unwise,' she said, 'for such as you to play thus.' But the little English lady looked so sad."

"I *am* sorry, Guillaume. I do wish it had not happened."

"So do we, ma'm'selle," said the boy simply, "for my mother, who is *blanchisseuse*, has lost some customers since then, too, and I cannot get anything here. To-morrow I go to St. Malo or Paramé to try—but they are much farther away. Yet we must have money to keep the little Hélène. She is so beautiful and so tender."

"Who is Hélène?" inquired Barbara; and at the question the boy's face glowed with pride and pleasure.

"I will bring her to you, ma'm'selle; she is now in the garden. She is with me while I am at home."

He shuffled off, and returned in a few minutes with a little girl in his arms: so pretty a child that Barbara marvelled at the contrast between them.

"She is not like me, hein?" he asked, laughing. "Hélène, greet the lady," and Barbara held out both hands to the little girl, who, after a long stare, ran across to her. In amusing her and being herself amused, Barbara forgot the reason of her visit, and only remembered it when the little girl asked her brother suddenly if he would fetch her a roll that evening.

The boy looked uncomfortable. "Not to-night," he hastened to say, "but the mama, she will bring you something to-night for supper. I used to bring her a white roll on my way home from the baths," he explained to Barbara.

"May I give her one to-night?" the girl asked quickly, putting her hand into her pocket. "I would like to."

But the boy shook his head. "No, no, the mama would not like it—the first time you were in the house. Some other time, if ma'm'selle does us the honour to come again."

"Of course I will. I want to see how you get on at St. Malo or Paramé," she said, "and whether Hélène's doll gets better from the measles."

"Or whether she grows wings," put in Hélène in waving her hand in farewell.

Barbara was very thoughtful on her way back, and before reaching the house, she had determined to give up her riding for the present. One more excursion she would have, in which to say good-bye to Monsieur Pirenne, who had been very kind to her; but it seemed rather selfish to use up any more of the liberal fund which her aunt had supplied her with for that purpose. After all, it was hard that the bath-boy, through her fault, could not even supply his little sister with rolls for her supper.

Mademoiselle Thérèse was somewhat surprised at the sudden decision, and perhaps a little annoyed by it, for she had grown accustomed to the trips to Dinard, and would miss them greatly. Monsieur Pirenne was also disturbed, because he feared "Mademoiselle had grown tired of his *manège*." Barbara assured him to the contrary, and tried to satisfy them both with explanations which were as satisfactory as such can be when they are not the real ones. As to connecting the girl's visits to the ex-bath-boy—which Mademoiselle Thérèse thought were due merely to a passing whim—and the cessation of rides, she never dreamed of such a thing.

The result of the boy's inquiries at St. Malo and Paramé were fruitless at first, and Barbara had paid several visits, and was beginning to feel almost as anxious as the mother and son themselves before the boy succeeded in his search. But one afternoon when she arrived she found him beaming with happiness, having found at least a temporary job at Paramé, and one which probably would become permanent.

"That news," she said, shaking the boy's hand warmly in congratulation, "will send me home quite light-hearted."

But somehow, though she was honestly glad, it did not make her feel as happy as it should have done, and she thought the road back had never seemed so long, nor the sun so hot. She would gladly have missed her evening lesson

and supper, but she feared that of the two evils Mademoiselle Thérèse's questions would probably be the worse. Indeed, when in the best of health, that lady's conversation was apt to be wearisome, but when one felt—as Barbara had for the past few days—that bed was the only satisfactory place, and *that* even harder than it used to be, then mademoiselle's chatter became a penance not easily borne.

"You are getting tired of us, and beginning to want home," the Frenchwoman said in rather offended tones two days later, when Barbara declined to go with her to Dol. "I am sorry we have not been able to amuse you sufficiently well."

"Oh, that isn't it at all," Barbara assured her. "It is just that I have never known such hot weather before, and it makes me disinclined for things."

"You are looking whitish, but that is because you have been staying in the house too much lately. Dol would do you good and cheer you up."

"Another time," the girl pleaded. "I think I won't go to-day," and the lady left her with a shrug, and the remark that she would not go either. She was evidently annoyed, and Barbara wondered what she should do to atone for it; but later in the day she had a visit that drove the thoughts of Dol from both her mind and mademoiselle's.

She was sitting in her room trying to read, and wondering why she could not understand the paragraph, though she had read it three or four times, when Mademoiselle Thérèse came running in excitedly to say there were two American gentlemen downstairs in the *salon* to see her—one old, one young. "Mr. Morton," was the name on the card.

"Why, it must be the American pretender!" cried Barbara; who, seeing her companion's look of surprise, added hastily, "the elder one used to know my Aunt Anne, and they have both been in Paris; it was the younger one who helped Alice Meynell there."

"Then, indeed, I must descend and inquire after her," said mademoiselle joyfully. "I will just run and make my toilet again. In the meanwhile, do you go down and entertain them till I come."

But Barbara was already out of the room, for she thought she would like to have a few minutes conversation before Mademoiselle Thérèse came in, as there

might not be much opportunity afterwards.

"How nice of you to call on me," she said, as she entered the *salon*. "I was just longing for one of the English-speaking race."

The elder Mr. Morton was tall and thin, with something in his carriage that suggested a military upbringing; his hair and eyes gray, the latter very like his nephew's grown sad.

"The place does not suit you?" the elder man inquired, looking at her face.

"Oh, yes, I think so; it is just very hot at present."

"Like the day you tried to ride to Dol," the nephew remarked, wondering if it were only the ride that had given her so much more colour the first time he had seen her, and the sea breeze that had reddened her cheeks the last time.

But there were so many things the girl was anxious to hear about, that she did not allow the conversation to lapse to herself or the weather again before Mademoiselle Thérèse, arrayed in her best, made her appearance. She at once seized upon the younger man, and began to pour out questions about Alice.

"You need not fear any bad results," Mr. Morton said to Barbara. "My nephew is very discreet;" and Barbara, hearing scraps of the conversation, thought he was not only discreet but lawyer-like in his replies.

The visit was not a very long one, Mr. Morton declining an invitation to supper that evening, with promises to come some other time. But before they went, he seized a moment when Barbara's attention was engaged by his nephew to say something that his hostess rather resented.

"The young lady does not look so well as I had imagined she would. I suppose her health is quite good at present?"

"She has complained of nothing," Mademoiselle Thérèse returned, bridling. "Why should she be ill? The food is excellent and abundant, and we do everything imaginable for the comfort of our inmates."

"I am sure you do, madame," he replied, bowing. "I shall have the pleasure of calling upon you again, I hope, before long. As I knew Miss Britton it is natural

for me to take an interest in her niece when in a foreign land. Your aunt, I suppose, is now in England?" he added casually to Barbara.

"Yes—staying with us for a day or two; but I hope she will come here before I go, and we could make an excursion on our way home."

"That would be pleasant for both, I am sure," Mr. Morton replied, taking a ceremonious leave of Mademoiselle Thérèse, and a simple, though warmer one of Barbara. The young man said little in parting, but as soon as they were in the street he laid his hand hurriedly on his uncle's arm.

"The girl is ill, uncle, I am sure of it; she is not like the same person I met before; and that Mademoiselle Thérèse would drive me crazy if I weren't feeling up to the mark."

"No doubt; what a tongue the woman has! But what do you want to do, Denys, for, of course, you have made up your mind to do something?"

Denys frowned. "Of course I don't want to seem interfering, but I won't say anything at home in case of frightening her mother. But——" he paused and looked up at his uncle—"do you think it would seem impertinent to write to the aunt? She might come a little sooner, perhaps, and, being at Mrs. Britton's, could use her judgment about telling her or not."

Mr. Morton pondered, his mind not wholly on the girl whom they had just left; then remembering his nephew he brought his thoughts down to the present. "I should risk the impertinence if I were you, Denys. But what about the address?"

"I know the village and the county," Denys said eagerly. "I should think that would find her. I will do it when I get back."

But it proved more difficult to write than he imagined, and it was some time before—having succeeded to his satisfaction—he brought the letter to his uncle for criticism. It ran thus:—

"DEAR MADAM,—I am afraid you may think it rather impertinent on my part to write to you, but I hope you will forgive that, and my apparent interference. I am Denys Morton, whom your niece met some time ago on the way to Dol, and, as my uncle and I were passing this way in returning from a little tour, we

called on Miss Britton, and both thought her looking ill. The doctor here is, I believe, quite good, but Mademoiselle Thérèse, though doubtless a worthy lady, would, to me, be rather trying in time of illness. I should not write to you, but I fear Miss Britton will not, being unwilling to worry you or any of those at home. My uncle made a suggestion on the matter to Mademoiselle Thérèse, which was not very much liked by that lady, therefore he thought I might write you. He asks me—if you still remember him as a 'past acquaintance'—to give you his regards.

"Hoping you will forgive my officiousness.

"Yours truly,
"DENYS MORTON."

"That is quite passable," Mr. Morton said when he had read it. "I think you will hardly give offence. I wonder if she remembers me?"

"She could hardly help doing that," and Denys nodded affectionately at his uncle. "But I shall be much happier when this letter arrives at its destination. The address is not very exact. However, we will see, and we can call again tomorrow—it would be kind, don't you think, to one of our 'kith,' so to speak, and in a foreign land?"

The uncle smiled. "It would be kind, as you say, Denys, so we will do it."

But when they called the following afternoon they were told that Miss Britton was in bed and Mademoiselle Thérèse engaged. As a matter of fact, she was in the midst of composing a letter to Mrs. Britton, for when Barbara had said as carelessly as she could, that she would stay in bed just for one day, Mademoiselle Thérèse, remembering her visitor's "remarks the previous afternoon, had taken alarm and sent for the doctor, and now thought it would be wiser to write to Mrs. Britton. Having wasted a good many sheets of paper, and murmured the letter over several times to herself, she sought her sister out.

"Listen," she said proudly, "I think I have succeeded admirably in telling Mrs. Britton the truth and yet not alarming her, at the same time showing her that by my knowledge of her language I am not unfitted to teach others."

"HONOURED MADAM,—I am permitting myself to write to you about your dear daughter, who has entwined herself much into our hearts. There are now some few days she has seemed a little indisposed, and at last we succeeded in persuading her to retire to bed, and called in the worthy and most respectable, not to say gifted, family doctor who gives us his attention in times of illness. He expressed his opinion that it was

a species of low fever, what the dear young lady had contracted, out of the kindness of her good heart, in visiting in time of sickness the small sister of the bath-boy (a profession which you do not have in England)

"That shows my knowledge of their customs, you see," the reader could not refrain from interpolating; then she continued with a flourish—

"and the daughter of a worthy *blanchisseuse*, who is in every respect very clean and orderly, therefore we thought to be trusted with the presence of your daughter, but whom, in the future, we will urge the advisability of leaving unvisited."

Mademoiselle paused a moment for breath, for the sentence was a long one, and she had rolled it out with enjoyment. "Of course," she said to her sister, "I have not yet visited the house of this *blanchisseuse*, but I inquired if it was clean, and, would not have allowed the girl to go if the report had not been favourable; but to continue—

"Your daughter, in the excellence of her heart, would not, perhaps, desire to rouse your anxieties by mentioning her indisposition, but we felt it incumbent upon us, in whose charge she lies, to inform her relatives, and, above all, her devoted mother.

"With affectionate regards,
"Yours respectfully,
"THÉRÈSE LOIRÉ."

"There!" exclaimed the writer in conclusion. "Do you not think that is a fine letter?"

Her sister shrugged her shoulders.

"Probably it is, but you forget I cannot understand English. But pray do not trouble to translate it," she added hastily; "I quite believe it is all that you say."

"Yes, you may believe that," and Mademoiselle Thérèse closed the envelope.

"I think it will make an impression."

In that belief she was perfectly right, and perhaps it was a fortunate thing that Aunt Anne was there to help to remove the impression; for, that lady having already had Denys Morton's letter, was prepared for this one, and was glad she had been able to tell the news in her own way to her sister-in-law the day before.

"Don't look so scared, Lucy," she said. "I don't suppose there is anything much amiss, though I shall just pack up and go at once. What an irritating woman this must be—quite enough to make any one ill if she talks as she writes."

With characteristic promptitude Miss Britton began to make her preparations immediately, and only halted over them once, and that was when she hesitated about packing a dress that had just come home, which she said was ridiculously young for her.

"It will get very crushed," she muttered discontentedly. "But then—— Oh, well, I might as well put it in," and in it went. Mrs. Britton hovered anxiously about her, and watched her proceedings wistfully.

"You don't think I should go too, do you, Anne?" she asked.

"Not at present, certainly," Miss Britton returned promptly, regarding her with her head on one side. "I promise I will let you know exactly how things are, and whether you would be better there. I would say 'Don't worry' if I thought it were the least good, but, of course, you will."

Then she stooped and fastened a strap of her trunk. "It was a most sensible thing of the young Morton to write straight away, and, probably, if they are there, they will be quite sure to see Barbara has all she wants—the uncle always was a kind-hearted man."

Then she straightened her back and declared everything was ready.

She crossed by night from Southampton to St. Malo, and was greatly afraid that she would arrive "looking a wreck," and, to prevent that she partook largely of a medicine she had seen advertised as a "certain cure for sea-sickness." Her surprise equalled her delight when she awoke in the morning, having slept peacefully all night, and she refused to believe that her good night was probably

owing to the calmness of the sea and not to the medicine.

She looked with a little dismay at the shouting, pushing crowd of porters and hotel touts waiting on the quay, wondering how she would manage to keep hold of her bag among them all, and, as she crossed the gangway, clutched it more tightly than before.

"No," she said, as some one took hold of it as soon as her foot touched the quay. "You shall not take my bag—I would not trust it to any one of you. You should be ashamed of yourselves, screaming like wild Indians."

It was just then that Denys Morton and his uncle came through the crowd. "That is she—there," the elder man said, recognising her after fourteen years. "Go and help; I will wait here."

It was at a crucial moment, when Miss Britton was really getting exasperated and rather desperate, that the young man came up, and she accepted his assistance and explanation with relief.

"My uncle is down here," he said. "We have a *fiacre* waiting. There is always such a crush and rout on the quay, we thought we had better come to pilot you through."

The young man, in spite of his easy bearing, had been a little anxious as to how the two would meet again, and dreaded lest there might be some embarrassment. But beyond an air of shyness that sat strangely on both, and a kind of amused wonder at meeting after so many years, there was nothing to show that they had been more than mere acquaintances, and the talk centred chiefly on Barbara.

"She does not know you are coming yet," Denys said. "Mademoiselle Thérèse got your telegram, but said it would be better not to tell your niece in case the ship went down on the way!"

"What a cheerful person to live with!" Miss Britton ejaculated. "I'm afraid I may be very rude to her."

"I hope not," Mr. Morton said. "It would do no good, and she seems to be an excellent lady in many ways."

"We shall see!" Miss Britton replied grimly, getting out of the *fiacre*; and Denys felt rather sorry for Mademoiselle Thérèse.

But Miss Britton was often worse in imagination than in reality, and she behaved with all due politeness to both the sisters, who met her at the door, and led her into the *salon*. She even bore a certain amount of Mademoiselle Thérèse's explanations with patience, then she got up.

"Well, well, I would rather hear all that afterwards, mademoiselle, and if I may just take off my hat and coat I will go straight up to my niece. I had breakfast on board."

A few minutes later Aunt Anne opened Barbara's door and entered, a little doubtful lest her sudden appearance might not be bad for her niece, but thinking it could not be much worse than a preparation "by that foolish woman."

Barbara was lying with her back to the door, but something different in the step made her turn round, and she sprang up in bed.

"Aunt Anne! Aunt Anne!" and dropping her face into the pillow began to cry.

Aunt Anne stood a moment in doubt. It was such a rare thing to see any of "the family" cry that she was startled—but not for long; then she crossed the room and began to comfort her niece.

"It was dreadfully foolish of me," the girl said after a while, "but it was so nice to see you again. Mademoiselle Thérèse is very kind, but—she creaks about, you know, and—and fusses, and it is a little trying to have foreigners about when you are—out of sorts."

"Trying! She would drive me distracted. Indeed, if I had only her to nurse me I should die just to get rid of her!"

"Oh, she's not quite so bad as *that*," Barbara returned. "She has been very kind indeed, aunt, and is a very good teacher; and you get used to her, you know."

"Perhaps. But now I'll just tell you how they are at home. Then you must be quiet, and, as I crossed in the night, I shall be glad of a rest too. I can stay in here quietly beside you."

Miss Britton having had a little experience in sickness, saw that, though probably there was no need for anxiety, Barbara was certainly *ill*. She felt more reassured after she had seen the doctor, who she allowed "seemed sensible enough for a Frenchman," and wrote her sister-in-law a cheery letter, saying the girl had probably been doing too much, and had felt the strain of the affair of the "solicitor" more than they had realised.

"The doctor says it is a kind of low fever," she told the Mortons; "but *I* say, heat, smells, and fussiness."

After a few days' experience, she owned that the Loirés were certainly not lacking in kindness, but still she did not care to stay there very long; and she told Denys Morton that she had never been so polite, under provocation, in her life before. The uncle and nephew, who had not yet moved on, did not speak of continuing their travels for the present, and Miss Britton was very glad to know they were in the town.

One of Barbara's regrets was that she had missed seeing the meeting between Mr. Morton and her aunt, and that she was perhaps keeping the latter from enjoying as much of his company as she might otherwise have done. There were many things she wanted to do with Miss Britton when allowed to get up, but in the meanwhile she had to content herself with talking about them. She was much touched by the attention of Mademoiselle Viré, who sent round by Jeannette wonderful home-made dainties that, as Barbara explained to her aunt, "she ought to have been eating herself."

A fortnight after Miss Britton's arrival Barbara was allowed to go downstairs, and, after having once been out, her health came back "like a swallow's flight," as Mademoiselle Thérèse poetically, though a little ambiguously, described it. She and her aunt spent as much time out of doors as possible, going for so many excursions that Barbara began to know the country round quite well; but, though many of the drives were beautiful, none seemed to equal the one she had had with Mademoiselle Viré, which was a thing apart.

They drove to La Guimorais again one afternoon, and on their return the girl told Denys Morton, who had been with them, the story of the *manoir*. He was silent for a little at the close, then, as if it had suggested another story to his mind, he looked towards where his uncle and Miss Britton were walking up and down.

"I would give anything—almost anything, at least—that he might be happy now; he has had a great deal of the other thing in the past," he said.

"So would I," Barbara agreed. "You know, I couldn't quite understand it before, but I do now. When you're ill—or supposed to be—you see quite another side of Aunt Anne and one that she doesn't always show. Of course, your uncle is just splendid. I can't understand how aunt could have been so silly."

Denys laughed softly, then grew grave, and when they spoke again it was of other things, for both felt that it was a subject that must be touched with no rough, everyday fingers. "They would hate to have it discussed," was the thought in the mind of each. But the story of Mademoiselle Viré, and all that he had heard about her, made Denys wish to see her, and as Aunt Anne felt it a duty to call there before leaving St. Servan, Barbara took them all in turns, and was delighted because her old friend made a conquest of each one. Even Miss

Britton, who did not as a rule like French people, told her niece she was glad she had not missed this visit.

As neither Mademoiselle Viré nor Miss Britton knew the other's language, the interview had been rather amusing, and Barbara's powers as interpreter had been taxed to the uttermost, more especially as she felt anxious to do her part well so as to please both ladies. When Mademoiselle Viré saw that her pretty remarks were not understood, she said gracefully—

"Ah! I see that, as I am unfortunate enough to know no English, madame, I can only use the language of the eyes."

Barbara translated the remark with fear and trembling, afraid that her aunt would look grim as she did when she thought people were talking humbug, but instead, she had bidden Barbara reply that Mademoiselle Viré would probably be as far beyond her in elegance in that language as in her own; and the girl thought that to draw such a speech from her aunt's lips was indeed a triumph.

The lady certainly did smile at the inscription Mademoiselle Viré wrote on the fly-leaf of a book of poems she was giving the girl, and which, Miss Britton declared, was like an inscription on a tombstone—

"A Mademoiselle Barbara Britton,
Connue trop tard, perdue trop tôt."

But she did not laugh when she heard what the little lady had said on Barbara's last visit.

"We are of different faiths, *mon amie*, but you will not mind if I put up a prayer for you sometimes. It can do you no harm, and if we do not meet here again, perhaps the good God will let us make music together up yonder."

Miss Britton fixed the day of departure as soon as Barbara was ready for the journey, proposing to go home in easy stages by Rouen and Dieppe, so that they might see the churches of which Mr. Morton had talked so much. The uncle and nephew had just come from that town, and were now returning to Paris, and thence, Denys thought, to England.

Mademoiselle Thérèse was "desolated" to hear that Barbara's visit was really drawing to a close, and assured her aunt that a few more months would make

Barbara a "perfect speaker; for I have never known one of your nation of such talent in our language," she declared.

"Of course that isn't true," Miss Britton said coolly to Barbara afterwards, "though I think you have been diligent, and both Mademoiselle Viré and the queer little man next door say you speak fairly well."

The "queer little man next door" asked them both in to supper before they went, to show Miss Britton, he said, what a Frenchman could do in the cooking line. Barbara had some little difficulty in persuading her aunt to go, though she relented at last, and the experience was certainly very funny, though pathetic enough too. He and his sons could talk very little English, and again Barbara had to play interpreter, or correct the mistakes they made in English, which was equally difficult.

They had decorated the table gaily, and the father and son both looked so hot, that Barbara was sure they had spent a long time over the cooking. The first item was a soup which the widower had often spoken of as being made better by himself than by many a *chef*, and consisted of what seemed to Barbara a kind of beef-tea with pieces of bread floating in it. But on this occasion the bread seemed to have swelled to tremendous proportions, and absorbed the soup so that there was hardly anything but what seemed damp, swollen rolls! Aunt Anne, Barbara declared afterwards, was magnificent, and plodded her way through bread sponges flavoured with soup, assuring the distressed cook that it was really quite remarkable "potage," and that she had never tasted anything like it before—all of which, of course, was perfectly true.

The chicken, which came next, was cooked very well, only it had been stuffed with sage and onions, and Monsieur said, with pride, that they had thought it would be nice to give Mademoiselle Britton and her niece *one* English dish, in case they did not like the other things! It was during this course that Barbara's gravity was a little tried, not so much because of the idea of chicken with sage and onions, as because of the stolidity of her aunt's expression—the girl knowing that if there was one thing that lady was particular about, it was the correct cooking of poultry.

There were various other items on the menu, and it was so evident that their host and his eldest son had taken a great deal of trouble over the preparation of the meal, that the visitors were really touched, and did their best to show their

appreciation of the attentions paid them. In that they were successful, and when they left the house the widower and his sons were wreathed in smiles. But when they had got to a safe distance Aunt Anne exclaimed, "What a silly man not to keep a servant!"

"Oh, but aunt," Barbara explained, "he thinks he could not manage a servant, and he is really most devoted to his children."

"It's all nonsense about the servant," Miss Britton retorted. "How can a man keep house?"

Nevertheless, when Mademoiselle Loiré began to question her rather curiously as to the dinner, she said they had been entertained very nicely, and that monsieur must be an extremely clever man to manage things so well.

One other visit Barbara made before leaving St. Servan, and that was to say good-bye to the bath-boy. It had needed some persuasion on her part to gain her aunt's permission for this visit.

"But, aunt, dear," Barbara said persuasively, "he helped me with Alice, and lost his place because of it. It would be so very unkind to go away without seeing how they are getting on."

"Well, I suppose you must go, but if I had known what a capacity you had for getting entangled in such plots, Barbara, really I should have been afraid to trust you alone here. It was time I came out to put matters right."

"Yes, aunt," Barbara agreed sedately, but with a twinkle in her eyes, "I really think it was," and she went to get ready for her visit to the bath-boy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END OF THE STORY.

When the day for parting came Barbara found that it cost her many pangs to

leave them all—Mademoiselle Viré first and foremost, and the others in less degree, for she had grown fond even of Mademoiselle Thérèse. The latter lady declared she and her household were inconsolable and "unhappy enough to wear mourning," which remark Barbara took with a grain of salt, as she did most things that lady said.

But the two sisters and Marie all went to the station to say good-bye, and each of them kissed her on both cheeks, weeping the while. Barbara was not very fond of kisses from outsiders in any case, but "weeping kisses," as she called them, were certainly a trial! What finally dried Mademoiselle Thérèse's tears was to see the widower and his two sons entering the station, each carrying a bouquet of flowers.

"So pushing of them," she murmured in Barbara's ear, and turned coldly upon them; but the girl and her aunt were touched by the kindness, and the former felt horribly ashamed when she remembered that more than once in private she had laughed at the quaint little man and his ways.

Barbara heard her aunt muttering something about a "dreadful humbug" once or twice, but she was very gracious to every one, and smiled upon them all until the train left the station, when she sank back with an air of relief and exclaimed, "Thank goodness! That's over—though, of course, they meant it kindly."

"They are very kind," Barbara said, looking down at the three bouquets on the seat. "I really don't deserve that they should be so kind."

"Probably not," Miss Britton returned calmly. "We sometimes get more than our deserts, sometimes less, so perhaps things adjust themselves in the end. I was really rather astonished not to see the bath-boy at the station too—your acquaintance seems so varied."

"Yes, I have learned a great deal since I went there," Barbara said thoughtfully; "and just at the end I felt I didn't want to come away at all."

"I have no such feelings," her aunt remarked, though, perhaps, a little thoughtfully also. But when they arrived at Rouen, the remembrance of their pleasant time in Paris returned to them, and they both felt ready for the delights of seeing a new town.

Apart from the information given by the Mortons Barbara felt already

familiar with the great churches and quaint streets, and for her Rouen never quite lost the halo of romance that Mademoiselle Viré had endowed it with.

It was to be connected with yet another story of the past, however, before they left it, one which, for romance, was fully equal to Mademoiselle Viré's, though its conclusion was so much happier.

It was the second day of their stay, and after a morning of wandering about the town, both Barbara and her aunt were resting, the former on the balcony in front of her room, the latter on the terrace in the garden. Although a book was in her lap, Barbara was not reading, but, with hands clasped behind her head, was idly watching the passers-by, when suddenly laziness vanished from her attitude, and her gaze became intent on the figure of some one who had just turned into the portico of the hotel. She rose from the low chair, her eyes shining with excitement.

"It certainly was he!" she said. "Now, Barbara—it is time for you to eliminate yourself—you must lie on the couch and try to look pale."

She pulled down the window blind, ran into her room, and had hardly settled herself upon the couch when, as she had expected, a maid came up with a message asking her to go down to the terrace.

"Please tell Miss Britton I have a headache, and am lying down for a little," Barbara said, congratulating herself upon the possession of what had annoyed her considerably a short time before, though in an ordinary way she would have scoffed at the idea of lying down for a headache. A few minutes afterwards up came her aunt, looking very concerned, and fearing lest they had been doing too much. Barbara's heart smote her, but she told herself that she must be firm.

"I sent for you to come to see Mr. Morton, senior," Aunt Anne explained. "Strangely enough, he arrived this morning in Rouen, and has put up at another hotel."

"How nice. How very nice! I shall come down later, aunt. I expect I shall be *quite* all right shortly."

She had a little difficulty in persuading her aunt that it was not necessary to stay beside her, but at last succeeded in doing so, and gave a chuckle of joy when the door closed.

She had intended to go down to the garden later on, but, strange to say, fell fast asleep, and did not awaken until the man tapped at her door, saying the tea had been ordered for four o'clock, but now, although it was half-past, madame had not returned, having gone along the river bank, he believed, with monsieur. So Barbara hastily descended and had tea—very much brewed—all by herself, and then returned to her room to read.

She had finished her book, and was thinking of getting ready for dinner, when Aunt Anne came in—quite a different Aunt Anne from the one she knew, with all her decision fled. She fidgeted about for some time, saying nothing of importance, then at last turned round and began hastily—

"I did a very silly thing once long ago, Barbara, and to-day I have done what I am afraid people may think still sillier—I have promised to marry Mr. Morton."

Whereupon Barbara seized her rapturously. "Oh, aunt," she cried, "I'm so glad, just gladder than of anything else I could have heard."

"It—it is a great relief, Barbara," she said unsteadily, "to have you take it so. I—was afraid you might laugh. You know, it needs some courage for a person of my age to do a thing like that. It is different for a girl like you, but I could not have done it, had I not felt that since he desired it so urgently, I ought to right the wrong I had done him long ago."

"You can't help being very happy, aunt," said Barbara, "I'm sure, with such a nice man as Mr. Morton. The only regret *I* have is that you've lost so much of the time——"

Then, seeing her aunt's face, she felt inclined to strike herself for having spoken foolishly.

"Mr. Morton is in the garden," her aunt said after a moment. "It would be nice if you went down and saw him." And Barbara sped away.

That interview was apparently entirely satisfactory, for Miss Britton, enjoining them later, found Barbara had just issued an invitation in her mother's name and that it had been accepted. "And, of course, you will come too, aunt," the girl added.

There was one part in the arrangements that Barbara begged to be left to her, and that was the letter home telling the news.

"You see, Aunt Anne," she said, "I naturally feel as if I had rather a big share in the matter."

"I think surely it was Denys Morton's letter that brought me," Miss Britton corrected; "but write if you like, Barbara." And, indeed, she was rather glad to be relieved from the responsibility.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CODA.

If Barbara had been at home when her letter arrived, she would have been quite content with the excitement it caused. At first Frances and Donald were inclined to think it a huge joke, but having read to the end of Barbara's letter they felt rather differently. Aunt Anne had acted more wisely than she knew in allowing her niece to be the one to write and tell of her engagement.

"Of course," Donald said in his decided way, "we must do the proper thing by her and treat her nicely—for after all, Frances, she's been rather a brick about Barbara—and the last time she stayed she was much improved."

"It'll be interesting having a new uncle too," Frances remarked complacently. "We're rather badly off for uncles, Don, and from what Barbara says this Mr. Morton must be very—nice, though, of course, Barbara isn't quite to be trusted, seeing she's such a friend of Denys'. Let me see, now, what relation will *he* be to us?"

"Oh, don't bother about relationships at present—you may just have to rearrange them again," Donald said impatiently. "Let's go and be thinking of something to welcome Barbara back."

On that matter they held a long consultation, Donald being in favour of

taking the horse out of the fly and drawing it home themselves, and Frances inclining more to wreaths and decoration.

She got her way in the end, as she pointed out to her brother that the cabman would probably not allow them to take the horse out, and that they would have to pay for it all the same, and worst of all, that they would be so much out of breath with pulling that they would not be able to ask any questions when they got home. It was probably the last reason that weighed the most with Donald, who agreed to devote his energies to making an archway over the garden path and setting off some fireworks in the evening.

On the whole, the arch was quite a success, and looked very pretty, though it was not so secure as it might have been, and its makers felt it safer to fasten to it a large label with the inscription, "Not to be handled."

The travellers were not to arrive till late in the afternoon, and poor Mrs. Britton was driven nearly distracted by the intense excitement pervading among the children during the morning. One of the twins had actually suggested putting on her best frock the night before so as to be quite ready on the following day.

It is seldom that such an eagerly-expected event is not disappointing in some detail of its fulfilment, but there was not a shade upon the happiness on this occasion. Barbara and Miss Britton arrived at the right time, *with* their luggage; the archway remained firm until both the travellers had passed underneath (though it collapsed shortly afterwards); and the fireworks were as successful as such things usually are. It is true that Donald was a trifle hurried over displaying them, for Barbara was as anxious to unpack the treasures she had brought home as the children were to see them.

"You are still a *little* thin, dear," Mrs. Britton said, as she watched her daughter; but Barbara declared it was imagination, and Donald and Frances gave it as their opinion that it was only the "Frenchy kind of look she had."

"You have dressed her in such jolly things, aunt," Frances said admiringly. "I like a person to come home looking like the country she's come from, and it'll be a great advantage to her teaching—she'll get heaps of pupils, I'm sure."

"Oh, we'll not talk about the teaching just yet," Mrs. Britton said quickly. "She must have a week or two free first, and then it will be time enough for us to think about it;" and to that there was no dissentient voice—except Barbara's.

Aunt Anne had brought home some treasures too; but was quite willing to keep hers till later, and the children declared, with round eyes of delight, that Barbara had brought enough to last for a very long time.

"You really were a brick to bring so many lovely things, Barbara," said Frances, trying to fix in a brooch with one hand while she stroked a silk blouse with the other. "This brooch is so pretty, I'm really not going to lose it, though I can't think how you got enough money to buy so much."

Miss Britton looked across at her niece, who hastily dived into her trunk again; but the former confided to her sister-in-law afterwards, that Barbara had distributed the remainder of the money she had given her for riding lessons between the bath-boy and presents for the home-people, which news made Mrs. Britton prize *her* share of the treasures more than ever.

The only thing that a little disappointed the children was that "Uncle Morton" had not arrived too.

"It's a pity he didn't come with you, we're all so anxious to see him," Frances remarked, looking at her aunt, whom Barbara relieved by answering in her stead.

"Both Mr. Morton and his nephew are coming soon to the inn," she said, "so you haven't long to wait."

But their curiosity rose to almost unbearable heights before the fortnight was over, and Barbara had a little difficulty in making them solemnly promise that they would not bother their aunt with questions meanwhile.

Frances and Donald both wished to go to the station to meet the train, but this their mother forbade.

"You will see them here to-night," she said; "they are coming up to dinner. Meanwhile, content yourselves with Barbara."

"Yes," remarked Donald; "we really didn't realise how much we missed Barbara until she was back. It's just jolly having her."

Nevertheless, they disappeared suddenly during the afternoon, and did not return until about an hour before dinner, when they both wore the half sheepish, half triumphant expression that Barbara knew of old meant some escapade

successfully carried through. Knowing they would probably tell her what it was, she went on arranging the flowers on the dinner-table while they fidgeted round the room.

"I say," Donald said at last, "I really think Uncle Morton is one of the nicest elderly men I've met for some time, perhaps ever."

"Yes," Frances agreed; "I think so too. He'll be quite an exquisation as an uncle. But we didn't go to the station," she hastened to add, as Barbara turned round to listen. "Donald wanted to go up to the inn this afternoon—at least we both did—to see Mr. Bates about the rabbit he promised us, and we were talking to him quite comfortably when a gentleman came and stood at the door looking into the passage."

"'That's an American gentleman as has come to-day with his nephew,' Mr. Bates remarked, and, of course, we knew it must be Uncle Morton, and we thought since we *were* there it would be rather unkind to go away without ever giving him a welcoming word. Mr. Bates thought so too when we asked his opinion, so we just went and introduced ourselves, and told him we were glad to see him, and so on. We saw the nephew too."

"Yes," Donald went on, without giving Barbara a chance to speak, "and as he seemed very glad to see us, and said it was kind of us to look in on him, of course we stayed a little longer. He's an interesting man."

"I'm glad you like him," Barbara said, bubbling over with laughter. "I'm sure it must be a relief to him."

"Yes," Donald nodded, "and to the nephew too. I think we'll be quite good friends with him. You see, Barbara," he went on, fearing lest she should feel disapproval about their visit, "it really was better for them not to have to face us *all* in a mass. Now they've got *us* over—they've only to get mother's approval."

But this remark was altogether too much for Barbara's gravity, and she drove her brother and sister off to make themselves presentable.

But when their visitors had gone that evening and she was talking in her mother's room, she told the story of the afternoon again, and they laughed over it together.

"Conceited little creatures," Mrs. Britton said. "But my judgment coincides with theirs, Barbara—and yours. I think he is one of the nicest men I have met, and it is splendid to see them so happy."

"Yes," Barbara replied contentedly; "it was really rather a happy thing that I was chased by that cyclist and met the 'American pretender,' wasn't it, mother?"

"I dare say it was," said Mrs. Britton; but she eyed her daughter rather wistfully, then kissed her and bade her go to bed, though long after the girl had left her she sat thinking. It was clear to her, as it had been to Aunt Anne for some time, that Denys Morton was anxious to make his uncle Barbara's, by a less round-about method than through his connection with Aunt Anne; and before a week had passed he had spoken of his desire, astonishing no one so much as Barbara herself.

"Of course," said Donald, who had gone to his mother for information on the matter, and was now discussing it in the privacy of the apple-tree with Frances, "I felt, as eldest son, I ought to be told about it, though I knew as soon as I saw Denys Morton that he wanted to marry Barbara."

"He would have been very foolish if he hadn't," Frances remarked. "But, of course, Barbara is such an unself-conscious kind of person that it was quite natural *she* should be surprised. Aunt Anne says she would choose Denys above every one for Barbara—only, naturally, she's got a leaning to the family."

Donald nodded.

"So have I, though that's no good if Barbara doesn't want to make up her mind, and she seems not to. In any case, mother thinks she's too young, though I should have thought that Aunt Anne kind of balanced it—being fairly old, you know; and besides, Denys is a lot older than she is."

"Well," said Frances, "I shall give him all the encouragement I can, for I think he's very nice. I believe, Donald, that he didn't go to Rouen just because it's an infectious kind of thing, and he didn't want to ask Barbara before he had told mother and us——"

"There he is," interrupted Donald. "He looks rather down; let's go and cheer him up," and the two dropped over the wall into the field that bordered the garden. They sauntered towards the path leading to the river, and surprised

Denys not a little by suddenly joining him.

"They surprised Denys by suddenly joining him."

"They surprised Denys by suddenly joining him."

"I say," Donald began, without giving him time to speak, "I don't think you need be worried,—I've known Barbara a good long time, and I've never known her to be so absent-minded before."

To say that Denys was startled is keeping strictly within the limits of truth, and at first he was not sure whether he felt angry or amused. But he had grown pretty well accustomed to Donald and Frances by this time, and after a moment of embarrassment accepted the situation. "Thank you," he said, "it is kind of you to take an interest in—me."

"Not at all," Frances said graciously, "we think it's really rather hard lines on you, as, of course we knew all along you wanted to marry Barbara."

"By jove!" muttered Denys a little helplessly.

"Yes, of course," Donald put in. "Anybody sensible would want to do that. If I hadn't been her brother *I* should have. But though it's rather rough on you, I think two months' absence in America will just be the thing for Barbara."

The young man gazed at his youthful adviser, and was so overpowered that he could think of nothing to say.

"When do you go?" Donald continued.

"Next week. I'm coming back in six weeks—not two months—for my uncle's wedding," said Denys, finding his voice.

There was a pause, and Frances, seeing from her brother's expression that he was deep in thought, forbore to make any remark until she saw him smile, then she said—

"Well, Donald?"

But her brother addressed himself to Denys—

"Considering you've been here a good time now," he said, "you haven't seen much of the country really. Suppose you came for a long walk on the moor tomorrow with Frances and me—and Barbara?"

Denys' eyes lighted up. "If Barbara will, I shall be charmed," he said.

"I think she'll come," Donald said cheerfully; and moved by some persuasion or force Barbara consented, and the four started off across the moors.

They started together—that was certain—but did not return in the same manner, for Donald and Frances had got most thoroughly lost, although as Donald said, with a grin, "he had walked that moor, man and boy, for the past six years."

But when the two truants returned they did not seem at all cast down by their misfortune, while Denys certainly came back in a more cheerful mood than that in which he had set out.

"I think you'll find things all right when you come back again," Donald whispered on the morning the visitors were to go, and Denys, nodding, gripped his hand so tightly that the boy winced.

"I think," said Frances, as she watched the carriage disappearing—"I think, Donald, Aunt Anne ought to be very thankful she was so generous. She has been rewarded, hasn't she, in finding Uncle Morton?"

"Yes, virtue has had its reward. But you know, Frances, I think we're being rather generous too."

"Yes?" Frances said interrogatively.

"Well, the end will be that we lose Barbara, and we haven't raised a finger to prevent it—on the contrary we've helped—and you know we're never likely to find another sister like her."

"No, of course not. But all the same a wedding—and I suppose there'll be two—will make a grand finale like the 'Codas' you have in marches."

"Yes. You're really rather poetical, Frances. And perhaps by the time you're ready for France another aunt will turn up to take you there."

"I hope so, though they can't always expect to find Uncle Mortons as a reward. But there's time enough to think of that; and at any rate, Don, I'm going to be bride's-maid at the wedding."

"Yes," said Donald. "And there'll be two wedding cakes running, Fran—think of that!"

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