

ments, fowls and pigs running loose, and children with their faces only half washed, except on Sundays. Every one is clean in Orleanais, but with a relative cleanness; at the Le Huguets' one would have thought oneself in Switzerland or Holland, before those whitewashed walls, those gates painted in crude green, that cold symmetry. From the first step into the working yard, everyone perceived a difference which was to extend from external objects to personal character. The stores of fodder filled pits dug on purpose, without a blade of straw running over the border-wall of stone; the soil was weeded; the animals were shut up in their several pens, which formed geometrical squares, and were kept scrupulously clean. The butter and cheese that came out of the Le Huguets' dairy had its recognized standing in the market. The servants who had worked at their place were quarrelled for by their neighbours; for such were sure to have been trained to order, to work, and to good conduct. The master was looked upon as a stern man, of taciturn disposition. He associated with the village folk as little as could be; he sought no acquaintance among the wealthy tradesmen of the towns, though his position as a large farmer gave him the right to mingle with them. In spite of his horny hands and his blunt manner, he inspired awe, and that by his very reserve; his purpose could not easily be guessed; no one felt himself at his ease with him. Strictly honest in business, he nevertheless made his interest prevail without an abundance of empty words; every act of his disclosed a basis of sagacity, of rigid justice, and of secret distrust. In reality, he was keeping on the defensive; standing as he did alone against all, and treated as antichrist by the zealots and as a foreigner by the mass of the population, who formed, so to speak, but one family, thanks to the closeness of their ties of affinity, whilst no Le Huguets had made a match with his neighbours for more than a century.

Madame Le Huguets belonged to the Germanic race, although a native of Orleans; soft and plump, she brought back to the mind one of Holbein's matrons. This citizen of the country, seldom talkative, wholly given up to the management of her household, appeared to be somewhat enslaved beneath two yokes—her husband's and her daughters' (the latter, easy and delightful, was long and gladly borne by a doting mother). These daughters were three in number—real ladies—educated to the age of fifteen in a boarding-school of the town, where they had learnt to play on the piano. Novels came to them by post from a circulating library, which caused a little gossip.

They were decidedly uncommon girls—very high spirited, and withal, people said, not flirts in the least. A certain Puritan severity in their attire prevented the vulgar from perceiving that they were really elegant. Wearing shoes fit to brave the roads broken up by winter, dresses generally made of sombre wool stuffs, and little, half-masculine hats, they bore a rough likeness to English "misses." The eldest was married now; she had wedded a burly tanner of Tours. Between the two younger ones there was a considerable difference in age. Little Suzette often made her appearance here and there, driving herself in a little English cart, drawn by a donkey with a red top-knot. She answered salutations with a little startled look that was prettiness itself, and spoke little, we might add—like all the Huguets. As for the other sister—the one they called Mademoiselle Simone—she had remained for long months invisible; she was known to be very ill. The doctor had gone to La Prée regularly twice a week; for the past week or more his gig was going by every day in that direction. It was a pity: such a beautiful girl! the fairest of the three! A queenly figure she had; and what a rosy face she always brought back from school! But her chest was failing her little by little; and soon perhaps she would go and rejoin the generations of Le Huguets who rested beneath the large white stone at the end of the churchyard, isolated in death as they had been in life, and there, as elsewhere, causing a scandal. The thick grass of the field of death was planted with crosses small and great: the La Prée folk must be heathen and no mistake to do without this symbol. Christians? Not they! Had they not answered Catherine, their farm servant, who offered to make for Mademoiselle a nine days' set of prayers to the Virgin, that they did not allow such superstitions where they lived. Meanwhile, they remained unhappy. The father brightened up more seldom than ever: his thin, compressed lips uttered no complaint; but there was something broken-hearted in the hoarse accent with which that imperious mouth henceforth let fall a command. The mother had all of a sudden grown ten years older. And little Suzette, when the inquisitive asked her about her sister, replied, ready to weep, "She keeps just the same."

The Vicar's thoughts had of course turned at once to the dying girl. But what did she wish from him? Could it be a mysterious and final charge, or perchance a confession—one of those avowals that prove the human as much as the divine necessity of the sacrament of penance, and which have driven, they say, certain Protestants harassed by scruples (or more precisely, certain Protestant women) into the confession-box, where they could be listened to if not absolved. If it was something else still! If grace had spoken to this darkened, soul dispersing its gloom; if he was going to have the signal honour of leading her to God! The heart of the apostle swelled with hope.

Once he addressed the little boy who was acting as his guide, as they crossed some stubble fields:

"What is your name?"

"Baptistin," was the answer.

"You are a servant at La Prée, are you not?"

"Not I: I had come from the hamlet of Guignes to glean there with my mother; and Madame Le Huguets, who knows me, handed me this bit of paper, forbidding me at the same time to tell anyone where I was carrying it to?"

"There are some sick persons in the house?"

"Yes; for a good while past—one of the young ladies."

"And she needs me?"

"I don't know. I have done what I was ordered. On the way I met Monsieur Le Huguets, who was looking at the reaping of some corn, out towards La Petite Croix. He asked me where I was running like that. I answered that I was going to the market town to fetch some provisions. If he had known I was lying, I should have got a good shaking. What Monsieur Le Huguets can bear least is lying."

(To be continued.)

THE SCRAP BOOK.

HABITS OF FRENCH LADIES IN THE PROVINCIAL TOWNS.

FRENCH ladies have much less influence in little town-life than they have in the capital. They have their own little clubs, that is, they meet for charitable purposes, and they visit each other a good deal, but they see little of the masculine portion of the community, except the priests. Ladies get up early, and the first thing they do is to go to the daily mass at the parish church, after which they look after household affairs till *déjeuner*, and in the afternoon either sit quietly in their drawing-room or else pay a call or two, when they have not some work of charity to attend to. It is exactly contrary to the truth to accuse them of much eagerness about gaiety and amusements. Balls are extremely rare; as for the theatre, it is true that such a building exists, but ladies seldom go there, except perhaps twice a year to a concert. There is very little festive visiting of any kind. I cannot imagine what the ladies would find to interest them without the varied ceremonies of the church, their own works of charity, and a little small-talk. The reader perceives how impossible it is that a lady who takes the whole tone of her thinking from the clergy of the Church of Rome should be able to judge of great contemporary persons and events with any degree of fairness. The whole condition of her mind is so opposed to the modern spirit, that the things which seem to us laymen most right and just appear iniquitous to her. We can hardly talk about any contemporary event without, in some direct or indirect manner, wounding her susceptibilities. We make a remark on the reception of Garibaldi's Tiber scheme by the Italian Parliament, here are half-a-dozen grounds of offence together. First the lady, not having read the newspaper, does not know that Garibaldi is at Rome, and is displeased to learn it, because his presence is an insult to the Holy Father; secondly, she does not like to be told that there is an Italian Parliament in Rome. There ought to be nothing there but the perfect ecclesiastical government; thirdly, it is dreadful to think that the presumption of wicked men goes so far as to meddle with the Holy Father's own river whilst he is languishing in prison, cruelly held in bondage by that monster of all wickedness, Victor Emmanuel.

We in our innocence may have forgotten all these things, to concern ourselves simply with an interesting engineering problem; we are wondering if the projected works at Fiumicino will pay interest, one of us has been there and knows the spot, he has also seen an inundation of the Tiber, and has his opinion on the possibility of avoiding other inundations by deepening the bed of the river. The lady perceives the direction of our thinking, and disapproves of it. Now suppose that the conversation turns to something at home. Littré has just been received at the French Academy; we are glad of it because we know what a genuine unpretending, wonderfully persistent and persevering labourer he has always been, and what gigantic services he has rendered to other labourers, were it only by his unrivalled dictionary; but the lady has been told that he is an enemy to all religion (which is not the truth), and considers his admission an insult to the church. Or suppose, again, that we talk of contemporary politics, of the establishment of self-government in France, which has our good wishes for its success; she sees in our desire for the regular working of a sound representative system nothing but a deplorable error. All her political reading has been in such little books as, Mgr. Ségur's "Vive le Roi," in which he condemns the representation of the people in parliament as La Revolution, "an immense blasphemy and an abominable theory, the impudent negation of the right of God over society, and of the right of which He has given to His church to teach and direct kings and people in the way of salvation." Her theory of Government is simple and poetic. A king by right divine should be upon the throne, he should be armed with all power, and exercise it under the wise direction of the church. So when we talk of future parliamentary legislation, she both blames and pities us as men who encourage others to follow a path which can lead to no good, and as being ourselves not only deceivers but deceived. Do what we will, it is impossible for us to touch upon any important subject without trespassing against the authority of the church, which disapproves of all our works and ways; she feels this by instinct, even when she cannot clearly define it. It is surprising that men should meet together in their clubs and cafés to talk over the things which interest them in their own way, without incurring moral disapprobation; they want an atmosphere in which practical subjects can be discussed in a practical way, in which the deepening of an Italian river, the construction of an Italian port, the reception of a philologist at the Academy, the election of members of Parliament in France, can be examined from a layman's point of view.

French novels have encouraged the idea that Frenchmen are always occupied making love to their neighbours' wives. One of my friends who lives in our city asked me a question which I will repeat here, with the answer. He said, "You are a foreigner who have lived many years in France, and you have observed us, no doubt, much more closely than we observe ourselves, whilst you have means of comparison with another nation which