

THE CHARMING OLD FRENCH LOVE STORY  
OF

## AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE.

(HUNTER DUVAR'S TRANSLATION.)

A distinguished French antiquarian, Monsieur de Sainte Pelaye (like the "Old Mortality" who spent his time in retouching the gravestones of the martyred Scottish covenanters), expended his time and fortune in rescuing from oblivion the works of the Troubadours. Rummaging, one day, in the year 1752, in a dusky nook behind the arras, he dragged out a mouse-eaten bundle of vellum, and lo! he had discovered a tender Lai of Love and Chivalry, by a nameless poet of about the twelfth century. The charming romance of this lay and the sweet simplicity and *naïveté* of its sentiments place it in the first rank of the love tales of any age or country.

The poem has been repeatedly republished in France, and thrice translated into German. There are three translations, all recent, that I have met with in English, Bourdillon's being the best, yet I do not wish to be guilty of presumption in thinking that all of the English versions are more of paraphrase than translation. In the following versification it is attempted to adhere as closely as possible to the peculiarities of the rhythm, which, it has to be remembered, was accompanied by a simple air on a lute or—to speak profanely—a banjo. A slight twiddle of the strings tapered off each verse to a close. It must have been a monotonous performance, depending much for effect on gesture and inflection of the voice.

The nameless author calls his work by the unique name of a *Chantefable*, and describes himself as "an old vagabond, *viel caitif*." But to our story.

Aucassin was the young lord's name. He was gallant and good-looking, and strongly built and well-shapen in legs and feet and trunk and arms. He had fair hair, in little curls, and his eyes were grey and laughing, his countenance clear and shapely, his nose high and well-placed, and he was so imbued with fine qualities that there was no evil in him but only good. But he was so conquered by love (which conquers all) that he did not care to be a cavalier, nor take arms, nor go to the tourney, nor do anything that he ought to have done. And his love was for Nicolette.

For the mayor of the town had bought a little maid from the Saracens and had reared her as his goddaughter and had baptized her "Nicolette," and intended one day to find her a young bachelor for a husband, who would earn bread for her honourably.

Nicolette is thus prettily described: She had golden hair that hung in curls, and her eyes were blue-grey and laughing; her face oval, with a delicately shaped nose, and lips more vermilion than rose or cherry in the summer time; her teeth white and small; her breasts were firm and bulged her vest like two walnuts, and her waist was so slim you could span it with your two hands; and the white daisies that she broke off with her toes and that fell across her instep (in escaping through a garden) showed black beside the whiteness of her feet and legs, so very white was the maiden. This last simile is especially fine.

The Count of Beaucaire, father of Aucassin, seems to have been a surly and false old person, who was naturally incensed at the love passages of this handsome young couple, and went so far as to lock Nicolette up. This was in the month of May, when the days were warm and long and clear and the nights so still and cloudless.

According to the pleasant custom of the time, Count Bougart de Valence send word to his neighbour of Beaucaire that, D.V., he was coming to burn his castle and hang him over his own doorstep. Aucassin refused to stir a step in his father's defence unless Nicolette were set free, which the crafty old Count promised, but failed to do, whereon Nicolette escaped by a rope ladder and took to the woods. The woods were very dreary for the young girl. Happening to meet with some louts of herdboys, she left a message with them for Aucassin to the effect that there was a fawn in the forest that he was to come and hunt, and if he could catch it he would not give one limb of it for a hundred

marks of gold—no, nor for five hundred, nor for any wealth.

Leaving the herdboys, she took her way among the leafy trees till she came to an open glade where seven roads forked. There, to attract the notice of her lover, she built a bower

With the leaves of the fleur-de-lys  
And of the scrub oak called garris.

Aucassin soon came along, and after being unmercifully chaffed by the herdboys, learned from them that his love had gone by—"just as we were eating our bread at the spring, a maiden came here, the most beautiful thing in the world, so that we thought it was a fairy and that all the wood lighted with her." Aucassin tosses them some coppers and rides into the wood, singing gaily:

Nicolette, O full of grace!  
For you I thrid this leafy place;  
Stag nor boar I now pursue,  
But I hunt the trail for you.  
Your sweet laugh and soft replies,  
And the blue-grey of your eyes,  
Have my heart brought near to death;  
But I'll search while I have breath,  
And will find, please God the Strong!  
My love ere long.

All day down an old grass-grown path he rode. Coming where the seven roads forked, he saw the bower Nicolette had made and lined within and without and above and before with flowers, and it was so pretty that prettier it could not be. Here he leaped down so hastily that he dislocated his shoulder-blade.

[A portion of the manuscript is here torn off, but the fragments show that on looking up Aucassin saw one star brighter than the rest, and he breaks out into a piece of extravagance]:

O star that I behold,  
Enwrapped in the moon's fold,  
Perhaps my dearest love  
Is now in thee above,  
And God has, I believe,  
Ta'en her for star of eve.

Nicolette hears him and comes running out and they kissed and caressed each other and their joy was beautiful. More than that, being skilled in minor surgery, as were other "blessed demoiselles" of her time, she pulled his dislocation into place and bandaged it with the lappel of her smock. Then mounting his horse, Aucassin took his love in front of him, and they set out into the open.

Handsome Aucassin the fair,  
Bonny lad and *debonair*,  
Forth from the great wood rode out,  
In his arms took Nicolette,  
With clasped arms round about,  
And, as she on saddle set,  
Kissed her on the eyes and brow,  
And her mouth and chin, I trow.  
Then said she: "Love, tell to me  
To what country do we flee?"  
Answered he: "I do not care  
Where we go so thou art there,  
Same are woods and deserts, too,  
Sweetheart, if I be with you!"  
Passed they valleys, hills and towns,  
Cities, with their great renowns,  
Until, at the dawn of day,  
Lo! the sea before them lay,  
And they lighted on the strand  
Of the sea sand.

Here they took passage with some merchants and reached the country of Torelore, where they met with several ludicrous adventures, but where they lived for a considerable time, in all honour, until the place was sacked by the Saracens and the lovers were carried away captive in separate ships. Fortunately that in which was Aucassin was wrecked and drifted to Beaucaire, where he became lord, his father being dead. But he ever mourned his lost love, grieving for her more

Than for his kindred every one,  
Though they all were dead and gone.

Meanwhile Nicolette, captive in a ship belonging to the king of Carthage, was questioned by the crew as to who she was, but could answer nothing, until, coming to Carthage, she recognized the place and remembered that she was the daughter of the king. The old king and her twelve brothers knew her and made much of her, and would have married her to a paynim lord.

Poor Nicolette was at her wits' end, and so she stole away in the night and took refuge in the house of a poor woman who lived on the beach. With her she stayed until she had time to get a coat and cloak and shirt and breeches made, and to learn to play on the viol. Then, donning her male raiment, she stained her face with the juice of an herb and bargained with a mariner, who carried her across the high seas to the land of Provence. There she took her viol (*Anglice* a fiddle) and went playing through all the country in guise of a minstrel, until she came to the castle of Beaucaire. Aucassin was sitting on a balcony with his captains about him. Nicolette lifted viol, lifted bow and sang:

List me, gallant gentles, ho!  
Seated there all in a row,  
Will it please you hear a song  
Of Aucassin the bold baron,  
And of Nicolette the true?  
So much love was twixt the two  
She in forest dark and grim  
Long was sought and found by him.  
But from Torelore one day  
Rovers carried them away  
O'er the sea to foreign shore.  
Of Aucassin I know no more.

Nicolette, of fair renown,  
Is in Carthage castled town,  
Where her father is the king,  
And to her in love doth cling;  
But to paynim would her wed.  
Nicolette will ne'er be led,  
For one's love she erst did win,  
And his name is Aucassin.  
She hath sworn by God his name  
Never will she wed with shame—  
Never wed save her true beau,  
Whom she loves so.

"Fair, sweet friend," said Aucassin to the disguised girl, "know you of this Nicolette of whom you have sung?"

"Sir, yes, I know her."

Then he gave her twenty pounds to go and fetch her. So she went to the mayoress of the town (for the mayor was dead) and told her all the story. Then she took the juice of the herb celandine, and washing the henna from her face, awaited in woman's gear for Aucassin's coming.

Need we say more?

When she saw her dearest friend  
Where she, waiting, did attend,  
Sudden leaped she to her feet  
And went forward him to greet.  
When he on his love did look,  
In his arms her form he took,  
Kissed her on eyes and face,  
Till the night drew on apace.  
Early with the morn astir  
Came Aucassin and married her,  
And made her Lady of Beaucaire.  
Many years this loving pair  
Led a life of fond delight—  
Aucassin had his full share,  
Nicolette was happy quite.  
My Song Story ends just so.  
That's all I know.

Hernewood, P.E.I.

### AMERICANEE.

I had just arrived in America and was taking my breakfast in the breakfast room of the hotel when a pretty woman came in with a little child and seated herself near me. The child had no appetite and refused, in a whining voice, everything that was offered to it. The mother was apparently disturbed by this, and at last relapsed into silence for a few minutes. Then suddenly she turned to the child and said: "Well, don't you feel like beefsteak?" Belmont—Feel like beefsteak! That was good. It is better than the singular epithet I once heard an American lady apply to a fish at a table d'hôte. When it was placed on the table she turned to her husband and exclaimed; "What an elegant fish!" Mallet—Odder still is the American use of love for like. They love beef and potatoes, and they like their friends. Belmont—I beg your pardon. They "perfectly love" beef, I admit, but persons are "perfectly sweet and lovely" too. Think of a "perfectly sweet and lovely" man, or a man who, besides being "perfectly fascinating," is also "just as sweet and lovely as he can be"; and I know not how many times I have heard that phrase.—*Blackwood's Magazine*.