

now we must separate for a few minutes. That little path to the left will take you dry shod to a good crossing of this turbulent little stream. I will meet you there."

As we turned back to the wood to follow the path, Ruth cried, "I am glad I fell into the brook; glad we are out in the rain; glad of anything and everything, opportune or inopportune, to relieve the dulness of such an existence as ours is at the Farm."

"And to-morrow will be as dull as ever," I cried. "Ah! how slippery this clay soil is!"

"Clay! Molly says it is mixed with iron ore," said Ruth, "and warned me that it will spoil our white skirts. If so, mine will be in a state of ruin. Just behold!"

"I am nearly in as bad a case," said I; "but here we are at the brook again, and the lady is waiting for us."

Some stepping-stones made the way across seem easy; but as the water bubbled and foamed over and around them, Ruth observed truly that she could not cross without wetting her feet, and for her part she wondered why the Squire did not make a bridge across it.

"The Squire," said the lady, with a smile, "would rather wet his feet every day than introduce any innovation of the kind. He has an intense love for ancient customs and for quaint, antiquated places."

"Everything looks old enough here," said Ruth, shivering as she looked at the "Grange," which now came into view.

"Yes, old, dark and dismal in the extreme. I would pull such useless old places down, and leave them for the wild fowl to build in, and I would throw my energies into the newer, brighter life which opens to view in the New World."

The lady spoke with quiet force, and not as if she were addressing her conversation to us.

"Does the sun ever shine here?" I

asked; "we have seen nothing but fog, mist and rain since we came."

"You will see sunshine before twenty-four hours pass, I hope," said she. "Are you not the daughters of Marguerite Bach?"

"Yes!" we cried eagerly. "How did you know?"

"I heard that you were staying at the Farm, but some twenty years ago I met your parents at Nice. They were on their wedding-tour, I remember."

"Mother is dead," said Ruth, sadly.

"Claudine resembles her," said the old lady, with a long look at me. "Now I am going to take you a short way into the house. See this old door—I have a key."

She unlocked the door, and we entered a large, old-fashioned kitchen-garden. I remember how dismal and deserted it looked; how dead, how wanting in fresh life. I longed to see a dozen happy-faced children romping round it. Now, nothing more cheerful was to be seen than washed-out sunflowers, and cabbages weighed down by the weight of the raindrops.

We were now standing at a side door, which had evidently once formed the principal entrance; now no bar was needed to keep an enemy at a distance, and the door opened easily from without. But inside I saw the heavy beam standing uselessly in a corner of the passage.

I was roused from my quiet contemplation of the unwieldy means of defence by a little pinch from Ruth. The lady was addressing words of welcome to us.

"You are very welcome," she said. "You are the first American ladies who have to my knowledge crossed the portals of this ancient building. How welcome you can never know, unless it ever be your misfortune to own such a place and have to reside in it. To me, you are embodiments of new life, and of a country where there is scope for a more active and vigorous existence."