

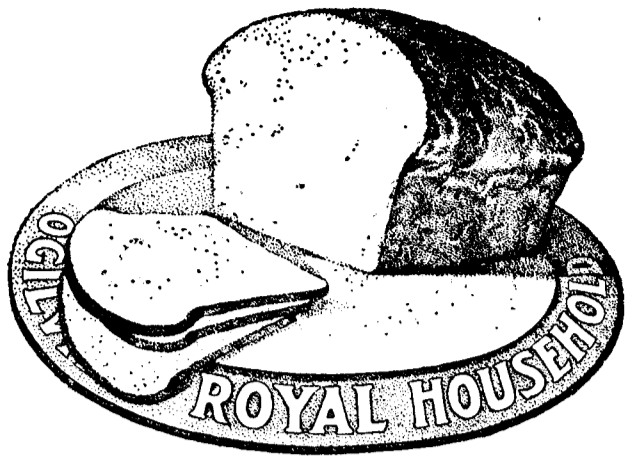
## OLD HOUSES I HAVE KNOWN

By M. Tucker, Ste. Rose Correspondent

(Continued)

### LES VIGIERS

Come with me to sunny France, far away down in Guienne, that lovely land that once belonged to the English; come to the Perigord, famous for good living, where you eat truffles and pates de foie gras, where there are no corn fields but only vineyards and verdant meadows, where you make your own claret. Here I stayed a winter in an old chateau—could it have been winter? All the time 'twas glowing sunshine, and when February came it was quite spring. I was visiting a marquise, the mother of one of my school-fellows. The house is so vast that there were rooms upon rooms unoccupied, although the family was pretty large. First the present marquis, father of my friend, quite one of the old 'noblesse'—when I say this I describe a perfect gentleman, of such courtly manners as you will rarely find nowadays. I can only begin to tell you how good and sweet was his wife—I have still a bracelet she gave me in parting, with her hair in a large carbuncle pendant from it. She prettily said, as the hair in the bracelet would retain its color when hers should be gray, so also should she cherish an unchangeable affection for me. If you want to know really nice people—graceful in speech, distingues in sentiment, brave in misfortune—you will find them amongst the old French families. Besides Suzanne, my friend, there were two boys, younger, at college; her grandmamma, the old marquise, and her sister, Mlle. Claire, a dear old lady. We played "Boston" nearly every evening when the gentlemen came in from shooting—they seemed to have little else to do; and we ladies loitered through the day in a delightful manner, occasionally receiving friends at home and dining out at neighboring chateaux. My little friend was deformed, and her dear father used to carry her upstairs every night to her bed-room. The one they had given me was large enough to put a Canadian settler's house in. It would have pleased you to have seen its sofas and arm-chairs in amber, with shepherdesses and their little lovers embroidered on the backs—sofas as large as beds, arm-chairs big enough to swallow one. Down stairs whole suites of rooms were hung with tapestry, principally representing battle-scenes, great warriors with staring eyes hewing one another. The house faced south—they all do in this land of sunshine. At the back was a Charmille (a grove of slender trees intersected with paths). We had a young artist staying here for a long time; he came to paint the family portraits. Don't suppose I fell in love with him, and lost my heart to his Vandyke beard and melting eyes; oh, no! He bowed and languished and threw kisses from his window overlooking the Charmille whilst I was gathering flowers and listening to the nightingales; this made me run away laughing. I don't like a man that is ashamed to go to church because it is considered not fashionable for men to go. When he met me on the stairs one night and my candle had blown out (I won't say I did not let it out on purpose to see what he would do,) he held his toward me with a most bewitching bow, and his left hand pressed to his heart, murmured: "Voulez vous de ma flamme, mademoiselle?" "Non, monsieur, mais je veux bien de votre lumiere," I replied. The old marquise was very strict and would not, if she knew it, allow me to speak to any gentleman; they seem to think girls are not to be trusted; they don't know English ones. She lent me a book to read entitled "L'Amour dans le Marriage," and what tickled me immensely was, the two instances given in the book were of English people, well known in history. They appear to be unacquainted with the fact that it is an Englishman's daily bread to love and be loved in marriage. However, I was not thinking of any Englishman, and in spite of restrictions, Roger and I settled matters pretty straight between us. Roger is the only son of the Baron de Briancon, whose land lies over the fence from Les Vigiers.



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In those lovely February mornings I used to go out with my book or work and sit on a piled-up heap of stones at the end of the nearest vineyard before grandmamma left her room (we breakfasted late). Roger was a sportsman and generally found his way round there when out shooting; he was fond of beating that cover, he said. You would never have taken him for a young Frenchman, but a sturdy English squire; I suppose that is why I fancied him first of all. He and his father lived in their chateau, Les Rochers. I have since known it is a very pretty place, though in those days one of mystery to me. He used to come out of the morning blue across the shimmering "fils de vierge," like cobwebs on all the vines, in gaiters and knickerbockers; son of the gods, divinely tall though not divinely fair. Grandmama said to me one day: "Mees Monica, why do you always wear that grey gown?" I did not reply, "because, chere madame, I don't want the servants to see me sitting on the gray stones talking to Roger," but the pretty young marquise said, caressing my cheek: "Our little Monica is always gentille, bonne maman, whatever she puts on." In the end there was no objection to the match—because why? I had a nice little fortune. Frenchmen are not supposed to marry for love, but when they do they make delightful husbands. I ought to know; we have been married some years now. We did enjoy those meetings; I suppose the spice of wickedness, being contrary to custom, made them delicious. Like a cynic said about eating a peach, it only wanted to be a sin to be perfect. Roger is not great at learning; when he was in philosophy at college they asked him, "Qu'est ce que la force agissant selon la loi?" he replied he guessed it was a policeman. He did not go up in class for this as some of his comrades thought he should have done. He has since said he shows his philosophy by making the best of a foolish little thing like me, being contented to bask in the smiles of his wife, and not caring to sit in the shadow of a very learned one; he is not the only man of this opinion I am acquainted with. Roger's father tells the biggest stories I have ever heard; but then you know, it is said, "See the waters of the Garonne and you will never speak truth

afterwards." He is also a great boaster and terribly vain of his country, as are all other Frenchmen I have known (except one). "The French," he says, "are the bravest the most honorable, noblest, truest, most heroic nation—they never fight for gain, only for honor." "You have forgotten one of their good qualities, monsieur," said I—"their modesty." This puts me in mind of some old savants who were composing another French dictionary. They had got as far as Bataille, and were considering how to spell and pronounce it, when one of them remarked: "Gentlemen, we write Bataille, and pronounce Victory" this was before Sedan, but after Waterloo. I believe it is their little weaknesses that make Frenchmen so amiable, but I don't think, with all their appreciation of women, there is any one of them capable of writing such dainty, exquisite, things about them as our Mr. Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin have done. Every woman who reads what they say of her must, it seems to me, endeavor to become better so as to merit such praise; like a sweet little wife I know who once told me her dear husband thought she had so many virtues

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she did not possess, that she was always trying to acquire them so as not to wrong his judgment. I am sure of one thing that it takes a lavish supply of the oil of mutual kindness to keep the domestic machine running sweetly. It would seem almost better to strike some dear women than for those they love to speak harshly to them. They and children and flowers are alike in this, they cannot blossom out into beauty and sweetness under cloudy skies.

A dear old cure used to dine periodically at the chateau. He was awfully afraid of this young English girl; he heard she knew so much that she could speak English almost as well as French, and "Is it true, mademoiselle? Oh! but it seems so natural to me, you know to speak in French," he said naively. "And have you learned Italian! Latin too, and German!—tiens! tiens! tiens!"

On Sundays we went to his poor, humble little church, which had a touching beauty of its own, however. We drove in a carriage and pair through a delicious country.

The women here wear bright-hued handkerchiefs on their heads instead of caps, knotted knowingly by the left ear; little shawls crossed on the bosom, leaving the neck slightly bare but always adorned with a gold cross attached with narrow black velvet; their red petticoats do not reach to their ankles. How gaily they all chat and laugh, these peasants, as if they had no cares! When the carriage drives up they all turn and stare; they are not so respectful as the poor in England who lived so long under feudal laws and who have naturally more deference for superiors. It did one good to hear the cure preach; what he said does not matter—he was himself the sermon. How his face shone! How through all his words and actions you felt he loved his Master, and you too longed to love and serve Him better! I don't know where they spring from, these bons cures de campagne, they are so unlike all the other men one sees; perhaps it is their special training or the grace of vocation; there are hundreds and thousands of them scattered up and down the length and breadth of fair France. God is very merciful to give the people such humble and faithful shepherds.

Before I left Les Vigiers, I went to call upon our good cure and take him a girdle I had made for him with a great deal of help and hindrance from Roger. A young lady may not go out alone in this or any other part of France so Malie, foster-sister (sœur de lait, they call it) to the marquis, went with me; her mother had been his nurse, and the two children were brought up under the same roof. Malie had never lived away from the chateau; when she was old enough she married Pierre, foreman on the property; they had one pretty boy of twelve, who was beginning to wait at table. Malie only spoke in French when addressing me, in patois to every one else, as did all the other servants.

This was the first time I had ever walked to the church. At one side of it, just before you came to the cure's little garden was a Calvary—a large cross with a Divine Saviour, nearly life size. Before this we saw the cure kneeling, and we walked very gently so as not to disturb him at his devotions. I fancy I can see him now; his breviary lay beside him as he knelt, hands clasped, head uncovered, his long gray hair stirred by the wind; his eyes were raised to heaven, tears streaming down

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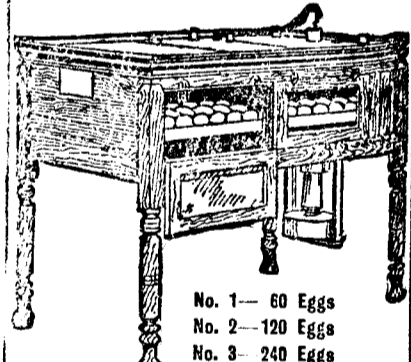
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