

of these excellent and sympathetic gentlemen, with whom it was an article of faith that one of the principle persons concerned must be ignorant of what was obvious to everybody else, and that Némorosa, if not fancy-free, must, at all events, imagine herself to be so.

As a matter of fact she was just as well aware of the state of affairs as any of them; and indeed the number of women whom an offer of marriage—even though it be a first one—has taken by surprise, is probably inconsiderable. What answer Marguerite intended to make when Berthon should have declared himself she was not equally certain. Victor was not the ideal whom she had dimly seen in her long solitary walks and in the half-formed visions of her dreamy, happy life. Yet she liked to think that he cared for her; his attentions gave her pleasure, and she had a feeling toward him which might easily have ripened into love, and very likely would have done so if nothing had occurred to prevent it. In which case there is every reason to believe that she would have lived blissfully and uneventfully ever afterward, and that her story would not now be in course of narration.

The love of solitude which is shared in a greater or less degree by all lovers of nature, was especially strong in Marguerite, and there were days—very blank days for Monsieur Victor—when she felt an impulse, amounting to a necessity, to escape from her friends and her admirers into the woods, and to spend long hours in roaming hither and thither without purpose, taking no count of time and exulting in the liberty which was hers now, and which, as she already began to suspect, might not be hers always. Now it came to pass that one cloudless summer morning she wandered forth, spurred by this irresistible longing, and fate or chance led her at length to the so-called Rocher des Demoiselles, a long ridge of the yellow-coloured sandstone rock in which the forest of Fontainebleau abounds, and which gives it its distinctive character. These miniature mountain ranges, separated from one another by deep valleys, intersected by gorges, overgrown with juniper bushes and broom, heath and heather, and crowned generally by a chaos of huge boulders, offer points of view too striking and beautiful to be neglected by the tourist and those who minister to his wants. They are for the most part approachable by means of the footpaths and sign-posts which Némorosa had denounced, and it was seldom that she cared to visit any of them. But the Rocher des Demoiselles being remote from Fontainebleau is less frequented than any other picturesque spots of a similar kind; and it was with a comfortable conviction that she ran no immediate risk of being disturbed, that ear heroine, having climbed its rocky flank, threw her arms over the top of a great block of sandstone, and resting her chin upon them gazed at the expanse of green woodland which stretched away from her in line after line of swelling hills into the far blue distance. Presently though she was startled by a very unusual sound—the clattering and sliding of a horse's hoofs upon the stony path; and before she had decided whether to yield to curiosity or to her desire for privacy, there emerged from round the shoulder of a hill not two hundred yards off an equestrian whose horse, with cocked ears and rigid fore-legs, appeared to be mutely protesting to the best of his power against being taken into places obviously unfitted for quadrupeds with iron shoes upon their feet.

Ah! this time it was no merry, commonplace Victor Berthon who was approaching our nymph of the woods. The new-comer was a tall, spare man, not very young, yet hardly middle-aged, with finely cut aristocratic features and weary-looking blue eyes, who sat on his horse even under those uncomfortable circumstances with a certain easy grace, and whose whole bearing breathed of distinction not unmingled with dignified melancholy. It was in short the ideal himself in *propria persona*; and I think even that Némorosa must have been warned by some intuition of his identity at the first glance, for instead of accosting him with innocent boldness, as it would have been in accordance with her usage to do, she blushed a little and dropped her eyelids, drawing back close against the rock to let him pass. But he did not pass. He looked at her, dismounted, and passing his arm through the horse's bridle-rein, advanced a few steps.

"You need not be afraid of my horse, mademoiselle," said he. "He is too much alarmed himself to think of hurting anybody."

"I am not afraid, monsieur," answered Marguerite, without raising her eyes.

Still the stranger did not move. After a brief interval of silence, Marguerite heard him murmur, as if thinking aloud, "This was well worth a scramble. I never saw anything more lovely."

Then at last she looked up and saw that his blue eyes were opened wide, and that the bored look had left them, giving place to a light of surprise and admiration which she well knew had not been evoked by the beauty of the surrounding scenery alone. Nevertheless she said, a little hurriedly:

"This is not counted at all the finest view in the forest." And then, "You ought not to ride here; it is dangerous."

"Perhaps so," answered the stranger meaningfully. There was another pause, after which he resumed in a lighter tone, "Ah! you mean that I may chance to break my neck. Very possibly; but that would be no great misfortune either to me or to any one else."

This was exactly the sort of speech which the ideal would be quite sure to make. Marguerite scrutinized him with quickened interest; nor was she slow to return the compliment. The next thing that he said was:

"Pardon me, mademoiselle; but unless I am mistaken I have the honour to find myself in the presence of a celebrity. Are you not she whom they call Némorosa, *Reine des Bois*?"

He was better informed than Victor Berthon had been; it was Marguerite herself, not M. Royer's model, whom he recognized. This ought to have gratified her vanity; but his question had been accompanied by a faint smile which irritated her, and for the first time her *soubriquet* struck her as ridiculous.

"Some of the young artists at Marlotte have chosen to call me so," she answered. "It is a silly name."

"It is a very pretty name, at all events, and I have no doubt an appropriate one. I have only lately arrived in these parts, which must be my excuse for being ignorant of the legend of your prototype. There is a legend, is there not? Would it be asking too much of your kindness to beg you to relate it to me?"

Marguerite, who knew every myth and chronicle connected with her dear forest, had told this one scores of times. She had in general a very graphic and effective method of narration; but upon the present occasion it must be confessed that she did no justice at all to her capabilities.

"Oh, do you not know it?" she said. "It is hardly worth learning. Long ago there was a certain knight, named René of Fontainebleau, who vowed eternal constancy to the memory of one Delia, who had died of the bite of a viper in the forest. Every day he used to come to the foot of the rock where she had met her death and lament there for hours together. But one morning the nymph Némorosa appeared to him as he was lying weeping on the ground, and after he had seen her he could think no more of Delia. The nymph appeared to him again and again, and for a time he kept his vow and would not look at her or speak to her; but at last he could resist no longer and fell on his knees and confessed his love. So the nymph got possession of him, and after that he was never seen nor heard of again. That is all." She added with much gravity, "These are only fables to amuse children with; there is no truth in them."

"Who knows? In any case I pardon poor René's infidelity. If Némorosa at all resembles—!" Here the speaker indulged in a telling apostrophe. "Very likely," he resumed, "René honestly believed that he loved Delia until he met the other, and then he found out that he had made a mistake—could! These mistakes are occurring every day, without any intervention on the part of wood-nymphs. Happy those who discover them in time to repair them!"

The modern Némorosa made no rejoinder. Perhaps she was thinking that she herself had been upon the verge of making a fatal mistake. During the above colloquy she and her interlocutor had been moving forward slowly and half-unconsciously, and were now standing on the westernmost extremity of the ridge. The ground fell away from under their feet in a succession of sharp precipices and further progress was impossible. All of a sudden it occurred to Marguerite that she had no business to be loitering so long in the company of a gentleman with whom she was totally unacquainted. It was the very first time in her life that such a notion had crossed her mind, and it afflicted her with a novel sense of embarrassment.

"I must be going," she said abruptly. "Good-day, monsieur."

But he entreated her not to hurry away. It was so seldom, he said, that he had the good fortune to meet one who, like himself, loved the rocks and the trees and the free air of heaven. In his world no one cared for such things. For his own part, he found in them his sole consolation. So Marguerite lingered awhile and listened to his talk, which in truth did not lack a certain pathetic charm. She would have liked to hear a little more about his world and what people did care for there, and of what it was that he required to be consoled; but he did not touch upon these topics. He confined himself to dilating upon the solace of communion with nature and to eulogizing the forest of Fontainebleau, being perhaps aware that a compliment to the forest would be looked upon as a personal compliment by his auditor. He declared his intention of exploring it to its inmost recesses. "I must visit the Rocher de Némorosa," he concluded with a smile. "Ah, how happy I should be if I could induce you to act as my guide to the spot!"

The girl looked troubled for an instant, but recovered her self-possession immediately. "No guide is wanted," she answered, rather coldly. "It is close to Fontainebleau, and only a few yards from the high-road. Anybody can show you the place."

"But only you can show me the nymph," he returned.

"Good-day, monsieur."

"Good-day, mademoiselle. I have been too presumptuous, I see, and must pay my vow at the shrine of Némorosa alone. I shall go there on Thursday next, about this hour, and I shall try to fancy myself the Chevalier René. It is unlucky that I am not provided with a Delia, but as I am to have no Némorosa, perhaps that will not matter so much."

Marguerite sped back to Marlotte without drawing breath. She said nothing to anybody about the events of the afternoon, nor was she

questioned upon the subject. Her periodical disappearances were too much a matter of course to excite comment, and if she were a trifle absent and silent during the evening, that also was nothing new. But as she lay in bed that night she made up her mind finally and decisively that she could not marry Victor Berthon. Of course her encounter with the stranger had nothing to do with this determination; though it is just possible that what he had said about fatal mistakes may have had some influence upon her. As for the stranger himself, she was not sure that she liked him at all. He was mysterious and interesting, but she was inclined to think that he had not been far wrong in calling himself too presumptuous, and it had been rather impertinent in him to specify in such a marked manner the day and hour at which he proposed to visit Némorosa's rock. It almost sounded as if he expected that she would be upon the spot to receive him. But in all probability he would not go at all. Anyhow, if he did, he should not find her waiting for him.

And then, when Thursday came, she went and met him there.

(To be continued.)

CUISINE GOSSIP.

According to G. A. Sala, many years ago a hearty Yorkshireman was sent by Messrs. Brassey & Peto to France to superintend the construction of a railway running into Paris. Upon alighting from the steamer at Dover, on his way home, he exclaimed: "Give me a rump-steak and a pot of porter. For the last twelve months I've been dining on ornaments." Even to this hour there is a suspicion among untravelled Englishmen that French cookery consists chiefly in imitating the devices of Harpagon's cook, in Molière's play of *L'Avare*. The result is that those London restaurants which are, in effect, Parisian cafés transported across the Channel, seldom maintain their original high standard of cookery for a long time. The "cordon bleu" who is brought over from Paris soon begins to pine in the heavier and less elastic atmosphere of London, and is especially galled when his sublimate culinary efforts are found fault with by men not to the manner born. Every *habitué* of the boulevards is aware that between the diners who regularly frequent a café and the *chef* who daily ministers to the gratification of their palates, there exists a reciprocity of sympathy which finds vent in a mutual interchange of compliments. In London and New York, on the other hand, the cook of a restaurant, however famous, remains a mystery, an abstraction to its frequenters, few of whom, indeed, can speak his language; while not half a dozen times in the course of the year does he receive from a guest those felicitations upon his skill in which the heart of a Frenchman takes such exquisite delight.

A GOOD SUNDAY DINNER.

Oysters.
Potage paysanne.
Boiled halibut, shrimp sauce.
Veal chops portugaize.
French peas.
Roast grouse.
Mixed salad.
Charlotte of apples parisienne.
Fruit, cheese and coffee.

GOURMET.

ECHOES FROM LONDON.

THE Postmaster-General's next novelty will be the introduction of reply-paid post-cards.

A BRANCH of the Bank of England, attached to the Chancery Pay Office, is to be opened at the Royal Courts of Justice in the course of October.

It is the intention of Mr. Carl Rosa to produce Balf's *Painter of Antwerp* at Her Majesty's Theatre in January.

A JOURNAL solely devoted to the interests of Post Office officials, entitled the *Post Office Gazette*, will make its first appearance during the month of October.

WE may expect further changes in postage stamps in colouring and designs. The Commissioners of Inland Revenue consider the present series not sufficiently distinct from each other for the purposes of circulation and distribution.

SIR WILLIAM COLLINS, of Glasgow, has just presented a handsome gold bracelet as a memento to Miss Macfarlane, telegraph clerk, Fort Augustus, as she was the first to convey the intelligence of his having been knighted, and to congratulate him.

THE new theatre to be built in Great Queen street, Lincoln's-inn-fields, will certainly deserve its name, "The Novolty." Among the special features of the enterprise will be the abolition of fees, the loan (free) of opera-glasses, and the supply of light refreshments without charge.

ANOTHER band of lady protectionists have appeared, with Miss Ellen Terry at their head.

In her next performance of Portia that lady will bring into fashion the shaded patterns of plush, which have been struggling so hard to come to the front for the last few months. Crimson of various shades, to suit different complexions, is to be the prevailing colour of this new material. Being entirely manufactured in England, it being taken in the general wear will give employment to thousands of persons who are now in distress.

THE officers of the Royal Artillery, as well as many of the rank and file, have subscribed towards a memorial in honour of the artillerymen who fell in Afghanistan and South Africa in 1877-1880. It is proposed to erect a suitable monument here, and with the remainder of the fund to purchase presentations to the various charitable institutions for the widows and children of those who lost their lives in the Afghan, Zulu and Transvaal campaigns.

LORD JUSTICE BRAMWELL has at length carried out his long announced intention of retiring from the Bench. A man is entitled to the repose of retirement after twenty-five years on the Judicial Bench, and at seventy-three years of age, even though his faculties may be as vigorous and his judgment as clear as that of Sir George Bramwell. He will be missed, sorely missed, from the Courts where his genial presence and ready wit were scarcely less conspicuous than his profound knowledge of the science and practice of law. It is hard to see where his successor is to be found. The past generation, no less than the one immediately preceding it has been exceptionally rich in great lawyers.

THE greatest enemy which the gas companies have, and they have many, is probably the Great Northern Railway, for if they succeed in a venture upon which they are now busied, the days, or rather the nights, of gas may be numbered. The Company are determined to push the lighting of their carriages a step further, and to light not only their offices and platforms, but also their carriages with the electric light. Hitherto experiments with the electric light have been spasmodic, but if the Great Northern succeed, and the trial will take place at the beginning of next week, then it is clear we have arrived within measurable distance of electric lights in dwelling houses.

It is pretty well known that the General Post Office have, during the past few months, been supplying bicycles and tricycles to rural postmen. This accommodation has been more particularly brought into use in Ireland, where the distances to be traversed by foot-messengers are longer than in Great Britain. The authorities are watching the experiment with a considerable degree of interest, owing to the fact that not a few casualties have occurred in the use of their new means of locomotion. Not long ago an Irish postman was pitched off his vehicle, and received such severe injuries that he shortly afterwards died, the Treasury being put to the expense of making a special grant to his widow. Naturally, these accidents are discouraging the authorities at St. Martin's-le-Grand, and, practically, the use of the iron horse is more on its trial now than it was in the first week that it started.

A BISHOP at the "Vic" is not a circumstance which would have suggested itself to our forefathers as at all likely to happen, but the Victoria of our day is a very different place to that of twenty-two years ago. Some one suggested a few years ago that one means of civilizing the denizens of the New Cut should be for the Archbishop of Canterbury to walk through the place one Sunday morning. The idea has, however, never received a nearer realization than that of last Sunday night, when the Bishop of Rochester preached to a crowded congregation, composed of many who had evidently been in the place, before even it became a Coffee Music Hall. These services are to be continued, and those who take an interest in Evangelistic movements will be glad to know they are likely to be very successful.

MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC.

MASINI, the tenor, is engaged for the St. Petersburg season.

MADAME MODJESKA has commenced a series of farewell performances at the Crystal Palace.

An attempt has been made to raise the Théâtre Déjazet into a home of a high-class drama.

THE Cincinnati Musical Festival will commence May 16, under the direction of Theodore Thomas.

SIR HERBERT OAKLEY, professor of music at the University of Edinburgh, has been appointed musical composer to the Queen, in Scotland.

AUDRAN's comic opera, *La Mascotte*, produced in Paris with such brilliant success, has had a favourable reception in London.

THE "Moore and Burgess Minstrels" celebrated last month the commencement of their seventeenth consecutive season at St. James's Hall.

MR. D'O'LY CARTER'S new "Savoy" Theatre, London, will be opened at the end of the month with *Patience*, for which new scenery has been painted.

HERN WAGNER'S anxieties as to the bestowal of his "Parolfa" hero and heroine are said to be ended by Mlle. Marian Brault's acceptance of the part of Knudry, and Herr Winkelmann undertaking to impersonate Parolfa.