

out. The long chestnut avenue, the sparkling fountains, the trim flower-beds, are the delight of the sisters' hearts. The green beauty of the garden, and the grey stones of the ancient building, form a charming background for the white-veiled women who glide with noiseless footsteps along the cloisters or the avenue: a background more becoming to them even than to the bevy of girls in their everyday grey frocks, or their Sunday garb of white and blue. For the sisters' quaint and graceful dress harmonizes with the antique surroundings of building and ornament as anything younger and more modern fails to do.

These women—shut off from the world, and knowing little of its joys or sorrows—have a strangely tranquil air. With some the tranquility verges on childishness. One feels that they have not conquered the world, they have but escaped it; and, as one pities the soldier who flies the battle, so one mourns for the want of courage which has condemned these women to an inglorious peace. But here and there another kind of face is to be seen. Here and there we come across a countenance bearing the tragic impress of toil and grief and passion; and we feel it possible that in this haven alone perhaps could a nature which had striven and suffered so greatly find in the end a lasting place. But such faces are fortunately few and far between.

From the wide low window of the great *salle d'étude* a flight of steps with carved stone balustrades led into the garden. The balustrades were half-covered with clustering white roses and purple clematis on the day of which I write; and a breath of perfume, almost overpowering in its sweetness, was wafted every now and then from the beds of mignonette and lilies on either side. The brilliant sunshine of an early September day was not yet touched with the melancholy of autumn: the leaves of the Virginia creeper had not yet changed to scarlet, nor had the chestnuts yellowed as if winter was creeping on apace. Everything was still, warm and bright.

The stillness was partly accounted for by the fact that most of the pupils had gone home for their summer holidays. The *salle d'étude* was empty and a little desolate: no hum of busy voices came from its open window to the garden; and even the tranquil sisters seemed to miss the sound, and to look wistfully at the bare desks and unused benches of their schoolroom. For they loved their pupils