



A FETE DAY.

BELGIAN GIRLS.

By DARLEY DALE, Author of "Spoilt Guy," "Little Bricks," "Cissy's Troubles," &c.

THE most important factor in the education of children, and especially of girls, is home influence; and in considering the character of Belgian girls it is only fair to them to say that their home influence is often decidedly bad. In well-regulated families the children are over-indulged and spoilt, and very soon learn to tyrannise over their parents, and this habit clings to them in after years, as we shall see when we come to speak of their school-life. But many Belgian families are unfortunately very much the reverse of well regulated; the *mauvais ménage*, as it is called, is more common than with us. Now a *mauvais ménage* means a household in which the husband and wife live apart, either from incompatibility of temper or for other causes, and it can easily be understood such a state of affairs can have only a bad effect on the children, so that if we find Belgian girls have very grave faults we must not forget that their home influence is often the very reverse of what it should be and happily generally is among our English girls.

In appearance the Belgian girls are usually fair, substantial in figure, with fresh complexions and quantities of glossy brown hair, which, regardless of the apostolic counsel,

they wear very much plaited, especially for the evenings, when the hairdresser is called in to dress it. They are often handsome, with a cold statuesque beauty amounting to stolidness and, in some cases, degenerating into the Rubens type of woman. They are famed for the indolence which invariably accompanies this kind of beauty; their faces have not much expression, and there is a want of spirituality in them which is rather remarkable when we reflect that there is a good deal of the artistic nature innate in the Belgian girl.

They have plenty of taste in dress; here, for example, the artistic nature peeps out. They are very neat outwardly, and there is an appearance of far more refinement about them than they really possess. Like most foreigners their love of the bath is not so great as it might be with advantage. They pay special attention to their boots and gloves, but they are too fond of wearing jewellery in the morning to suit our English notions of good taste. Their peasant sisters wear the costume of the country, a short woollen petticoat, with a cotton jacket reaching to the waist, and a close fitting white muslin cap. They too are very trim about the feet, which are covered with thick woollen stockings and wooden

sabots; on Sundays and *fête* days they wear fine cashmere handkerchiefs handsomely embroidered with coloured silks on their heads, and, near Antwerp, long golden earrings, which are heirlooms. In Flanders and Brabant it is still the fashion for Belgian ladies to go to early mass and to market in a brown cloth cloak called a "capuchin," with a hood which is drawn over the head, and makes a picturesque and becoming costume. Among very old-fashioned people ladies appear in the morning in a cotton wrapper instead of a dress, for economy's sake; but this slovenly fashion is happily dying out, and the modern Belgian girl does not follow it.

Belgian girls are rarely educated at home, but are sent either to a convent or a boarding-school. At the latter there is usually a sprinkling of English and Dutch girls among the scholars. It is scarcely needful to warn English parents not to send girls to a Belgian school, or, indeed, any foreign school, without due inquiry. At school the bad effects of their home discipline soon manifest themselves, for while they stand in great awe of the head-mistress and are respectful enough to her, to the under teachers they are ruder than rude, utterly wanting not only in respect

but in common courtesy also. They treat these subordinates as inferior beings only fit to be trampled on. They are very lazy, and it is only with driving that they can be made to work at all. They are not intellectual, but they have talent and taste for music and painting; they often draw and sketch remarkably well, and they are exceedingly clever with their hands in all manner of needlework, especially in lace making and embroidery, while they knit from the time they can hold the needles in their childish hands till they are too old and infirm to do anything else.

They have a great talent for acting and masquerading, and are exceedingly fond of it; they indulge and cultivate this taste at school by getting up plays and proverbs at the end of the term, and when they leave school fancy balls and theatricals are a favourite form of amusement. Their artistic talent shows itself here in the taste and skill with which they get up such entertainments. They are very fond of pleasure and excitement, and of a frivolous kind of pleasure, too; and even while at school they constantly go to balls and parties. During the summer these balls are often given at the seaside, and the girls, allowed leave of absence to attend them.

Fête-days are a great element in the life of a Belgian girl. As is the case in all Roman Catholic countries, the *fête* day takes the place of our birthday, the *fête*-day being the day of the saint after whom the person is named, and they have a very pretty custom of sending

bouquets of flowers to their friends on their *fête*-days; these bouquets are piled upon a table, and if the person be popular the room is filled with them. There are two great *fêtes* which come during the winter, and are observed in the schools as well as at home—the *fêtes* of St. Nicholas and St. Thomas. St. Nicholas is the same as Santa Claus of Germany; he makes his appearance on his day about dusk, clad in a white robe, with a bishop's mitre on his head and a crosier in one hand, and a basket of presents in the other. He is seen descending a ladder placed for his convenience in the garden or courtyard, which is lighted up with Bengal lights for the occasion, his advent being heralded by a penny trumpet blown in some mysterious corner by a servant bribed to perform that part of the ceremony. When the generous saint reaches the ground he is relieved of his basket by some elder girl bold enough to approach his holiness, and the gifts are then distributed to the rest of the party; these gifts are, for the most part, sweets and gingerbread models of the saint.

By the way, Belgian girls are passionately fond of bonbons, and are very greedy over them; they never go to Brussels or any large town without buying a large box of sweets, and they think nothing of spending five or six francs on them at a time. Indeed, we have heard of a family of five sisters who returned to school with one hundred francs' worth of sweets after a day's outing.

But to return to the saints. On St.

Thomas's day the aim and object of a Belgian girl's life is to lock some one, and the more important the person the better, up in a room, and only to release the prisoner when he or she has promised to give the jailor some treat, such as to take them to a concert, or give them an outing of some kind, and this promise is always kept. Would that they were equally honourable in greater matters, but, alas! untruth is the most terrible fault of the Belgian girl. They don't know the meaning of the word truth, and they never hesitate to tell a story if it suits their purposes. They will deny a fault in the most barefaced way, and invent any story to get them out of a scrape, or they will stand still and see others punished for their misdoings when a word from them would save them. Happily, in Belgian schools, English girls have earned a character for truthfulness, so that it is no uncommon thing to hear it said, "Oh, if an English girl says so and so, it is sure to be true," whereas if a Belgian said it the chances are ten to one it is false. *J'ai menti* is as certainly a part of all their confessions to the priest as the formula itself, and is thought little or nothing of by either priest or penitent. The Belgian girls being Roman Catholics are required to go to confession at certain intervals; but, odd to say, there is frequently an amicable rivalry between them when preparing for confession, as to who has the most sins to confess. If A has twenty-two, B says she must try and find another sin, as her list only contains twenty-one. They are com-



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pletely in subjection to the priests, who restrict their reading so much that at a competitive examination the Protestants have a far greater chance than the Romanists, and invariably carry off the prize. For the most part, from the fact that so many books are forbidden fruit to them, these girls grow up remarkably ignorant and empty-headed, and, having no inward resources to fall back upon, they give themselves up, when they leave school, to gaiety and gossip. And yet many of them are very devout. Their religion may be very erroneous, but none the less they believe firmly all they are taught; they observe strictly all the fasts of the Church, and they are very charitable, visiting the poor and the sick, clothing the naked, and frequently paying for the education of the ignorant.

Brussels being one of the smallest European capitals is also the most gossiping; society is on such a small scale, and though divided into cliques, the cream of one clique is sure to know the fag-end of the clique next above it, and the consequence is an appalling amount of gossip and scandal is talked at the evening tea-parties. Tea-party, by the way, is a misnomer, tea being seldom drank, except in case of illness; coffee is the usual beverage, and during its consumption the conversation flows freely on such interesting themes as Baroness B.'s new bonnet, its probable price and its suitability to the wearer's age and appearance, the last engagement, the *mauvais ménage* of the C.'s, the why and the wherefore of it—

which if no one knows, someone probably invents—the fearful extravagance of Madame D. and the supposed state of her husband's exchequer, the number of Countess E.'s servants, their wages, their duties, and the manner in which they perform them, the awful impropriety of an English girl actually seen walking in the Park on Sunday with a gentleman who finally turns out to be her brother, etcetera, etcetera, and so it goes on night after night, and yet no one seems to tire of it.

But we are anticipating; all this happens after the girls have left school and have developed into introduced young ladies, and yet, as school is in itself a little world, there, too, a great deal of gossip and scandal goes on; there are cliques there as in the world, and there is a system of spying and reporting to headquarters prevalent in Belgian schools.

Belgian girls are fond of tremendous friendships, called *bundschas*. Almost every girl has a *bundscha* with another girl. While it lasts—and as a rule it lasts a very long time—the girls are inseparable, and behave as absurdly as engaged people are wont to do, without the same excuse. There is little, if any, harm in these *bundschas*—indeed, there is some good in them, for a girl who has a *bundscha* is not likely to have any real or imaginary love affairs, which, while they are at school, are very undesirable things. In Belgium more liberty is allowed to young men in the choice of their wives and to en-

gaged people generally than is the case in France, but here, as there, marriages are frequently arranged by the parents without consulting the principal parties, and though a girl can, if she choose, say no to a proposal of marriage, yet, as a rule, she does not do so, knowing very well that if she does the chances are she must either become a nun or remain unmarried for the rest of her days, for numbers of Belgian girls do not marry; those who have no money never do. Dowry is always the chief consideration in choosing a wife of a Belgian gentleman, especially if he be an officer, for in that case his position is assured, and all he wants is money to keep it up, and even if he be of noble birth he will be content with a rich bride from the upper bourgeoisie.

When a Belgian girl leaves school her life is, for the most part, spent in a round of gaiety, balls, concerts, theatricals, masquerades, theatres, and promenades in the park or the Bois de la Cambre, where all the *élite* meet daily, but particularly on Sunday, when the park is the rendezvous of the upper classes, who turn out to see and criticise each other. The more serious moments of the Belgian girl will be spent in lace-work, embroidery or knitting, varied, perhaps, by drawing, if she happens to have a taste that way, or by music, if her taste lies in that direction. One lowly but useful art they possess to perfection—the art of darned stockings so that it is impossible to detect where they have been mended, and which is called “*ramailage*.”

It consists in picking up the stitches and re-knitting them with an ordinary sewing needle—no easy task with fine silk stockings.

Reading novels is not one of their vices, though any English novel would be permitted by the strictest parents. The very fact of its being English, or rather translated from

English, is considered sufficient guarantee that it contains nothing unfit for a young girl to read; sometimes, consequently, a sensational English novel gets into their hands which many English parents would certainly taboo.

And now, having said a great deal about the faults of the Belgian girls, let us not for-

get that they have their virtues as well as their vices. They are generally very amiable, bright, good-tempered, cheerful and affectionate; and, as was said at the beginning of this paper, their faults are more the evil results of their education and bringing up than of their nature.

A D O P T E D .

By ANNE BEALE.

CHAPTER II.

ALLIE.



RISCILLA FIELD-BURN was the only daughter of a respectable Kentish farmer. Her father had been dead three years, and had left his family ill provided for. She had three brothers, two of whom had emigrated to Canada, and the third was bailiff to Squire

Nugent, of Brookside Manor. Her mother lived with the latter in a small cottage on the estate her son helped to manage. Priscilla was good and clever, and, when her father died, set to work to perfect herself as a certificated teacher, for which she had long been training by teaching in the day and Sunday schools of her native parish. She had been well educated, besides, and passed her examinations so creditably that she was recommended by her rector to a vacancy in the Board school to which little Allie and the other children went. This was how she resided in London; but she loved the country best.

Her heart was burdened by care for little Allie while she was teaching that afternoon, and she had never before been so delighted as she was when the hour of dismissal came. She went straight to the vicarage, which was not far from the school, and was fortunate in finding the vicar. He went with her at once to Goat's-gardens, telling her on the way that he had seen Looson the day before he died, had found him in a happy frame of mind but resolute not to be removed from his desolate room, where, he said, his wife had passed away and his children were with him. All the neighbours were kind to him, and food had been sent him from the vicarage. The Rev. James Monson was a bright and cheery pastor, but even he grew depressed at times at witnessing the distress he failed to relieve.

"You, who work of an evening in the ragged-school classes," he said to Priscilla, "can judge how difficult it is to minister to the necessities of the thousands of my poor parish."

"I can indeed, sir," she replied; for she was a volunteer teacher and visitor in the district, both on week-day evenings and Sundays, as well as a paid Board school official.

They found Allie very ill. The doctor had been, and had said that she should be either taken to the workhouse infirmary or to a hospital. Margey and Sally were watching her, and striving to make her eat. Mrs. Snarl was engaged in detailing her case to half a dozen women, who, seeing the relieving officer, had "just looked in to learn what it was all about." They cleared out when the vicar

entered, but paused to say a word to Priscilla, who was a great favourite with parents as well as children. Little Allie's face also lighted up when she perceived her, but she was too weak to speak.

The vicar soon decided for all parties. He wrote a hasty note, himself fetched a cab, and sent Priscilla off with little Allie to the nearest children's hospital. Mrs. Snarl, Margey, and Sally wept copiously, the former declaring that the child should return to Goat's-gardens as soon as she was well. "And as to Snarl, he wouldn't mind; for he was used to children." She wrapped Allie in her best plaid shawl and placed her in Priscilla's arms, exacting a promise that she should bring her news of the child.

When Priscilla first left the fresh, fair, pure country for the smoky atmosphere of London, she little knew what the change meant. She had been accustomed to visit her poor neighbours in their healthy, airy, neat cottages, and to nurse their clean, tidy children; but when she first breathed, or tried to breathe, the stifling and impure gases of some of the houses round about her school, she thought she must have fainted. She got used to it, however, as all must who devote themselves to teach and work in over-crowded cities. Still, when Allie lay against her breast in the narrow cab, ragged, dirty, forlorn, and with the peculiar odour acquired in the slums she had lately frequented, it was as much as she could do to bear the proximity. How she rejoiced when she reached the large, airy hospital, presented her credentials to the secretary, and was admitted with her charge! She inquired for her friend, Sister Frances, who came at once, and they carried the half-insensible Allie through the broad passages, up the great stone staircase, and into a room where a doctor came to see her.

"The usual complaint—starvation," he said, and Sister Frances knew what to do.

Priscilla was allowed to remain while Allie was restored to consciousness, and so much revived by proper means, that she fixed her large eyes on her friend, smiled, and murmured "Teacher." Priscilla helped to strip off the rags, place her in a warm bath, disentangle the matted hair, and put on the knitted vest, nightgown, and scarlet bodice ready for the small patients. What a transformation! Priscilla scarcely knew the child in that cheerful and becoming attire, and Allie whispered to her confidentially, "Isn't it nice, teacher?" Truly she had not been so clean and well tended since her poor mother died.

Sister Frances carried her tenderly into one of the great wards, and Priscilla followed. They placed her in a cot surrounded by scores of other cots, all containing children of various ages adorned with red jackets. It was no wonder she looked about her astonished. The large and lofty room, the numerous half-open windows, the white-aproned, kindly nurses, and, above all, the patients, were revelations.

"How nice it smells, teacher," she said, as Priscilla sat down by her cot while Sister Frances went to fetch some milk.

"Violets and primroses!" cried Priscilla, ecstatically.

"What's them, teacher?" asked Allie.

"You shall see when you get better," replied Priscilla, as Sister Frances came back with the milk, which Allie drank greedily.

"She does not know what violets are," said Priscilla, and Sister Frances fetched a glass containing a bunch from a table.

"These are the first we have had from our kind flower-mission ladies in Kent," she said, giving three or four to little Allie.

The child scented them, and burst into tears.

"Snip told me about them. Will you bring him here, teacher? I wish father had some," she said.

"You had better go now," whispered Sister Frances to Priscilla, who kissed Allie and promised to look for Snip.

The child put her arms round her neck, returned her embrace, and said, "Is this heaven, teacher?" and, almost before Priscilla left her side, fell asleep.

As Priscilla glanced down the long, beautiful ward, she felt that it must be almost like heaven to the afflicted children who came there from the courts and alleys of the great city, and she thanked God that He had inspired man with the thought of providing such a place for His suffering little ones.

When she returned to Goat's-gardens she met old Snarl, who was setting off on his perambulations with his potato-oven.

"How's the little gurl?" he asked. "His reverence is the cove for my money. Al'ays knows what to do in a fix. We go to his church most Sunday evenings, 'cause he looks in upon us quite 'umble like, and we send the kids to his Sunday-school. Let the little gurl come back to my missus from orspital for a bit, not for long though, for we can't afford it. Like a baked potato, miss? No call to pay for it. Hot's the word."

Before Priscilla could accept or decline this generous offer, Snarl had picked his largest potato from the stove and presented it with a bow to Priscilla, who was too well-mannered to refuse it. Hot it certainly was, and she was obliged to receive it in her handkerchief.

"Tis a whopper!" said Snarl, admiringly. "Take a bit of salt and pepper."

"I think I will eat it at home, thank you. I am very much obliged to you," replied Priscilla.

"Quite welcome," said Snarl, trundling off his oven.

Priscilla found Mrs. Snarl and "the kids" at supper; that is to say, finishing the meal which had been laid for Snarl. He had, apparently, been enjoying a cup of ale and a herring, while the others had tea and bread and treacle, but without the intermediate plates.

"Snarl works hard, miss, and must be supported," said his wife, apologetically, when Priscilla had given Allie's little history. "You works hard, too. Have a cup o' tea, my dear. Now, you must. I won't take no refusals, if you'll condescend."

Again, before Priscilla could accept or de-