



A WEDDING AMONGST THE FRENCH FISHER-FOLK.

FRENCH GIRLS.

By ANNE BEALE.

TIME revolutionises manners and customs as politics do governments. Steam is as revolutionary as time, and by annihilating space tends to bring people of different nationalities together, and to prove how much they all have in common. Christianity is the greatest revolutionist of all, and would unite peoples of various races and tongues in the bonds of a common brotherhood. It is as Christians, then, that we should approach foreigners, and whether we be young or old, male or female, strive to reconcile differences, and promote union in the spirit of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Time was when English and French hated one another, and contemptuously interchanged the epithets of John Bull and Jack Frog, and when the girls of one nation looked superciliously on those of the other. A game called French and English was then much in vogue, and young people of both sexes took sides and played it, *con amore*, half dislocating their shoulders in their efforts to drag one another from the ranks of the one army to that of its adversary. Now, thanks to nearly seventy years of peace, we are good friends with our neighbours across the Channel, and long may we continue to be so. But for that strip of water we might almost be one people, for nowadays half the English speak French and the French English, and young girls of each country visit the other to acquire fluency in the tongue naturally foreign to them.

French girls flock to London much as the English to Paris. As *gouvernantes*, *bonnes*, *modistes*, they are everywhere, and they should be cautioned not to undertake situations without proper references, as they, and indeed all girls who leave their native country in search of employment, are often cajoled and ruined by false advertisements.

At home they are gay and light-hearted. The French know how to amuse themselves, and girls are not backward in this particular. The clear atmosphere and sunny skies are aids to diversions of many kinds. In fine weather they almost live out of doors, and boulevards, avenues, parks, *cafés*, and gardens are thronged with bright girls of all ages. Some use the skipping-rope, or play at *battledore* and *shuttlecock*, *barre*, and various games, with all their hearts, unconscious of spectators, while others pace the *Champs Elysées* or drive through the *Bois* attended by mother or *gouvernante*. But no young girl is allowed to be in public without *bonne* or *chaperon*. They have not what we call "liberty." This superintendence is as much carried to excess as is the freedom demanded of late years by the English girl. A French lady lately declined to allow her English governess to go out alone of an evening, because she thought it was not "convenable."

It is said that this strict supervision makes the girls sly and untruthful. It probably originated in the parental desire to see them what is called well married. *Mariages de convenance*, or suitable marriages, were, and indeed still are, arranged by the parents, particularly in the upper rank of life.

Although less universal than they were, the girl has still no voice in the matter. Fortune, rank, position, a good establishment, politics even, decide a girl's fate for life. It matters not if her fiancé be old and ugly, dissipated, irreligious, of furious temper—she must marry him. If she hated him and loved another, she still must marry him. In most instances, what she thinks chiefly of is emancipation from the strict surveillance she has hitherto been subjected to. She has been

brought up with this matrimonial finale in view, and has accustomed herself to the idea, with no consideration for the responsibilities of life. To be free, to have an establishment, to do as she likes—this is the *elysium* she sets before her mind. The consequences of the parents' ambition are frequently awful.

What is life without love? A void to fill which the young life rushes into dissipation. She has no longer anyone to control her, she is free at last. Accordingly, balls, operas, comedies, spectacles of all descriptions, dress, admiration, are the aim of days for which she must give account. Too often the *mariage de convenance* ends in separation and complications which can only result in sin. Hence, the impurity and immorality of so many French novels and plays which portray life as their authors witness it, and inculcate lessons that demoralise instead of elevating the reader's soul.

Sometimes the young girl thus affianced by her parents and guardians prefers the convent to the sacrifice of her affections. She is sincerely attached to one who would gladly marry her, and is intended for another, whom she does not love, and, to escape, embraces a religious life, for which she may possibly be ill-fitted. A lady who was the friend of a young girl so sacrificed gives us the following example.

Pauline was beautiful and accomplished. When she left her pensionnat, where she had been much beloved and had gained many medals and crowns for good conduct and ability, she was destined by her parents to marry a man whom she despised. He was rich and of noble birth, but poor and ignoble of character and conduct. Moreover, she loved another. In spite of persuasion and resistance, she took refuge in a convent, declaring a vocation for a religious life. She performed her *noviciate*, after which, says our informant, "I saw her take the veil, a ceremony I never wish again to witness. In the cathedral, amid crowds of spectators, she appeared first as a bride, clad in white, veiled and adorned with jewels. She looked lovely, and I wept copiously. The veil was removed, her beautiful hair cut off by the priests, and placed with her jewels on a sort of salver. This was presented to the oldest of her many assembled relatives—a tottering lady, much advanced in years, who passed it on to the youngest, a bright child just entering life. Subsequently, this fair bride was clothed in black, laid on her back, and covered with a pall. I shuddered and my tears rained down. Then I saw my dear friend arise, a nun for life. Certain questions were put to her by the priest as to her vocation for the life she was entering, her reasons for relinquishing the



RETURNING FROM CONFIRMATION.

world, or something to that effect, and I could but feel that her answers were hollow, if not absolutely false, for I knew she had taken that black veil in which I saw her last to avoid an uncongenial marriage."

It is unnecessary to comment on this ceremonial; it was doubtless typical of a renunciation of the world for Christ, but it impresses on the mind the text, "Perform unto the Lord your vows," and proves to the unprejudiced that young girls are best in the sphere in which God places them, doing therein "their duty to Him, their neighbour, and themselves."

While we are on subjects matrimonial, we are bound to admit that all these *mariages de convenance* of the upper classes are not necessarily unhappy. They are sometimes quite the contrary, and then no one brighter or more charming than the high-bred *mère de famille*. As in England, the marriages of the bourgeoisie, or citizens, are the happiest. There is more freedom of choice for the girl, and to judge from her bright appearance after her fate is sealed, she is all mirth and smiles. There is no prettier sight in Paris or elsewhere than that of a wedding party parading the streets, or seated round tables at cafés in the boulevards in their bridal attire. The *nouvelle mariée* has always her veil and wreath, white train and white shoes, and is not afraid of soiling her dress, apparently, by exposure to the weather. All the wedding party spend the day together, and hilarity and light-heartedness are its prevailing features. The weddings of the French "fisher-folk" are also singularly picturesque, as, with flying caps, long shawls, and large bouquets, the party leave the church, surrounded by admiring friends, to pace the streets or make holiday at the cafés or elsewhere. Under all circumstances, *toujours gai* is the motto of the French girl. Even trouble does not weigh her down for long, and solemnity seems foreign to her nature. If the bridal train is a pretty sight, so is that of the veiled and white-clad figures that constantly appear in the streets preparatory to Confirmation, or "first Communion." The girls are confirmed young, and the priests take much pains to prepare them for the solemn ceremony, which, though differing somewhat from ours, is fundamentally the same.

Mention has been made of medals and wreaths in connection with Pauline, which naturally involves the subject of education. This may be private or public. Some girls are educated at home, others at the large lycées or externats answering to our boarding and day schools. Some of these receive a considerable number of pupils, and every incentive is given to industry and consequent proficiency. We will take one as an example, at which about a hundred girls are educated, some of whom are boarders, others day scholars. Here many English girls mingle with the French, although the subjects taught in our country differ little from those of the other. The acquisition of French is, however, considered so necessary, that other matters, even to religious diversities, are sacrificed for it.

Naturally, in so large a school there are many divisions or classes, and each has a separate class-room. The various divisions are marked by the dress and belt of the pupils. For instance, one wears a grey dress and carmelite belt, another a brown dress and blue belt, a third a black dress and orange belt, and so on. Over this attire is put during the hours of study a black *sarrau*, or large, loose over-frock, to absorb ink and keep the dress clean. Silence is rigorously observed. The principal foreign languages taught are English and German. Emulation is promoted by means of cards called *cachets*, which are given to the girls as rewards for their labour. Twelve pink *cachets* ensure a large green one,

and in turn the greens secure a silver medal. Then comes the public examination, at which parents and friends are present. The excitement of the girls may be imagined.

The successful candidates for honours receive their prizes in public from the priests. These place a wreath of flowers on the head of each as they present the book or medal, after which the juvenile recipients courtesy as only French girls can, and, as they retire, slip the wreath on the right arm. Let it be understood that in the education there is no religious interference between Catholic and Protestant, but on public occasions the priests distribute the prizes.

Many girls are educated in convents, where the nuns and sisters teach them, and schools for the poor are attached to most religious establishments. We will not, however, enter here upon differences of faith, but confine ourselves to mere education.

The Conservatoire, in Paris, where French girls go to perfect themselves in music, is a fine institution, but study there is no sinecure. If the student intends to make music a profession, she finds it very laborious, and must devote time, energy, perseverance, brain, and fingers to her task. But this is the same everywhere, and French girls must work to live, if they have no income, like those of other nationalities. They may be seen studying painting in the galleries of the Luxembourg, and are proud that one of the greatest of animal painters, if not the greatest the world has produced, should be a Frenchwoman. Rosa Bonheur is an artist of whose fame it is excusable to boast, but, oh! how she laboured!

So do others of her sex and country. The French peasant girl, in her picturesque costume, white cap, and heavy sabots, or wooden shoes, works in her cottage, field, or orchard, and learns to be thrifty and content with little, as were her ancestors. Her cheerfulness and chatter are unceasing, and if only one could understand her patois, one might learn many a lesson from her. Fêtes and fairs are her delight, and she, like her richer sisters, knows how to amuse herself. She existed through the war, and was still gay and ready for the jest or repartee. The fisher-girl is also cheerful and industrious, and in her pretty costume "lives to laugh," if she cannot always "laugh to live."

So are her fellows of the town. Whether in shops or in service their volatile, sprightly nature stands them in good stead. Then they are so polite! It is delightful to hear them end every question or answer with the *monsieur*, *madame*, or *mademoiselle*, which we English are either too proud or too rude to employ. It is no wonder they think us cold and surly. As the driver of a fiacre said to us in Paris not long since, "Ah! but we are so different! The French are *tapageurs* (noisy) *la! la! la!* but you English, it is *oui, non, non, oui*. I once drove an Englishman for five hours round and round the Bois. It was winter; freezing hard; his nose was blue, his face violet, but he still held his cane and looked about him. 'Will *monsieur* be pleased to be covered?' I asked. 'No, I like to see clear,' he replied. I kept warm by stamping my feet, but he, he never moved. *Ma foi!* I never saw a man like that, and never shall again."

That was descriptive and suggestive. One may certainly be too *tapageurs*, but one need not be impolite.

Still, life is not all amusement, and we could wish to see many changes in the manners and morals of French girls. We should like to see them reverence the Sunday, instead of keeping it as a *jour de fête*. They think us *tristes*: we think them irreverent, because we would "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," while they dance, attend

spectacles, and otherwise divert themselves, after their early mass. Sunday in Paris, with its races, operas, cafés, work and worldliness, is, to the thoughtful mind, a melancholy sight. Besides, there are so many fête days, and so much amusement, that it seems sad they cannot devote one day of seven to better and more serious pursuits. Besides, the worker has no rest, since labour as well as pleasure is interrupted. Long may God preserve to us our English Sabbath!

Of all fête days, New Year's Day is the most generally observed. Girls are all alive with expectation, and interchange presents and visits from morning to night. The fabulously beautiful shops are filled with tempting articles, all labelled "Etrennes," or New Year's gifts; and young and old, rich and poor, keep zealously the birthday of the year. Parents take their daughters to various amusements, and whole families may be seen at the cafés, regaling themselves with coffee and sweetmeats of every description. We only wish our coffee-tavern keepers and assistants would make as good coffee, and wait as briskly as the French. Then the trade would not be on the wane, but at the full.

French girls are reputed frivolous and vain, but beneath the attention to dress and appearance runs a vein of natural kindness, which finds vent occasionally in what people call compliments. They are unaffectedly polite, and what often seems on the surface a mere *façon de parler* is the outcome of a desire to give pleasure. The kiss on both cheeks at meeting, the gesticulations, shrugging of shoulders, and rapid speech, and the despair at parting are the expression of genuine feelings, which less emotional people repress.

If much of their charm of manner is superficial, it is agreeable, and has not happily as yet been superseded by the fastness, independence, and freedom from polish which they so often complain of in girls of other countries. It has been said that they are greedy, and do not in their *pensions* share their gifts of sweetmeats and cakes with their companions; but this is not altogether peculiar to them! They are generally dutiful to their parents and respectful to their elders, for which admirable virtues we will excuse them this small vice.

Indeed, the more we make excuses for one another (not for ourselves), and the less we pass judgment on our neighbours, whether native or foreign, the better. "To avoid the evil and choose the good" is an excellent maxim, and we recommend it to the consideration of our young readers, both as regards their immediate surroundings and the more remote circle of foreign nations.

TWO CHANGEFUL YEARS.

By the Author of "Wrapped in the Robes of Mercy,"
"Fairview Rest," &c.

CHAPTER III.

"The strain unfolds

In sad perplexed minors."

E. B. Browning.

THINGS resumed the even tenor of their way, at any rate to outward seeming, at the vicarage for the next few months; but then a great change took place. The vicar had the offer of a living in Kent, within easy reach of the metropolis, which, after much prayerful deliberation, he accepted. The leave-taking was a very sorrowful one for both pastor and people, but then came a yet greater sorrow to the latter, when, three months later, the sympathising friend, the wise counsellor, he who had for many years unwaveringly proclaimed the glad tidings of a Saviour's love, was carried back to be laid beside the wife



A French Fisher Girl.