CORSICAN MAIDENS, MANNERS, AND MYSTERIES

A FRENCH TEACHER'S MEMORIES.

PART I

IT is a strange fact that we often know much more about some people and places which are very far from us than we do about others that are much nearer. Between us and the remoter there may be relations and associations which in the other case may be lacking. We know a great deal about Egypt or Palestine because Scripture history has turned our attention to those lands. We know much of France and Germany and Norway, because we or our friends go there for summer holidays. We know something of America and Australia, because we have friends who have settled there, and because we have somewhat of a common property in literature.

But what do we know about Corsica?

Well, probably most of us know that it is an island; that it was the birthplace of Napoleon Buonaparte, and that its inhabitants have or had a curious system of family feud or revenge, called the "vendetta." And little more!

The reason for this, of course, is that not only does Corsica lie somewhat remote from the ken of the average tourist, is no health resort, though of great salubrity, and is a French department, therefore looking to France for civil service, education and literature, and yet forming no part of France. Just so, our own Island of Man or Isles of the Western Highlands would be almost "unknown land" to continental people, who are nevertheless familiar enough with our great capital cities and other centres of interest.

There was, therefore, all the charm of novelty about the conversation of our dear French teacher, Madame Dralla, who had spent many of the earlier years of her eventful life on this far-off island, engaged in educational work which brought her into close and friendly touch with its primitive people. Our encyclopedia might tell us (after we had become interested in the matter) about the romantic scenery of the Corsican interior, a "very labyrinth of mountains," about its flat swampy coasts, its varied vegetation, its thickets of broom "where bandits hide," its mineral resources and the story of its conquests by Saracens and Genoese, till it fell into the hands of the French in 1768. But only Madame Dralla could tell us of its people and their prejudices and superstitions and customs. Very likely but for Madame Dralla we girls should not even have heard the traditional discovery and naming of Corsica, as given by the Roman historian Sallust. He recounts that a Ligurian slave woman observing that a bull in a herd she was tending was accustomed to swim across the Pyrrhenian Sea, and to return with an increase of flesh, followed the animal in a boat to the island; and the Ligurians, on hearing that it was extraordinarily fertile, went thither, and called it by the name of its discoverer, Corsa or Corsica.

I think I shall try to write down some of the stories she told us, keeping as well as I can to her very words, for I took notes as well as I could while she spoke, because I afterwards made some of her stories the subjects of school essays.

She told us once, that about twelve years before the French Education Department had committed to the charge of a friend of hers, whom we will call Madame R——, the formation of a training-class in Corsica. She had eighteen pupils, two French girls of good family, the other sixteen being Corsicans with little culture and strong prejudices, who sought education only because they desired to gain their living by teaching and knew that their prospects would be poor, unless they submitted to the regulation discipline.

Some classes have to be held very early, because later on, it is too hot for work. So, one morning, as usual, Madame R—— entered her class at six A.M. Her pupils were already assembled—girls ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-five.

To Madame R——'s great astonishment she noticed that the Corsican girls were all in great excitement and distress, while the two Parisians seemed agitated by suppressed laughter. Madame R—— paused, inquiring—

"Why are you crying? What is the matter?"

Of course, she knew that some of these southern people are very extravagant in the expression of feeling, or she would have been still more astounded when her sixteen Corsican pupils burst into audible sobs, while the French girls no longer restrained smiles. At last one Corsican in a broken voice tried to explain herself thus—

"Oh, madame, we could not bear to tell you—the truth—at first. Madame, you are about to die!"

"To die!" echoed the astounded teacher. "But I am not ill; I have never felt stronger!"

"Oh, madame, that does not matter! In three days you will be dead! You cannot help it. You must die."

And the sobs redoubled dismally.

The teacher commanded her patience. "What makes you think I must die in three days?" she inquired.

"The souls of your beloved ones who have left this earth came yesterday evening to warn you of your fate," said one of the weeping girls. "We saw them; we know what we are saying."

"Who are these beloved ones of whom you speak?" asked the teacher.

"Your father, mother, and three of your children," answered the girls.

"Where did you see them?" said Madame R——.

The reply came promptly. "They were standing on your verandah facing the sea."

"And I did not invite them in?" she remarked sarcastically.

"Ah no!" they wailed. "You must get ready to die."

"Dear! dear!" said Madame R——. "But tell me, will you?—why did only three of my dead children come to visit me when I have lost five?"

The tears stopped with surprise. "Five? Have you really?"

"Ah, I should not say it to you," sighed madame, "if it were not true!"

The girls looked at each other. "We do not know why the other children were not there," they whimpered.

Madame R—— resolutely shook off the sad memories which were chilling her heart and said brightly—

"I am sure my parents must have thought me very rude to have left them standing on the verandah. If I had known they were there, I should have invited them in, to share my excellent coffee!"

"Ach! madame, please do not laugh! There are serious things to consider. You must let us have your money to bury you!"

"Thank you very much," said madame a little tartly now. "The mayor of the town knows all about me. He will see to that matter when it becomes necessary."

"But there is your little niece," they pleaded, too earnest to be offended. "What is to become of her? Shall we take her back to her home in Paris? We should do it with pleasure, if you will give us money for the journey."

"Please do not trouble about her, but let us begin our work," said Madame R—— with calm resolution. And accordingly she delivered her class lecture, to which nobody seemed to pay attention save the two Parisians.

At 8 A.M. Madame R—— left the schoolhouse and returned home, rather puzzled by what had taken place. A childless widow, who had recently been through great tribulation, it would have been small wonder if her nerve had been somewhat shaken. Involuntarily she asked herself—

"Can any danger threaten me? I have not done harm to anybody! I have had no dispute with any of these people. They have always been very kind to me. Can it be that my husband had angered some of them before his death? It seems most unlikely."

Yet she felt it wise to take some precaution. Accordingly she called on one of the other tenants of the house where she lived—a well-to-do, honest man who had been very kind during her husband's last illness.

"Sir," said she to him, "if you should hear any strange noise in my apartment during the night, will you be so good as to come to my help immediately, in case I required you to defend me."

"Of course, madame, I will do so with the greatest of pleasure," he replied. "But what have you to fear? In this island we have bandits—the glory of the country—but we have no mere thieves and burglars as you have on the continent?"

"I don't fear thieves or robbers; but suppose there was a vendetta?" said madame, dubiously.

"A vendetta!" he echoed with surprise. "Whom have you offended? Have you killed somebody?"

She shook her head with a smile. "I am not aware of having made a single enemy," she said. "Only somehow to-day I feel nervous, and so I have come to you."

He assured her of his protection. It may be noted that madame prudently avoided all mention of "the souls of her departed beloved ones," for her good neighbour, though a courageous man, would certainly have objected to an encounter with a ghost.

When night came on, the little French-mistress locked her door, set her writing-table out upon the verandah and sat down to work before one of the most magnificent views one can imagine. She saw her pupils pass again and again before her house, and from time to time she nodded to them, as though to say—

"I am not yet dead!"

The day after, and the day after that, she gave her lessons precisely as usual. The fourth day dawned. Madame R—— was not

dead! There had been no midnight alarm, nor any ghostly visitant.

So on this fourth day she thought it her duty to speak seriously to her class on the folly and wickedness and danger of such superstitious fancies. The Corsican girls knitted their brows, and the French teacher's sharp ear caught the hissing whisper "Franciotte," a word of hate and scorn which warned her that serious feelings of animosity were rising.

Immediately the class was over the girls flew together in hurried conclave. They declared to each other that no peace was possible till they knew why the French-mistress was still alive. They had been ready to weep for her prospective death; they were filled with anger that it had not come off. Some of them went to consult an aged hermit, an ignorant and bigoted man, with views and ideas worthy of the darkest age. His question was:

"Of what religion is this woman?"

When they answered, "She is a Protestant," then he said:

"Be sure her parents did not come for her sake, but to warn you not to listen to her teaching."

The class seized this idea. Their decision was that they would "put in their attendances" so as not to damage their own interests, but that they would pay no attention to their teacher's instructions. They regarded themselves as accepting the warning of the dead.

It is not hard to realise how Madame R—— suffered when she understood the position. She even appealed to the Educational Department, but its warnings and counsels were powerless against what was believed to be the oracle of the departed. In the end, in the interests of the benighted girls, Madame R—— had to go to another appointment. She had to give up her post because she could not die!

What had been mistaken for "ghosts," or how the idea had arisen, Madame R—— could never discover. She thought that perhaps the shadows of some trees hard by had laid the basis of the fancy, and lively and ignorant imagination had supplied the rest.

Madame Dralla always ended this story by saying, in her pretty, prim way:

"The direst and the least humane of wars is the war waged by the uncultivated and prejudiced mind."

Truly the ignorance of these Corsicans (at least within the last few years) is appalling. Madame Dralla told us that they actually believe that the first Napoleon and his son, the so-called King of Rome, and the Prince Imperial, who was slain in the Zulu War, are all still living. Oddly enough, they admit that Napoleon III. is dead, but the others, say they, are in safe-keeping in the mountains. On Napoleon's birthday, the 15th of August (the Roman Catholic Festival of the Assumption), she had seen the peasants gather round the emperor's statue which stands among the trees in the great Square of Ajaccio. They arrive in procession, kneel down, and sing a sort of national hymn, which, in its deification of the famous Corsican, is as blasphemous as it is superstitious. They believe that the Saviour was born in Rome, and that Napoleon arriving on earth on the Feast of Assumption was a sort of second appearing. Undoubtedly the papal power, which he treated with such hard measure, is not responsible for this delusion, which seems to arise from sheer national vanity.

Madame Dralla told us that the scenery around Ajaccio is very lovely. The road, which winds along the sea-shore, has on one hand a grove of brilliant tropical vegetation, running down to the sunny blue waters of the almost tideless Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand rises a hill, also clothed with orange and lemon trees and other lovely tropical products. On this hill stands the English church, built for the benefit of visitors wintering in the town. It is a pretty building of white and grey marble, daintily relieved by the dark foliage of the orange grove in which it stands. The ground in front of the church is carefully cultivated according to the English fashion, and is full of beautiful flowers, its trim neatness contrasting with grounds entrusted to Corsican gardeners, who, encouraged by their sunny climate, think that Nature is strong enough to take care of herself.

When we expressed interest in a church being built wholly of marble, Madame Dralla told us that Corsica possesses many marble quarries, a certain green marble, which is used for clock-stands and small ornaments, being specially valuable. It seems that the workmen in these quarries receive very small wages. Very often they are not paid at all in coin, but in chestnuts—a staple article of Corsican diet. In some places even material for clothing can be had in exchange for chestnuts.

Passing along this seaside road one presently sees the villas, chiefly occupied, Madame Dralla told us, by visitors from this country or from the mainland of Europe. Then a flatter region is reached, the road itself is on the very shore, and on the inland side one is struck by a succession of buildings, which look like little houses about seven yards long and five broad, with flat roofs and high narrow openings in lieu of windows. Few or none of these openings are glazed. Some of these little buildings are very elegant, but all around, close to their very walls, grow vegetables of every kind.

"What do you imagine this place can be?" Madame Dralla would ask us, in an impressive, dramatic whisper.

(To be continued.)

VARIETIES.

What a Halfpenny Did.

An office-boy in London owed one of the clerks three-halfpence.

The clerk owed the cashier a penny.

The cashier owed the boy a penny.

One day the boy having a halfpenny in his pocket was disposed to diminish his outstanding indebtedness, and paid the clerk to whom he was indebted three-halfpence one halfpenny on account.

The clerk, animated by so laudable an example, paid one halfpenny to the cashier, to whom he was indebted a penny.

The cashier who owed the boy a penny, paid him a halfpenny.

And now the boy, having his halfpenny again in hand, paid another third of his debt to the clerk.

The clerk, with the said really "current" coin, squared with the cashier.

The cashier instantly paid the boy in full.

And now the lad, with the halfpenny again in his hand, paid off the third and last instalment of his debt of three-halfpence.

Thus were the parties square all round, and all their accounts adjusted.

Be Liberal.

"A man there was, some people thought him mad,
The more he cast away, the more he had."—*Bunyan.*

No Home Without Her.—A Chinese proverb says: "A hundred men may make an encampment, but it takes a woman to make a home."

Engaged.

"Do you so love him that you could die for him?" asked a spinster of a young lady of whose engagement she had just heard.

"No; but I love him well enough to live with him!" was the bright reply.

Healthy Housework.—Housework is healthy, and many physicians recommend it to women who need exercise. Walking is not enough; it exercises only the legs, while dusting and sweeping bring an entirely different set of muscles into play. It will be found, too, that many girls will take more interest in their homes if encouraged to assist in the care of them.

Politeness at Home.—In family life do not let familiarity swallow up all courtesy. Many of us have a habit of saying to those with whom we live such things as we say about strangers behind their backs. There is no place, however, where real politeness is of more value than where we mostly think it would be superfluous. You may say more truth, or rather speak more plainly to your associates, but you ought not to do it less courteously than you would speak to strangers.

Self-denial.—There never did and never will exist anything permanently noble and excellent in that character which is a stranger to the exercise of resolute self-denial.

Be Contented.—If poor people knew how hard the rich have to work and how little they get for it, they would be more contented.

Music in Japan.

The inferior position which music occupies in Japan is best shown by the fact that its chief, and until quite recently only, exponents are women, and women in that country are still treated as an infinitely lower sex than the men. Most men would consider that they were making themselves ridiculous by playing or singing in society.

The music of Mikadoland, however, reflects in many ways the quaintness and the national grace of its promoters. It is, therefore, characteristic and individual; then again, nature in Japan is a silent teacher, singing-birds are rare, the most frequently heard being the unmusical crow; the air and the water seem motionless, and the result of this wan and weirdly peaceful environment is a peculiarly calm though monotonous style of music.

He Hated Noise.—The famous artist, John Leech, had a morbid horror of noise. Once he had been asked to a gentleman's house in the country for a few days' hunting. He arrived there in the evening. Next morning he was awakened early by a grating noise made by the gardener rolling the gravel under his window—it was a noise he never could endure. This had such an effect upon his nerves that he got up, packed his things, and was off to town before any of the family were aware of it.

How to be Unhappy.—The girl who is jealous and envious of her neighbour's success has foes in her heart who can bring more bitterness into her life than any outside enemy.

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PART II.

THE village of little houses standing in gardens, which I have described, narrated Madame Dralla, is nothing more nor less than a Corsican graveyard. The Corsicans have a great reverence, of a kind, for their dead. If they are rich they keep beautiful lamps burning scented oil near the departed ones. Rich and costly draperies are folded around. Each departed one has his own place, and each place has its own ornaments. Sometimes one finds poetical inscriptions half-hidden by the hanging.

Nobody but a native can really appreciate these verses, for they are written in a language which is taught in no school—the Corsican *patois*, a mixture of Italian, Greek, and French. They are composed by one or other of the strangely-gifted women who are summoned when there is death in the house, and who sit down by the corpse, calm and indifferent, but presently catch the inspiration of sorrow, and give it expression when it comes and as it comes. These women can seldom write or read, yet their improvising is exquisitely beautiful. Its utterance seems to relieve the mourners, who listen with rapt attention. These weird *improvisatoires* go to rich and to poor alike, and they are as eloquent in the meanest cottage as in the grandest mansion.

In Corsica the coffins are highly ornamented. The dead always get a new costume to be buried in. A widower will spend all his savings to buy a silk dress for his dead wife, though she would never have dreamed of such a thing in her life, and though he may have to starve himself and his children to make up the cost. One terrible thing about this is, that as the hot climate of Corsica necessitates that a funeral must take place within twenty-four hours of the death, the ornaments and dresses are often prepared as soon as a fatal termination of illness is believed to be imminent—a custom which explains the coolness with which Madame R—— was requested to prepare for her prophecied demise. Sometimes the dying one does not die, but returns to life, alas! to find that there is nothing left to live on. But the convalescent finds consolation in having received such a mark of affection from her relatives, and the funeral insignia is stored up as a memorial of their devotion.

A BANDIT.

Madame Dralla had one Corsican friend of good position—her son being a colonel in the French army—who keeps what she intends shall be her last dress, a beautiful white and gold embroidered robe, carefully folded away in a box of scented wood, her own explanation being that she was anxious to have this solemn vestment made according to her own taste, and would not trust her daughter-in-law with so serious a commission.

Certain men, called "the death-hunters," attend funerals, and are engaged in combat by the mourners. A regular struggle takes place, and if a bereaved son shows great courage and prowess, the other relatives say to him,

CONTADINI.

"Now we know that you really loved your father." If "the death-hunters" are injured, the family pay them compensation.

The coffin's crossing the threshold is the moment for the women to manifest their love and sorrow. They gather at a window in the upper storey of the house, tear out their hair and fling it on the coffin. After that the procession for the cemetery is formed. Rich people hire women-mourners, who tear their hair and scratch their own faces, and are paid in proportion to the amount of mutilation they can bear to inflict on themselves.

Despite this dramatic and organised display of grief, Corsicans allow children to play in the room where a corpse is lying. A French friend of Madame Dralla's had been horrified to see a horde of village children invade the death-chamber of her little daughter, and prepare to play marbles there. Of course she sent them away. Thereupon her Corsican servant came to her, in a dignified way, saying that since children had been forbidden the house and the door locked upon them, she herself would leave the house at once. So she did, and what is more, she carried off with her everything eatable! And this was not a theft, but the usual custom of the country. One can imagine the pain and terror of the grieving mother. But friends came to her, and each of them brought food, wine, coffee, etc., this being another national custom.

For one week after a Corsican lady becomes a widow she must wear a strip of thick black woollen material tied on her eyes. During the same period she must be fed and led about by the hands of her friends. All chairs in the room must be turned down; windows and doors are made thoroughly fast. The room is not cleaned for a week, neither may any fire be lighted in the widow's house.

"Of course," said Madame Dralla, "people from the Continent are not inclined to submit to these customs, and for this and for certain other reasons it is difficult for us to get on thoroughly well with country people in Corsica. Their ideas too, about right and wrong, are different from ours. Concerning the 'vendetta,' for instance."

We all cried out that surely they could not claim any "right" about that, but must simply choose to do what is wrong, as some people do everywhere.

Madame Dralla shook her head wisely.

"No," she said; "Madame R—— had an experience which convinces me that it is not so."

Madame R—— was asked by the department to go and settle on new lines a little school in a poor and remote mountain district in Corsica. She could travel by train to a certain point. From there she had to take a mule, the road being too steep and narrow for any conveyance. And she was recommended to take the guidance and protection of one Guglielmo, a prudent, courageous, honest inhabitant of the village of her destination.

She found him waiting at the railway station. He selected a mule for her and an ass for her little niece, who accompanied her. He also fixed the time for their start. It must be understood that a mule is the correct steed in such places. Horses are best for a flat country, but on hills mules are to be preferred, and an ass is, indeed, better than either.

They decided to start at 10 P.M., for though it was the month of September, the heat was still excessive, and it was more pleasant to ride by night than by day. The night proved a splendid one. The moon was full in the starry sky, the air was pure and invigorating and laden with perfumes of the wild flowers of the country. All seemed peace, rest, and serene light. They rode rather silently, for Corsicans do not talk much unless they are excited, when they not only speak without giving time for reply, but gesticulate so vehemently that one would think a quarrel had broken out and that they were coming to blows. So far from this being the case, excited talking seldom means a quarrel. When infuriated the Corsican is silent, bides his time, and strikes down his enemy coolly and effectually.

They left the town and its suburbs behind, and took a steep road up the mountain side to a place which is marked on the map as the "Col de St. Georges," the French giving the name "Col" to any narrow passage between two mountains. As they went higher and higher they could see the sea stretching to the right, the mountain side rose on the left, and the whole scene was exquisite. On the sea—nay, on every tiny wave of it—was reflected the lanterns, of divers hues, which the fishermen fasten to their boats to attract the fish. The little girl was delighted with the magical spectacle, and Madame R—— herself was glad to make a frequent halt to enjoy this beauty.

Riding on they presently found themselves surrounded by abrupt peaks, and soon after midnight they entered the Col de St. Georges. Madame R—— could scarcely describe her sensations. She said they seemed shut up, apart from the world. In the narrow pass the darkness was intense, and only a few stars remained in sight, while the shrubs on either hand looked like weird supplicating dwarfs, stretching out their arms and warning of unseen dangers. The girl shivered, as much with nervous emotion as with cold. Indeed, when Madame R—— offered her another wrap, she answered: "No, auntie; I am not cold to want a shawl. It is in my heart that I feel the cold."

They were glad to reach an open place with an inn and a few houses, commanding glorious views of the surrounding country. But from that place onward the road became very bad. It was a narrow pathway winding on the flank of the mountain, with an awful precipice at the other side. They were about 1800 metres above the level of the sea.

Madame R—— addressed her guide. "Why do you not have a better road to T——?" she asked, naming their place of destination.

He answered curtly. "Because we do not want it."

Presently, glancing up the mountain side, Madame R—— noticed among the shrubbery and brushwood certain strange lights, which sometimes seemed to go out in one place, only to appear in another, while some were stationary and others moving. She took opportunity, when the road broadened a little, to bring her mule beside Guglielmo's and inquired—

"What are those strange lights that I see?"

"Nothing," he answered.

"Why nothing?" she retorted. "I can see them. Why will you not answer me?"

"I told you 'nothing,'" he persisted.

"They cannot be people charcoal-burning," she suggested. "The mountain is too high for that."

"No; there is no charcoal-burning."

"Then what is the glare?" she reiterated.

This time Guglielmo replied with a question: "Do you believe in the law of honour?"

"I shouldn't be a Frenchwoman if I didn't," said Madame R——

"Do you believe that this law is above any other?" asked Guglielmo.

"Above any other human law perhaps," answered Madame R——; "but it is encompassed and superseded by the Divine law."

"The greatest of religious laws is love to God and to our neighbour," said Guglielmo, "and then co-revenge for the sake of justice and protection."

"Revenge?" interrupted Madame R——. "Vengeance belongs to God alone."

"God gives vengeance to those who are strong enough to claim it and wise enough to deserve it," observed Guglielmo.

"Then the vendetta?" said Madame R—— interrogatively.

"Vendetta," returned Guglielmo, "is a law promulgated by God, who has said, 'Tooth for tooth, eye for eye.' And those lights are the bandits who have given up family, fortune, and all the joys of life for the great law of revenge. Who has exiled them from their homes, their wives, and their children? Honour! Always honour. The banditti are the glory of our Island of Corsica, and the personification of our national feelings. If any day you are in danger, pray God to send to you a bandit, and you will be saved, for he will stake his life ten times to save yours. He may beg you not to forget his starving little ones; but he will not rob you of a farthing had he all your fortune in his hands."

Madame R—— knew that what Guglielmo said coincided with all she had heard of these terrible men of the mountains, whose one idea is to wreak vengeance on the objects of their family hatred. Yet she felt very uncomfortable. The path had become so narrow that they had to ride in single file. Suddenly the report of a gun was heard, the sound reverberating among the peaks. Guglielmo rode on unconcerned. "What is it, auntie?" whispered the terrified child, and Madame R—— herself instinctively felt for the pistol which she always carried with her on such lonely and romantic journeys. Her effort to do so caused her mule to slide, and many pebbles went rattling down into the chasm below.

"Leave your mule alone, madame!" said Guglielmo, sharply, "the beast knows its own business better than you do." He simply thought that madame had pulled at her rein. What would he have said had he known that she was thinking of a means to protect her life!

At last, they arrived at Z——, the poor child half asleep on her ass. "I suppose there is an hotel here?" asked Madame R——.

"An hotel! Goodness, no!" answered Guglielmo.

"Then where can I get a few hours' rest before I begin to inspect the school?" she inquired.

"You can stay with us, if it pleases you," said the peasant. "We have a French bed, where you may lie down with the little girl. My wife, a good wife, believe me, will see to make you comfortable. Do you accept my offer?"

"With pleasure," said Madame R——, and so the guide knocked at his door. It was now about four o'clock in the morning.

The cottage was a square building, with very few small windows; it had only one storey and a low narrow entrance door. The mules and ass were turned into a field hard by.

The door was not opened at once. A peephole was opened, through which a pair of bright eyes made inquisition of the arrivals.

"Open the door, Beppo, and quick," said Guglielmo. The door turned on its hinges and Madame R—— and the child followed the guide into a room, in the middle of which a fire was burning on some large stones, surrounded by a stone kerb or fender about a foot high. The fire had no chimney for its smoke, save a large hole in the flat roof. If one was seated near the fire one got the benefit of this hole and could breathe, but the rest of the room was smothering in smoke. However, Madame R—— glancing round could discern the forms of ten or twelve men, short, as nearly all Corsicans are, dirty beyond expression, and so shy that their downcast eyes did not meet hers. It was impossible to discriminate their features, but she noticed that each leaned on a gun, so that in the apartment, it was only the newly-arrived party and Guglielmo's wife who were unarmed.

"Take a place near the fire, madame, please," said the pure sweet voice of the mistress, "and be welcomed among us."

"And be welcomed!" echoed the armed men. And at the moment, the truth dawned on Madame R——; these men were themselves banditti!

One of them courageously coming forward lifted a huge log as if it were a straw, put it near the fire and bade Madame R—— "Sit there, you and the little girl will be better than seated on a chair!" The poor child was already asleep in her aunt's arms.

Madame R—— was then hospitably asked what refreshment she would take, and expressing a wish for coffee, if they had any, was answered—

"We have always some good coffee; we could not live without it. These bandits, as soon as they leave their homes, never again touch wine or spirits; then they must have some coffee or die."

Astonished at this "Temperance" annunciation, Madame R—— inquired, "Why do they relinquish wine?"

"Because these men have all a *vendetta*. If they were drinking some intoxicating beverage, they could not rely on being able to string up their nerves to act at any notice, or on having all their strength at their command. As they are always in danger, they must be always ready!"

"That is indeed true," murmured Madame R—— meditative on many things.

By-and-by she and the little girl were led into a side room, very bare but very clean. Sheets, pillow-cases and towels were taken from a great chest scented by aromatic plants. This was the only bedroom; indeed the only other room beside the big kitchen. Madame R—— and her niece had some quiet and refreshing repose.

They found that Guglielmo and his wife retired to rest in a kind of balcony set in the kitchen wall, forming a sort of gallery for that apartment. As for the bandits, they simply dragged a mattrass where they chose, far from the fire or near it, each according to his fancy. In the morning, these mattrasses with their accompanying pillow and blanket were rolled up and put out of the way.

"One may be sure that the school in such a place was rather primitive," said our teacher. Madame R—— used to give the following instance of its simplicity. Addressing the resident teacher, Madame R—— remarked, "I suppose you have always followed the regulations which have been drawn up by the Education Department."

"Of course," said the worthy woman, "and I shall always do so."

"Then I presume you have given instruction on the use of the thermometer, as I see that such an object-lesson should be given at this time of year?"

"Oh, madame! Please to excuse! The thermometer! My pupils hardly know the meter."

The good lady had taken the thermometer for one of the measures of the *systeme métrique!*

"Madame R—— always said," added Madame Dralla, "that mountain experience taught her, that even bandits, with a moral code which is to our consciences itself a great and terrible crime, are yet human beings like ourselves. And after all," she went on, "the true root of the evil is in the spirit of reprisal, and how few of us could say that it does not lurk in our innermost hearts! Nationally, it is still even justified and praised. The poor ignorant Corsican simply substitutes 'family' for 'nation' or 'race,' and justifies and applauds the same thing, killing and injuring those who belong to the hostile side, though he may have no more personal dislike for them or knowledge of them, than soldiers have of the soldiers of a hostile camp! It is very terrible, girls, and nothing can eradicate this evil principle of reprisal from the human heart, save the Divine Spirit inspiring us to practice the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount."

One of us asked, "Did you ever see anything of a vendetta yourself, madame? Did you ever come across any one concerned in one?"

"Yes!" said Madame Dralla, "I did." It was a solemn and awful subject, and yet a faint smile flitted across our teacher's thoughtful face. We all settle ourselves to listen with eager attention.

(*To be concluded.*)

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QUESTIONS FOR THE MONTH.

341. By what name, of a descriptive character, was St. Luke known? How does his Gospel indicate, in some measure, his profession?

342. Where is this Evangelist first mentioned? What do we know of his previous and subsequent career?

343. Who were the parents of St. John the Baptist? Give a reference to the "course of (Abia) Abijah," and explain the meaning of the term.

344. Who was the angel sent to Zacharias, and where is his earlier appearance mentioned?

345. Name the four great Christian hymns found in this Gospel.

346. Relate the only incident mentioned in this Gospel which refers to the childhood of Christ.

347. How would you summarise the contents of this Gospel as regards the life of our Lord?

348. Name the parables that are recorded only by St. Luke.

349. What are the miracles recorded by St. Luke only?

350. What two remarkable incidents connected with the crucifixion are related by St. Luke only?

find the way along its windings! The identity of Honpsezit, of Kaûrhannû, and of "Lady Bind-Bracelets" (*Heryt-thes-beqsu*) is doubtful; but Râ, Tmû, and Geb we know already. Nehbûkaû was a serpent-headed god, and "the Two Weepers" are Isis and Nephthys, who close the mouth of Osiris, and weep by his bier. Here it must be noted that every dead man was in a sense apotheosed, he "became Osiris." He was addressed as "O Osiris Âmenhotep," "O Osiris Pinehasi," or whatever else his name may have been, and was worshipped as being Osiris. A woman or a small boy also became Osiris, not Isis or Horûsaisit; for distinctions of sex do not appear to have been kept up in the next world, among the souls of mankind at least.

(*To be continued.*)

CORSICAN MAIDENS, MANNERS, AND MYSTERIES.

A FRENCH TEACHER'S MEMORIES.

PART III.

"WELL," said Madame Dralla, "if I am to tell you what I saw of a vendetta, I must begin with a school examination day! Does that not sound like a mingling of 'incompatibles?'

"It was an entrance examination, and scholarships were to be competed for. Very many girls came in for the competitive examination. All the written papers had been examined. On their evidence we were to select a certain number of the girls—more than the number of scholarships—and we were to put these to the further test of spending a week in the school, so that we could not only conduct the oral examination on our own lines, but could get acquainted with the girls themselves, and form some opinion on their character, capacity, and general promise.

"Among the girls who had come up for examination was one who seemed to be the object of keen and kindly interest on the part of the mayor of the town and other well-known and influential people. We received many letters concerning her, the tune of them all being, 'Take her. She may not be already well read, but she is very intelligent, and so good and willing! For pity's sake, do not turn her back. Though she may know very little now, and most probably is not up to the mark you demand from prospective pupils, yet receive her. She will work to the best of her ability, and may do much if she get an opportunity.'

"True enough, her written papers showed that she knew nothing! The utmost we could do for her was to invite her among those who were to come up to the school. There was not the faintest hope that she would be among those finally selected, but we yielded to her friend's pleas so far as to give her the pleasure of spending a few days among us.

"Unlike most of Corsican race, she was tall, very slender, and naturally graceful. She had teeth like little pearls, dark hair and eyes which gazed forth intently as if she would fain absorb all at once the knowledge which would permit her to become one of us. She was gentle, sweet, and lovable. But we noticed that she shrank from the other girls, who did not seem attracted to her; and whenever she was not with us, she became awfully sad. We would watch her walking to and fro in our large garden, and sometimes she seemed to forget where she was, and joined her hands as if in fervent and well-nigh despairing prayer.

"Of course, our interest was aroused. We tried to gain her confidence, but she seemed so sensitive and shrinking that we feared to press her for the secret of her unhappiness. Once, indeed, a discussion seemed to arise between her and one of the other girls, and we heard her say, in her sweet pathetic voice—

"'True, I am the last of them; they sleep in the *magnis*. God alone knows how soon I may follow them.'

"Unfortunately at that time none of the teaching staff had lived long enough in Corsica to understand the full significance of those words, nor of the awful issues depending on our decision. Saturday came—the day when the names of the scholarship winners would be publicly announced.

"Before doing this, the whole staff of the school being convened, we sent for the girls who had failed, that we might break the blow to them in comparative privity. As Maria entered the room, she read the expression of our faces, and clasping her hands, cried passionately—

"'Oh, no, no—you will not send me away!'

"'Dear Maria,' said the head mistress, 'we find it is not our duty to accept you. We are bound by our regulations to accept only the most promising candidates, and the Government who pays and appoints us has a right to control our decisions and to make us accountable for them. If we receive you, we shall not be just, and twenty other candidates whom we have received will protest—and it will be right to do so—in the public papers. But is there not anything else we can do for you? We shall be rejoiced to help you if we can.'

"'What can you do for me?' wailed the unhappy girl. 'Can you prevent me from being killed—murdered? Can you plough the land around my father's cottage, so that I may reap some corn or gather some fruit? Can you go and speak to the Archbishop, and bid him bring the woe of my family to an end? I have now only one cousin left. He has taken my beloved father's place. Any moment may put an end to his life—and to mine! Could the Holy Virgin, to whom I owed my life, to whom I gave up my hair * two years ago, have pity on me!'

"'Maria, my dear girl,' said the head mistress, 'we do not understand you.'

"'I will tell you all, and you may judge,' she cried, throwing herself into a chair. As we gathered round her, she related her strange story.

"'My father was a steady, honest farmer, fearing God and the Holy Virgin, after whom he named me Maria. He was clever. He never drank. Our land was the most productive in the district of B——. My mother was full of goodness and spirit; she loved us dearly; we were all so happy!

"'Opposite our house was a cottage whose inmates were not quiet folk as we were. The husband did not care to work. The wife was seen more often chattering with the women of the village than mending the clothes of her children. They ran wild, in tatters, and my parents did not like to see my brothers associate with them. For me, as only daughter and youngest child, I was always at my dear mother's side, learning something from her as she worked.

"'One day, just as the evening was freshening, my brothers joined in a game of "pins" with our young neighbours. Do you know how it is played? With a piece of chalk the children trace a circle on the ground. In that circle they put about fifty pins, heaped at random. Then they send an elastic ball on the heap and they catch the ball as it rebounds. Of course the pins, when struck, jump over the chalk line, and are claimed by the child who hurled the ball and caught it back. The game is very easy at the beginning, but the last pins are difficult to dislodge from their place. For a time,' narrated poor Maria, 'the game went on nicely, the boys all seemed friendly and to be enjoying it. Suddenly we heard dispute arise. My mother ran out, the other mother did the same, but my mother seeing that her neighbour was excited, returned to the door of our abode and called my brothers. But our neighbour caught one of my brothers by the arm, slapped his face and called him "liar." That roused my poor mother, who advanced and asked the woman what she meant, endeavouring to release my brother from her grasp. At that moment, the neighbour's husband came out, and without a word of inquiry, began to abuse my mother, who all unused to anger and dispute, stood pale, trembling and voiceless.

"'Then behold, my father came up returning from the field with his scythe and spade. When he heard the abusive language which was being used to my mother, he got angry, and the quarrel passed on to the two men—who did not even know how it arose.

"'Then a vendetta was opened by our neighbours. It was to begin, as is the rule, twenty-four hours after warning given. We came into our house, bewildered. We kissed our father over and over again. He put in order certain of his papers, examined his gun, which was old and out of order, sent us children to bed, and when all was quietness and darkness he blessed us, kissed our mother, and went into the *magnis*. My father was a man of peace, not used to fight, and he was killed in the first encounter with his enemy.

"'We were left to the care of my mother. It became my eldest brother's turn to take up the vendetta. He fought and killed and was killed. My uncle was called upon to pursue the vendetta, and he was slain, and now I am alone, for sorrow killed my mother, and neglect and misery my younger brother. What will become of me?'

"We looked at one another. Our first idea was to send Maria to some orphanage in France. We suggested the idea to her, but she refused it sadly, saying—

"'My cousin has now taken up the vendetta. It would not be right for me to go so far away and desert him. Oh, could I only speak to the Archbishop of Corsica!'

"'We might manage that for you, Maria,' we said. 'But suppose we do, what can he do for you?'

"'It is in his power,' said Maria, 'to call into his presence the heads of each family involved in a vendetta, and by pleading and reasoning with them, he can sometimes bring them to make peace. Because, you see, our Archbishop is a true Corsican; he keeps our laws of honour, and would not wound our patriotic feeling; hence he knows how to

* Girls give up their hair to the Madonna when they have any special petition to offer. It is made into ornaments for the church.

deal to bring concord and yet not shame among us.

"'You see it is managed like this,' she explained; 'when it is settled that a vendetta shall come to an end, and peace is sworn privately before the Archbishop, then he convenes the two families concerned to meet together in a church. The family which began the vendetta sit on the left side of the church, the other on the right. They do not take any notice of each other. A mass is said for the souls of those who have been killed. When the time comes for communion, the two leaders of the vendetta advance to the Holy Table. The priest holds in his hand the sacred wafer, and asks these men if they are ready to swear that they are willing to give up their rancour, to forgive one another, and to help one another as Christians ought to do. They swear it. While they are uttering this promise, the celebrant breaks the sacred wafer into two parts, as equal as he can get them, and taking one half in each hand, he gives them to the two men. After that he administers the communion to all the other members of the two families who desire to join in the ceremony.'

"'And is peace really and truly concluded?' we asked.

"'O yes,' said Maria, astounded. 'Who would dare to break one's oath. Oh, such a thing has never been heard of!'

"After that, the school staff had a consultation and came to a decision.

"First, that we would keep the girl with us, each mistress paying something towards her board, as she could not be received as a student.

"Second, that the staff of the school would ask the Archbishop to receive a visit from the head mistress that she might beg 'His Grandeur' to interfere in favour of the orphan girl.

"This plan was successfully carried out. It was found that both families were equally anxious to be at peace, though neither would accept it without the intervention which spared their 'honour.' The silly feud had lasted for ten years, and had cost the lives of six men, beside the resulting deaths of broken-hearted women and neglected children!

"Peace was sworn in a little village church, Maria and her cousin sitting together, the last survivors of their race.

"She needed our protection no more. Three months afterwards she married this cousin, whom she had so loyally refused to desert. They rebuilt the ruined cottage and restored the wasted fields. She has little ones of her own now, whom she dearly loves, but she said to me the last time I saw her—

"'I never allow them to play at "pins." Never! No!'"

"Is it easy to believe that people could be so silly!" I cried, "to quarrel over nothing—and kill each other, and wish to leave off, and yet go on, till they stop with a ceremony."

Madame Dralla smiled drily. "I think, my dear," she said, "that my true story of a Corsican vendetta is uncommonly like the history of many great wars done into a parable! Individuals composing enlightened nations have almost come to their senses in these days. But the nations, as a whole, seem to remain nearly as stupid as my Corsicans."

A CHILD OF GENIUS.

By LILY WATSON, Author of "The Hill of Angels," "In the Days of Mozart," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

DANTE'S Purgatory is a mountain rising from out the shimmering main. The account of his approach to it with Virgil is one of the most beautiful parts of the Divine Comedy. He has issued from the awful depths of the Inferno, spent with weariness and terror, to "behold anew the stars." Venus shines in the East, the Southern Cross irradiates the heavens, and the dawn is at hand. The hoar frost, melting in the rising sun, serves to wash the tear-stains from Dante's cheeks; the sea trembles in the sunlight, and a bark, with an angel in the prow, and Dante's friend Casella, a singer and a musician on board, approaches the foot of the Mount of Purification.

The lower portion of the mountain is ante-Purgatory, a waiting-place; but Purgatory proper is guarded by a gate and an angel. Three steps lead to this gate; the first is of white marble, "so polished and so smooth that in it man beholds him as he is." The second is of rough and calcined stone, rent throughout, to represent the contrite heart: the third and crowning mass methought was porphyry, and flamed like the red blood fresh spouting from the vein. "This symbolises love."

We cannot dwell on the allegorical meaning of all this, wherein its true value consists, but perhaps some of the audience at the High School thought of it as they looked on the face of the Angel guarding the portal. Grave, serene, and sweet was the expression of her features, with a gaze that never wavered or flinched, as she seemed to look through, rather than at, the approaching visitants. Her face—the face of Mary Percival—was undoubtedly the central point of the tableau. Her white draperies fell with studied grace, and her pure, ineffable serenity spoke of unfathomed mysteries.

"Dear child," murmured Mr. Percival, the ready tears rising to his eyes, "such a moment as this repays a father's heart."

What for, no one seemed exactly to understand, but the important thing to Mr. Percival was that the surrounding company should know this was his child, and give him in some mysterious way the credit of Mary's transfigured appearance. Mrs. Percival also was touched; for she read in the look of her child a whole history of noble, patient, uncomplaining love and trust. Sometimes to all of us there comes a moment when we appear our ideal selves, as it were, and show, in one look, a hint of the best that we may become.

The curtain was raised again and again by acclamation. Katharine was delighted with Mary's success; her mind was also dwelling on the mysterious apparition in the gallery. Was it really Douglas? If so, how had he sped hither from Switzerland so suddenly? and did he know—if so, what would he have said—that the Angel whose presentment charmed every one, was none other than his own cousin?

Katharine could not go off in quest of him, for she was to take part in the fifth, and final tableau. This represented the Epiphany, or appearance, of Beatrice to Dante.

On the summit of the Mount of Purgatory there is a garden, which is the terrestrial paradise. It is watered by two rivers, Eunoe and Lethe. On the further bank of Lethe stands Beatrice. Dante passes through the river, helped by a "gentle lady," Matilda by name, and falls at the feet of her for whom his eyes had wearied ten long years.

The moment of his emerging from the stream was the moment chosen for the tableau. A sheet of glass represented the stream, its banks bordered by rushes. Flowers sprang up beneath the feet of Beatrice. The three virtues, Faith, Hope, Charity, were beside her, with attendant angels. To Katharine had been allotted the part of Hope. Clad all in green, "with eyes upraised and backward floating hair," her bright personality gave a meet picture of what she represented; Mary Percival's inspired steadfast gaze and white garb