

CHILDREN OF ALL NATIONS: THEIR HOMES THEIR SCHOOLROOMS,
THEIR PLAYGROUNDS.

I.—FRANCE.



IN this series of papers we propose to give some accounts of the daily life—in their homes, their schoolrooms, and their playgrounds — of girls and boys of various nations; and for our first subject it seems fitting to speak of the children of the great country which is nearest to our own.

All nationalities have their peculiar attributes, not only in

language, but also in character, costume, education, amusements, and even religion. These differences are seen even in infancy, and child-life in France and elsewhere has its distinctions, both in the prince and the peasant.

The baby and nurse of a grand Parisian lady form a sight worth seeing. The nurse usually comes from Burgundy, and is a black-eyed, high-coloured, round-faced woman, very picturesquely dressed. She wears neither bonnet nor hat, but a full-bordered cap surrounded by a ruching or puffing of handsome ribbon, the ends of which are so long, that they sometimes reach the bottom of her skirt; so that one is inclined to think the rank of the mistress is shown by the length of the ribbon-tails at the back of the head, like that of the Chinese mandarin. Beneath these flowing ribbons is a long round cloak, generally of the same colour, which serves to shelter the infant. Cherry-colour cloak and ribbons are particularly effective, and contrast prettily with the baby's white robes. But some parents still send their children to the provinces to be nursed by the hardy and healthy peasant-women. This used to be a general custom, but it is not now so much observed as formerly. However, infants are frequently consigned to the care of the honest country-folk, and are brought up with their own children for several years. Thus, they have foster-parents, and foster-brothers and sisters, to whom they become much attached, and who are devoted to them. It is funny to see the little master or miss toddling about with the peasant

children, and growing up healthy and happy with them amid the orchards and fields of beautiful France. The peasant child wears a blue-checked blouse or pinafore with long sleeves, and a close white cap, and looks like its mother in miniature. It is a sad day for all when the foster-child returns home. This "little he or she" has learnt to look upon the friends of the province as the nearest and dearest, and does not understand being suddenly transported to grand salons, where bare feet are not allowed; or to fine gentlemen and ladies who speak a different language from the patois of the *chaumière*, or cottage. Patois is another word for the brogue or dialect of the province, and must be unlearned as fast as possible. And thus education begins.

This does not greatly differ from that of England, and is sometimes pursued at home, sometimes abroad. Boys go early to the *lycées*, or colleges, which are numerous, and the pupils are distinguished by a uniform. This resembles the dress of an English telegraph-boy, is generally of dark blue with brass buttons, and has a red stripe down the side of the trousers. The cap is like a midshipman's. But each *lycée* has something in the costume to distinguish it from its fellows. The pupils have every incentive to make them industrious, and it is, indeed, difficult for them to be idle, because their tutors and governors are constantly with them at work, at play, and even asleep! Rewards are offered for every sort of proficiency, and emulation is stirred up even by the hope of a decoration. To be *décoré* is an honour sought by young and old, and boys have sometimes ribbons on their breasts, like our old soldiers. Perhaps this helps to make them little men before their time, for they are always particularly polite, and behave as well as their elders. It is their custom, and that of all French people, to ask and reply to questions with the addition of Monsieur, Madame, or Mademoiselle, which renders their conversation far less abrupt than ours. In familiar intercourse they use thee and thou, which is called *tutoyer*, but it is reckoned more respectful for children to say *vous* to their parents.

Although the French are very lively and talkative, silence is imperatively enforced during school hours, and any pupil who fails in it loses both recreation and reward. As morning school usually opens at eight o'clock and continues till nearly twelve,



AFTERNOON RECREATION IN THE TUILERIES GARDENS, PARIS. (See p. 22.)

these hours of silence, save for the purposes of instruction, are sometimes broken by the refractory, but never with impunity. The morning begins with prayer, and ends with the benediction. Perhaps we should say *began*, as many changes are taking place in public education in France.

Girls are strictly educated on these principles. If they go to an *externat*, or day-school, they enter and leave silently, although there may be forty, fifty, or even sixty pupils. Supposing so large a number, the *externat* would be divided into two principal classes, which would be again subdivided into four divisions each. The girls from five to twelve years of age would fill those from the eighth to the fifth, and those from thirteen to eighteen would be placed in the divisions from four to one. The idle pupil would remain in her division until she rose by industry; and so it is everywhere—perseverance wins the day. When the girls begin lessons they put on a black *sarrau*, or sort of smock-frock, to preserve their garments from the ink. This reaches from the chin to the bottom of the skirt, and effectually keeps the dress, about which they are very particular, from being soiled. They look like a flock of crows.

Writing, dictation, arithmetic, verbs, history, geography, and the like, occupy the junior pupils, but there are some very hard names in the list of studies pursued by the elders, such as "lexicology, logical and grammatical analysis, hononyms, synonyms, epistolary style, French narratives," &c. &c. English and German are the chief foreign languages learnt, and in private education an English governess is generally engaged, so that French children learn to speak English from nurse or governess, as the English learn French from *bonne* or *gouvernante*.

The children are very fond of their instructors, and as a French lady writes, "fear to displease them, and often correct themselves of a *caprice* at home, lest 'la petite mère' should complain to their teacher."

After morning lessons comes the *déjeuner*, some time between eleven and twelve. Now this is not actually breakfast, as the name would imply, but a sort of luncheon. But there are no great joints of meat or heavy puddings such as the English like; only light food, very pleasant to the taste, which French cooks well know how to prepare. They have a hundred ways of dressing vegetables and

salads, and as to pastry and confitures these are absolutely delicious. They eat cream cheese with pounded sugar, and very good it is, and fruit is universal.

Children eat a great deal of bread and fruit, which they munch at all hours of the day, and are very fond of. The poor children stand about the cafés and restaurants with a piece of bread in their hands, which they think tastes all the better for the fumes that proceed from these places, so that they may almost be said to eat through their noses.

It is customary in Paris for the principals of the various colleges and schools to take their pupils for recreation to the different large squares and gardens. Thus, at certain hours, the grand gardens of the palaces of the Luxembourg and Tuileries, the large open spaces of the Palais Royal (of which we have given illustrations on pages 21 and 23), the magnificent promenades of the Champs Elysées, the delightful *allées* of the Parc Monceau and the Bois de Boulogne, are crowded with young people. Here they enjoy their *ébats*, or various sports. Skipping is much in favour amongst the girls, and it is remarkable in this our age of black stockings, that they mostly wear white, which are certainly much more natural.

Hoops, balls, and battledore and shuttlecock are much in vogue; and games called *la tour*, *les rondes*, *prends garde*—for which there seems no exact English equivalent—are generally played. Boys play at *barre*, *l'ours*, hide-and-seek, and ball. At the last-named game they strike the ball with a racket instead of with the hand. They are very fond of blindman's buff, which they call *colin maillard*, and there is a pretty game named *les grâces*, which is in great favour, though, perhaps, not so much as it used to be. This is played by throwing hoops by means of two long sticks, from one to another, and catching them on two other sticks. It is as graceful as its name implies.

Of course French children have many holidays. Thursday is the general one in all the schools. But they love New Year's day the best, because that is a universal fête. Everybody visits everybody to interchange good wishes, and "kisses on both cheeks," as is the French customary salutation. Presents seem to fall from the skies. They are called *étrennes*, and poor indeed must be the child who has not one. The word *étrenne*



A FRENCH BOY.

figures in every shop window, and there never were shops like those of Paris. On this day the boulevards, or streets edged with trees, are full of people, old and young, and every one seems in good humour. The Jardins d'Acclimatation are full, for here the children never tire of the animals, and love to watch the big ostrich pull the little carriage-full of small juveniles. Truly it is a gala-day. So, too, is Pâques, or Easter, with its

their flounces. They, like the boys, have very elegant manners, and are full of life and ready wit. Vanity is, perhaps, one of their characteristics, perhaps it is also one of ours.

But they are solemn sometimes, in spite of their elastic, volatile nature. When they receive "their first communion," as well as when they are confirmed, the girls are dressed entirely in white, from the long white veil that falls from their head to



IN THE GARDENS OF THE PALAIS ROYAL, PARIS. (See p. 22.)

shops full of Easter eggs, made of chocolate, sugar, and what not, which contain all sorts of curiosities, and are sometimes as big as one's head. Dolls in full dress, and elegant gifts of every sort come out of them. But they are scarcely as curious as the *poissons d'Avril*. Instead of making "fools" they make presents in France on the first of April, and call them "April fish." Fish of every kind and size are manufactured, chiefly of papier mâché, and filled with all sorts of funny articles. A pink salmon, a silver trout, a gigantic crocodile even will attract the children, and cause them a great deal of amusement.

The young ladies are very particular about their dress, and would rather spoil their games than

their white boots; while the boys have a piece of white ribbon bound round the arm. They are constantly met in the streets in this dress. So are very many children clad in blue, belonging to charitable institutions (blue is a favourite colour in France). Many of these poor children, like their richer brethren, are sent into the country to be nursed by the peasants, and as the French are very cheerful and good-natured, we will hope that they are as kind to these pauper children as they are to others; and we trust, too, that all young people will bear in mind, whether they live in town or country, that they can imitate what is good and avoid what is evil in the peculiar customs and characteristics of foreign peoples.

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