



MAURICE BOUTET DE MONVEL. FROM A RECENT PHOTOGRAPH.

MAURICE BOUTET DE MONVEL.

BY MARIE VAN VORST.

GREAT poets have written for children; there are several writers whose immortal fame rests on fairy-tales and stories told to little people. But until the Frenchman, Maurice Boutet de Monvel, took his pencil and brush to draw and paint children,—children of all classes and ages, at sport and work and play,—until the Parisian parents clamored for him to make portraits of their little ones, we have never had a “painter in ordinary to children.”

The children claim M. de Monvel; and since the French edition of *ST. NICHOLAS*, years ago, was among the very first of the periodicals to give him work, it is understood

that we have the right to take a close and personal interest in his career.

The French boy at his games and pleasures, on the way to the *Lycée*, with his black leather portfolio, dashing through the Bois de Boulogne on horseback, playing in the Tuileries or Luxembourg Gardens at the various French games with his companions—the French boy, poor or rich, scholar or apprentice, is in dress and manner a very different being from our own little fellows in America.

He wears his trousers short, very full, and drawn in at the knee by an elastic band. His suit is a sailor-suit. His legs, in the coldest



COUNTRY CHILDREN GOING TO SCHOOL.

winter weather, are often bare. On his head is a cap known as the *béret*; over his shoulders is thrown a *capuchon*, or hooded cape.

His suit is covered by a black apron, gathered in around his waist by a leather belt. Such is the school-boy darting across the park and

boulevard, an especially picturesque figure in a city where all is picturesque.

As to the little girls, they are perfectly bewitching! With their nurses they flit up and down the Avenue du Bois, their pretty dresses, flying ribbons, and big hats making bright spots of color as they troop up the Champs-Élysées, or stop before a "Punch and Judy Show," or to buy a toy from the booths of the venders. These are the rich little maidens. Then there are the Jeannes and Maries and Catharines of the people, in soberer clothes, coarse blue stockings, stout laced boots, their dresses covered by the inevitable black apron. Hatless they go, winter and summer, to school, the neat pigtailed bobbing behind as the child carries home a long loaf of bread, or joins her little friends on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens, where the groups sew, and chatter as sharply as the sparrows twittering around.

The French children are at once cheerful and sedate, polite and useful—a good combination, it seems to me! Indeed, it is hard to say which are most attractive—the flowers of Paris or the

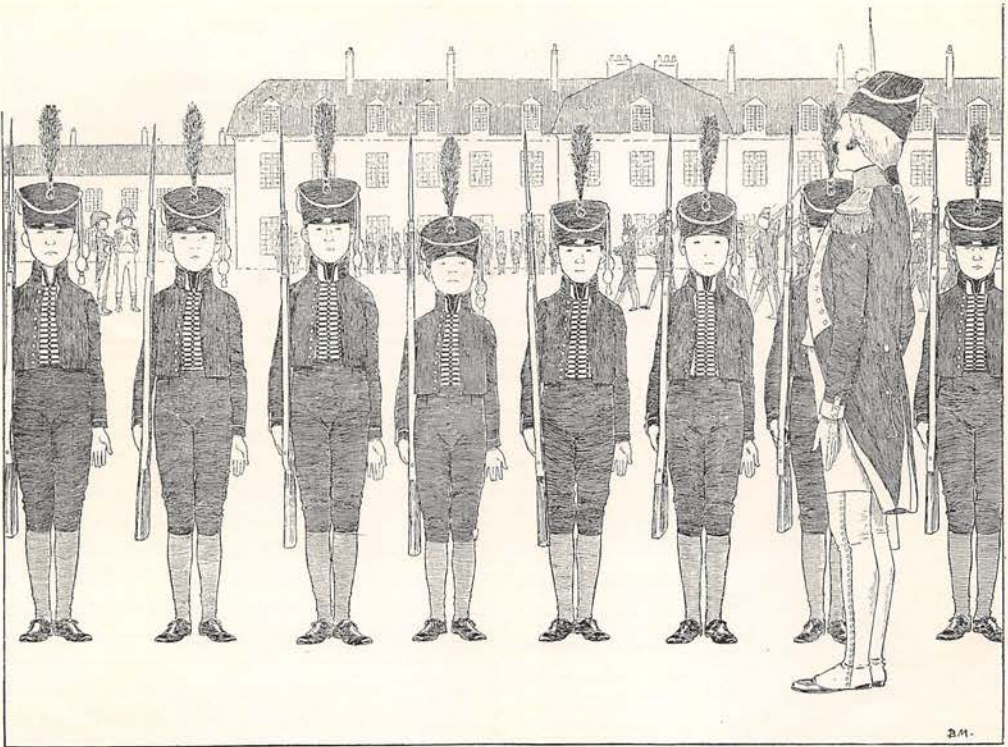
little people; for both make the city streets gay, winter and summer. But in this charming place M. Boutet de Monvel has found the children to be his inspiration, and the most delightful things of all.

Boutet de Monvel was born in Orléans in 1850. His family went to Paris to live when he was three years old, and there he grew up, surrounded by a houseful of younger brothers and sisters. As soon as he could hold a pencil Maurice began to draw, and later covered school-books and slates and every available scrap of paper with his sketches.

As a young man he studied painting in the big studios of Paris under the most celebrated masters. Like most of the people whose names are important in science, art, and letters, Boutet de Monvel knew what it was to be poor, to struggle, and to be often discouraged. But determination to succeed, love for his work, faith in his inspiration, were stronger than circumstance. With his portfolio full of illustrations, he started out to earn his daily bread. At first refusals met him everywhere. "It would not have



GUIGNOL'S BOOTH—THE FRENCH "PUNCH AND JUDY."

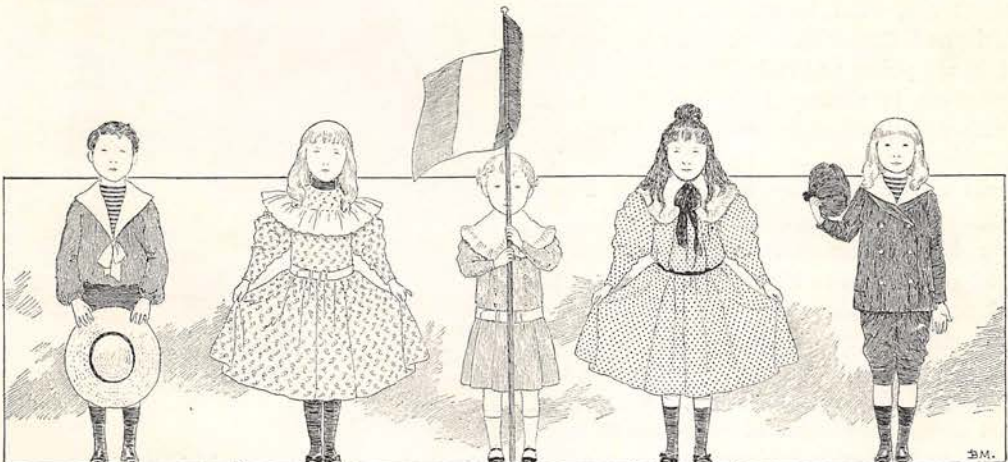


AT THE MILITARY SCHOOL, PRYTANÉE DE LA FLÈCHE, UNDER THE FIRST EMPIRE.

taken *much* more to have completely discouraged me!" he has said.

But success was just before the disheartened artist. One day, when he entered a certain publishing-house to ask for some illustrating work, M. Delagrave gave him a child's history

of France to illustrate, and we can fancy with what delight the publishers greeted the quaint drawings which the unknown artist brought to them. "This was my *début*," says M. de Monvel, "and after that I had all that I could do to fill the orders that came in to me."



A DECORATIVE HEADING FROM A CHILD'S BOOK.



THE BRIDE'S SONG. FROM "CHANSONS DE FRANCE."
BY PERMISSION OF MESSRS. E. FLON, NOURRIT & CIE.



Between 1883 and 1897 he had illustrated "Nos Enfants," "Chansons et Rondes," "La Civilité Honnête," "Fables de La Fontaine," and his "Jeanned'Arc."

French and English people, big and small, laughed with pleasure and delight as they

turned the gay pages of this novel literature for children. them; they had begged for her midday meal of bread, and she had crumbled it for them. The birds were little beggars. Fanchon knew it. But then they were also singers, and Fanchon had too kind a heart to refuse bread to those who paid for it with a song!" Farther on, Roger curries and feeds his old wooden horse, "who shall carry him far away across the land

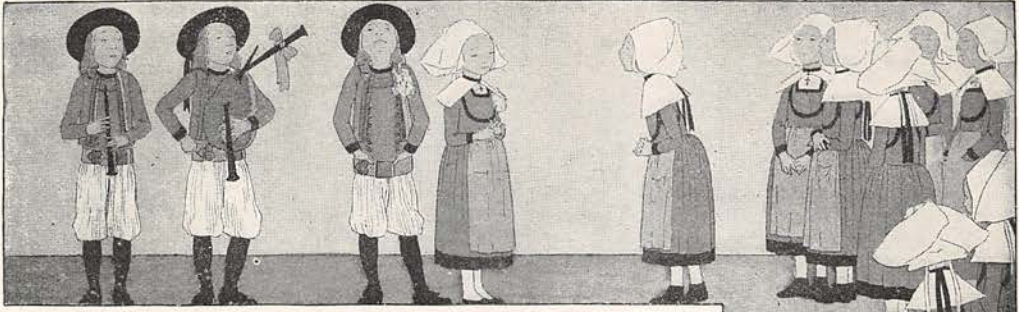
turned the gay pages of this novel literature for children.

In these books, surrounded by the bright French life, Paul, Henri, and Roger, Jeanne, Marie, and Catharine work and play, eat and drink, are polite and rude, sad and merry, live their lives in nursery, farm, and field, as the artist's exquisite imagination shows them to us.

"Nos Enfants" is a beautiful book. The words are written by a celebrated French writer of fiction, Anatole France. Here the little Michael draws for us his pictures "of wonderful horses and beautiful animals, which look more like ostriches on four legs than anything else." And Fanchon,—dear little Fanchon!—in blue apron, white cap, and sabots, passes the day with her grandmother, and goes home across the evening meadows, followed by a flock of birds, who sing to her their sweetest songs. "Fanchon recognized



A LITTLE FRENCH GIRL IN HER CAPUCHON.



M. DE MONVEL AT WORK.



of dreams." And in "La Civilité Honnête," what is more amusing than the excitable Paul, who never looks where he is going, and who warmly embraces the expressman in the front hall, mistaking the man for his father! "Monsieur is very kind!" stammers the expressman, dropping all his packages.

In his "Chansons de France" there are the drollest, most original illustrations imaginable—"En Revenant d'Auvergne," for example, the mischievous Savoyard, with his



DRAWN FOR ST. NICHOLAS BY MAURICE BOUTET DE MONVEL.
CHILDREN AT PLAY.

funny fiddle and his irresistible performing mar-mot, certainly the most enchanting animal that ever danced to music! Then we have the innocent, naïve "Cadet Rouselle," with his tight yellow breeches and his funny belongings. Many of the pictures of children are true portraits of Boutet de Monvel's little sons, or of his own brothers and sisters as he remembers them.

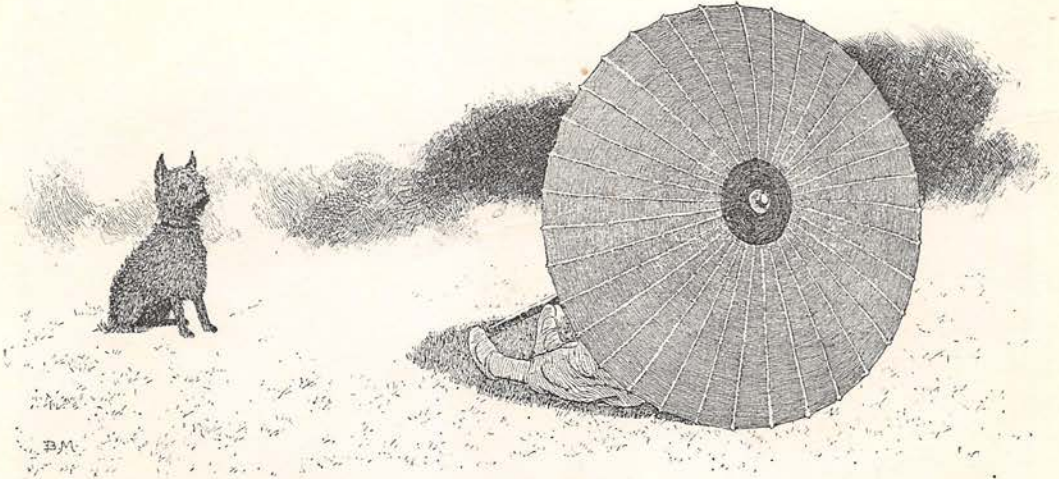
"I was the eldest of a large family," said M. de Monvel. "Our inventions were legion, and the tricks and manners of all children, their games and interests, attracted me. Once, I remember, in our country home, I determined to make a flying-machine experiment. I set the time and place—in the afternoon from the back nursery window. My admiring and faithful band of brothers and sisters gathered around me. I took my father's green-lined umbrella, opened it wide, and prepared to

descend from the window into the garden, when I was forcibly seized from behind by my nurse, and—I forget the rest! . . . Away back in the years, I can see the tiny figures of the two youngest of us all. Poor little things! they were always tagging on, always last, always out of breath trying to catch up. Étienne, the very smallest, I see him in his short trousers and bare legs trotting after us in the park, his cheeks puffed out with running so hard, his short legs carrying him along as best they could. I can hear him murmur to himself, half in disgust: 'I will not play any more; I tell you, I am not playing!'"

Do you wish to see little Étienne de Monvel as he was? Turn to "Nos Enfants"; his picture is there!

"Our dearest game," went on M. de Monvel, "was one of ships and the sea. In front of mother's fireplace was a fender, and my sister and I used to stagger out with it to the garden. It made a splendid ship, with a mast in the middle, and in this vessel Suzanne and I sailed all around the globe. In terrific storms we shook with terror, and clung on for dear life, although our boat was really immovable."

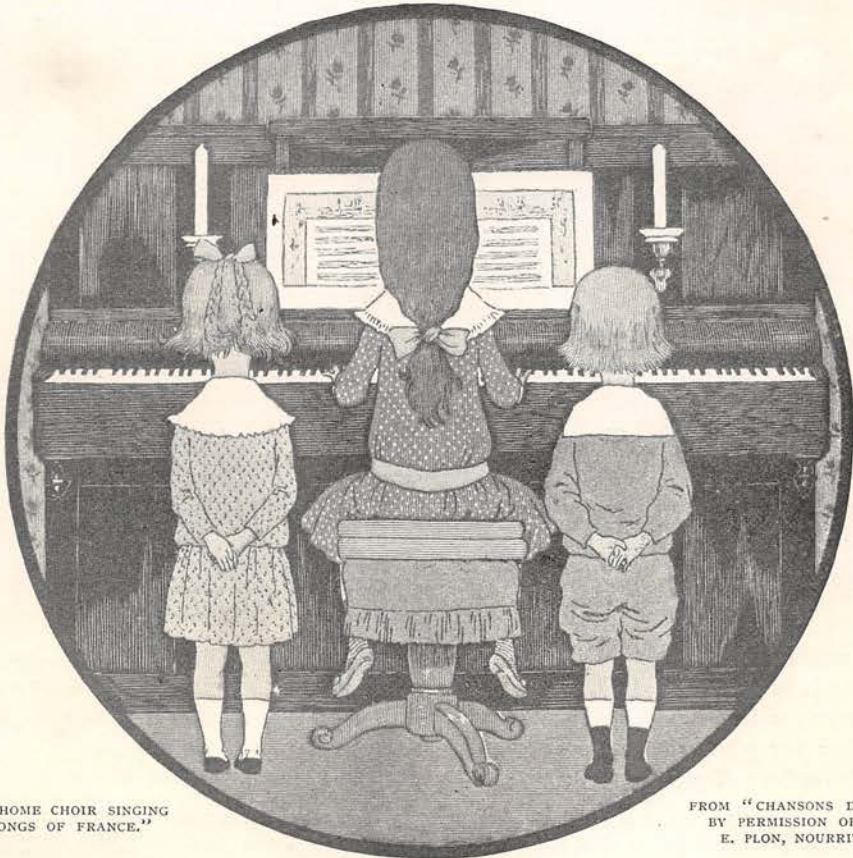
When, tired of their traveling, Maurice and



IN THE SUNSHINE. FROM "NOS ENFANTS." BY PERMISSION OF MESSRS. HACHETTE & CIE.

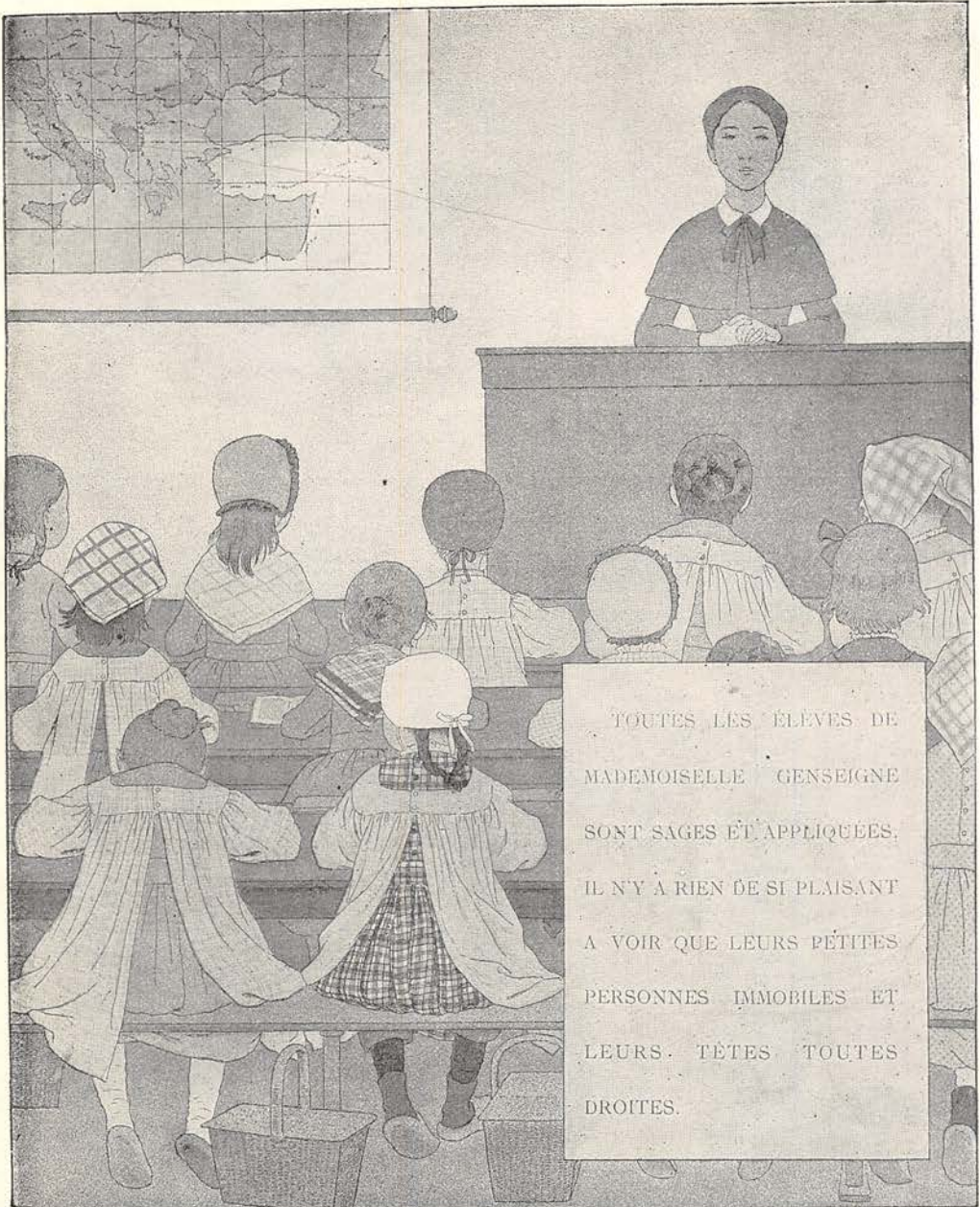
Suzanne returned to port, they found themselves in the selfsame garden, by the same rose-bush, under the same unchanged sky that looked down upon them when their voyage began;

and this, you see, is where they had the advantage over the "grown-ups": for the rose-bush and the garden every one can see; but where the children went, and the countries they



THE HOME CHOIR SINGING
"SONGS OF FRANCE."

FROM "CHANSONS DE FRANCE."
BY PERMISSION OF MESSRS.
E. PLON, NOURRIT & CIE.



TOUTES LES ELEVES DE
MADemoiselle GENSEIGNE
SONT SAGES ET APPLIQUEES.
IL N'Y A RIEN DE SI PLAISANT
A VOIR QUE LEURS PETITES
PERSONNES IMMOBILES ET
LEURS TETES TOUTES
DROITES.

THE SCHOOL. FROM "NOS ENFANTS."* BY PERMISSION OF MESSRS. E. PLON, NOURRIT & CIE.

touched and left during the hours, no one but themselves in the whole world knew.

A little white house surrounded by a white wall, within the white wall's shelter a luxuriant garden where flowers run riot, is Boutet

de Monvel's summer home. "Nemours sur Seine" it is called. To Nemours M. de Monvel goes when he wishes to get away from noisy Paris.

And I wish every one of you could see this

*The words in the picture mean: "All Mademoiselle Genseigne's scholars are good and studious. No sight is pleasanter to see than their motionless little figures, and their heads held straight."



"LITTLE MICHAEL DRAWS HIS WONDERFUL PICTURES." (SEE PAGE 98.) FROM "NOS ENFANTS."
BY PERMISSION OF MESSRS. HACHETTE & CIE.

sweet French village when giroflée and rose are at their loveliest, when the peaches grow redder and mellow on the latticed trellis all over the front of the villa, and the ripening pears lay their soft cheeks against the soft gray stucco of the garden wall.

To peep over the red-tiled top of this wall down the highroad that winds to the river, where the straight rows of feathery poplars border the Seine all the way to Paris; to recognize possibly a little Fanchon trotting along to see her grandmother, in white cap, blue apron, sabots, and all; then to climb down the ladder (for the wall is high) and find the De Monvel family, Madame, Monsieur, and Roger, all waiting to show you the garden

and studio—this experience on a summer's day is like having a fairy-tale come true.

In his country studio Boutet de Monvel is painting his greatest work—a series of frescos of the life of Jeanne d'Arc, to be placed in the memorial chapel at Domrémy, where Jeanne d'Arc was born.

Five hundred years ago, France, in the power of the English king, was wasted by war and in bondage, and the rightful king, crownless, without arms or force, was a timid refugee. To proclaim him king needed a conviction that no one possessed until out of her distant province came Jeanne d'Arc. She believed in her cause, and that Heaven had called her to deliver her people. We who have seen our



JEANNE D'ARC KNEELING BEFORE THE KING OF FRANCE AT CHINON. FROM A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ORIGINAL PAINTING.

ONE OF THE SERIES OF FRESCOS BY BOUTET DE MONVEL FOR THE MEMORIAL CHAPEL TO JEANNE D'ARC AT DOMREMY, FRANCE.

soldiers go to war know what patriotism means. The love of country stirred this little peasant girl. She called the French to arms. She crowned the king at Rheims. She led the army of France to victory, and, in return, her ungrateful country delivered her to the English enemy as a sorceress. She was burned to death. Through faith and courage a saint, because of her country's blindness a martyr.

Some of you have seen the book "Jeanne d'Arc," by Boutet de Monvel, which the Century Company published in America. The painter has taken his subjects for the five frescos directly from the book, and one of them he brought with him to America; it shows Jeanne d'Arc kneeling before the king at Chinon.

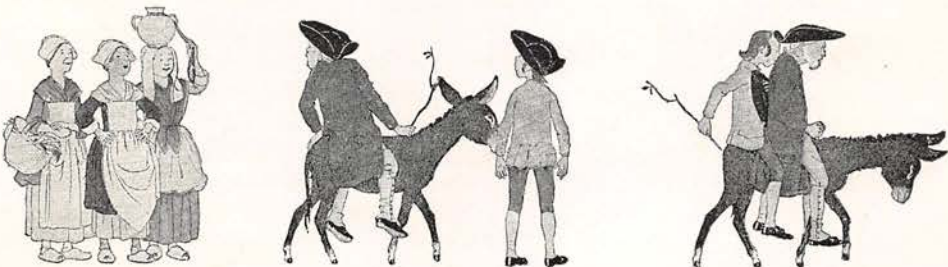
When you look at this brilliant painting, it is as though a page were opened to you from a giant's most bewitching picture-book. The splendid figures of princes, nobles, king, the nodding plumes, curious caps, the jewels, torches, embroidery, the magnificence of the French court of five hundred years ago—all this makes you rub your eyes and wonder if your histories are coming true, and you long to see the rest of this giant book, from which this is such a beautiful page.

"I have thought a great deal about Jeanne d'Arc," said Boutet de Monvel. "When I was a boy I passed my vacations in Orléans, a city full of legends about the saint, and I thought the graceful figure of this warlike young girl, with her spirited bearing, the most beautiful thing in the world. I grew to be familiar with her in the drollest way imaginable—not

in a very poetical manner, I am afraid! In Orléans they sell a kind of sugar candy in little boxes, on the covers of which are gay pictures of Jeanne d'Arc, and whenever I had a few sous I used to buy one of these boxes of bonbons. I never had very many sous, and as my treats were rare, I tried to make the sweets last as long as possible, so I must confess that I *licked the candy little by little*, often keeping a box for days. Of course every time I licked the sugar I saw the picture, which I grew to know very well indeed!"

M. de Monvel is forty-nine years old. His hair and pointed beard are a little gray. He is successful, famous, distinguished; his name is known everywhere; in his buttonhole is the ribbon of the Legion d'Honneur. But the honors of the public have not spoiled him. He is a delightful comrade, frank and unaffected. The possession of a happy childhood is his, and its joy has gone with him down through all the years. His keen eyes fairly sparkle as he talks of his souvenirs, and reveal him full of the spirit that youth loves, and to which it quickly responds. He is in love with childhood and its memories, and he has made it live for us in his pictures.

The world, children and grown people, always glad to welcome the truly lovely and to feel its charm, greets M. de Monvel as a friend. He has caught the fleeting, exquisite impression of childhood, and held it for us on the delicately colored page, as, on a summer's day, one among the loiterers in the meadow catches the fairest butterfly of all, and holds it in the net triumphantly for the rest to see.



THE MILLER, HIS SON, AND THE DONKEY. FROM "LA FONTAINE'S FABLES."
BY PERMISSION OF MESSRS. E. PLON, NOURRIT & CIE.