

THE ENGLISH GIRL IN THE FRENCH SCHOOL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE FRENCH DOLL."

WHEN Ursula Swayne was fifteen, she was sent to a French school. Ursula was too much in the habit of dreaming or "mooning" to be able to realize everyday life, and so it happened that she surprised all her friends by the willingness she showed to go so far from home and so entirely among strangers.

"I have never got comfortable with school-fellows yet," the shy girl said to herself. "In French stories the girls seem so delightful, so full of heart and sentiment, and besides it will be such a thorough change, and I am so tired of everything being alike, and of course they are not near so clever as I am, so I shall get heaps of prizes."

She had been a morning now at Madame Henry's school, and she had met no check to her anticipations.

Madame was a tall grey-haired lady, who had once been fair and was now the colour of brickdust. She smiled very graciously at Ursula, but there was a kind of hidden lightning in her transparent grey eyes suggestive of storms. Madame had only come in for an hour or so, had walked to the top of the room with stately steps, while every one stood curtsying, and had then taken the "analyse" of the elder girls—an analysis with such a hard name that Ursula felt excited to know what it could be about; difficulty always acted like a spur to this English girl. She looked down the long row of brown holland frocks and smooth exquisitely-arranged heads of her companions. Madame Henry's was a large school, and every one dressed alike.

Scarcely any one looked at her.

"They don't stare as English girls do," said Ursula; "but perhaps that is because we're in class. Well, it's a comfort I have nothing set me yet. I shall be able to get a good look at them. Oh, I shall soon beat these near me at any rate! Girls who spend so much time fiddling over their hair can't have any brains; besides, isn't it always said French people are vain and frivolous? and frivolous people are never clever or learned."

Ursula had been stooping forward shyly over the desk at which she was placed; but at this thought she drew herself up with a smile of self-complacency.

Sitting opposite to her, apparently intent on writing a "cacographie" in the time allowed for it, was a tall, slender, black-haired girl; her long dark eyes had seem-

ingly been fixed on her copybook, but she had taken more than one sweeping furtive glance at the new arrival.

"For pity's sake look then at the Anglaise!" she said to her right-hand neighbour. "I told thee, Sophie, when Mademoiselle Prage brought her in to breakfast, I thought she was just the sort of shy, awkward creature English girls must be; but look at her face, then, quick, and see how she is peacocking."

Sophie looked up timidly; she had a dark freckled skin, a skin that nature had meant to be sallow, but which was as sunburnt as that of a haymaker; light greenish eyes, and hair of a lifeless dull brown. Nobody could help thinking Sophie de Visme a very plain girl, and yet there was something in her shrinking manner, in her low gentle voice, more attractive than in dark-eyed, slender, mocking Valérie.

"She is timid," Sophie whispered; "and she looks ill."

"Ah, bah! Timid! I don't believe in it. Thou wilt see presently. I say she is insolent."

Valérie had spoken rather loud, but so fast that Ursula sitting opposite could not make out what she said; still her self-consciousness guessed that she was the subject of discussion.

"Ah! but no!" Sophie spoke so eagerly that she forgot all caution. She raised her head from her copybook and looked at Valérie; "insolent is not the word. I see many things in her face, but not insolence."

"Taisez-vous, Mademoiselle!" Ursula started. Madame Henry's voice came like thunder from the upper desks, and glancing towards her the English girl saw that her eyes were flaming with anger. "Mademoiselle Sophie de Visme, is it not then inconceivable that you of all my pupils should draw down on yourself this reproach; you to whom the instruction you receive is so important—the means doubtless of your future support? What will your benevolent guardian say when he hears of your misconduct?"

Ursula shrank at first from looking at the culprit; her own spirit rose vehemently against this public attack; she felt as if she could have shaken Madame Henry before her scholars; but presently an irresistible fascination made her long to look across the table, and a suppressed sob took her eyes there. Sophie was crying; great drops were falling fast on her