

copybook ; she looked uglier than ever. All Ursula's indignation turned against the sobbing girl.

"What a mean-spirited baby ! If any governess were to insult me in that public way, why I'd die before she should think I minded it. What a horrid coward !"

The bell—such a cracked, noisy, prolonged sound—and then a scuffling of feet, a grating of chairs as they were pushed back, a good deal of flapping up and down of desks, and in the midst of all a—

"Silence, Mesdemoiselles !" and Madame Henry stood up, and, as it seemed to Ursula, gabbled a prayer over very fast. Everybody crossed themselves, and then, two and two, the line of girls filed out through the folding-doors at the end of the room, curtsying to Madame as they passed.

They came into a long bare room with a long narrow table and benches. Madame had stayed behind, but Mademoiselle Prage and the other governesses tried to keep order while the girls seated themselves.

Ursula sighed. "It is not so home-like as an English school, after all. It seems like convicts to be paraded in that marching fashion, just to come in and get lunch, for this can't be dinner, and I don't like my fellow-convict."

The "fellow-convict" with whom Ursula had walked into the room was the unlucky Sophie. Ursula would not look round at her ; she sat eating bread and butter and pears, feeling that she was undergoing a polite but keen scrutiny from two pairs of opposite eyes,—the long dark sly eyes of Valérie Dutemps, and the blue laughing glances of Léonie Rendu.

"I shall like that pretty, good-tempered looking girl opposite," thought Ursula. "She has quite an English face, nothing of the skinny Frenchwoman about her. I daresay she's not clever, and I can help her with her exercises, and we shall get on. I should like her for a friend. I must begin to talk to some of the girls, or I shall never improve myself."

"Mademoiselle !" Ursula started at the low, sweet voice, and turned round ; she started again at finding Sophie's eager green eyes fixed on her. "Pardon ! but Mademoiselle has dropped her handkerchief."

She spoke so softly, she moved so like a cat, that Ursula disliked her more and more.

"Thank you," she said, gravely, and then she put her head shyly on one side, and got very red at the sound of her own accent after Sophie's.

Sophie shrunk back into her shell.

"Valérie is right ; the English girl is proud, and she has not an amiable expression."

The girls soon went flocking into the court for a few minutes before "classe."

Ursula looked round in dismay : there was positively nothing to be seen but the green-shuttered, whitewashed walls of the school-house, which surrounded the court on three sides ; a low wall, also whitewashed, made the fourth boundary ; and in one corner stood a pump with a stone trough beneath.

"Mamma said I must try and send a sketch of the house or something," the girl thought dolefully, "but there's nothing but the pump to draw."

She had travelled all night, and though she had been taken to a dormitory on her arrival, she had only gathered a general impression that it was fresh and pleasant-looking, and that the pretty white basins were much too small to wash in.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle." Valérie had come up to her, linked arm-in-arm with pretty blue-eyed Léonie. "Is it the first time you come in France, Mademoiselle ?"

Valérie's elaborate politeness made Ursula desperately conscious of awkwardness ; her cheeks grew fiery red under the gracious smiles of the two French girls.

"Yes, I thank you," she stammered out in her limping French.

She looked up, she felt they must be laughing at her ; but no, Valérie looked gravely polite, and Léonie smiled pleasantly.

"We must tell you our names," she said ; "you will not feel at home with us if we call you Mademoiselle, will you ?" Léonie smiled yet more sweetly ; she was pleased with the admiration she saw in the English girl's great dark eyes. Like many another unattractive person, Ursula almost worshipped personal beauty, and Léonie had a fair pretty face with soft blue eyes, and golden hair waving round her high, narrow white forehead, a rosebud mouth, and a small, very aquiline nose : it was more like a face painted on ivory than one exposed to the wear and tear of ordinary life.

"I am Léonie Rendu, and this is Valérie Dutemps, and you are, I think, Ursule ?"

She spoke with such charming ease, with so much frankness, and yet with such grace, that Ursula was won out of her shy reserve.

"I am called Ursula," she smiled.

"Ursula, ah ciel !" Valérie put both hands to her ears.

"It must be Ursule," said Léonie, laughing ; "we shall never arrive at pronouncing it rightly. Do you know what class you are to be in, Ursule ?"