

MADELAINE LEROUX.

(By KATHARINE S. MACQUOID, in the *Atalanta*.)

I.

THE white road that leads from Caudebec to V llequeter mounts for a short way very steeply, until it is some eight above the little meadow beside the Seine. On the right is a wooded hill, and the top of the descent to the meadow is bordered by silver-stemmed, slender armed birch trees, which at evening time look weird and ghostly.

At the foot of this road, on the side nearest the town of Caudebec, there stands a pleasant looking white house, with a high roof and two huge chimney stacks. The porch and a bay window are covered with climbing roses, which have stretched their branches to reach an upper row of lattices.

A large grass plot, with a slated path running round it, is in front of the house; and this path continues on the left and is soon lost to sight in a shrubbery, backed with trees, that leads to a garden behind. On the other side a low stone wall, so old that it is many coloured with moss and lichen, divides both front and back garden from the orchard which slopes up the hill beside the white road.

The river makes a sudden bend outwards after it has passed the house, so that its steep green bank borders the road just opposite Mademoiselle Chaumelle's dwelling. Only a few days ago the high autumn tide of the Barre swept furiously over this bank, across the road, and through the tall iron entrance gates, till it flung a shower of yellow foam and stones and twigs against Mademoiselle Chaumelle's windows.

The river looked quiet enough this morning, half veiled in a soft mist that gave warning of coming frost. The trees far on the left, where the river takes a dark bend towards Caudebec, looked much less dense than they had looked yesterday; so many brown and gold leaves had fallen under cover of the darkness.

The lattice above the bay window opened, and a bright girl's face looked out. For a moment her earnest dark eyes gazed lovingly across the Seine, and then leftwards toward the mist-veiled bend; but Madelaine Leroux was practical, and she knew that if she meant to gather Aunt Virginia a nosegay before breakfast she had little time to spend in admiring the view from her window.

The few remaining blossoms on the Gloire de Dijon rose below her window were out of reach, and so were some creamy noisette roses on the porch. When she reached the garden, the border flowers that had looked so gay from her window, proved themselves to be deceptions; the tall white daisies on which she had reckoned had blackened tips, and the chrysanthemum petals were tipped brown. She gave a little cry of triumph as she looked round. Just against the iron fence in front of the house she spied a bunch of China-roses, so exquisitely varied in their rosy tint that they seemed too lovely to be real. Madelaine thought this as she stood looking at them she was so absorbed by their beauty that a sudden grunt made her start.

She turned round and saw an enormous pig in the middle of the grass plot; it was grunting both with its front paws and with its snout, in search of some treasure which it evidently expected to find under the turf, and it grunted as it grunted.

"Go away, go away, you nasty, greedy creature!" the girl cried in a frightened voice. "You are spoiling aunt Virginia's grass plot; go, I say!" She swished her pale blue skirt at the intruder; for an instant it lef off grunting, but it stared at Madelaine with such fierce little red eyes that the girl drew back in alarm.

"What shall I do? I believe pigs bite when they are savage;" then she shouted, "Joseph, Elsie, come, come! Joseph, make haste, the garden will be spoiled."

The huge pig had gone back with a grunt to its grunting, but the girl's cries seemed to irritate it; it came towards her, shaking its huge sides and grunting, looking, she thought, still more savage. It was between her and the house, and as it continued to advance on her, Madelaine suddenly lost courage, and she fled to the entrance gates.

A passer-by stopped as she reached them.

"Help me!" the girl said, breathlessly, and she opened the gate "Please drive the pig away; I am frightened of it."

She scarcely looked at the stranger; she only saw that he was a man, and she felt sure that he would help her.

The stranger seemed young and strong, but the pig took no heed of his raised walking stick. Seeing this, he rained a shower of blows on the back of the ugly brute, which drew forth a hideous series of grunts and squeaks, and, to Madelaine's relief, the creature trotted out into the road, its enormous sides shaking an accompaniment to its clamour.

Two women servants and a man ran into the garden. There was a buzz of questions, and Madelaine saw her aunt come out into the porch.

"Come in, monsieur; come in, then, I beg of you. Let me thank you a thousand times for stopping mischief. Ah! then, monsieur, it is the fault of my careless gardener, Joseph, to whom, if you will believe me, I have more than once pointed out the necessity of mending

that hole in the wall beside the orchard. Ah! monsieur, you are indeed a friend in need. It was well that you came to the rescue, for that was the savage sow of the Marais, and it is a wonder she did not fly at you. Where you much frightened, my precious Madelaine?"

By this time Mademoiselle Chaumelle had come up with Madelaine and her champion, and the stranger could not help smiling at the contrast between the aunt and the niece.

The round ball of a woman, with her happy, smiling face, seemed shorter than she really was, as she stood patting the slim, tall girl's shoulder. Just now Madelaine's dark, gipsy-like face was bent down, and her slender figure seemed to be crouching with shame at the remembrance of her cowardice, for she thought that a really formidable animal would not have been so quickly routed: she thought, too, that her aunt was unnecessarily gushing in her gratitude for such a service.

Madelaine had only arrived late on the previous evening, and then Monsieur le Cure had come in to supper; so there had not been time for a comfortable talk alone with Aunt Virginia.

Madelaine Leroux had a father and an excellent stepmother. Her own mother, her Aunt Virginia's sister, had died when the girl was still an infant; but though her stepmother loved her very dearly, Madame Leroux did not spoil Madelaine as Mademoiselle Chaumelle did, and the girl was always ready to go and stay at Caudebec. She had come this time to take her aunt's advice on a very important subject, and she was uneasy till their talk had taken place.

"Is Monsieur making a stay in Caudebec?" Mademoiselle Leroux asked the stranger.

"I shall be here a few days," he answered; and then he glanced on the porch as if he wanted to be asked indoors.

Mademoiselle Chaumelle was looking at him with a very mournful expression in her eyes.

"Pardon me, monsieur," she said, and Madelaine thought her aunt's voice sounded broken, "but you remind me so much of someone I knew years ago. May I venture to ask your name?"

Madelaine looked hard at the stranger, and she thought she had never seen that grave, almost stern face before. Dark, grey-blue eyes looked out frankly under well-marked eyebrows; the nose and forehead reminded the girl of an ancient coin, and the mouth, though partly hidden by a brown moustache, was sharply cut and full of character. Madelaine decided that the stranger must be very severe, and she felt certain he must think her aunt foolish. The part of his face she liked best was his broad, square forehead, and the crisp waves of rich brown hair above it. He looked, she fancied, surprised at her aunt's question, but he answered at once:

"My name is Maurice Henri, mademoiselle. I live at present in Paris, but I shall probably settle in Rouen some day."

Mademoiselle Chaumelle looked disappointed.

"My friend's name was not Henri, monsieur; but it is strange that one of his Christian names was Maurice. Monsieur must permit me to say that the likeness I see makes me feel as if he were an old acquaintance. Will he be so amiable as to come in and breakfast with us this morning?"

Monsieur Henri bowed. He had breakfasted before he came out but the spinster's real hospitality pleased him, and, besides, he wanted to talk to her silent niece. Madelaine was not inclined to talk, and after several attempts, Monsieur Henri devoted himself entirely to his hostess.

Madelaine felt so cross and contradictory that she preferred to be silent. She was so much accustomed to be in the right with every one that it rarely occurred to her to question her own wisdom; but after a few minutes she regretted her silence, and the abrupt way in which she had answered this gentleman who had spoken politely to her. And then she told herself that it was quite natural that she should not be allowed to stay long at Caudebec, and she had to discuss with her aunt the unpleasant and important subject that troubled her before she went home. It was true that she had already made up her mind on this marriage proposed to her by her father and her stepmother. She did not want to be married, and she had said so: they had smiled in answer, and told her she must not decide hastily. Madelaine felt sure she was right, but she wanted to be justified by her aunt's assent to her opinion. Aunt Virginia always agreed with her. "We think so much alike," the girl said to herself, as she ate her breakfast, perfectly unconscious that she had as yet never yielded up her own will to that of Aunt Virginia.

She could not help enjoying Monsieur Henri's talk, it sounded so interesting; and at last when he gave an account of a journey he had made in Switzerland that summer, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes glowed as he related his Alpine adventures—for Mademoiselle Chaumelle had the gift of drawing out conversation from others.

Madelaine's eyes strayed to the visitor's face, and she saw how truly it expressed his feelings, he looked so determined, so in earnest, and yet there was a sweet, kind look in his eyes that fascinated her in spite of herself. Her observations were quickly interrupted.

Monsieur Henri seemed to feel that her eyes were fixed on him; he looked up so suddenly that he met them full. Madelaine turned away with an angry flush at the admiration she saw in Monsieur