

Paris Fashion and Gossip

by Katharine de Forest.

ALICE and I went to Versailles to the "literary five-o'clock" given by Mrs. Bessie and Miss Marie van Vorst, and breakfasting at the old Hôtel des Reservoirs on our way, were surprised to find what a gay and animated place the automobiles were making it. Every table in the large flower-banked veranda and in the great dining-room, as well, was filled with automobilists and people who might, could, would, or should some day become automobilists. They all sauntered out into the court-yard after they had finished their coffee to look at the array of smart traps, and it was amusing to notice the contrast between the "chauffeurs" attached to the horseless ones of these, in their trim dark, working liveries, and the few grooms in white buckskin knee-breeches, as these relics of a more effete civilization clambered down from the four-in-hands and hustled into trousers to lunch the horses. We noticed the pretty sporting costumes of the women, especially the light ducks and linens. Many of the daintiest were made with trimmings of contrasting color. A buff piqué had a bit of scarlet set into the collar and cuffs, a gray had pale blue, another had mauve. The skirts to these gowns were nearly all cut bias with a seam down the middle of the front and back, and trimmed with stitched bands. There were many light linen and batiste shirt-waists of exactly the colors of the skirts, with fine lingerie work set in, incrustated with color. We saw one or two charming frocks of stuff with canvas collars embroidered with silks in Persian colors. Let me say, in passing, that the berries at breakfast were all served, as is the fashion everywhere in Paris just now—we have seen it at formal dinner parties—in the tiniest possible earthen flower-pots, with a cover of leaves crowned with a pyramid of the berries.

The lodge of Lady Anglesey's place, which the van Vorst sisters have been occupying for some months past, looks out over the park of the Trianon, as everything in Versailles must, to be self-respecting. This is where

"Bagsby's Daughter" was written. It is there that Miss Marbury and Miss Elsie de Wolfe spend their summers. A Louis XVI. salon runs along the garden side of the house, hung with dotted muslin over pink, the walls covered with old prints and colored engravings of the epoch. Out of this, looking over the garden, opens a large, glass-enclosed piazza, fitted up with chairs, and tables strewn with the latest reviews and books, with plants and box-seats. It was on the great table in the centre that the fortunes of Violet Bagsby were consigned to paper. A literary co-operation between women is rare, especially in fiction, and it is not common among men. The two Marguerites, Paul and Victor, and the Rosnys are celebrated collaborators in France. Paul and Victor Marguerite have reached such a perfect unity in their habit of thought and its expression that they write on the same sheet of paper. Bessie and Marie van Vorst each took certain characters in the book and developed them separately. They offer one of those rare examples of friendship among women which disprove the saying that the feminine sex is incapable of deep and lasting friendships. It was many years ago that they met in Paris, and immediately developed that strong sympathy one for the other which was cemented lately when the one, then Miss Bessie McGinnis, married her friend's brother on his death-bed. Both are strikingly handsome young women, gifted with particular magnetism and charm. While their lives have been so strongly united their tastes are quite opposite. Miss van Vorst is a poet; her sister-in-law has always had a special fancy for scientific and sociological subjects. A book resulting from the co-operation of these two minds cannot fail to be of the greatest interest.

An afternoon tea preceded by a "causerie" or a "conference" is a favorite thing in Paris just now. At the van Vorsts' M. Victor du Bled gave a delightful lecture on the mode and its evolution, a subject on

which there is always plenty to say. I like to hear it treated "in terms of the rest of our knowledge," put on the same plane with other sociological themes. M. du Bled's definition of the mode was interesting: "It is the art of imposing on the many what is only becoming to the few." Its underlying principle was mystery, he said. Fashion is suggestive, not assertive. The mode is due largely to caprice. One of the "few" has one hip slightly higher than the other, perhaps, and with her dressmaker she combines a clever contrivance to hide the slight deformity. Speedily this is taken up by the many and becomes a fashion.

In this connection I am reminded of a little talk I had a few days ago with some one in the Beaux-Arts interested in the opening of the new salles of the Louvre, which will be fitting companions to the splendid new Rubens salles. They also have been arranged by M. Molinier, but will be entirely devoted to furniture; a historical exposition of styles according to the epochs. Style in furniture, it seems, is quite as much the result of individual caprice as fashion in anything else. As an example, in the early part of the seventeenth century certain importations of Chinese things which were showed to Mazarin so took his fancy that French workmen began to use Chinese lacquer in home manufactures, and largely from that came the style called Louis XVI. The chairs we actually sit on nowadays in France are, many of them, only some caprice in form which specially appealed to Madame du Barry, who was a much cleverer woman in every way than Madame de Pompadour, and who has left much more of an impress on her country. Examples of all these things of the past we saw last year in the Petit Palais.

Our first impression, when we went to the varnishing day at the Petit Palais at the opening of "The Exposition of Childhood through the Ages," was that of a sad feeling of homesickness for the "Little Palace" of last year. Paris seems slightly lonely this summer without its Exposition, and we began the exhibition of things pertaining to childhood at the practical end, where we found ourselves plunged into statistical maps, prospectuses of sterilized milk, plans of orphan asylums, and model nurseries, samples of baskets woven by the blind, and gingham aprons made by the halt. All these things are interesting and instructive, but not decorative. Where was the lovely "Little Palace" of last year, with its sumptuous sections of wood-carvings, of wrought iron and brass, of old ivories and enamels, of art treasures without limit? This same vision of artistic beauty you find now in the right half of the palace, where is gathered together everything that the arts have furnished during the ages to idealize childhood. There are the earliest toys in existence, which, as a rule, are the most beautiful, artistically, for play in the early times was a dignified function whose symbols in toys were serious objects fashioned by the greatest artists and craftsmen of the day. Here are specimens of toys such as were used by Louis XIV., all of his epoch, and a strange comment on this king, who, though so extraordinarily virile, cared only for the playthings of little girls. Among them is

a doll's tea-set, a little furnace, candlesticks, a table, and an easy-chair, all made in gold, enamelled silver, and silver gilt. A toy kitchen that once belonged to Louis XIV. is one of the most beautiful bibelots imaginable, quite too fearfully and wonderfully wrought to have ever been put to any practical use as a plaything. It is entirely of Dresden china, with brass ornaments by the celebrated Caffieri.

The two long galleries devoted to childhood in art are one long enchantment, with the Fragonards, Poussins, Chardins, the modern Bernards, Carolus Durans, and Carrières. The practical side of the Exhibition is of the greatest interest to the sociologist. You would be surprised to see the great number of charities and philanthropic institutions carried on by Paris in connection with its children. A whole day would pass quickly in this Exhibition alone. There are delightful little models of *pouponnières*, or nurseries. The *crèches*, or day nurseries, are illustrated by manikin babies sitting at little tables.

Among the things of the most interest were the photographs and portraits of celebrities at a tender age. Sarah Bernhardt was a pretty little girl with dark curly hair and a thoughtful face, standing by her mother, holding her hand. She wore a quaint old-fashioned plaid silk dress, with a turned-over collar and white under-sleeves. The mother had a lovely face, and an unmistakable air of the gentlewoman, in her simple silk dress and wide collar and sleeves of fine embroidery. Alfred de Musset appeared as a curly-headed boy with regular features and wide-awake eyes. Paul Deschanel, the present President of the Council, at four was a featureless child in full petticoats, tenderly holding the rein of a wooden hobby-horse. One of the most interesting of the photographs was that of Madame Dieulafoy as a gentle-looking little girl, and then as a young man, for, as you remember, ever since she went with her husband on his archæological expeditions, when she found it necessary to wear man's dress, she has kept to masculine attire. She dresses extraordinarily well as a man. On the varnishing day of the salon we were amazed at the cut of her coat and the spring of her trousers. She wore short hair and a man's tall silk hat, but her hands betrayed her. They were slender and delicate, far too much so for any man, even encased in white gloves. At her dinner parties and evening receptions Madame Dieulafoy always wears a man's dress suit.

The salons have been especially delightful this year, notably that of the Champ de Mars. Miss Nourse had a great success in this with her strong and interesting pictures of Bigoudin Bretons. Mrs. Lee Robbins, who is an associate member, had her usual fine exhibition. One picture which we picked out particularly among those of newer *exposants* was a "Portrait of a Young Boy," by Miss Katharine Abbot, of Zanesville, Ohio, which we found unusually nice in values, and Mrs. Grace Wood is an American painter whose exquisite miniatures, of which two are in this salon, are beginning to attract attention. She will go home in the autumn, and will set up her Lares and Penates in the shape of her beautiful collections of Empire furniture and china in a New York studio.