

CHAPTER NINE

LES BUISSONNETS

IT was late in the evening when the travellers arrived, and the children were so tired that they were almost dropping asleep. As soon as supper was over, therefore, Marie and Pauline took their little sisters up to bed.

Alone with his brother and sister-in-law, Monsieur Martin began to discuss with them his plans for the future. The fortune which he had made in business at Alencon was sufficient to allow him to live henceforward on his income, and to devote himself entirely to the education of his children. He relied on the kindness and affection of Madame Guerin to guide his elder girls in their duties as "little mothers" and mistresses of the new home in Lisieux.

Early the next day our party set out for "Les Buissonnets." After crossing the public park, they were soon in the narrow lane leading to the house where Therese was to pass her happy sheltered childhood. The elder girls looked sadly at the home where they would never see their dearly-loved mother.

But Therese was delighted with everything.

The house itself was bright and sunny, and to add to its charms there was a large belvedere with carved woodwork and stained glass windows, commanding on all sides a beautiful view over hills and meadows. In front of the house was a flower-garden with lawns and trees, and behind, a big kitchen-garden. It all seemed wonderful to the imagination of a child of five.

They soon settled down in this their new home. Marie spared no pains to make her father happy, while Pauline busied herself with the little ones confided to her care. This was a charge that seemed to have been left to her by her mother, who on her deathbed had taken Pauline's hand and kissed it reverently, as if to appoint her spiritual mother of her sisters.

Pauline took upon herself the entire care and education of Therese, who was still too young to go to school. Under so devoted a teacher, the child soon learned to read and write, and the first word she could read was "Heaven."

Every day, when lessons were over, the "little Queen" went up to the belvedere, the usual quarters of her father, whom she called her "King." She would climb on to his knee and proudly show him her marks, which were always good.

Sometimes she would find him in the garden, and take him for a walk, skipping along gaily at his side. If she left him for a moment, it was only to make up strange drinks from the bark of trees. When these "wines" turned out a pretty color she would bring them to her father in a doll's cup. He would pretend to drink the odd mixture, and declare it delicious.

Another favorite occupation of Therese was to make altars of moss in a hollow of the garden wall. When they were ready, her father had to come and look at them and go into raptures over their beauty.

To encourage her to work diligently at her lessons a celebration was held every year at "Les Buissonnets for the distribution of prizes. Though Therese the only competitor, strict justice was observed, and she only obtained the rewards she had really deserved. A number of friends were invited to see acted by the children, the conservatory being hung with draperies for the occasion.

But before the play began, the "little Queen" made her entry on the stage, and her father, seated in the place of honor, solemnly presented her with her prizes.

This ceremony always suggested to the childish imagination of Therese the day of judgment, when only the wicked need have any fear, while those who all their lives have worked for God will be generously rewarded.

A printable file of this chapter as well as a coloring picture are available below.