

XXVII

KENNETTE'S VISION.

A Legend of Springwells.

A FEW years ago the figure of an old woman was frequently seen on our principal streets, whose quaint dress, erect bearing and keen piercing eyes, challenged the attention of every passer-by. She seemed to be a relic of a past age, who had strayed by accident into the present and was at variance with her surroundings. To-day, after slumbering for fifteen years, her restless spirit seems to revive and cause agitation in civil as well as political circles.

Marie Louise Thebault, generally called "Kennette," well known to the older portion of our French community and by tradition to its younger members, dwelt in a little old wooden house on

the River road, opposite the Lafferty homestead. A stately elm threw its majestic shadow over the humble dwelling, seeming to shield it from rude winter blasts and to protect it from the summer's intense sun. Alone she lived here like a hermit. Her sister had married against her wishes, for Kennette was no advocate of matrimony. She believed in woman's rights ; was a sort of pioneer in that doctrine among the people of those times, and to-day would have been a powerful ally to the leading spirits of the question.

A distinguished writer says : "Show me a man's room and I will tell you his character." Kennette's dress forcibly illustrated the application of the remark. It was stamped by her strong individuality. At all seasons she wore a calico dress, rather scant, short enough not only to clear the ground, but to bring out in bass-relief an ankle whose outline freed it from all suggestiveness of symmetry. Hooks and eyes, and even buttons, were superfluous luxuries when pins could be substituted, and failing these a thorn would answer. A red handkerchief around her neck was crossed on her breast ; a coarse cotton cap with a deep frill, innocent of starch and fluting, emphasized each movement of that decided head ; a check sunbonnet for outside wear, a blue umbrella and a pair of stout shoes of her own

manufacture, completed a costume as characteristic as it was unique.

She seemed to scorn the usual gentler accomplishments of her sex, yet with a strange inconsistency frequently found in positive natures, she hated man, but adopted his pursuits. Never did her voice keep time to the music of the spinning wheel, nor did the steel needles flash through those fingers knitting stockings in which so many weave the history of their past, or build castles for the future. Seated on a wooden bench, with all the cobbler's implements, she would volunteer to make shoes for the children and warrant their durability, and even the most pronounced hoyden found Miss Kennette's sabots *pièce de résistance*, which defied everything save beauty.

No cat ever basked in the warmth of her hearth, no cow stood in her stall, no dog barked a joyous welcome as she crossed the threshold of her dreary and lonesome home. These were luxuries only for the wealthy, she said. Her means were more than sufficient to gratify her simple tastes and to allow her some indulgences, but she was penurious to a miserly extent. The neighbors along the River road all knew her well, and always gave her vegetables and fruits. Her evenings were invariably spent out to save light and fuel, and it was a rare treat and a token of particular

good will if Miss Kennette brought her violin. She had a good ear for music, and with cultivation might have been an excellent performer, but her untutored efforts were rather crude. The children would cluster around her at a respectful distance, for Miss Kennette was a warm advocate of the doctrine that "children should be seen, not heard." Woe to the little urchin whose perceptive powers were too keen and who dared to ask why Miss Kennette used so much rosin, and was always shifting corners, complaining one was too warm, another too cool for her violin, and why she did not make it speak like George Maisenville's (a noted fiddler in those days). A tingling sensation and a peculiar redness of the ear warned the luckless boy not to repeat his questions.

She read much, and mostly works that tended to render her skeptical in religious matters. She had no patience with those who told her wonderful stories of apparitions. She was always ready for an argument, and would emphasize her declarations with expressions which, though original were more forcible than elegant. Toward the close of her life an incident happened which invested her with more than usual interest, caused a decided change in her religious belief and left its impress upon her character. There are many still living who have heard her relate it and who, know-

ing the strong, self-reliant nature of the woman, could not help being deeply impressed.

It was a bright moonlight night, and Kennette was spending the evening with a neighbor who lived near, and amusing all, as usual, by her quaint and piquante conversation. She was relating how she had allowed an elderly friend of hers to rent a room in her house, so that by the arrangement she would not only get a little rent, but could use the fire and light of her boarder; that this person was always preaching to her and destroyed all her pleasure, and that if her instincts of economy were not so well developed, she would not go near her. "It is not pleasant," she said, "to be told that the books I read are wicked, that they instill poison into my heart, and that when I am old I will be stranded on the shore of remorse and despair. Well, to hush her up I made an agreement. 'I don't believe in hell or purgatory,' I said, 'so if you die first come back; if I should, I will return. Just appear and I will know that there is such a place.'"

The bargain was made, and Kennette for a while sunned herself in the borrowed warmth of another's fire and had contentment. But the restless Kennette soon quarreled with the boarder, a good, pious soul, and told her she would never forgive her for some imaginary wrong she fancied the old

woman had done her. Shortly afterwards the boarder died, and Kennette stood inflexibly and sternly beside the dying bedside and said she would not forgive, but their compact would hold.

Whilst she was talking to her neighbors one evening and sipping cider, of which she was very fond, one of the boys of the house returning from town, asked Miss Kennette why she left a light burning in her house, for knowing the old woman's miserly habits, he had thought it strange. Jumping up and seizing a poker, she said she would go over and find out who dared enter her habitation. Others accompanied her. Nothing but darkness reigned there, although the boy said positively he had seen a light; they thought probably it was the light of a fisherman's boat passing on the river, and dismissed the subject. But night after night the same occurrence took place and people spoke about it and avoided passing near the old house. It always happened on an evening when Miss Kennette was away.

Worried by the reports, and having witnessed this shifting light and searched everywhere for it, Miss Kennette determined to discover the cause, for she was not at all superstitious nor afraid of anything.

One evening she returned earlier than usual, softly let herself in by the back door and imme-

diately retired. Hardly had she composed herself to sleep, when she saw the reflection of a dim light on the wall at the head of the stairs. The upper room was not divided and the staircase was in the center. The light grew larger and larger, as if a person were carrying it up the stairs. Seated bolt upright in her bed, which was in a corner of the room near the west window, Kenette watched for the solution of a mystery which had so long baffled her. A stranger to fear, she was cool and collected, and patiently waited the developments. At last the light seemed to have arrived on the top step. It was no candle, no lantern, but a peculiar vivid white light. It glided along the wall and as it came nearer to her bed, it suddenly assumed the outlines of a figure draped in clouds. Then a tremor ran through her. Her blood became chilled; new sensations crept over her. Rousing herself she rubbed her eyes, saw she was not dreaming and realized that it was no idle fancy but a fearful reality. Slowly was the apparition gliding along towards her. Seeing she must do something to arrest its progress, she said: "Come no nearer; I know you. I believe and I forgive," and as the mysterious light came, so it disappeared.

From that day forward all noticed a change. The dark hair was bleached, wrinkles were writ-

ten on that stern face and a softer expression played over it. She returned to the faithful performance of her spiritual duties, and the Nemesis which had haunted her steps appeared satisfied, for the weird light was seen no more in her desolate home.

