

**LITTLE GERVAISE,
AND
OTHER STORIES**

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Little Gervaise, and other stories by Various

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VARIOUS

**LITTLE GERVAISE,
AND
OTHER STORIES**



"Gervaise shared the chocolates and the
sous . . . with the little clown."

LITTLE GERVAISE

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AND

OTHER STORIES

BY

FRANCES E. CROMPTON

OLIVE MOLESWORTH

AND

E. M. GREEN

WITH TWENTY-ONE ILLUSTRATIONS

PHILADELPHIA

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

June 1900. 20

~~June 1900. 4~~



George W. H. ...



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SHE was called Gervaise Lecourt, and, as her name tells you, she was French. She was young, pitifully young, slight of form, transparently fair of skin, with blue eyes, and golden hair. Eleven years had gone over her sunny head, but in size she was not larger than a child of seven. Kith and kin she had none—to her knowledge. Rumor in the circus which made her world said that she had been sold by her parents for thirty francs; sometimes rumor put it that she had been stolen from her parents without any consideration of money. If that was so, they had very little chance of tracing her, for she was described in the bills as “the little English Equestrienne,” under the name of Maude Carrington. Ever since she could remember she had been Maude Carrington in the bills which announced the details of the performance given in the circus, and equally long she had been Gervaise in private life. Most of the people by whom she was surrounded had no knowledge of her name of Lecourt; they called her “la petite,” or “petite Gervaise,” and sometimes “the little Englishwoman”; but Gervaise knew no word of English, excepting her fancy name of Maude.

How shall I describe to you what a life it was? Hard, yes; cruel, no; for, as a rule, French people are not cruel to children. A poor life, a wretched life, squalid and desolate in

many ways, her ambitions centred wholly and solely on her feats with Etoile, the beautiful thoroughbred mare which was her partner in the show. Her only playfellow was the clown's little boy, and from him she accepted scratches, kicks, and bites as philosophically as little French children usually bear such attentions from the juvenile lords of creation. There were times when Paul was pleasant and agreeable, generally when Gervaise had received a few pence in the ring, or when some extra tempting box of chocolates had been thrown to her from some admirer in the better parts of the house. Gervaise shared the chocolates and the sous when she possessed them, with the little clown, taking it quite as a matter of course when Paul had money and they happened to be in a town where a fair was going on, that he should spend it upon the roundabouts, and never dream of sharing so much as a farthing with his little sister of the ring. He was learning to be a clown like his father, was Paul, and his taunting remarks as to the future often cut Gervaise to the very depth of her desolate little heart.

"A clown has the best of it," he would say. "See my father—he is in the ring all the time, everybody watches him, everybody laughs when he comes. As for Miss ——" speaking of the English lady rider who was the great attraction of the circus—"she has finished every night in a quarter of an hour! Pooh! What good is there in that?"

"It is not easy," said Gervaise, indignantly, one day, when he had jeered at her until her powers of endurance were exhausted.

"Easy! No, *ma foi*; but who knows how difficult it is? Not one of those idiots who sit staring and sucking oranges. But the clown pleases them all—the oldest and the youngest, the clever and the stupid, all can understand and enjoy the clown. As for you, you miserable girl thing, you tremble

every night when your time is coming, and you shake with emotion when it is over. Bah! What sort of a part is that for one round of applause!"

"I get many rounds of applause," cried Gervaise, indignantly, "yes, many rounds of applause, and sometimes chocolates, and sometimes sous; when does a clown ever get anything?"

"He gets all the laughter," repeated Paul, sturdily, "that is the best of it. The game is not worth the candle for the equestrians."

For a moment Gervaise stood looking at him, her eyes blazing with indignation. Would

he never give her credit for what she did; would he never put her upon a level with himself; would he always despise her, wound her, jeer at her; would it always be the same? Would she go on year after year until she was a grown woman, and would Paul, whom she loved so much, whom she looked up to and almost revered, would he never understand that there was something in her that even a clown could not touch? But no; it could not go on forever; no, no, not even though his father was very powerful, one of the most celebrated clowns in France, for a day would come—"Thou wilt have to go for a soldier," she burst out indignantly.

Whereupon Paul promptly pinched her, nipping her so hard that she shrieked out in dismay and whimpered a little, and cringed to him as girls do. He towered above her.



"The clown is greater than the rider," he said, threateningly.

"No, no, Paul."

"Yes, thou shalt say it—the clown is first."

And, by the aid of another judicious nip, she gave in and cried, "Yes, yes, the clown is first above all."

A few evenings later the circus was all bright with light; the house was full; a sea of faces surrounded the ring, the ladies all wore their best skirts, the men their smartest clothes, the horses had been given an extra grooming, and the heart of Gervaise was sick with apprehension. For it was a great night with the Grand Cirque de Vendôme. In truth the proprietor had been sufficiently fortunate to induce the great lady of the neighborhood in which they then were to bespeak the evening, and Madame la Duchesse had just arrived with a large party, and was occupying the place of honor.

Now, Madame la Duchesse was thoroughly English in her tastes and sympathies. Although purely French by birth, she had been brought up very much in the English manner, and had received an almost English education. From her cradle English nurses had tended her, and later on English governesses had trained her for the great world, in which she played a very important part. She believed, with many other enlightened French people, that there is a reason for the dominance of the English race, that there is a reason why English people spread all over the globe and make themselves at home in every corner thereof; she believed that, as a race, the French are wanting in many of the best qualities which distinguish the English nation, but that when once France has grasped the secret of English greatness France will become the greatest nation in the world. If only Madame la Duchesse had had a large family of children whom she could have trained according to her ideas, she would have been the happiest woman in