

**MARIE-CLAIRE**

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Marie-Claire by Marguerite Audoux & John N. Raphael & Arnold Bennet

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**MARGUERITE AUDOUX & JOHN N. RAPHAEL & ARNOLD BENNET**

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MARGUERITE AUDOUX

# MARIE-CLAIRE

BY  
MARGUERITE AUDOUX

Translated by  
JOHN N. RAPHAEL

*With an Introduction*  
By *ARNOLD BENNETT*



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INTRODUCTION TO  
MARIE-CLAIRE  
BY  
ARNOLD BENNETT

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE origins of this extraordinary book are sufficiently curious and sufficiently interesting to be stated in detail. They go back to some ten years ago, when the author, after the rustic adventures which she describes in the following pages, had definitely settled in Paris as a working sempstress. The existence of a working sempstress in Paris, as elsewhere, is very hard; it usually means eleven hours' close application a day, six full days a week, at half a crown a day. But already Marguerite Audoux's defective eyesight was causing anxiety, and upsetting the regularity of her work, so that in the evenings she was often less fatigued than a sempstress generally is. She wanted distraction, and she found it in the realisation of an old desire to write. She wrote, not because she could find nothing else to do, but because at last the chance of writing had come. That she had always loved reading is plain from certain incidents in this present book; her

opportunities for reading, however, had been limited. She now began, in a tentative and perhaps desultory fashion, to set down her youthful reminiscences. About this time she became acquainted, through one of its members, and by one of those hazards of destiny which too rarely diversify the dull industrial life of a city, with a circle of young literary men, of whom possibly the most important was the regretted Charles Louis Philippe, author of "Bubu de Montparnasse," and other novels which have a genuine reputation among the chosen people who know the difference between literature and its counterfeit. This circle of friends used to meet at Philippe's flat. It included a number of talented writers, among whom I should mention MM. Iehl (the author of "Cauët"), Francis Jourdain, Paul Fargue, Larbaud, Chanvin, Marcel Ray, and Régis Gignoux (the literary and dramatic critic). Marguerite Audoux was not introduced as a literary prodigy. Nobody, indeed, was aware that she wrote. She came on her merits as an individuality, and she took her place beside several other women who, like herself, had no literary pretensions. I am told by one of the intimates of the fellowship that the impression she made was pro-

found. And the fact is indubitable that her friends are at least as enthusiastic about her individuality as about this book which she has written. She was a little over thirty, and very pretty, with an agreeable voice. The sobriety of her charm, the clear depth of her emotional faculty, and the breadth of her gentle interest in human nature handsomely conquered the entire fellowship. The working sempstress was sincerely esteemed by some of the brightest masculine intellects in Paris.

This admiring appreciation naturally encouraged her to speak a little of herself. And one evening she confessed that she, too, had been trying to write. On another evening she brought some sheets of manuscript—the draft of the early chapters of “Marie-Claire”—and read them aloud. She read, I am told, very well. The reception was enthusiastic. One can imagine the ecstatic fervour of these young men, startled by the apparition of such a shining talent. She must continue the writing of her book, but in the meantime she must produce some short stories and sketches for the daily papers! Her gift must be presented to the public instantly! She followed the advice thus urgently offered, and several members of the circle (in particular Régis Gignoux