

**FRANCOIS
THE WAIF**

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Francois the waif by George Sand

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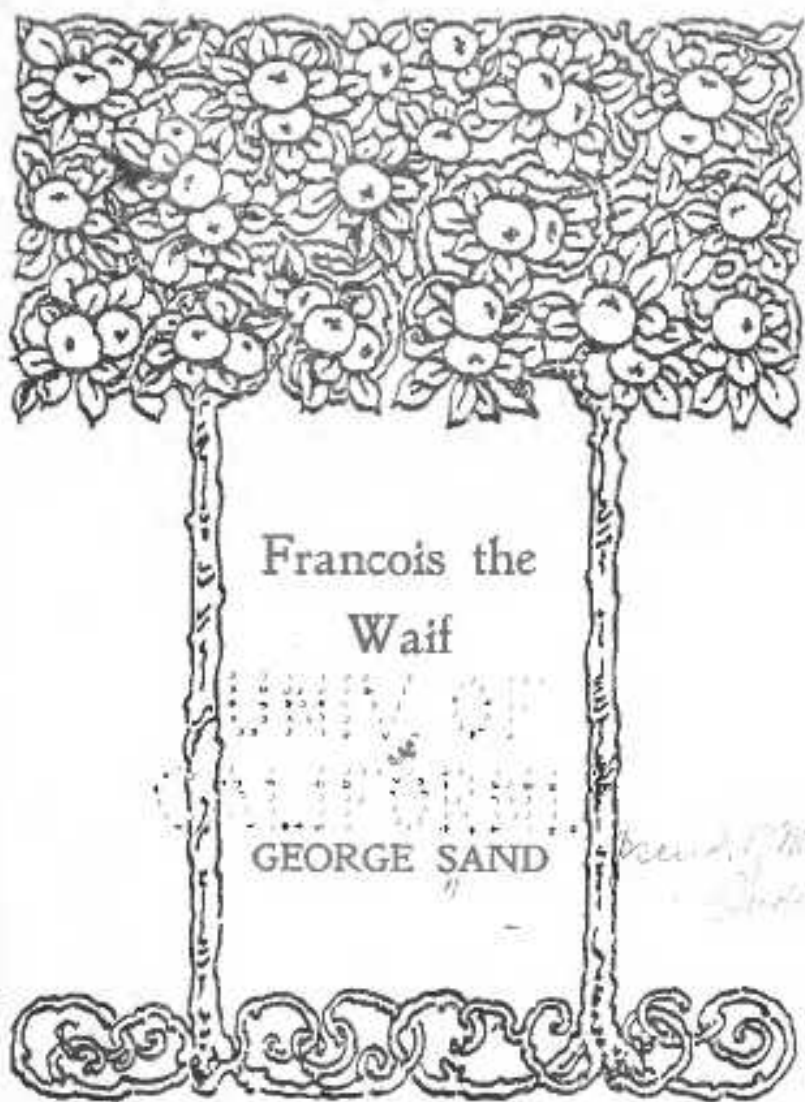
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GEORGE SAND

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THE WAIF**



Francois the
Waif

BY
GEORGE SAND

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GIFT OF

A. F. HANCOCK

TO THE

AMERICAN

PREFATORY NOTE

FRANÇOIS LE CHAMPI, a pretty idyl that tells of homely affections, self-devotion, "humble cares and delicate fears," opens a little vista into that Arcadia to which, the poet says, we were all born. It offers many difficulties to the translator. It is a rustic tale, put into the mouths of peasants, who relate it with a primitive simplicity, sweet and full of sentiment in the French, but prone to degenerate into mawkishness and monotony when turned into English. Great care has been taken to keep the English of this version simple and idiomatic, and yet religiously to avoid any breach of faith toward the author. It is hoped that, though the original pure and limpid waters have necessarily contracted some stain by being forced into another channel, they may yet yield refreshment to those thirsty souls who cannot seek them at the fountain-head.

J. M. S.

Stockbridge, January, 1894.

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PREFACE

FRANÇOIS LE CHAMPI appeared for the first time in the *feuilleton* of the "Journal des Débats." Just as the plot of my story was reaching its development, another more serious development was announced in the first column of the same newspaper. It was the final downfall of the July Monarchy, in the last days of February, 1848.

This catastrophe was naturally very prejudicial to my story, the publication of which was interrupted and delayed, and not finally completed, if I remember correctly, until the end of a month. For those of my readers who are artists either by profession or instinct, and are interested in the details of the construction of works of art, I shall add to my introduction that, some days before the conversation of which that introduction is the outcome, I took a walk through the *Chemin aux Napes*. The word *nape*, which, in the figurative language of that part of the country, designates the beautiful plant called *néufar*, or *nymphæa*, is happily descriptive of the broad leaves that lie upon the surface of the water,

FRANÇOIS THE WAIF

as a cloth (*nappe*) upon a table; but I prefer to write it with a single *p*, and to trace its derivation from *napée*, thus leaving unchanged its mythological origin.

The *Chemin aux Napes*, which probably none of you, my dear readers, will ever see, as it leads to nothing that can repay you for the trouble of passing through so much mire, is a break-neck path, skirting along a ditch where, in the muddy water, grow the most beautiful nymphææ in the world, more fragrant than lilies, whiter than camellias, purer than the vesture of virgins, in the midst of the lizards and other reptiles that crawl about the mud and flowers, while the kingfisher darts like living lightning along the banks, and skims with a fiery track the rank and luxuriant vegetation of the sewer.

A child six or seven years old, mounted bare-back upon a loose horse, made the animal leap the hedge behind me, and then, letting himself slide to the ground, left his shaggy colt in the pasture, and returned to try jumping over the barrier which he had so lightly crossed on horseback a minute before. It was not such an easy task for his little legs; I helped him, and had with him a conversation similar to that between the miller's wife and the foundling, related in the beginning of "The Waif." When I ques-

PREFACE

tioned him about his age, which he did not know, he literally delivered himself of the brilliant reply that he was two years old. He knew neither his own name, nor that of his parents, nor of the place he lived in; all that he knew was to cling on an unbroken colt, as a bird clings to a branch shaken by the storm.

I have had educated several foundlings of both sexes, who have turned out well physically and morally. It is no less certain, however, that these forlorn children are apt, in rural districts, to become bandits, owing to their utter lack of education. Intrusted to the care of the poorest people, because of the insufficient pittance assigned to them, they often practise, for the benefit of their adopted parents, the shameful calling of beggars. Would it not be possible to increase this pittance on condition that the foundlings shall never beg, even at the doors of their neighbors and friends?

I have also learned by experience that nothing is more difficult than to teach self-respect and the love of work to children who have already begun understandingly to live upon alms.

GEORGE SAND.

Nohant, May 20, 1852.

