

SHE IS NO "YANKEE."

But She is Clever and Has Seen Much of Life.

Mrs De Rochemont Newington Has Been a Sister of Mercy to Many.

She Has a Decided Opinion on the Question "Is Marriage a Failure."

In the little town of Newington, N. H., unique among New England villages not only for its charming situation in the arms of the blue Piscataqua, but because it numbers among its inhabitants neither lawyer nor doctor, and owns not even the smallest shop wherein to market butter and eggs and match a spool of cotton or a stick of braid, there dwells an old lady of personality so intense and experience so varied that I need make no apology for introducing her to the readers of The Globe.

Her home is an old-fashioned, roomy farmhouse, built by Christopher Rymes, whose grandsons, Cedric and Oscar Lighton, now own the Isles of Shoals, its wide hall and ample proportions recalling the colonial days and according well with the spirit of hospitality that rules its mistress' heart and has made it a mecca for many pilgrims through more than 50 years.

Mrs Maria Louisa de Rochemont is no "Yankee," as she sometimes laughingly says, but was born in Georgetown, Demerara, British Guiana, on March 28, 1811, her father, Castin Cornelius de Wit, being descended from the family of John de Wit, governor of Holland, and her mother tracing back her ancestry to Francois Baron de Rochemont and Seigneur de la Mothe, at des Bresjores, who died in France in 1661. The blood of the Huguenots, some of whom died for their faith, pulses strongly yet in the veins of this descendant and their spirit flashes in her black eyes as she proudly recounts their deeds of valor and points out the long line of unblemished ancestry to the children at her knee. As fascinating as a fairy tale are her stories of her childhood life, among the lovely flowers and luscious fruits of that tropical clime.

Her father was a sugar planter and his schooner, on its weekly voyage from the plantations, which were situated on an island off the coast, brought stores of oranges, bananas, plantains, and many other delicious fruits which we never see here, as well as armfuls of sugar cane for the eight children of the household.



MRS M. L. DE ROCHMONT.

Especially interesting is her story of a trip up the Essequibo river in a schooner manned entirely by half-breed Indian women, in the course of which she nearly had a piece taken out from her foot by a bite from a fish, as she dipped it for a moment in the limpid waters of the river.

Among the delicacies on which she was feasted by her kind hosts were venison, turtle, wild hog, game of many sorts, some as large as turkeys, fish of every description with which the water abounds, mangoes, shaddocks, cassava bread, figs, coconuts, breadfruit, guavas, yams of several kinds, peppercot unade of boiled meats or fish flavored with cassirap and red pepper, a sort of a cocoa prepared from a seed which needs no milk, soursops, sapadillos, pawpaws, monkey apples, spice apples, golden apples, plums, cherries and figs, also the coomaramarrow, which resembles marmalade.

She visited an Indian encampment where the women were busy with their pottery and baskets of fine and artistic workmanship; saw hosts of monkeys, parrots and parakeets, and found everywhere a people dwelling among such prodigal gifts of nature that hunger and suffering were unknown, in a climate so equable that lung troubles are unheard of, with neither frost, dew nor malaria to disturb.

When Mrs de Rochemont was 7 years old, her father took his family to Portsmouth, N. H., to visit his brother-in-law and they remained two years, during which the little girl attended a private school kept by Mrs Susan Huntress. Among her playmates were two little girls one of whom married Ichabod Goodwin, afterward governor of New Hampshire, and the other became the mother of Cella Thaxter, the poet.

When Mr de Wit returned to Demerara he took back with him his oldest nephew, Frederic William de Rochemont, who a few years later fell deeply in love with his cousin, then just budding into womanhood, and after some years of parental discouragement on account of the near relationship, during which she attended a school where French, embroidery and the other studies of the day were taught, they were married, the bride being 17 and her husband 24.

A handsome couple they were, he 6 feet tall in his stockings, and she full of the vivacity of her race and with a stock of courage and energy that was equal to every emergency.

With perfect health and ample means she soon became a social leader, dancing out a pair of slippers in a single night, presiding gracefully over her hospitable board and wisely administering the affairs of her home, which, before the year was out, opened to receive her four young sisters, whom she cared for till they sought homes of their own.

Six times during the 11 years she remained in the colony she visited the states, always with a child or two in charge, and always during the three weeks' voyage—for it was before the days of steamers—so ill that she would have thanked any one to throw her overboard.

During these trips she developed a marked business ability, investing in new goods for her husband, who was a large dealer in burnt wares, as well as owner of a bakery.

She was the first to introduce glassware into the colony, and made enough profit on one cargo to buy and equip a schooner.

Returning from one trip she insisted on her husband's visiting his mother at once. When he came back he was accompanied by a pale, slender invalid, who was carried to the vessel on a mattress, having suffered from hemorrhages until his friends had given up all hope.

He remained three years, nursed by his host through an attack of yellow fever, which visited the colony twice during the 28 years of Mrs de Rochemont's life there, and then went back to New England to defy its climate for more than three-score years and ten, never having any return of the disease.

His name was Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber, and he afterward married Ann de Rochemont.

In 1833 the emancipation of the slaves led to considerable disturbance in Demerara, and a year later M de Rochemont yielded to the long continued entreaties of his friends and returned to his native land, followed to the ship by a mournful procession of his sable servants, who entreated to be taken also. The old nurse, Nina, did accompany her mistress, nursing tenderly her 10 children and living to be more than 100.

A more complete change than that from the South American city to the Newington farm can hardly be imagined. Climate, customs, conditions of living, all were altered.

But our heroine, accustomed to the abundant help of the plantation regime, where a nurse is assigned to every child, and a half a dozen women divide among them the duties each farmer's wife here performs alone, was equal to the occasion, and soon reigned over her new kingdom.

She learned to cook all the New England dishes in a style that surpassed her teachers, to plan for the long, rigorous winters, to do without the tropical fruits so long delighted in, and to replace the jessamines and orange blossoms by a garden that was the wonder of the town and that still yields flowers by the bushel for Memorial day.

A talent for nursing and a love for humanity, broad and deep enough to include everyone within her reach, drew her instinctively to every home where sickness entered. Many a babe found its first cradle in her arms, and chronic cases given up by physicians yielded to her simple remedies.

If "to share is the bliss of heaven," as the poet says, it will be no strange land to her, for she can never enjoy anything that she cannot give away, and the amount of flowers and fruits, vegetables and poultry, jellies and more substantial viands that she has freely dispensed would require more than an issue of even the Sunday Globe to chronicle.

The warmth of her welcome attracted a

ceaseless influx of visitors, nieces and nephews finding no place like Aunt Louisa's for a summer vacation.

Among these is Ike Partington, hero of many an escapade, and another who still remembers the occasion when he turned a two-gallon jar of cream into the pig's trough instead of the sour milk he had been bidden to dispose of.

She was no less prodigal of advice than of service, and has inspired many a poor boy with the resolution to make a man of himself, and straightened many neighborhood entanglements in her day.

She is perfectly fearless in these matters and will say anything she thinks ought to be said to a body, from advising them to speedily make their will to pointing out the proper disposition of their estates.

Strange to say, she never reads novels, but watches the course of public affairs assiduously, perusing The Globe constantly and being able to give the record of every man of note.

Her executive ability may be seen from the fact that she has often entertained 15 or more unexpected guests for the day with unruffled composure, and once took care of 12 boarders for the summer with the help of only one daughter and a little maid.

Notable events in her life were the family gathering of 1868, when 101 out of 104 descendants of her grandfather de Rochemont gathered beneath her roof; the surprise party given her husband in 1874, at which Frank Jones presented him with an ebony gold-headed cane, and other Portsmouth friends with a silver tea service; and the golden wedding in 1878, when more than 100 guests braved the Arctic atmosphere to bring congratulations and gifts.

Her opinion on the vexed question, "Is marriage a failure?" shall be given in her own words called forth by the question from a neighbor on the morning of her golden wedding:

"Ain't you sorry you ever got married?" "What should I be such a fool as that for?" was the indignant response, "when I've been so happy all these years. And look at my children; not a black sheep among them."

She is quite proud of the fact that she could read fine print without glasses until very recently, when an injury to the eye weakened her sight somewhat.

For her husband, who seven years ago fell asleep in Jesus, she mourns deeply, yet with a glad looking forward to the reunion beyond the dark river that has no terrors for one who has walked with God for so many years.

Her one wish now is to see another family gathering, and it is hoped that one may be arranged for this summer. The family connections now number over 200, mostly resident in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, for all of whom "Aunt Louisa" with her sunny smile, her quaint accent with its inimitable flavor, perhaps caught from the Dutch of her father who spoke it as frequently as English with his children, and her overflowing sympathy that never forgets the least detail of any confidence or leaves the smallest corner to feel neglected or alone, will be the bright particular star of the occasion.

It is years since she has seen her six remaining children together, the youngest, Herbert S., being a real estate dealer in San Francisco, and two daughters, Mrs Homer H. Jones and Mrs Usher Parsons residing in Canandaigua and Wilson, N. Y., and the 16 grandchildren and three great grandchildren have never yet been all together. May the coming summer witness their happy reunion.