

FRANTO.

A SKETCH ON THE NOVA SCOTIAN COAST.

BY HENRY ST. PETER.

"Larnin' can't tell everything," said Job to Peter.

"Larnin' or no larnin'," said Peter to Job, "no Schoolmaster need tell me as Franto's ghost don't appear on the Cape. When a man has got a wife as sees things out o' the other world, he ain't to be easy persuaded."

The cousins sat in Job's kitchen with Job's daughter, Mary Ellen.

With the exception of the Schoolmaster no one at Misery Bay could tell why Franto had been called Franto, though they had always taken a lively interest in the ghost. The bold, bald headland, turning its precipitous front to the crashing Atlantic, and its sloping flank to the deep inlet of Misery Bay, had been known as Franto ever since Job's grandfather had come into Nova Scotia. The ghost was of equal antiquity, and shared Franto's name. The events which connected Cape Franto with the ghost were understood to have occurred before Job's grandfather had "emigrated;" and into anything so distant the intellect of Misery Bay did not care to enquire.

Now, a community which has enjoyed for eighty years the unquestioned possession of a ghost likes to keep its distinction. The Schoolmaster, therefore, met with no little resentment when he began to ridicule the idea of Franto's existence. The Schoolmaster showed, moreover, a tendency to explain things away, in a manner which had never been customary at Misery Bay. This inclination naturally called forth the disapproval of that self-respecting village. A rude, remote, and lonely fishing-station. Misery Bay had never before possessed a Schoolmaster; but if the duties of such were to upset the notions long formed in elderly people's minds, then Misery Bay did not greatly regret its loss.

"Schoolmasters isn't what they're held up to be," Job continued. "I don't see much use in all this here readin' and writin'. I've half a mind to take Jack away afore the quarter's up. It 'ull come to no good wi' him as fur as I can make out. 'Readin' and 'writin' makes a man think as he knows everything, an' there's things as man can't know."

"Yes," said Peter, "there's things as man can't know; and that's the way with ghos'es. A ghost wouldn't be a ghost if you knowed what he were, and where he come from. That's my belief."

"An' its flyin' in the face of the Almighty for the Schoolmaster to say as there's no sperrits when Scriptur' is full o' 'em. As fur as Scriptur' goes I'll go, and where Scriptur' stops I'll stop. And what 'ud become o' the devil now, if there was no sperrits? There's that to be thought on."

"That's so," said Peter touched by the force of the argument. "The devil's a sperrit by what I can make out. Anyhow he comes an' goes, and that's the way with all the sperrits as ever I heard of. Franto comes an' goes."

"Not," protested Job, "not as I'd go so far as to say Franto was like the devil. There's good sperrits an' bad, so I've heard tell. Franto is none o' them as goes round leadin' folks into mischief. He's been on the cliff now this seventy or eighty year, an' there's nayther man nor boy has come to any damage by him. That's more nor can be said of some sperrits, and more particularly the devil."

"That's so," said Peter again. "And if Franto didn't appear, how is it people see's him? Can the Schoolmaster answer that?"

"If there was nothin' to see, no one couldn't see it," said Job hurriedly. "And there's my wife as see him as plain as a pike-staff, wi' her own two eyes, the week afore little Amos was born. He was like a kind of cloud, with a suit of black clothes on, an' he was runnin' over the Cape like mad. That's what my wife says, and she see him herself. No Schoolmaster need tell me anything different from that."

"Larnin' can't find out everything," said Peter again, rising to go. "It's my belief as this readin' an' writin' an' Schoolmasterin' is a oncertain thing. It means mischief; settin' itself above the devil, and a-sayin' as there's no ghostsees. Blood is blood, and sperrits is sperrits. That's my belief, Schoolmaster or no Schoolmaster."

When Peter was gone, and the conversation ended, Mary Ellen was very sorry. For with her this subject never lost its interest. Sitting unnoticed, in the dim, autumnal twilight, she had been attentive to every word; for Mary Ellen had her own reasons for trying to believe that Franto's ghost had no existence.

This tall, slim, dark-eyed creature of nineteen was not without her little bit of drama. She had lived through scenes of deep emotion, in which Franto's Cape was the majestic background, and Franto's ghost an appreciated, unseen presence. The most memorable part of her past was centred in that grand headland, rising like a rampant monster over the insistent sea. For here she had been accustomed to meet Michael Greek; here she had promised to love him and be faithful to him; and here she had parted from him, now nearly two years ago. Two years is a long time in a young life, and neither Michael nor Mary Ellen could read or write. For two years Michael had been fishing on the Banks; saving slowly the money that was to make him a son-in-law acceptable to so important a man as Job. During all that time Mary Ellen had scarcely heard his name.

On her own part she dared not mention him. There was not a man among her rude, proud, Teutonic kin, who would not have felt it a personal dishonour to see Mary Ellen marry the son of a worthless Greek sailor and a half-breed squaw. For Michael had inherited this strange mixture of blood. Thirty years before a foreign vessel had been wrecked upon the Nova Scotian coast; and of her rescued Greek crew one had chosen to

remain where Providence had cast him. Here he had married a nameless, homeless young woman, partly Indian, partly white; and Michael was their son. Both parents were now long dead; and Michael had lived from childhood in the dense woods behind Misery Bay, cared for by a lonely wrinkled woman of mixed blood like his own. She was called Nancy, and bore no other name.

Perhaps it was his outcast, woodland life, perhaps it was some deeper cause, that made Michael Greek very different from all the men at Misery Bay. Mary Ellen had noted it, the first day he came to work for her father. He was five and twenty then, tall, broad shouldered, and dark, with deep set, flashing eyes. He bore little trace of his Indian blood, except in his straight black hair, and the shambling wolf-like gait, inherited from an ancestry bred among the woods.

A less impressionable mind than Mary Ellen's would have seen in his quiet dignity and simple seriousness, something different from a common type. By instinct this girl, as lonely as himself, turned to him as to one who could teach and guide her, one who could free her from the prison of her own dull, narrow, unenlightened life.

And Michael, on his part, had soon seen in her something like the ideal for which his nature craved. Her small, oval, sun-browned face was beautiful to him. Her upright, slight, and supple figure was to him the embodiment of all the ideas of grace, caught from the pine-tree and the silver-birch. When he looked into her eyes he had the same insatiable desire for more, more, as when he stood upon the Cape, and gazed at the silent splendor of the sunset. Michael and Mary Ellen could neither read nor write; but in a dumb instinctive way they knew there was a life of beauty somewhere; and they found it in each other.

No one but Franto knew of their meetings on the Cape; no one but Franto heard when they said what they had to say; and no one but Franto and Mary Ellen could tell why Michael Greek had gone fishing on the Banks; while Nancy was left with her pipe and her dog, alone and lonesome, in the deep, dim woods.

Mary Ellen had vowed to be faithful, and she had meant to be faithful. But two years is a long time, and they could neither read nor write. Then the Schoolmaster had come.

A simple schoolmaster will not be a hero to the gentle reader, but he was to Mary Ellen. It must be taken into consideration that he played the harmonium, and sang with no little sweetness; that his hair was golden, his eyes blue, his hands white, and his manner gentle. Mary Ellen had loved Michael because he was the worthiest production of her own world; the Schoolmaster seemed to her as one descended from another sphere. She loved him for his soft, clear voice; she loved him for his kind, refined, and protecting manner. He came to her as one from that distant life in the outside world, which her fancy painted as so much lovelier than her own; and so she loved him.

And then the long walks, and the long talks, so different from the silent life with Michael Greek! And then the beautiful things he taught her—about the woods and the stars, which she could see, and about the great world of men, which she could not see! This half-wild creature was thirsting for joy and knowledge, and what the Schoolmaster said was to her like revelation from a higher power. He told her stories from history, which made the world seem larger and older than she had thought. He told her of deeds of daring and danger surpassing anything she had ever dreamed. And he told her among other things how Cape Franto had received its name.

Standing on the headland overlooking the great sea, he took her back to the days of Cortereal, and his Portuguese explorers. He pointed out to her where the ship *Miseria* had rounded the Cape on which they stood, and had anchored in the bay. With quiet, interesting ease he recounted the quarrel which ended in the murder of one Fra Antonio, an aged monk. His body was thrown into the sea; and his death had named the Cape. On an old map he showed her *Cabo de frey antonio* marking the spot on which they stood. She could not read the letters, but she admired and loved him because he could.

Her quick intelligence followed him through all his tales. She only ceased to follow him when he laughed down, as a foolish fancy, the sailors' belief that Fra Antonio's ghost had ever since continued to haunt the Cape.

Mary Ellen had believed the Schoolmaster in all he had said. She tried to believe him here; she wished to believe him here. Franto had been the unseen witness of her vows to Michael Greek. She would be glad to think that the spirit had no existence. If he were blotted out, those vows might somehow be erased. And yet she could not quite blot him out. She had believed in Franto always; in spite of herself, in spite of her faith in the Schoolmaster's word, she could not renounce him now. The story of the monk seemed only to make the existence of the ghost a more vivid fact. She dwelt upon the thought that under Franto's name there lay this long unsuspected drama. It stirred a chord in her heart to know that the grand Cape stood there as the eternal monument of at least one who had gone down to that nameless, boundless grave. These things moved something that lay deepest within her nature. She could not disbelieve in Franto; she could not blot out Michael from her thoughts; but all the same she loved the Schoolmaster more and more.

The autumn waned to early winter; and one December day Mary Ellen made to the Schoolmaster the same vows that she had made to Michael Greek. That night Michael Greek came home.

The return was a blow to Mary Ellen. In the new joy of the Schoolmaster's assured love, she had nearly persuaded herself that Michael was dead. The hope that he could not come back had kept her silent as to his name. Her fear now was lest the Schoolmaster should learn that she had been once bound to another; and lest he and Michael should in some way meet. That must be prevented. In order that it should be prevented