

## The Romance of Le Petit Isidore of Montmorency.

WITHOUT a doubt Isidore Giroux strongly resembled a black bear, not the wicked beast of the story books, but the good one who is the delight of all really virtuous children.

In the winter time when he drove along the Beauport road he was hardly to be distinguished from the big fur coat in which he was swathed, but on gala days when he was "Charretier" and drove Madam into Quebec then it was that it was impossible to think of Le Petit Isidore as a man at all, for the great coat, belonging to "Giroux le Fort," his father, went almost twice around him, and his twinkling brown eyes and shining teeth, which were the only things to be distinguished through the long black wolf hair, rather added to than detracted from the resemblance.

I think that it was one winter day that the idea of marriage first entered into the head of Isidore. He was carting manure from L'ange Gardien, and the wind, blowing straight from the west, made the journey a long cold one. However he had made himself as comfortable as circumstance would permit, twisted his reins through the handle of his pitchfork, and laid himself down, his back to the wind upon his warm but not too fragrant load; leaving to the Bon Dieu and his little pony the responsibilities of the road.

The lights of the cottages winked and twinkled brightly as the pony plodded through the snow, and perhaps it was the evident comfort of the half seen interiors which turned the habitant's thoughts from the general to the domestic.

Par example, it was time that he married, he mused; his mother had told him so a dozen times, and among his comrades he could hardly think of one his own age, 23, who had not already entered the holy estate. He could well afford to keep a wife. A man who was part owner of three horses and had first chance of all the carting done for the "Chantier" had a right to ask any girl. Besides there was lots of room "Chez Papa" and even if she declined to live with his parents they could manage nicely, providing her "dot" was even fairly substantial. Decidedly marriage was the thing for him. But here an unusually large drift stopped meditation and pony, and it was not until next day that Giroux resumed his train of thought.

The sun was shining brightly, the wind had died down, Madam was seated in the little red Carriole behind him and they were whirling into Quebec at quite an incredible rate of speed. Full however of his matrimonial projects Giroux kept an attentive eye on the cottages as they flew past and few girls on the Beauport road missed a smile that morning. What few escaped got their share in the afternoon on the return trip from Quebec, and Madam made an entry that night into her neat little diary speculating upon the cordial relations existing between the young men and women, and also upon the awful preponderance of the female element in the population of the Province of Quebec.

Isidore's scheme however which had seemed so simple last night was terribly complicated this evening. Marriage indeed was no great matter but the preliminaries of choice were most difficult.

Clara and Philomene were undoubtedly pretty, but Marie's little dot would undoubtedly be pleasant. Then Eulalie and Emelie were just as pretty as Clara or Philomene, and Alexina's plenshing was just as substantial as Marie's, and Jeanne was so "capable" and Blanche was so gay, and in no way could our hero decide where the handkerchief should best fall.

On Saturday after a week of indecision Isidore decided to ask the advice of the Boss at the Chantier, but the Boss as soon as he understood what was wanted of him only shoved back his cap off his head and roared with laughter leaving his difficulties no nearer solution than before.

Saturday was pay-day and a half holiday, and Isidore, perplexed with his failure, stood aside to watch the hands as they streamed out of the factory towards their homes. Suddenly his eye brightened. At the end of a little group moving towards the village were two girls, *les sœurs Huots*. Why had he not thought of them before? Both were charming; either would do nicely. His problem was solved. Quick as a flash, with a gay shout, he sprang upon his Traineau. In another moment the girls were beside him and, screaming and laughingly clutching each other, were whirled

down the road to their homes, away from their comrades' envious glances.

Once decided, Le petit Isidore was constant in his attentions, and henceforward at dance, mass or sliding party, he was sure to be found among the many swains attendant on the two sisters, for they were popular pretty girls, had the name for being "bien smarte," and were the acknowledged belles of the village. They in their turn accepted his attentions with evident cordiality and all seemed felicitous. The course of true love, however, never did run smooth, and spring brought trouble to Isidore. A big handsome Irishman came from Montreal as blacksmith to the Chantier, and he was indeed an obstacle.

O'Reilly, like most Irishmen, had an eye for the girls, and quickly singled out Rose and Verginie Huot as worthy of his attentions. Henceforth he was their sole Cavalier, caring first for one and then the other with perfect impartiality, but brooking no interference with his monopoly from the other men. The village girls were charmed with the big handsome fellow, and envied the Huots their admirer, but the men were furious, and, headed by Le petit Isidore, went one lunch hour and remonstrated and pointed out the error of the Irishman's ways to him.

"One girl surely was sufficient," argued Giroux, with much suavity and many gesticulations. "No man can converse with more than one at a time." For himself he had no preference. Let O'Reilly court the elder sister, and he would content himself with the younger one, or vice versa; both were equally charming. Here, however, he stopped abruptly, for O'Reilly's eyes were flashing fire, and his hands had reached forward to grasp a convenient crowbar. Seeing which the deputation fled as one man, for L'Irlandais was "une homme maudit," and a crowbar is an awful weapon in a crowd; failing the man, Isidore appealed to the master, but with no better success, for the boss only laughed louder than before, slapped him upon the back, and advised him to "tackle the girls." Such counsel was valueless, for O'Reilly seemed never off his guard, but spent dinner time with one at each side of him, and sat all evening with them at their house, or strolled proudly around with one on each arm. Driven to bay, Isidore tried a last resource, and called upon the Cure to interfere and stop such scandal in his flock. What transpired at the interview between priest and erring lambs no one to this day knows, but the only result was that the evening stroll was deferred until the good Cure had made his evening round of the village and gone to bed, when the trio appeared as happily as usual.

The situation had reached its crisis, Le petit Isidore felt that the eyes of the parish, of the world indeed, were upon him. It was rapidly becoming a question of race warfare, that most tender point in a French Canadian village, when the problem solved itself, as is the common manner of problems, in quite an unexpected manner. The Chantier shut down for indefinite repairs, and O'Reilly announced his intention of seeking work elsewhere.

The sky seemed to brighten for Giroux as he stood upon the platform of the station and saw the Irishman's grip sack tossed into the baggage car, but alas, the thunderous clouds lowered quickly, for the grip was followed by two little hair trunks, and, as the train puffed out of sight, *Les sœurs Huot* waived and nodded adieu to their friends from the rear platform of the second-class car, and Montmorency knew them no more.

Isidore has never married when urged to do so by the wiseacres of the village; he acknowledges willingly that the standard of beauty both above and below the hill is exceptionally high, but he intimates the difficulties of choice are insurmountable, and his own experience in the way of *les creatures* has satisfied him.

Travellers tell of a little manufacturing village in Maine where any fine evening O'Reilly may be seen strolling down the street with Rose smiling on one side, and Verginie leaning on the other, at once a scandal and a mystery to the good New Englanders, for Mrs. O'Reilly, a recent importation from the Old Country, sits in her doorway smiling also across her big Irish face and surveying her husband with evident complacency.

When the boss hears tell of these stories, he shoves back his hat still further off his head and grins, as is his custom. But Madam, with great gravity, maintains that it is a genuine case of that much doubted fact, a "platonic friendsh p."

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