

PELAGIE'S CHRISTMAS.

BY ROBERTA BELL.

On the right bank of the "Father of Waters," in the year 17—, was the little French village destined to become one day the great city of St. Louis.

The place at that time consisted of a single street running along the bank, well up from the river. Back of this street was the village common, while here and there, at increasing distances apart, were log cabins, marking the road which led first to the fort and later to the settlement of friendly Indians, several miles away.

The houses along the street fronting the river had mostly a well-kept, thrifty look, while a few were even pretentious. One of these excellent all the others in its neatness and air of consequence.

It was built of upright poles, the spaces between filled with a mixture of mud or plaster, and the whole brilliant with successive coats of whitewash.

In the open door of this cottage, one fine day in the latter part of December, stood a young girl of perhaps sixteen years of age. Her figure, slight, yet full of curves, fitting in the dark, tightly-fitting "josey," then worn. Her short skirt of bright-hued homespun revealed a neat-fitting stocking on the trimmest of little ankles. From her little toes, alight with some what clumsy shoes, up to her brilliant brown eyes, she was a model of girlish beauty.

At this moment her white forehead was puckered up, and her face very serious, but when she smiles—ah! you shall see such a burst of sunshine. All the boys know the dazzling effect of Pelagie's smile, but perhaps Jean Vallot knows it best of all.

The hand which shaded her eyes as she gazed long and eagerly up and down the river was white and firm, unspiced as yet by housework.

She has evidently looked in vain, for a little frown of disappointment clouded her face as she dropped her arm and vanished within the doorway.

The room she entered was filled with a merry group of young girls, busy as bees and noisy as humming-birds. A few young men loomed about the low-ceilinged apartment, some aiding, some hindering their fair companions. A jolly-looking, fat French woman fitted back and forth from the kitchen, superintending all, and adding her own work to the preparation for the coming festival. Christmas was only a week off, and the "grand banquet" was to be at Monsieur Guion's house, and while every household made its own special provision for the day, all combined to assist at the fete at the beloved Commandant's.

A storm of lively query and comment greeted Pelagie's return to the house. "My faith, and didst thou see him, Pelagie?" "Thou has looked long enough!" "Ciel! no. I would stand a week at the door to await him were he my sweetheart," said another.

"Not a glimpse of him, Fanchette. I fear he has found a new bride, and I shall have to look elsewhere for a partner at the Twelfth-night dance."

"No fear of that," cried a half-dozen together. "I hope he has, and will bring her home, that I may dance with her," said a sturdy youth who was wearing Fanchette's apron string in and out of the back of her chair.

A chorus of approving chuckles from the boys and disapproving grunts from the young girls greeted this remark. "Thou shouldst never dance with her were she my bride," growled a tall, blue-eyed fellow of nineteen years, who was sweeping in and out of the kitchen-apron, and engaged in chopping some sweet-scented, fruity substance in a large wooden bowl. A chorus of laughter went up at this—Jean Vallot's warlike soul and his peaceful occupation were ludicrously at variance.

"Thou art indeed a jealous monster! but not so bad as that!" "And how wouldst thou prevent me?" said the first youngster, tauntingly, as he tied the final knot in Fanchette's apron-strings.

I would shoot him or knife him who dares lay a finger on her." Jean touched his weapon as he spoke, and nodded his head several times.

One and all burst into a peal of laughter. With a face like a thunder-cloud the boy stooped to pick up an apple that had rolled from Pelagie's lap on the floor. She also stooped, their heads came together with a soft concussion, their hands touched in reaching for the fruit. Their eyes met, and for a moment her face was crimsoned, a smile dimpled her cheek and her eyes danced, and lo! as by magic, the angry look melted out of her face and an air of contentment took its place—and while this happened good Mère Guion shook her head at the others with a reproachful glance, as if she would say: Why torment this poor Jean, when every one knows his weakness?

The hum of voices, the cracking of nuts, the rattle of chopping knives, and the occasional twitter of a caged bird in the room, drowned any sound which might have been made by a door opening.

At this moment a tall shadow fell athwart the white floor. A bronzed figure followed on tiptoe, and with a finger warningly laid upon his lips stood in the centre of the room. Only Pelagie, whose back was to the door, and Jean, who was looking at her, failed to perceive the apparition.

Fanchette started up with a tremulous face, but being tied sat suddenly down again. Pelagie had just peeped an apple with dainty care, ring after ring of bright red apple-skin curled around her white fingers. She smiled at Jean Vallot, who was turning red and white with jealous fears as to the outcome, and threw it over her shoulder. As she turned to see what shape the curving peel might have taken, a pair of strong, firm hands were placed gently upon her eyes.

"It is a V. V. I tell thee that, Pelagie!" chirped one of her chums in bird-like French. "No, but no!" cried Fanchette, stretching her head and neck to look, "it's a C—erment a C—nothing else."

"But your first who is this?" said the owner of the strong hands. "Paul—Paul St. Vrain," she answered, as she struggled to pull them away. Amid the buzz of greeting which now

ensued, Jean Vallot slipped quietly and all unnoticed out of the room.

The newcomer was a well-built young fellow of twenty, dressed in a picturesque and handsome hunting costume, his bearded leggings alone being worth the price of many oxen.

In reply to the questions and congratulations which poured upon him from all sides, St. Vrain told of the unusually prosperous voyage he had made. "Out—yes, friends, instead of the one bateau and five canoes which I took away, I have brought back two bateaux and nine canoes—and the store of fine skins is great. We have had wonderful luck, though we have passed through great dangers. See, a bullet from an Indian's spear took off this little piece of my ear, and as he was about to shoot again one of my friends took him off—with another bullet just a little better aimed. A dead Indian and my life saved!"

"Where is Edmond Gamsche, he? Oh, gone to Vide Poché. He fears his old mother might be dead, and the other boys are gone home, too. Ten months is a long time to be away from friends, and wives and sweethearts." He gave a long look at Pelagie as he said this. She frowned a little.

"By my faith, girls, I have brought back a famous sweetheart for one of you—if so be one is lucky enough to catch him." He was immediately surrounded by the bright-eyed maidens, who unceremoniously elbowed the boys aside.

Fanchette, who had only now been released by Mère Guion from her bondage, was in the very front. Paul was besieged with questions. "But, yes—one at a time," he remonstrated. "He is English, from New York and from London. Tall? Oh, yes! A good shot, a fine oar. Yes, it was his shot that saved me from that unseemly Indian. Brave—oh! and he is an artist; he can draw a picture like life itself."

"His name, didst thou say, Fanchette?" His name is Chester Hardie—and thou shalt see him to-night at the dance and shalt admit he is the finest fellow in the room; and perhaps he will get the best out of thy Twelfth-night cake, and be thy man!" He pinched Fanchette's cheek playfully, which little liberty caused her to color painfully and draw back. The home-coming of so many village lads and the arrival of the stranger filled these simple village girls with excitement. They met their adieu to the family of the good Commandant, and hid to their respective homes to tell the news—to bear some and perhaps to meet others of the returned travellers, ere attiring themselves in their gayest apparel for the dance which, at one house or another, wound up the tolls of nearly every day.

In honor of the new arrivals, the dance would be this night at Veuve St. Vrain's. The young fellows, of course, gathered their hats and accompanied the girls. He only remained with Pelagie. He had formerly been so devoted to her, that he considered her suitor, though no definite word had passed between them. His successful voyage had made him feel well able to marry, and it was in his mind to get from her at once a definite promise, and perhaps a definite date for the wedding.

But Pelagie was very coy—what a mixture of feelings in the heart of a girl of sixteen, what a jumble of thoughts in her mind! In Paul's long absence her youthful fancy for him had somewhat faded. Other admirers had not been lacking. She enjoyed the possession of the village hero as she enjoyed her own position of village belle and beauty. Yet, she individually she cared little, and a wedded life with him looked terribly common-place now that he was here. It would seem so with any one, she fancied. Besides he seemed so assured and so persistent. She might perhaps marry him, really, if he would not tease her so, but some imp of contrariness made her loath to admit even that much.

"How do I know," she said with a roguish demureness, "how do I know," I may not meet some one I like better?" "Oh, I will love thee so well I will not let thee, Pelagie—kissing her hand—"I know thou wilt marry me, but I want to hear thee say so." She shook her head obstinately. "Wilt thou say yes to-morrow? No? Next day?" She still shook her little head with a vehemence that threatened to bring down all these black bristles round so neatly about it. "The Twelfth-night day?" Her face was averted, but her head still moved from side to side energetically, and now Paul, who had been trying to look into her eyes, seized it firmly, and gently held it between his hands.

"Now, then, canst thou shake thy head, and if thou sayest No, I will kiss thy lips until thy breath is all—gone!" At this dreadful threat, the eyes sparkled and the dimples came out in force, but no word was spoken. Paul gazed at her an instant, thinking he would inflict the penalty anyhow, but he evidently thought better of it, for he released her with a sigh, saying: "Then it is Yes, on Christmas day, and no fail—I think I'll marry thee the next minute. Now, Petite, I must go; Chester Hardie will think me a poor host. To-night thou shalt see him, and thou shalt like him for my sake."

"I know I shall not like him," murmured Pelagie, stroking her braids and settling a vagrant hair-pin.

"And thou shalt see the fine picture he has made of me, and I will ask him to make one of thee, also. What! not one little kiss?" he grumbled, as Pelagie nimbly eluded him. "Well, I can wait until Christmas, but then, oh, I warn thee, I shall be an ogre, and eat thee up."

As Pelagie watched his figure disappearing in the distance, she felt a little strange feeling of disappointment, that he had not taken that kiss, which she had yet no mind to accord him.

When Pelagie, accompanied by her parents, reached Veuve St. Vrain's house, the guests, young and old, were already assembled, and many couples were gaily feeling of disappointment, that he had not taken that kiss, which she had yet no mind to accord him.

Then arose on the night a burst of harmony from organ and voice, and the murmur of prayers, and anon the priest re-took the old ever-new story of peace on earth and good will toward men, and a hundred hearts, throbbing with holy fervor. In a dis-tinct, shadowy pew, two hands had somehow

found each other and forgot to separate. Out in the deep darkness at the river brook, silent, unhappy Jean out in the dappled darkness of the forest rode Paul, merrily humming the last waltz—he had danced it with Fanchette, somehow, and not with Pelagie, "more's the pity."

Paul could not be discontent, even though danger threatened the village. "It would all come right somehow."

Amid the merry clangor of Christmas bells, the church poured out its throng, and the now rarely wearied people sought their homes. A slouching shadow had pursued Chester Hardie and Pelagie to the Guion's gate, and as the two lingered for a last word, a knife, sharp and glittering, clove the air, and—but love is quicker than hate—Pelagie's arm interposed, and the cruel knife did not quite reach Chester's heart, but tore Pelagie's arm instead, and then buried itself in Hardie's side. As Pelagie's piercing scream rang out, Chester put out an arm to shield her, and grasping each other they fell unconscious to the ground.

Jean turned upon his heel and vanished into the nearest shadow. The girl's cry had not only brought out her father and mother, but also arrested a host of friends, who, with much gaspulation and many "May Deu's" carried the pair into the house.

Pelagie soon recovered consciousness, and applied herself feverishly to tend and care for Chester, who still lay pale and speechless.

Many were the expressions of wonder that one so beloved as Chester should have been the subject of such an attack, and many were the questions asked—where, suddenly missed and no one could say where he had gone. Trembling neighbors came in to know if it was true that Paul St. Vrain had been shot by Hardie; while as many more had heard that Paul had himself killed his friend. In the midst of this confusion Paul entered, very pale and almost breathless. A glass of Mère Guion's good home-made wine was given him, while he listened to the story told by a dozen excited people.

He set his glass upon the dresser, and after a slight pause said—"Jean Vallot." A babel of voices arose. Why had no one thought of it before! "Find Jean at once!" "Send for him." "He will have died!"

Paul now told his story—how he had gone to see if there was danger from the Keekuks; how the Osages had denied that there was anything in the report—how, speeding along the road, he had met Jean Vallot, and, reining in his horse, had called out to him a friendly greeting.

"He was pale," said Paul, "like a corpse; he was pained enough already, and without a word, he plunged his knife into his own heart."

"I almost fell off my horse with horror; but he he lies, in the road stone-dead. I galloped in for assistance as fast as I could. Why—why, on earth, did he do this thing?" Chester Hardie took up Pelagie's hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Holy Mother of God!" exclaimed Veuve St. Vrain, "he thought he had slain thee, and it was thy spirit that had arisen to accuse him!"

"Yes, that hunting-suit—that new suit of M. Hardie—he took him for thee."

"Just so," said Chester faintly; "the fellow has long thirsted for your blood, Paul, and he has gotten a little of mine by mistake."

"And so thou has saved my life once more! What can I ever do for thee in return?" Chester fixed his bright burning eyes upon his friend for an instant, then again he took the hand of Pelagie with his own. The look and action were full of significance to Paul. In his present exalted state he comprehended everything. His face fell, then with a heroic effort he mastered himself.

"Is it really so? Chester, Pelagie!" The girl hung her head, but she nodded. A clink of glasses came from the adjoining room, where the villagers had stopped preparatory to setting out after Jean Vallot's body. No one was in the room but themselves. Pelagie's eyes had found Chester's, and it was better to Paul to see the love-light in them. "Thou hast saved my own life, only I will have Pelagie first." So the happy young couple passed on, walking on a blissful, unharmed, and Jean Vallot slunk heavily down to the river-side to nurse his hot, bitter thoughts of revenge.

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OCEAN WONDERS. What May Be Seen Down Among the Corals.

In no quarter of the world are the partly-buried ocean wonders more lavishly displayed in all their endless variety than off the north-eastern coast of Terra Australis, within the Great Barrier reef in the Coral Sea.

As the boat is launched to take us ashore (says a traveller) the wonders commence at once. It is surely some fairy forest, where elfin kings court princesses in fishy guise, or water babies sit and pour on some coral boulder. Or is it a submarine flower garden where the mermaids dwell?

Deep down in clear, bright water wonderful shades and colors are seen, at first indistinctly, like a tinted photograph out of focus; then, as the water gets shallower, more and still more distinctly flash the jewel fires, and the picture is complete. Large flat bowls of milk-white coral first attract the eye. Then others, with branching antlers of a faller deer, on the top of which there are lying buried the huge, confused mass. Some of them are covered with 10,000 sharp, pinnacles of a light purple color, such pinnacles having a bright blue eye (or what looks like an eye) at the extremity. There light and feathery branches of fern-like coral are blanketing the sea floor. Here large solid masses of brain coral, round and white, the surface encrusted or engraved with the most delicate lace tracings; and others green and shaped like a coarse moss.

Salvini and Edwin Booth. From California we returned to New York where I had an offer to play for three weeks with the famous artist, Edwin Booth, to give three performances of "Othello" a week, with Booth as Iago and me as Othello. The cities selected were New York, Philadelphia and Boston. As the managers had to hire the theatre by the week, they proposed that we should give "Hamlet" as a fourth performance, with Booth as Hamlet and me as the Ghost.

I accepted with the greatest pleasure, flattered to be associated with so distinguished and sympathetic an artist. I cannot find epithets to characterize those twelve performances! The word "extraordinary" is not enough, nor is "splendid." I will call them "unique," for I do not believe that any similar combination was ever aroused such interest in North America.

To give some idea of it, I will say that the receipts for the twelve performances were \$15,500, an average of \$3,625 a night. In Italy such receipts would be something phenomenal; in America they were very satisfactory.

During this time I came to know Booth, and I found in him every quality that characterizes a gentleman. The affability and modesty of his manners rendered him justly loved and esteemed, not only by his countrymen, but all who had the fortune to make his acquaintance.—Century.

Stranger hurried away. When the sketched went in to tea he felt that something was wrong. "You're in for it!" said his wife. "Let us look at the sketch first," said Mr. Ruskin; and luckily it was a very good one.

By-and-by it came out. The Yorkshireman had caught the professor, and eagerly described the horrible outrage perpetrated on the tall. He had received some very emphatic language in return, whereupon he took off his hat and bowed low.

"But sir," he faltered, "the gentleman up there said I was to tell you, and you would be so interested!" The professor, suddenly mollified, took off his own hat in turn, and apologized for his reception of the unwelcome news.

"But," he added, "I shall never care for Hardwood Waterfall again."

He was indistinctly conscious that the chrysanthemum on the coat matched her glorious tresses. Yes, she would be his. He was not dreaming. "Alred," she whispered, timidly, as he rose to go; "wont you leave me a token upon which I may look and remember our vows?"

With lowered glance she waited. "Here," he rejoined, bending his head until his lips touched her brow. "On the morrow I will place upon thy finger a ring." She smiled in sweet resignation. "Very well," she said bravely; "I suppose a string will answer until then."

Some years ago there lived in Perth, Scotland, a man of convivial habits, well known by his Christian name, Jamie. One dark night an acquaintance found Jamie lying at the foot of an outside stair. "Is that you Jamie?" asked the acquaintance, in a voice of the greatest astonishment. "Ay, it's me," replied Jamie, in a tone of complete resignation. "Have you fa'en down the stair?" was the next question. "Ay I fell down; but I was coming down, whether or no."

Visitor—"And which is the older, Tommy, you or Willie?" Willie—"What's tie away? Visitor (mystified)—"What do you mean by tie away?" Tommy—"Aw, we're twins."