

suffering has taught him his folly, he will begin again with a gift from God; but all the years are wasted, and the first talent is for ever forfeited. And every sin of man, every violation of truth and justice, every denial of the faith, every neglect of the great salvation, will entail its everlasting penalty. To neglect an opportunity of divine service and communion is to lose an enjoyment,—the delight which flows from the performance of a duty—the satisfaction which arises from a sense of growth in love and holiness; aye, it is to lose a very part of life.

CHRISTIAN.

THE MILL OF ST. HERBOT—A BRETON STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PATTY."

CHAPTER V.

COEFFIC STITCHES AND TALKS.

Louise had done her errand to the tailor Coeffic in Huelgoat before she went down into the rocky valley, and the next morning the small, bandy-legged man arrived at the Mill of St. Herbot.

Mathurin saw him coming out of the wood. He crossed himself, and disappeared behind the cow-stalls, for the old serving-man was a pious believer in relics, charms, spells, and invocations, and the material creed and practices of this red-haired, crook-backed, limping tailor were to him abhorrent. Moreover, he regarded Coeffic as a fitter associate for women than for men—one who inhe-trigued and manoeuvred, and was altogether feminine in his ways, especially as regarded matchmaking. Mathurin did not wish Louise to marry at present, and he suspected the cause of the tailor's presence.

The tailor tapped at the door of the cottage, and Louise opened it.

"Health and happiness, my pretty child," Coeffic had a fawning, flattering voice, but he looked hideous as he leered at Louise. "Now where is this fine corset that I am to stitch at, and what colours is it to be stitched? See!"

He advanced to the table, and unfastened the strings of a bag which had hung over his shoulder. Out of this he took silk and chenille of various colours, and asked Louise to choose among them. While the girl bent over the gay tints, he laid aside his broad-brimmed hat, and pushed his dark-red hair behind his ears.

"And how is the good mother, pretty Louise? and when is she going to let me find you a husband?"

Louise smiled and tossed her head; but the keen-eyed tailor saw that she also looked confused, and yet he had often before asked her that question.

Madame Rusquec came in at the door. She heard the word "husband," and she frowned.

"Good-day, Stéphane Coeffic. I will give you the cloth, and you can set to work. Louise will give the patterns."

Coeffic raised his eyebrows ever so little at her cold tone; but he took no more notice of Louise.

He had soon cut out the new justin, or corset, a sort of sleeveless body of green stuff, cut square in front, and on this he was to embroider a border round the edges, and also at each eyelet-hole, with blue and scarlet and yellow silk. As soon as he was ready for stitching, he seated himself cross-legged on the table surrounded by his work, while Madame Rusquec drew her stool near, ready to help in the inferior part of the sewing.

Louise hovered about, but so long as he was planning and fixing even Coeffic kept silence, and finding no one to answer her, the girl went out, and left the silent pair alone.

She was too full of excitement to endure her mother's serious reproving looks this morning. Yesterday seemed to have begun a new life for her. In the morning of that day her head had been full of Jean Marie, and then came that charming meeting among the rocks of Huelgoat. She tried to persuade herself that it had come by chance, and that therefore she and Christophe were destined for one another; but now, as she sauntered idly along towards the wood, she felt that she was imposing a falsehood upon herself. She knew very well that she had gone down to see the grotto as an excuse for lingering in Huelgoat, and also in a faint hope of seeing Christophe Mao.

"Still it was a sort of chance," she said, and she went on to the sabotier's hut to find Barba.

Coeffic stitched on in silence, he waited to see if Madame Rusquec would scold him for what he had said to Louise.

She being always slow at speech, a rare contrast to her daughter, stitched a whole seam of Louise's new green skirt before she so much as looked at the tailor. Only the click of the needles, an occasional shuffle as Coeffic shifted his position or his work, and the sleepy purr of a long-tailed, furry, yellow cat lying near the hearth disturbed the silence.

Having finished her seam the widow handed the gay coloured petticoat to the tailor for another to be fixed for her. Then she clasped her fingers round her knee, and spoke the sentence which all this while she had been framing.

"Stéphane Coeffic, it is not well to talk about a husband to Louise; she is too young to be married."

Coeffic grinned till his almost toothless gums showed plainly.

"Madame," he said, smoothly, "we forget our own feelings when we were young. It is the way with us all. Now I am sure from the youthful aspect of Madame herself that when she wedded she was no older than our pretty Louise."

A faint flush came into the widow's long fallow face.

"Perhaps not; but then marriage did not make me so happy that I should wish my girl to follow in my steps."

The tailor put his head on one side and looked at her out of his half-shut eyes. He had not often worked for Widow Rusquec; she had cut up and con-verted old gowns of her own for Louise, but he had heard of her as a reserved woman; it was a surprise to him to hear her speak thus openly of her own life.

"It is an old saying, neighbour, that no two leaves of a tree are alike, and, by the same rule, no two lots in life have resemblance. Madame is wise very

wise, and if her superior wisdom choose the husband, our pretty Louise will be a happy wife."

Madame Rusquec had only one strongly-placed bit of self-complacence. She believed in her own judgment, and was usually ready to doubt the opinions of others before they were uttered.

"I do not know that there are any men in these parts wanting wives just now," she said.

The tailor looked up eagerly.

"If that is the only hindrance, be at rest," he said; "I can name three or four. There is Michel Kerest, and Jules Le Houédec, and, better still, there are the two brothers at the farm of Braspart."

Madame Rusquec looked more interested, and Coeffic noted cunningly her increased attention.

"There is only one man there able to marry."

"With your pardon, there are two; they have both drawn for the con-scription, and have both been fortunate. They are therefore free to seek wives."

Madame Rusquec sat upright and looked full of contradiction.

"That may be true about the lots, but only the eldest is free to seek a wife. Christophe Mao has nothing to keep a house with."

The tailor left off his work and held up both hands.

"Ah, but then how is it that the men of Huelgoat keep their wives. There are some who work in the mines, and others who carry about wares for sale, there are few farmers for the land is too barren—there is no farm like that of Braspart."

Madame Rusquec clasped her chin with one hand and sat thinking; the tailor gave her back the work he had fixed and returned to his stitching, and again the click, click of the two needles sounded in the silence.

"That is as I say, Jean Marie Mao is well-to-do, he has a house, and furni-ture, and chests full of linen; he can take a wife when he pleases; but for the young Christophe it is different."

The tailor looked round him with delight, he seemed to appeal to some unseen audience when he spoke.

"That is it. Did I not say it." He seemed to draw his stitches extra tight to emphasize his sentences. "Is she not a miracle of wisdom? It is indeed different for the young Christophe, but he has already earned money at the fishery: ah, yes, why not? and now he earns wages from his brother. Why should not he marry our Louise, and work the mill in place of poor old stupid Mathurin."

Meantime Louise had not found Barba, and had gone round to the back of the mill; here was another plot of cabbages stretching upwards to the wood; these had mostly been cut, and Mathurin was busy digging the stumps out of the ground and making it ready for fresh planting.

"How busy you are," the girl said, when she had watched him for some minutes, "you and Coeffic are both hard workers, but you do the most because you never talk."

Mathurin stuck his spade in the ground, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead with his blue and yellow handkerchief.

"It would be well for Coeffic if some one stitched his mouth up before he goes jabbering among young girls"—he spoke angrily—"he is a foul-tongued flatterer."

Louise laughed.

"He flatters—yes. But then he is amusing, Mathurin."

The old man went on digging.

"Coeffic has a tongue like a woman." He said this after some minutes' thought.

"See how jealous you are, Mathurin, you will not have any one praised; and you wrong Coeffic, he does not always flatter, he speaks of other things—he asked me if I should like a husband."

Mathurin dug on for some time, throwing up the earth with much unneces-sary vigour.

But Louise would not leave him in peace. She pulled her knitting out of her apron-pocket, and seated herself on a lump of stone facing Mathurin.

"Mathurin, guess who I saw yesterday and at Huelgoat?"

"You went to Huelgoat then; why could not I have summoned Coeffic?"

Louise raised her head and tried to look dignified.

"Because I chose to go myself; or, if you must know"—she could not bear not to be friends with everyone—"I had to tell Coeffic about the silks to embroi-der with. Now could you do that? But you have not guessed," she added, teasingly.

"I do not know who you saw at Huelgoat. The mistress has told me that Jean Marie came here yesterday."

"Yes, and I saw him. Mathurin, I want you to tell me what he and Chris-tophe were like when they were boys. Would either of them do for my hus-band, old man?" She laughed, but she bent over her knitting to hide her blushing face.

Mathurin stuck his spade into the ground, raised his hat, and crossed him-self.

"May St. Yves and the holy saints forbid! The farmer is not a man to marry, and Christophe, who is good and gentle enough for any woman, has no money to keep a wife with."

"Why do you look so alarmed about the farmer? Why should not Jean Marie marry? He is rich, and I am sure he is a fine-looking man. What do you know against him, Mathurin?"

"I know naught of him now. I quarrelled with his father, and with him too; but that is long ago. He was a wild, fierce-tempered boy, always more ready with blows than words. He was jealous, too—so jealous, that the young boy, Christophe, was sent away to sea, to be safe from his brother's temper."

Louise's smiling face had grown serious. She kept silent, and went on knitting.

"I saw Christophe yesterday." She looked up at Mathurin to see how he would take her news. "He looks good-tempered, but he is not so clever as Jean Marie is."

"Christophe is not clever at all, but he is good. He always was good and loving."