

It was about the beginning of December, 1850, when Edward was again starting to cross the Atlantic.

Arrived at Portland, Edward stepped on board the cars and whether by chance or mistake, at Richmond took the train for Quebec instead of Montreal. When he discovered the error it was too late to return and on Sunday morning he found himself at the Grand Trunk station at Levis.

"Why, Kent, are you out again? How do you do?"

"How are you, Williams?"

"You are the third of the Regiment out this winter. Burton and Wells are here before you. I suppose you are on the same hunt."

"I think not," said Capt. Kent. "I believe Burton and Wells are on matrimony bent. I intend to go after moose and cariboo."

"Anyhow you will have the pleasure of seeing Burton enter the bonds. He is to be married next week."

"So soon? He told me the lady's name, but I forget it," said Capt. Kent. "Who is it?"

"Miss Butler" replied Mr. Williams.

"Yes, that is the name he told me."

This conversation Edward heard. His fur cap covered his face, and the expression of it was hidden. "Heavens!" he muttered between his teeth, "is this the first welcome I get? What a fool I was to have come here. I shall go mad if these fellows don't stop." But the fellows did stop, at least on that subject, and the Beauport Lunatic Asylum lost a patient.

Fevered and excited and cursing himself a hundred times for coming to Quebec, Edward, after breakfast went out to cool his aching head. He walked along steadily, without noticing those he met; he wished to get out of the city to find the country; the hotel had stifled him and he strode on rapidly. A lady and gentleman, evidently on their way to church, were slowly walking along.

"Why, Loo, I swear here is that dared-evil Capt. Houghton who balked me in the Crimea. He seems to haunt me."

"Where?" asked Louisa Butler.

"Meeting us," answered Capt. Burton.

"Edward!" screamed Louisa Butler, and she stood face to face with him.

"How do you do, Louisa?" and they shook hands.

"Oh! Edward, how glad I am to see you. We all thought you were drowned."

"I wish I had been, but the sea won't have me and war won't harm me. How is your father?"

"Very well, but come and see Bertie."

"Excuse me; she may not wish to see me."

"Not wish to see you! and she has been nearly dead because she thought she had been the cause of your death. You must come, right away. Excuse me for not introducing you both before. My cousin Mr. Houghton, Capt. Burton, and your cousin too, for do you know you are in time for our wedding, which takes place next week," said Louisa.

"Loo; tell me," cried Edward, "is it you that is to be married to Capt. Burton?"

"Yes," answered Louisa.

"And were you at the Natural Steps that day?"

"Yes, of course I was, and came up just in time to find Bertie almost crazy because you had gone."

"My God," cried Edward, "what a fool I have been. It has been all a mistake, and what misery I have suffered, and how I have suspected you all! Can you forgive me, Loo? And you, Capt. Burton, can you forgive me, for I have hated you? And dear Bertie, how is she, and can I ever forgive myself for having doubted her? Let us go to her at once," and Edward seemed beside himself.

"Dear Edward, don't be so excited; there is nothing to forgive, but you cannot see Bertie, if you do not control yourself, for she has been very ill for the last two years, and the least excitement might prove injurious to her."

"I have killed my darling," exclaimed Edward in his anguish.

They had reached Mr. Butler's house and Edward waited in the library while Louisa prepared Bertie for his appearance.

Bertie reclined on an easy chair before a grate-fire in a sitting room, and Louisa walked quietly in, in case she was asleep; but the door had hardly closed when, as if by intuition, Bertie glanced quickly at her sister's face and read there her fate. The blood overspread her pale face and she screamed out, "Tell me quickly, Loo, you have seen Edward, he is here, why don't you fetch him," and she sprang from the chair; the blood fled from her face, and giving a piercing shriek she fell into her sister's arms.

In a moment the house was in commotion, the doctor was in attendance and restoratives applied; slowly she recovered from the deathlike faint and when her eyes opened the first word she uttered was "Edward," he was by her side with her hand in his, "My darling; my own one, I am here."

He hardly knew the pale face before him from that he had left so bright and glorious two years ago; and oh! how earnestly he prayed that those fresh colours would soon come back again. And they did, for the presence of him she loved filled the aching void in Bertie's heart and was more beneficial than any medicine.

Edward would not leave his Bertie, but telegraphed to Montreal his safety and arrival in Quebec. Mr. and Mrs. Houghton came the next day to welcome their long lost son, whom they had so sorrowfully mourned.

Louisa's marriage with Capt. Burton was to take place shortly and so it did, and at the same time that of Bertie and Edward; for Bertie quickly recovered after that happy meeting.

These marriages were duly recorded in the evening paper under the usual heading as follows:

"This morning, at the Cathedral, by His Lordship the Bishop of the Diocese, assisted by the Rev. Rector, Charles Burton, Esq., Captain in Her Majesty's 20th Regiment and of Burton Hall, Cheshire, England, to Louisa, eldest daughter of Horace Butler, Esq., of this city."

"At the same time, Edward Houghton, Esquire, Captain in Her Majesty's 40th Regiment and Bellevue House, Montreal, to Bertha, second daughter of Horace Butler, Esq., of this city."

In the same paper, under the heading *Fashionable Weddings* was given a description of the proceeding, who were there and what they wore.

Christmas soon came, and we need not say it was royally celebrated at the residence of the above Horace Butler, Esq., nor that it was the happiest at least for two years that had been passed by the families of Butler and Houghton.

T.

(For the Canadian Illustrated News.)

THE DRINKING STONES.

A BRETON CHRISTMAS STORY.

(From the German.)

Not far from Vannes, in Morbihan, which the reader will remember is the Breton Department *par excellence*, is a small scattered hamlet that bears the quaint but characteristic name of Plouhinec.

Now Plouhinec, unlike other localities chosen by storytellers for the scenes of their relations, is remarkable for nothing more than the extreme poverty of its inhabitants. The country round about is hard rocky ground, which does not even afford pasture enough to fatten an ox for the festive season of Christmas. Even a fatted hog is a rare and highly esteemed delicacy.

But if there is a notable absence of pasture in the neighbourhood of Plouhinec, there is no lack of stone. One spot in particular is covered with immense boulders, fantastically arranged, by the fairies, the simple Bretons say, in rows, forming long alleys.

Not far from this Breton Stonehenge, there lived, at the time of which my story tells, a peasant, named Marzanne, the only rich man in the neighbourhood. He would hardly have passed for a wealthy man anywhere else than at Plouhinec, but at Plouhinec he was looked up to and respected as only a Cræsus is looked up to and respected by his humbler neighbours. Did he not salt down a pig every year? Had he not always black bread enough and to spare? And had any one ever known him fail to appear at mass on Palm Sunday with a brand new pair of wooden shoes? Yes, Marzanne was undoubtedly a rich man, and he knew how to comport himself accordingly. Besides his wealth, however, he was the happy possessor of something else that greatly increased his prestige. This something was a sister, of whose good looks the neighbours were as proud, almost, as of the wealth of her brother. Rosine was certainly a comely, buxom lass, the acknowledged belle of that part of the country. Of course she had no lack of admirers; wealth and beauty never want for such.

Among the number of those who aspired to Rosine's hand was a young peasant named Bernez—a hard-working, honest young fellow enough, but who unfortunately for the success of his hopes, was of all the poverty-stricken people of Plouhinec, the least endowed with worldly goods. He had made his appearance in the parish some years before, in search of work. At that time Rosine was quite a little girl. The two had now grown up, and of all her former admirers Bernez was the only one who had not been discouraged by Marzanne's refusal to dispose of his sister's hand and fortune. His constancy was the talk of the whole hamlet, and the gossips without exception agreed that Bernez was in love with Rosine as surely as the English had nothing but petition to look forward to. As this last proposition amounted to a conviction among them we may be sure that they had some grounds for the assertion.

Rosine, I may add, treated him kindly, though it was only in secret; while Marzanne was always well disposed towards him, although he did refuse him his sister's hand.

One Christmas Eve Marzanne invited a number of young men, Bernez among them, to his house. He wished to assert his position and his generosity by treating them to a supper of sausages with barley-broth and honey. Had it been a fine night the whole party would have gone to midnight mass first, but the weather was so bad that they were compelled to stay at home. So, as they had nothing better to do, they fell to at the fare their host had provided—with the exception of Bernez, that is, for he was too much occupied with the thoughts of his hopeless love to care even for such unwonted delicacies as barley-broth and sausages.

The guests had just joyously responded to the invitation of their host to draw their stools up to the table, when a knock was heard at the door and without further parley an old man entered the room and wished all present a hearty appetite.

The new comer, though he was dressed in rags and had all the appearance of a beggar, had boldly stepped into the room without waiting for permission to enter. No one bid him welcome or returned his greeting. In fact the only recognition he received was a scowl, for he was a suspected man. He never had been known to enter the church, so he was generally set down as a sorcerer, and feared and disliked accordingly. The peasants accused him of bewitching their cattle and blighting their crops. Some even went further and insisted that he possessed the power of changing himself into a werewolf.

Out of respect for his cloth the old man was allowed to draw up a three legged stool before the hearth, and a bowl of broth was handed to him. When he had eaten his fill the beggar asked to be shown a place where he could pass the night, and Marzanne showed the way to the stable—a ramshackle old shanty, the only occupants of which were a mangy donkey and a very lean, ill-favoured ox. Without more ado the old man coiled himself up in the straw, and was on the point of dropping asleep when midnight struck.

The last stroke of twelve had hardly died away when the mangy donkey shook its long ears and addressed himself to his neighbour, the ill-favoured ox.

"Well, cousin," said the gifted animal, "how have things gone since our conversation last Christmas?"

The ox at first made no reply, but contented himself with eyeing the beggar suspiciously.

"Much was it worth while," he grumbled at last, "that our forefathers were present at the Birth at Bethlehem, and that therefore we are allowed the gift of speech on its anniversary, if we must talk in the presence of such a good-for-nothing fellow as this."

"Hoity toity, you are mighty proud, cousin," returned the ass gaily. "If any one has a right to be so, surely I have, for do I not bear the mark of the Cross on my shoulders, the sign that my ancestor carried the Saviour into Jerusalem. But I am not given to bragging about the powers that have been conferred on me. Don't you see that the old sorcerer is asleep?"

"Yes," replied the ox, "that's always the way with him. He is always asleep when he should be awake, and so with all his sorcery he never did anything yet. Had he been awake to-night I could have told him a better secret than the Devil ever has."

"What is that?" asked the ass, pricking up his ears with curiosity.

"That on the last night of the year he could make his fortune close by here."

"How so? How so?"

"Don't you know," said the ox, contemptuously, "that once in a century the great stones on Plouhinec heath go to the river to drink? This year their time comes, and while they are away at the river the treasure they conceal lies unguarded."

"I know, I know," cried the ass, pensively shaking its ears. "How one's memory gets rusty as one grows older. Yes, the treasure lies unguarded, and anyone can take as much as he likes, but the stones come back so swiftly that the treasure-seeker is crushed to death unless he has taken his precautions."

"Not if he has provided himself with groundsel and five-leaved clover, and holds them out before the returning stones."

"And even then, if I remember right," continued the ass, "he must sacrifice a Christian soul or all his treasure falls to dust."

"Yes, unless he receives a Christian soul in return the Devil allows no mortal to enjoy his treasure."

"Pooh, the old sorcerer would have no trouble about the soul."

Here the conversation took a domestic turn. The beggar, who had heard every word, laughed to himself as he thought: "Ah, my little beasts, my dear little hearts, you have made me richer than the mayor of Vannes. Don't be afraid, the old sorcerer was not asleep when he should have been awake."

At day-break the old beggar rose and went his way. Begging, however, was not his business. The two charmed herbs, groundsel and five-leaved clover, were the objects of his search. The quest was no easy task, for he had to seek a more fertile part of the country than that about Plouhinec. After a week's hunt, however, he succeeded in finding what he wanted and returned to the hamlet on the last day of the year.

He had all the look of a weasel that has found its way to the dove-cot. And we may be sure that he had not forgotten the last necessary to the compact, namely, the Christian whose death and deliverance to Satan was to ensure him undisturbed possession of his treasure. This was no other than poor Bernez.

The first person the sorcerer met on reaching the heath was Bernez himself. His unconscious victim was standing in front of one of the largest of the unholy stones, which he was busily chipping with a pointed hammer.

"God help me," cried the sorcerer with a crafty laugh, "are you hollowing a cave for yourself in yonder rock?"

"No," returned Bernez. "I am out of work just now, and I thought it would be a God-fearing deed to carve the Holy Cross on one of these unhallowed monsters. It can do no harm, and may be God will not forget it when I go to him with a request."

"So you have a request to make to God?"

"Where is the Christian that has not?"

"Ah, but has not yours something to do with Rosine?"

"So you know all about it," returned Bernez. "Well, there is neither shame nor sin in loving her, nor in wishing to make her my wife. Unfortunately Marzanne wants a brother-in-law who has more reals than I have sous."

"And supposing," whispered the sorcerer eagerly, "I were to put you in the way of earning more louis d'or than Marzanne has reals?"

"You?" cried Bernez in astonishment.

"I," replied the beggar coolly.

"What would you require me to do in return," inquired Bernez eagerly. He knew the man he had to deal with only too well.

"Nothing more than remember me in your prayers."

"Then I do not endanger my salvation."

"Not at all."

Bernez let his hammer fall.

"Tell me," he cried eagerly, "what I must do. Had I to face death a hundred times I would do it joyfully, for Rosine is dearer to me than life."

"Listen then," said the beggar, mysteriously lowering his voice. And he poured into the youth's willing ears the whole story he had heard a week before in the stable, taking good care, however, to omit that portion which related to the danger to be incurred and the necessary sacrifice of a Christian soul.

"Old man," cried Bernez, "so sure as there are Three Persons in One God you may count on me for this adventure, and I shall ever be beholden to you for letting me into the secret. Leave me to finish the Cross I am carving here, and when the time comes I will meet you in the wood yonder."

Bernez was true to his word. An hour before midnight he made his appearance at the spot he had indicated. The beggar was already there. In anticipation of the spoil, he had brought with him three large sacks, two of which he carried in his hands, while the third hung round his neck.

"Let us sit a while here," he said. "Now tell me what you intend doing, if you get as much silver, gold, and jewels as you can wish."

"What I intend doing if I get as much silver as I could wish?" said the young man, seating himself by his tempter's side. "I shall give my darling Rosine everything she can wish for, from linen to silk, from black cherries to golden oranges."

"And if you get as much gold as you could wish for?" continued the sorcerer.

"If I get as much gold as I can wish for," replied Bernez, dreamily, "I would make all Rosine's relations and friends rich."

"But if you get all the jewels and precious stones you could wish for?" asked the beggar once more.

"Then," cried the young peasant, in an outburst of generosity, "I would make all men rich and happy, and say that my Rosine had wished it so."

The two stopped talking and each busy with his own thoughts awaited the coming of the hour that was to make them rich men.

Suddenly a thundering crash broke over the heath. It was midnight and the old stones awoke from their hundred years' slumber, to quench their long thirst. Rocking to and fro they tore themselves from their beds and started off in the direction of the river, stumbling and blundering like drunken giants. By the dim light of the stars the two men watched the monsters rush past them and disappear in the distance.

Springing from his lair the sorcerer made as fast as his legs could carry him, for the coveted treasure. The young man, ignorant of the danger that threatened him, followed at a slower pace. When he reached the deserted spot Bernez uttered a cry of amazement and piously crossed himself. Each hole in which a stone had stood was filled to the edge with silver, gold, and jewels. The sorcerer was cramming his sacks