

BERTRAND THE VRAIC-GATHERER.

CHAPTER II.—VRAICKING TIME.

Although a great impression had been made on Bertrand, it did not result in his acting rightly. He ought to have told his father what he had done, for he had sinned against him as well as against God. He certainly had never possessed a shilling that gave him the annoyance this one did. Since the day he received it from his father, it had lain in a little white-wood box in his chest among his clothes. What he wanted money so much for was to have enough to buy some fowls of his own. Ned Lane had told him that he would sell him his for five shillings, and Bertrand longed to possess some hens, for he thought he could sell the eggs and soon make money. He had heard of many people who now were rich who had begun upon eggs.

He knew quite well that it was wrong to have taken that shilling; that it was stealing, and stealing of the worst kind, for it was taking money that had been given to God.

The August days came to an end, and in September the weather was splendid. The farmers all rejoiced, for they predicted that it would be fine weather for the vraicking.

Ned Lane had been brought up in England, and had never seen the vraicking.

'How often do you have it?' he asked Bertrand one day, when they had been talking for some time about the hens.

'Twice a-year is 'racking time,' replied Bertrand, pronouncing the word as the Jersey people do; 'in spring and autumn.'

'Curious kind of stuff, isn't it?' asked Ned, as they leant over the sea-wall watching the tide coming up. 'Is it all that yellowish-brown kind of seaweed you see on the rocks over there?'

'And can any one go?'

'Yes; and we can never cut it except on the days appointed by the States, in March and September, for a fortnight.'

'Oh yes, at those times they can.'

'Why not at other times?' asked Ned.

'Because in spring and autumn tis ripe, and better for the ground.'

'Fancy its being valuable! I heard the other day that it was,' remarked Ned.

'Yes; the farmers think a good deal of it. You see, in spring we generally put it on wet and

in the autumn we dry it and burn it, and then put the ashes on the ground.'

'Father uses some dark stuff for the fire, but I did not know it was vraic.'

'I suppose you have never seen it before,' said Bertrand.

'No. Do you get plenty of it?'

'Oh, yes. La Rocque is a fine place for it. All those rocks, when the tide is out, are mostly covered with vraic.'

Of course Farmer Hibert made the most of the season, going out every day with the tide, taking Bertrand with him, and often returning very late.

'Father, when you were out to-day the new clergyman called,' said Jeanne.

'Ah! and how is the good gentleman?' asked Farmer Hibert.

'Very well,' answered the farmer's wife. He says that on Sunday week there's to be a missionary sermon.'

Bertrand at the words was bending over the table, and he lowered his head and turned away from his supper.

'I remember last year you liked it so much, Bertrand, and the same gentleman is coming again,' continued Mrs. Hibert. 'And Mr. Esnel told me that the mis-

he has run away in this fashion.'

'I haven't noticed anything of it,' said the farmer. 'Perhaps he has not gone to bed, and will be coming back.'

But the mother's eyes were more observant, and though she said no more she wondered to herself what could be the matter with Bertrand. She might indeed wonder, for all her guessing would never have resulted in her finding out the real cause.

CHAPTER III.—THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

Bertrand lay awake for some time that night. He was in a tangle of perplexity, and very miserable. If he had only had the courage to go to his father and tell him all his trouble, matters would have mended. It was not that his father was severe, for that he rarely was, but Bertrand was ashamed of what he had done and shrank from the further shame of having to confess it. Then, too, he forgot one thing—he forgot to ask God to help him in his difficulty. He puzzled his brains to find some way out of it; he thought and thought and at last he hit upon an expedient which he thought would serve his purpose. He had now quite resolved to put back a shilling into the missionary-box if only he could get one. The same shilling he had taken he could not put back, for he had spent it, but if his plan succeeded he would be able to give not a shilling only, but more. The next morning early he went to his father.

'Father I want to ask something,' he said.

Farmer Hibert was standing at the sea wall, looking at the splendid sunrise away in the east, and the flood of light that was poured over the shining sea and the rippling waters.

'Well, my boy, what is it?' asked the farmer.

'May I go out vraicking, father?'

'I can't go with you, my foot is too bad,' answered the farmer. 'I've suffered such pain all night that I could hardly sleep.'

'But alone, father—may I go alone?'

'Well, yes, if you will be careful. But there's really no need, for we've got vraic enough for all we're likely to want.'

'Yes, but father, I wanted to know if I might sell it for myself.'

'Oh, that's it!' said the farmer, smiling. 'Very well, yes; you're a pretty good boy, Bertrand, and never give me trouble, and you deserve a little reward.'



BERTRAND ILL AT EASE.

The evening before the last day of the season came, and as the tired farmer sat with his wife by the kitchen fire he said he did not think he should go on the morrow.

'Why not, father?' asked Jeanne.

'I have hurt my foot, dear! I sprained it a little getting out of the boat to-day; and besides, I have got enough vraic, quite as much as we shall use for our land. We've worked hard; haven't we, Bertrand?'

'Yes father,' said Bertrand, contemplating his great high boots, which were drying at a little distance from the fire.

missionary-boxes will be opened next Sunday, and—'

Without saying good night to any one Bertrand rose from his seat and ran out of the room, not even waiting to hear the end of his mother's sentence. Up the wide, low stair-case, two stairs at a time, he rushed, to his bedroom.

'Dear me! what can be the matter with Bertrand?' said Marie. 'How quickly he went off! And he looked so queer!'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Hibert; 'I can't make out what has come to the boy lately. He is not the same as he used to be, and several times