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PIERRE PREVOST'S STORY

OR, TRUE TO THE LAST. CHAPTER III.

Pierre and I soon become firm friends, and I persuaded him on one occasion to take me on one of his fishing expeditions.

It was a lovely night, the heavens were ablaze with stars, and the little boat tossed idly on the waves which scarcely rippled against its keel, Pierre's companions were asleep down in the cabin, waiting for a breeze to spring up before they could throw in their nets. As for myself, I was smoking quietly on the deck, having my back against a coil of rope, and revelling in the delicious quiet which reigned around, when Pierre joined me, and having lighted his pipe, and sat down by my side, and spoke, as far as I can remember, as follows:—

I believe, monsieur, you are anxious to know why I am such a sad looking fellow? Perhaps you will laugh at me, that can't be helped. I am sure you are sincere, and wish me well, and therefore I have no hesitation in opening my heart to you.

I love Marie! There is hardly any need, perhaps, to tell you that. And yet this love is the foundation of all my sorrow. But I firmly believe that the good God willed that we should love another, and so I am content. Ever since our earliest childhood, we have gone through life hand in hand. When we were little ones we always played together on the sand; and there has hardly been a pang of sorrow or a feeling of joy which has not been felt by both alike. I used to think once that we were one both in body and soul, and there are other folks in the village who have said it over and over again. We made our first communion on the same day, and at the same hour, side by side; and these little matters are bonds of union indeed, and are not easily forgotten. When I first began to seek my bread on the sea, she always offered up a little prayer for me at the cross in the village, and she was ever the first to rush waist-deep into the sea to greet me on my return. And these I used to carry her on my shoulders back again, and kiss off the tears of joy which flowed down her pretty cheeks.— Ah! we were happy indeed in those childish days, which are passed and gone. Why are we not always children?

And the years that followed were hardly less happy for either of us. In the cold winter-time we were always side by side in the chimney-corner. Spring saw us wandering over the fresh meadows gathering the early violets. We worked together in the harvest-field under the summer sun, and went off nutting when the brown leaves told us of the approaching autumn. And then came the time when we were both old enough to marry. We had neither of us dreamed of such a thing, and could not be persuaded that we were not still children. We were quite happy enough without troubling our heads about marriage.

However, others thought of it for us, and good Father Hermann began to be anxious that we should make up our minds.

But the matter was not so easily settled, and several obstacles soon presented themselves.— To begin with, Marie's mother was rich. I was far from it, and an orphan into the bargain. I had been brought up by my brother Victoire—a splendid fellow. It was he who went with Father Hermann to Marie's mother, in order boldly to talk over our marriage, which they were all so anxious about.

I had always made up my mind that Marie should never marry any one who had not quite as much as herself; replied she, 'and that was her dear father's wish. However, I am sure you speak truly when you say that they love one another very dearly. Let it be as you say.'

The old lady had a kind warm heart. As he said these last words, Pierre's voice thickened, and I noticed a tear trickling down his honest brown face. But my sailor was a brave fellow, and I had hardly time to shake him warmly by the hand before he had quite mastered his grief, and he was able to go on with his story.

Marie and I were not the only happy ones then, I can assure you. Victoire, my brother, Father Hermann, the whole village in fact, for we were both very popular, rejoiced with us.— Of course I had not gone to sea. Victoire was also very anxious to remain; however, his wife persuaded him to go. Several in the village found fault with her for doing so, on the pretext that working at a festival time was very bad luck; but they had no right to say so. Victoire's children were very young, and had to be provided for; and so Victoire went. In the evening great black clouds darkened the sky. We were evidently threatened with a dreadful storm. But we were enjoying ourselves too much to think of storms or friends at sea. All at once there was a vivid flash of lightning and a peal of thunder, which seemed to shake every cot-

lage to the foundation. And then came piercing cries;

'A boat in distress, and threatened with instant destruction.'

It was Victoire's boat! I was on the shore in an instant. What an awful storm! Never in my whole life had I seen its equal.

All that was in man's power I did, you may be quite sure. Three times I dashed madly into the waves, only to be thrown back by the fury of the sea. The last time I was all but lost myself. However, I was rescued and brought back to the shore, bruised and insensible. Some thought me dead. Would that I had been, and laid out side by side with that other body stretched lifeless on the rocks.

It was Victoire. When I came to myself he was near me, quite still, and covered with blood; but with just enough breath left to whisper in my ear:

'Pierre, my boy, be a brother to my wife, a father to my children. God bless you, boy.'

'Victoire,' answered I, 'I swear it.'

And then he died without a murmur.

CHAPTER IV.

Of course you will guess, Monsieur, that this awful affair was the means of putting our marriage off. Marie and I neither of us complained, but consoled ourselves with the reflection that all would soon be well. I took up my position in my brother's house, and warmly kissed my brother's children, now mine. Alphonse tried to show her gratitude as well as she could. And so six months slipped away, and the villagers began talking again about our marriage. I don't know how it was, but I began to feel very nervous and uneasy about the matter, and I did not so much as dare broach the subject to Alphonse or Marie's mother. In a little time the latter began the subject herself.

'Pierre,' said she, 'you have adopted your brother's children, have you not?'

'Yes, mother.'

'And his wife also?'

'Yes; I must take care of his wife quite as much as her children.'

'You have quite made up your mind.'

'Perfectly.'

'Am I to understand that you never mean to leave them?'

'I swore I would not to my brother before he died.'

Then there was a silence, and my heart beat very quick.

'Listen, Pierre,' said the old woman; 'don't think that I wish to deprive the widow or the orphans of one morsel of the sustenance you intend to set aside for them. But you must understand that I know Alphonse. My daughter can never live with Alphonse; and Alphonse can never live with me. Never!'

This last word seemed to open an abyss before my very feet. I too knew Alphonse.— I too began to understand that either of these arrangements would be perfectly impracticable.

'Mother,' I began—

'I don't wish to hinder your marriage,' replied the old lady, very slowly; 'I simply impose one condition. You must be quite aware that in this matter my will must be law.'

Still I hesitated.

'It will be for you then to decide your own fate,' added she; 'and my daughter's as well.'

I raised my head. Marie was there, and our eyes met. I must break my oath or lose her for ever.

It is an absolute torture to recall those fearful moments. My head seemed to swim round, and when I tried to speak, there was something in my throat which nearly choked me. And still Marie looked at me; and oh, how tenderly.

'Pierre,' said the lady again, 'you must answer; will you remain alone with Alphonse, or will you come here alone? Choose for yourself.'

I looked at Marie again, and was on the point of exclaiming, 'I must come here!' but the words again stuck in my throat, and my tongue refused to speak. And then I began to ease my conscience with the thought that I could still work for Victoire's wife and children, and tried to think they would be equally happy, although I was not always with them. But then I thought of that dreadful night, and the storm, and the pale face, and the whisper in my ear came back again, and I fancied I heard my brother say, 'It was not that you promised me, my brother; it was not that.'

At last the bitter words rose to my mouth, and in a hollow voice I answered:

'I must keep my oath! And then, like a drunken man, I fell prostrate on the floor.'

When I recovered she was near me still, and her sweet voice whispered in my ear.—

'Thank God, Pierre, you are an honest man.'

Those words were my only comfort in the long dreary year which followed that fearful day.

I was never myself again. I tried to rouse myself up, and take some interest in my daily work, and did my best to appear cheerful and contented at home, but I was not the same man that I used to be. The children were a great comfort to me when I was at home; but the long hopeless days and the dark dreary nights were miserable enough, God knows, I seemed to dream away my life.

I thought it best to keep away from Marie, as a meeting would be painful to both. And so we never met.

At last a report got about the village that Marie was going to be married.

I could no longer keep away from her now, and she, too, appeared anxious that we should meet. In a very few days we were once more side by side.

There was no need of me to speak. She read my question in my eyes; of her own accord she answered:

'Yes, Pierre, it's quite true.'

'But Pierre,' added she in tears, 'I am yours, and must be yours for ever. Unless I can get you to say, marry Jacques, I will remain single for life. But my mother begs me to get married; and what can I do? She is old and very ill just now. I feel I too have got a duty to fulfil.'

I uttered a cry of despair.

'Pierre,' said Marie, still weeping, 'you must know I dearly love you. My fate is that I must love you still. But, for all that, Pierre, I cannot let my mother die.'

I could not bear to hear her weep; but what comfort could I give? At last the devil entered my heart, and I broke forth in bitter curses at my fate, and what I choose to call her inconsistency.

'I don't deserve this,' said Marie very softly; 'and I hardly expected that I should ever hear these words from your lips. Still, I believe you do love me, after all. I hope you will feel, when you think over all that has passed, that I am not heartless, and that I deserve some answer to the questions which my lips almost refuse to ask.— You will give me an answer, I am sure, by-and-by.'

And then she left me, half mad as I was, lying coiled up in a heap at the roadside.

During the next few days I did reflect. If I could not marry Marie myself, had I any right to render her marriage with another? Was I justified in preparing for her a life of solitude, and in depriving her of a mother's care? And then, again, I began to perceive that no one was at all inclined to take my part in the village.— My popularity was fast declining, since no one could look into my heart, or could have the least idea what I had suffered, or knew what had actually taken place. I was pined, but considered very selfish. I was continually told that Marie's mother was ailing sadly, and that she certainly had deserved better treatment at my hands.

At last Father Hermann comforted me, and benefitting by his good advice and by the help of our holy religion, I began to be in a much better frame of mind.

I made up my mind to give Marie her freedom, but I could not bear to see her again, and so I wrote.

CHAPTER V.

The marriage between Jacques and Marie was soon arranged, soon the second festive day came round.

In the morning I put to sea as usual: but as the evening wore on, I found I were under the influence of a spell, and that it was quite impossible for me to remain where I was. Accordingly I returned: and led on by the spell and attracted like a moth to the candle, wended my way to the rejoicings, in order that I might torture myself right well for the last time.

I have heard of the agonies of the rack, of the thorn-screw, of saints being boiled in oil and crucified, and many other dreadful horrors; but I very much doubt if any martyr ever suffered the agony that I did that night.

It was in the dusk of the evening, and Marie was just finishing a song, while all was resting in quick succession. She was just singing the last verse, in which my name was accidentally introduced, when a sailor who was just behind me struck a match in order to light his pipe. The light exposed me to the view of the whole company. Directly Marie saw me, she uttered a peculiar cry and fainted away. I rushed towards her, not thinking what I was doing. But Jacques was at her side before me. Instead, however, of showing the least jealousy, or putting himself in a passion, he grasped me warmly by the hand, and then looked tenderly at Marie, who now began to revive.

'Never fear, and keep a good heart,' said he in a strange kind of voice. You would never guess what he did, and perhaps will hardly believe when I tell you.

Ordinarily a very temperate, steady man, he astonished the company by giving out that he

intended to throw a little life into the fete. On this he ordered wine and cider, and tastily a plentiful supply of brandy.

In a very little time he was helplessly drunk, or at least pretended to be so. As the evening wore on, he got from bad to worse, insulted and quarrelled with the men, and fairly disgusted the women. The village was in an uproar, and there was not a soul who did not speak in strung terms of the disgraceful conduct of Jacques. At the earnest entreaty of the worthy fellow, we kept our council, and accordingly the new marriage was at once broken off.

The rest of the story you know almost as well as I do myself. You see my life from day to day. You can picture to yourself my sorrow and my unhappy position. You can see how little she has changed.

And yet we can never be more to one another than we are now. Never! Never! We are married, and yet we are not. We are separated, alas, here on earth, but we must be united in heaven. Think of the years that have passed, and think how happy we might have been, and what a thread there was between our present existence and the life we long to lead. God's will be done!

Poor Pierre here let his head fall into his hands, and wept in silence.

How could I comfort the poor fellow.

It was not the kind of grief that needed consolation, and so I let him weep on.

All at once a breeze sprung up and filled the sails. Pierre immediately roused himself, but soon relapsed into his accustomed calm quiet manner.

Both the other sailors now came on deck, the nets were tarrown over, and the business of the night began.

CHAPTER V.

Three years afterward, by the merest accident in the world, I happened to return to my favorite little village. There was evidently some excitement going on, and as I chanced to recognize my old friend Father Hermann, I went up and renewed our acquaintance.

'What is the matter?' said he; 'why, you do not mean to say you don't know?'

'Not in the least.'

'Why your old friend Alphonse has been dead six months.'

'I really don't see why the worthy inhabitants of the village should rejoice at that,' exclaimed I.

'A great obstacle has been removed,' said the father, 'don't you remember?'

'Of course; and what has followed?'

'The marriage of Pierre Prevost and Marie?'

I was not long in accompanying Father Hermann to the cottage in which my old friends were receiving the warm congratulations of their friends and neighbors.

They recognized me at once, and insisted that I should be present at the entertainment which was to follow in the course of the day. Of course I accepted the invitation. I never remember having enjoyed myself so much, and am quite certain that I spoke from my heart when I proposed, in my very best French, the health of la belle Marie and Pierre Prevost.

END.

THE TWO PORTRAITS.

BY MISS L.—

(Translated from the French of Emile Souvestre for the Catholic Mirror.)

The tourist who delights in variety and survey, will always choose the steamboat in preference to every other mode of travelling, for the extensive and diversified field of observation that it affords. The almost compulsive intimacy formed in public conveyances generally, is often prolonged to the very limits of endurance; it wearies and disgusts us, nor is there any hope of putting a stop to it, or of escaping from a troublesome companion, but by patiently enduring him to our journey's end; and the very constraint robs us of that freedom of mind and vivacity of disposition, indispensable to interest and observation. Aboard a steamer on the contrary we may choose our neighbors, we may linger with or leave them as we feel inclined; we have an opportunity of observing our companions under different circumstances, while the ease and comfort we experience, makes conversation more lively and more varied.

Standing on the deck of a noble steamer as it goes puffing on its course, through the waters of some beautiful river, how many, and how diversified are the views it presents to the eye, and for which we might seek in vain elsewhere. Here everything is characteristic and picturesque; the villages are reflected in enhanced beauty, by the magic bosom of their own native stream; the weeping willows droop gracefully over the winding banks, the tiny barges glide gently across the bays; the verdant island as you pass, arise in the waters like so many boat-jing groves; the low murmuring of the river, and

the whispering of the breeze, form a peaceful lullaby; your mind almost insensibly yields to the combined influence of all those charms, and you experience a sweet and happy sensation.

M. de Rivaud and his daughter had felt the full power of all these pleasures, since their departure from Orleans on the steamer Heiondelle. Seated on the deck, they beheld the smiling borders of the Loire displayed successfully before their enchanted gaze, ever changing, yet always lovely, like the magic scenery of some theatrical representation. Scarcely a moment passed, that the young girl had not some remark to make to her father, to which the latter replied by some useful instruction or passing anecdote. Thus their attention was alternatively occupied by the beauty of the surrounding country, and by their companions de voyage. The quick and mobile mind of Honorine, found interest in everything around. Prompt in her judgments, like all novices in experience to whom, even the very shadow of doubt or suspicion is unknown, her conclusions were formed, and her likes or dislikes determined by the first glance of her eye, and these impressions were no sooner formed, than they were communicated with childish confidence to her father. Meanwhile, the Steamer which was passing the coast of Montrichard, slackened its speed, to receive a passenger from a barge which came alongside.

This new-comer who was rather corpulent, wore a costume, half citizen, half peasant, which announced in those parts, that he was a well-to-do farmer; but his large ruddy face bore an expression of discontent. As he stepped upon the deck of the steamer, rather close to M. de Rivaud, he touched his straw hat with an air of familiarity.

'By my faith, I was afraid I should miss the boat,' said he; 'there was no one at Verou to row me over. Why don't the government attend to such things?'

One of the passengers remarked that it was a private affair, and did not come under the action of public authority.

'But that don't prevent a man from losing the steamer, and being late at some business of importance. Yes,' continued the sturdy farmer, 'I, for example, would have run the risk of arriving too late in town if I had not overtaken the steamer.'

'Where are you going, M. Jean Baptiste?' asked a little citizen, who had come aboard from the wharf.

'Ah, this is M. Dubois,' replied the farmer with a look of recognition; 'good day sir, I hope you and yours are well.'

'Quite well, I thank you: you are in for a trip I see.'

'Yes, I have just been at Montrichard for a farm.'

'Are you going to leave the old one?'

'What, didn't you hear that that stingy old man gave me notice to quit?'

'What stingy old man?'

'Well! the owner then: he is going to put big Thibaud in my place; you remember Thibaud, whose father was in prison some time ago? mighty common folks. Yes, the old miser has given him the preference because he offered thirty louis more.'

'And he is going to turn you out after living there, father and son, for over a hundred years?'

'So much for the gratitude of these rich misers,' replied Jean Baptiste, bitterly; 'you cultivate their land, you make a fortune for them, and when times get hard they put you out. But I'll pay him, mind if I don't.'

'May be all this is done by the notary?' objected Dubois.

'Oh, no,' returned the angry peasant; 'tis the master himself that wishes it, he came to the country for nothing else.'

'Did you see him?'

'See him indeed! I went twice to see him; and they told me he was sick. You see he is so proud that he is afraid the very sight of poor people like us would contaminate him. They fooled me twice that way.'

'Nonsense, you don't mean that.'

'No! I only saw his children and they are nothing to boast of, for good looks, or behavior, either, they stared at me as if I had horns. After all they are rumps of the old block. Only they were fooled this time; you see I brought them a fine hare, which I carried back in my game pouch, and I tell you we had a feast of it at the farm.'

'You are right, Baptiste,' said Dubois tapping him knowingly on the shoulder, 'as my deceased mother used to say, a peasant is equal to a bishop when his bread is baked.'

'Yes, but everyone don't think so,' replied the farmer shaking his head, 'my master never thinks he has enough, and heaven knows he wants for nothing. He has just succeeded in having the great high road run through the middle of his property; besides the large pond they have given him to drain.'