

Upon the day after the events described in the last chapter Téphany met the curé of Pont-Aven; not the dear old man who had baptized her and listened to childish confessions of innumerable peccadilloes, but a stranger, père Hyacinthe. Obeying an impulse, Téphany entered into conversation with him. An offer to subscribe to a local charity challenged the village priest's attention, an attention which Téphany's personality soon quickened into a lively interest. The curé was of a type happily not uncommon in Finistère. Like most Breton priests outside of the big towns, he was born of the people, although he had received an admirable education at a theological college. But under his soutane throbbed the big heart, the sturdy muscles, the intense vitality and virility of a son of the soil. Téphany recognised this, with keen appreciation of such qualities.

For the first few minutes the talk fluttered about the changes in Pont-Aven. Téphany asked questions, M. le vicaire answered them. Then, an odd sparkle in the shrewd hazel eyes, a genial smile, the subtle assumption of a fatherly manner, told Téphany that she had been identified as the daughter of Henry Lane.

"You know who I am, Monsieur?"

"Yes." He added with a pleasant laugh which tempered the rebuke: "I thought you would have come to see me, my daughter, before this."

Téphany felt that her cheeks were hanging out signals of distress, but her voice was calm enough as she replied: "I understand you perfectly. But I no longer belong to your Church."

"You have ceased to be a Catholic, Mademoiselle?"

"I cannot call myself a Roman Catholic," she answered gently.

The curé opened his wide mouth and closed it. He had tact. With a humorous shrug of his broad shoulders, he murmured: "I am not unprepared for this. Yvonne told me you had spent the last ten years in England."