

THE MILL OF ST. HERBOT—A BRETON STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PATTY."

CHAPTER VI.

JEAN MARIE IN LOVE.

Jean Marie was a puzzle to himself. His nature was disturbed. The horizon of daily life which till now had been the strict fulfilment of a certain round of duty, the gaining of a certain advantage to his land or cattle which should ensure an equivalent return in value—this narrow material limit had lifted, and showed in its place vague, but at times intensely bright, pictures of a life which, till now, he had not thought possible for him.

Why should his home be desolate? why should there not be a sweet face sitting opposite him beside the hearth, and the patter of children's feet on the floor? He sat smoking his pipe half-an-hour longer than usual, while he indulged these visions, and then he shook himself and looked full of shame.

"A fine example I am setting Christophe," he said to old Jeanne, who had sat spinning in silence; "he will have gone to work."

Jeanne had watched Christophe lie down and smoke his pipe among the rocks, but she kept silence; there was no need to stir up strife—she felt that it would come soon enough.

When the brothers met in the evening they smoked in silence, and went to bed earlier than usual; they were both thinking of Louise, and yet they would not speak of her.

Christophe's dreams were coloured with the romance of young love. He thought of his next meeting with the young girl, and planned the words he would say to find out if he had really offended her. He recalled every look and word that passed, and then he dreamed of her face and figure as she rested on his arm, and pictured her listening to his love, and owing hers in return.

Jean Marie's feelings were stronger, but far more practical and commonplace. First, he told himself, he was too old to marry so young a girl, for the farmer's thoughts went straight to marriage; he had no time to waste in dalliance. To Jean Marie everything that was not decidedly useful was waste, and waste was to him the greatest of sins.

"She is very young and childlike—too young to manage a household." On this thought he pondered for several days; then it struck him suddenly that a young woman with Jeanne at hand to help and teach her would soon be able to fulfil the duties of his simple household; her youth and ignorance were in her favour. "She would have nothing to unlearn," and this thought cheered him. Then came the question of her beauty, and Jean Marie told himself that he could never marry a woman who had not good looks, and that as his wife Louise would be safe from admirers.

"If she can like me"—there was a proud, resolute smile on his lips—"I shall love her well enough to make her happy; and I think she has no dislike to me."

But he was not a man to act hastily. He should wait; then, if he found he still wished for Louise, he should go over to St. Herbot, and see her again before he decided.

But, spite of the resolute will with which he forced his thoughts once more into the narrow round of daily cares, love asserted its power, and for his very struggling against and contempt for the usual ways of a lover, it tormented him fiercely. He seemed to see Louise everywhere, and the strange sudden hunger he had felt at the mill at the sight of her teased him day and night with a longing to gaze on her again.

But he would not yield to it. He despised himself; for the fancy which mastered his senses was in his experience unheard of in the choice of a wife; a wife was chosen for what she had, and for her thrifty qualities, never for her beauty. He grew thinner, even a shade yellower; and his manner towards Christophe became so silent and captious, that Jeanne lived in daily fear of a quarrel between the brothers. About a fortnight after his visit, the farmer had been more sullen than usual. The Pardon of St. Herbot was a hand, and Louise had spoken of meeting him at the festival. Should he wait till then, or should he see her again first, and decide whether he would marry her or try to live without her. He did not anticipate a refusal; he felt sure that Louise was not likely to get so good an offer as his—he had only to make his proposal to Madame Rusquec, and he would be accepted; but he had got a fancy into his head which mastered him while he scorned it—and if he had been a cultivated thinker, instead of a Breton farmer, he would have marvelled at the constraining power of love—he wanted Louise to marry him for himself, not for what he had to give her. To-day, as he sat at dinner, this thought had been paramount.

All at once Christophe said, "Why, what ails thee, brother? thou art as haggard as an old man; but thou art getting old, in truth—thirty! it is half a life! How I will dance at the fête. Ah, I wish one could be always young."

He rose, went to the door, and stood looking out. Jean Marie trembled with fierce anger and doubt. If Christophe thought him old, would not Louise think so; and for the first time a chill dread fell on him—would not Louise prefer Christophe to himself when they met at the fête.

He sat speechless, motionless; his anger was congealed by the chill, horrible suspicion. Christophe's voice roused him.

"Here is that mischief-maker, Coeffic the tailor. I leave him to thee, brother."

He drew back from the doorway and passed into the other door.

A few minutes after, the sinister face with its red hair showed under a broad-leaved dusty black hat in the doorway.

"At your service, Master Mao," Coeffic spoke in a cringing, ill-assured voice. He was never so much at ease with men as he was with women.

Jean Marie despised the tailor, as his fellows did generally, but he looked on him as a necessity, to be tolerated for the common good. To-day he was too much engrossed by his thoughts to notice his presence, till Coeffic, never easily rebuffed, advanced from the passage into the room itself, and stood beside him. Then the farmer gathered in the meaning of Christophe's words, and he looked up, frowning.

"What ails you, master, you seem troubled? Or is it that you are ill?"

"The man's fawning voice irritated Jean Marie. "What do you want, Coeffic?" Say it out, and have done."

"What do I want! Ah, neighbour, you are pleased to be witty. Is it to be supposed that I have no feeling or interest for a man whose father and mother I knew before he was born? I came to inquire for your health, neighbour. You are not well, I fancy."

Jean Marie got up with an impatient grunt, and strode across the room with long steps, leaving Coeffic standing beside the bench. He kept his cringing attitude, but he watched the farmer keenly from under his thick red brows.

"It is the part of a girl or a child to think about health"—Jean Marie had turned his back on the tailor—"what have full-grown men to do with fancies? If a man is sick, he takes to his bed, he dies or he recovers, but as long as he can get about, the less he thinks of health the better."

The tailor stood looking at him out of his half-closed eyes. It was plain to his keen wits that, if he meant to do any business with Jean Marie this afternoon, he must begin by soothing him.

"Those are two fine little cows of yours I saw as I came in," he said. "Are they of your own rearing?"

Jean Marie looked interested, but he spoke without turning his head. "They are my own rearing, and their grandmother was a calf when I was a boy; she was a finer beast than either of them."

"How fond your mother was of the cattle!" The tailor was trying to get round to his point with the least possible delay. "I have known her sit up with a sick cow all night."

His mother's name always softened Jean Marie. He turned round. There was a sad smile on his lips.

"Will you drink?" he said.

Part of Coeffic's business lay in studying the foibles of his neighbours, and he knew that Jean Marie was more thrifty than hospitable. He shook his head. "No; but I thank you all the same. I was thinking that you want such a housewife as your mother was, farmer."

"That is not possible; no one could match her," he said, simply, and he seated himself on one of the long benches. But the scowl had left his face, and the tailor thought the right moment for speaking out had come.

"When do you mean to give the farm a mistress, and send for me to make the first advances?" The tailor put his head on one side, and looked confidential.

Jean Marie smiled against his will at the intent expectation in the man's face. "You had better look for occupation elsewhere, Coeffic. I am not in haste to marry; and if I do marry, I shall choose carefully for myself."

"And get deceived." Coeffic forgot caution in his eagerness. "What is the use of the Bazvalan if he does not take all the trouble off the wooer's hands? At this very moment, I know of a charming young girl, fresh and beautiful as spring; she has not much fortune, it is true, but her mother is a thrifty housewife and a good spinner, and she comes of a good stock. There are stores of homespun linen as white as snow in her house; and though the girl's beauty is such as has never been seen at Huelgoat, as yet she has no lover. Shall I not propose you? I speak of Louise Rusquec, of the mill of St. Herbot."

A dark flush had been deepening on Jean Marie's face, and Coeffic's last words were spoken in an uncertain, quavering voice, for a heavy frown had gathered on Mao's forehead at the name of Louise.

"Malediction on all meddlers!" He struck his fist fiercely on the bench. "It is very well for fools who cannot choose for themselves to use the services of such a creature as you—go-between, mischief-maker that you are! When I want you I will send for you. Now be off quickly, or your long ears may be the worse for it."

Coeffic had crouched during this speech till he looked almost like a tail. As Jean Marie stopped, already ashamed of his passion, the tailor raised himself and backed to the door. Feeling himself safe there, he shook his fist, and called out—"Take care, wild man, Coeffic is better for a friend than for an enemy. You are more like a wolf than a Christian. Holy Virgin! what was I about, to propose a fair young maid to such a savage."

(To be continued.)

CORRESPONDENCE.

DEAR SIR,—Can you give or suggest any reason or reasons why sympathy in the United States, where England is concerned, is ever on the side of England's opponents, no matter how depraved the civil, political or religious character of the latter may be? Observe the tone of such journals as the *New York Herald*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, &c., when discussing the present differences between England and Russia. The tone used against the former is characterised by "envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness," while that used in reference to the latter is one of affectionate regard and spontaneous gush. Of course, in a paper of the *Herald* stamp it is just as immaterial where the sympathies lie as the manner of their enlistment, but that the general sentiment across the border should be so antagonistic to England is surely strange. Is it possible that this indicates a backsliding tendency on the part of our neighbours, of which repudiation and political corruption are only differing evidences? Perhaps they can neither forgive nor forget the fact that we sympathised with the South during the civil war, but is there no difference between our sympathising with one brother as against another, and their sympathising with Russia as against England? If the northern counties of England were pitted against the southern, one could not marvel at American sympathy with one particular side; but here we have them "hand and glove" with a nation about whose virtues the less said the better, and fully prepared to rejoice and make merry over the wished-for discomfiture of, not only a brother, but one of the freest and most enlightened nations on the face of the earth. In fact, for a nation to be an avowed enemy of Great Britain seems sufficient to endear it to every true Yankee, and no matter how closely it may resemble its spread-eagle friend in "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain," its hatred will cover a multitude of sins.

IMPARTIALITY.