Marie Duplan's Child.

The sleepy little parish in the province of Quebec, seemed, like Rassela's happy valley, shut out from all the world. Beyond the hills, I told myself, mankind knew bitterness, defeated hopes, broken faith, dreams gone astray, but on this hither side such sadness could not come. I glanced half enviously at the peaceful village lying in the sun. I had paused near the rude Calvary on the bank above the noisy stream and I now discovered that a woman was standing at its foot. She had evidently finished her prayer, for she slipped her rosary into her pocket and turned toward me with the ready smile of her people. I made some comment upon the soft beauty of the day. From where we stood we could see the gleaners at work in the fields, and an occasional snatch of song or burst of laughter was borne to us on the still air.

"It is a spot that knows no sorrow," I said.

My companion, who was not a young woman, followed my glance.

"It is a happy people," she answered slowly, "like the children, but there is no spot where sorrow comes not, m'sieu', save in the blessed heavens. I've seen heart-break so cruel here the sun has never been so bright since that day."

"Tell me about it." I urged.

She made a gesture of assent and invited me to a seat on the bank. "It was long ago," she began, after a moment's reflection; "so long that if you ask them yonder about M. le cure they'll think you mean the cure who lives by the church—a very good man—but I don't mean him, I mean the Abbe Moreau—a very good man likewise, save for one sin. Ah! m'sieu', who of us has not one sin and more? The good God sees and I think he is not so hard with us as we are with each other. Mais—I don't know—I am only an old woman.

"Well, nobody can tell you that story like me—nobody knows. But I don't forget, it's all clear as if it was yesterday when it happened. It begins with Narcisse Duplan, the same who killed himself, as m'sieu' has heard—no? It was because of Marie his wife—she ran away and left him, and then it was the same as if the sun had gone out of the sky for Narcisse. He grew so dull; where he came the laugh and the song, they vanished like smoke. We were sorry—oh, yes! —but your neighbor's sorrow don't make much difference to you after all, m'sieu', it don't last long, and bimeby we forgot. Marie wasn't worth remembering anyhow, and so we told Narcisse, but the winds will heed your voice sooner than will a man who loves. He knows no reason, and poor Narcisse had none at all. So one day there was an end to his sorrow. —he stopped it all with his knife—like this. He left no money, no land, nothing but his little girl Margot, and what to do with her was the one great question. Nobody was willing to take her—children were plenty in Beaupre and every year there were more here and the fields and the brook—more coming. Nobody wanted this child —nobody had cared for the mother and maybe the child would grow up like her. Then the cure said to me:

"'Madame Rose, there is no child to make sunshine in your house—let this little one come in.'

"And I answered:

"'Pardon, M. le cure, what do I care for Marie Duplan's child? The mother is a bad woman. My husband told me that many times before he died. She made Sylvestre Laroque the same as crazy with love for her, she ruined Jean Prevost's home, she broke her father's heart, and now she's gone away with the Englishman and that poor fool Narcisse is dead.

"'S'pose my house is lonely, I cannot do what you ask. Once there was a little child here that I loved more than all the world—oh! you know M. le cure —and the Lord took her. I want no other child in her place, I only want her back again—my arms are empty without her.'

"So he had to take Margot himself, and he carried her all the way to the manse. She wasn't afraid, she just clung to him close; she was about five years old then and not big for her age. Was she pretty? Par exemple! Maybe there were prettier children in the parish, I don't know. She was better than pretty, she had—how do you call it? —charm. Beauty is a very nice thing, m'sieu', and the woman that has it is like a careful soldier always well armed, but it is as quick to depart as the rose itself—fire, fever, the years, and behold! it is gone. That other stay still the end. Margot's mother had it too, in her low voice and her soft eyes and in the heart that knows no age. If Narcisse Duplan left nothing to his child. Marie was more generous with her gifts.

"It don't seem very long, those twelve years that Margot lived at the manse, but they made some difference. Not with the cure, but with her. She was like her mother, just as fair to look upon. When she passed, all the young men felt their hearts beat faster. Only she was not the same as her mother, for she seemed not to see them. Then one day she came to tell us good-bye. She was going to teach in a village yonder, and she was both glad and sorry to leave Beaupre, and the smiles and tears were on her face same like the sky in April. Oh! she would be back again some time, she said. But I thought maybe when that sometime comes many will not be here. Who knows? It's like that in this world, and so it ain't all easy to say good-bye. Truly I sorrowed most to let her go; the others had their husbands and children and thought not deep of her, but always I must think that she might have been with me all the days making sunshine like the cure said, and I missed her—missed her.

"Well, he missed her too. How do I know that? If your little child goes away, m'sieu', don't you sorrow for her? Ain't the world a sad place without her? The cure is only a man like other men, I told myself when I saw how his face grew white and whiter. He was very good to us then, and he smiled just as often as before—only his smile hurt, because you felt it was like a cloak drawn up over a big sore that you wanted to heal and were not able. Margot wrote back long letters about how nice she found the school and how sweet the children were. And she said too, there was no spot like Beaupre after all—it was the very heaven of the world. She loved all the people she said she heard its voice all the time and it called, 'Come back— come back.'

"The cure read it all out to us and he showed us the letters besides. I never saw anything more beautiful than those letters, and he seemed so pleased when I told him that, because it was he who taught her from the very beginning And he said:

"'She was a good pupil, Madame Rose. No man ever had so good a pupil. No man in the whole world is prouder of her than I am.' And then he went away and walked—walked.

"I know something how he felt, for sure. When my little girl died I couldn't stay in the house; I couldn't bear the emptiness and the stillness, and I didn't want to come back to it, because it was so lonely without her. And when I saw the cure always walking in the fields and over the hills I told myself, 'Voila! the house is empty for him too, poor man.'

"He grew very still, and then the smile didn't come so quick to his face —it had disappeared. Sometimes—most often—he'd pass by the men and women as if they were but stones, and he had no word for the children running out to meet him. Well, the people said for excuse he had migraine perhaps, but when there came no change they thought he had the fever because his eyes were strange and dull, and they were afraid. Then I said to them:

"'He misses Margot. Any father would miss his child and M. le cure was the same as her father. And she is Margot—nobody could know her without loving her. Bimeby he'll grow all right, because time will cure him. Time cures everything. You cut yourself and no matter if you lose much blood the skin comes together again. It's the same with the heart. It cracks maybe, but little by little, little by little, the edges come together —it gets itself mended. It ain't so good as it was, but it will do! Don't I know what I speak? Ain't my heart cracked-like this very long time, hein?'

"The people listened to me, and they said I was right and they would wait patiently until the cure was healed. But what do you think? M. le cure got no better. In all weather he walked as if he wasn't able to keep still. And there was nobody to hear confession. The church stood empty day after day—day after day—and the whole village began to murmur. Then one Sunday, when everybody had gone to church, the doors were shut and a little card was hanging there. Alphonse Seguin—he's Baptiste's father, m'sieu', and he's too old to work in the fields now—he took the card and read how there wouldn't be any service that day. Well, for sure, the people were very angry.

"All that week long the cure did just as I've been telling you, but when Sunday came again there was no card on the church doors; they stood open wide and the people—so many people —went through. I never saw so many —everybody, little and big, was there. It was very still in the church and we waited a long time, but bimeby the cure came in. He was all in black and his face was so white, and somehow it didn't seem as large as before. He walked to the altar steps, then he turned and looked at us all; so he stood for maybe two—three minutes. It seemed like an hour, and it was so quiet I could hear Angele Prevost's breath came puff—puff, and she was 'way behind me, but I knew that sound.

"Then he said, very soft:

"'My people—'

"There was a little stir among us like the noise you hear when you throw a stone into the hedge and the birds fly up scared, then it was still again in a moment and he said once more:

"'My people, it is a long time that I have known you all and you are very dear to my heart, and maybe when I tell you good-bye you will feel sorry as I do. For I come this morning not to preach, not to hear confession—no, it is I who make confession, and then I go.'

"Everybody moved quick, but the cure didn't stop, he just kept on in that same gentle voice:

"'It makes it easier if I tell you a story, because we are the same as the children, we all like stories. Very well, then: there was a priest once who lived in a beautiful little parish, and he was very fond of his people and they loved him too, so he thought he would stay with them always. And that made him very happy. Then one day, because of his abundance, he adopted a small child. She had no father nor mother, and was all alone in the world. Well, for sure, that made some difference! Other days when that priest got home he used to shut himself in his room with is book, but now he cared no longer for his books. It was the same as if his house, which was always a pleasant place, was set right down in paradise, so much, so very much more beautiful did it become. And that was just because a little child was there. I said that priest loved his people before, but truly he loved them not so tenderly as he loved them now. Very often in those other times he thought them stupid and he lost patience with them, but now he was more gentle and he just thought of them as children — God's children— and he couldn't be angry with them. Then he told himself. "Now I understand how the good God loves us." And it was his love for the child that showed him the way.

"'The years stood not still with that man and little girl. They both grew older, and the love between them grew too, till there was nothing sweeter in the whole world. The priest taught that little child out of the books and her mind was like some lovely flower, and she taught him, too, so that everywhere he looked beneath the sin and sorrow he found something good and fair. But there came a day when it all seemed very dark to him, and I'll tell you about that time. The little child was a young girl now and she went away to teach the children in another village. He let her go because he thought it was for her happiness, and she was a ward of the church and the bishop and others said it was best. He seemed glad, like everybody, because of her good fortune, but he was no more glad when she had gone and he came back to the manse. It was so lonely. Everywhere he saw her face and he thought he heard her voice. First it was like the voice of a child singing "Dors-tu bien" to her doll; then it grew older and it said the 'rithmetic tables and spelled the words; then it grew older still and it wasn't so loud, but it was the same voice, and he heard her say, "Good-night, father." And when she thought he wouldn't tell him good-night any more, he put his hands up so and he cried, "Oh! my God, I miss my child—I want my child!"

"'So he sorrowed many days; he went into the fields, and everywhere she went with him in his mind. He felt her little fingers in his hand, and he heard the patter of her feet running to keep up by his side, and sometimes he carried her as he used to when she was five, or six, or maybe seven years old. Pretty soon she was able to keep up and very often she would run far, far ahead and would laugh at him when he didn't catch her. The priest made pictures like that, but bimeby—and this was very strange—it wasn't any longer the little child he thought so much about. When he turned his head it wasn't to look far down where a little child would stand —he only looked just so far and he saw her face there with the shining eyes and the blush of a wild rose in her cheeks. It was so he thought of her. It was not the child, it was the young girl.

"'And one day he looked down and because the face wasn't really there he groaned out aloud. It was all clear to him. He loved her—and he was a priest of God. He loved her as you men love your wives, he loved her as you women love your husbands— he couldn't live without her. He went back to his house, but she wasn't there; he went out into the fields, but she wasn't there. He couldn't pray —always in his prayers her face would come—he was only able to ask for one thing.

"'Then he knew he wasn't fit to guide his people any more. He kept away from the church, he spent long days beneath God's sky and he tried not to think of the happiness that you know, but it was impossible to put that dream aside. He only asked to live a little time in the sun, he wanted a place there—he was not so old, not so much more than forty. Then he told himself, "I'll be a priest no longer," and he wrote to the bishop that he renounced his vows—'

"The cure stopped talking and stood very still with his head dropped on his breast; presently he straightened himself and looked around at us all.

"'Pray for me,' he said at last, 'pray for me. I am he that I have told you about. I have sent that letter —I have forsaken my parish. Soon I go to see Margot and I will say to her. "Child, I cannot live without you. I am no longer a priest. I want to marry you. Will you come with me?" And I think—I think— she will say yes. I don't know, but there is something here which tells me she will say yes. Good-bye, my people. Good-bye, my children.'

"Then he turned and went swiftly from us like a shadow; he made no sign of the cross—he didn't seem to see anything. We heard his steps on the stone floor and the door closed to and then there was no more sound in the church, save only some women crying.

"P'rhaps you think, 'msieu', we said something, hein? But we had no words and nobody looked at his neighbor. I liked that. Why should we look at our neighbor? S'pose we had thought because the cure stood so near God with our sins he was different from us—that only showed our ignorance. He was no more than a man and we couldn't blame him. It was the fault of Marie Duplan's child—she wasn't like her mother for nothing. But nobody said a word in the church, it seemed too great a sin. Bimeby Alphonse Seguin went out on tiptoe and then Jules Perrot went too, and after that every one of us till we all stood in the sunshine. Truly it was no longer quiet then. Everybody was sorry for M. le cure and everybody blamed Margot, Then what do you think, m'sieu'? Mere Angele she upbraided me—me. She said, 'Rose Michelet, if you had taken Margot this had not happened!' She said other cruel things besides, and the rest said them likewise.

"Well, I went home quick, I can tell you. I didn't want to hear their voices. But the voice in my heart said the same words, and I knew it spoke true. But I could do nothing. The bishop was angry with M. le cure and God was angry. It was too late. The cure had given up everything—God and the church—for the sake of a little girl, and I was the real one to blame. So I sat there all alone and wept, and presently the door behind me was opened very gently. I didn't more, for I thought it was only the wind, but soon I heard some one say:

"'Madame Rose.'

"I looked round scared and there stood Margot. I thought I was dreaming, but no! it was she— and yet it was no more the same Margot I used to know. She was no longer a girl, she was a woman, and her face was all white as if she suffered miseries. I put up my hands to keep her off—I didn't want her near me —it was she who had brought all this sorrow and shame to Beaupre. She shrank back then as if I had hurt her, and she cried:

"'Oh! I nave no other place to go, madame. There was another place, but I cannot go there now, I've walked miles and miles this day. I was in trouble, but the more close I came to Beaupre, the more distant seemed my cares, till at last they disappeared. When I reached the church I thought: "Everybody is in there—I will go there too. They will be glad to see me again. And afterwards I will go to the manse, and M. le cure and Ursula—oh! they'll be more than happy to have me with them once more." So I crept into the church; and it seemed like some fete day that I didn't remember, there was so many people. But it was very still; there was no music—nothing! Then I saw my dear M. le cure standing by the steps of the altar and —and I heard every word he said. And my heart leaped in my breast, and then I understood—never mind what. I heard the women sob, but I didn't weep. Why should I weep? All the same I stole away; I wanted to be where I could think. I went along by the brook till I came to the Calvary and I waited there in the bushes. I was happy—oh! never so happy as then. I wanted to run to the manse, but some thing held me back, and I told myself I must wait till my heart went not so quick. And I thought I'd go in a little while and I'd knock very soft on the study door, but M. le cure would know that knock anywhere. He'd throw the door open wide and he'd cry, "It is Margot—enter—hasten!" Just to think of that made my heart go fast—fast—and I knew it would take too long for it to grow slow and calm again, but when I would have left my hiding-place some people stopped near me and I heard them say it was all my fault that the cure had given up everything, that God would never pardon him, and then they cursed me. Well, I didn't know what to do then. I wasn't able to think very plain—there was so much noise—the brook and the birds seemed to mock at me. Bimeby I told myself, "I will ask Madame Rose to help me.' I don't want harm to come to the cure. What must I do?"

"She stopped speaking and looked at me with those soft eyes of hers.

"'You must never see him again," I said; "you must go away where he can't find you.'

"'And then what will happen?' she asked.

"'Why,' I said, "I don't know for sure, but I think the bishop will talk with M. le cure and give him some penance and M. le cure will do it and so get back his peace one day."

"'And what is for me?' she asked.

"I couldn't tell, m'sieu', so there was no more speech between us for a while. Soon she began talking again, and she said:

"'I have no longer any school. There is an old man in the parish yonder who wanted to marry me. He has much money and the people there think he is a grand man—me, I know different. I cannot marry him, and so I told him many times. Money and lands won't satisfy a woman's heart, madame. They can't buy happiness. Well, he was very angry when I tried to make that clear and he said he would fix me sure—I shouldn't teach the school longer. So he told them all it wasn't right for me to be with the children; that I wasn't fit. He knew all about my mother—oh! she did much wrong my mother—and he made up very shameful stories besides, about me and one Antoine Marcel, because I took his flowers and when he went away forever I wept for his grief. He loved me, madame, very true, that Antoine, but I cared not for him either; my heart was here in Beaupre all the while. But the people believed those stories and they wouldn't let me stay. So that is why I come home, and—I—have—no—home!'

"'No,' I said, 'you have no home here.'

"Then m'sieu', it was plain in one great flash how the cure could be saved for the church.

"'Hold,' I cried to Margot; write a letter to M. le cure, write it quick and I will bear it to him. Tell him you don't like the stupid life of the village and so you go to see the world with some one who is young and gay.'

"'But, madame,' she interrupted, that ain't true. I cannot tell that lie. I cannot have my dear cure think me like that. I love him as he loves me.'

"'There is no other way to save him and save his soul,' I said. 'Va! it will be but a little pain. S'pose it is a lie, we women, can't always say what is true—we must think of others and keep back what will be for their harm if we love them.'

"She stood still and warred with herself, and once she almost fell, so I pushed her into a chair by the table, then finally she said:

"'I will do what you tell me, only I'm a good woman, madame. I'll always be a good woman."

"I brought the writing things to her and she sat and thought a long time before she began to write. She tore up much good paper and she wrote again and again; when she had finished at last she read me the letter. It wasn't very long and she said in it that what the people yonder spoke of her was true; and it was true, too, what they couldn't tell him, that she was very happy because she knew what love was. She meant always to be happy and gay in the world and she wouldn't ever see him again. That made her sorry, but only a little, for she hadn't time to think much of the old life. Then she said good-bye. When she came to the end she kissed the paper many times before she gave it to me.

"'Will he understand?" she whispered.

"'Yes,' I answered.

"What?' she asked, 'will he understand that?"

"'No,' I said very firm, 'he will just think you are Marie Duplan's child and that will cure him."

"'Oh, God!' she sobbed, 'how can I let him think me like that—how can I?'

"I was very sorry for Margot, m'sieu', but what would you? The cure must be saved. He had not yet left the manse when I reached there, and I handed him the letter myself. He didn't ask any questions; he just opened it and read it, maybe two, three times, as if the writing wasn't easy to make out. Then he went past me very quick and closed the door of his room, but I saw his face and I understood.

"It was late when I got home and Margot still sat by the table, She raised her head when I came in and I saw the heart-break in her face too. The pain of it hurt me sharp like the blow with a knife. I had looked on sorrow that day. I had never seen such sorrow before, and never once since that time. But all the same I think it was the cure who was wounded the deepest, because he must tell himself that Margot had failed him every way.

"As for her, m'sieu', I wanted to keep her with me always, only that couldn't be. She was like a pure little dove—I say that and I know all about her mother. I can say nothing else, for I have looked into her eyes and have seen the whiteness of her soul. But there could be no home for her in Beaupre and so she went away into the night; and she said, the last thing, 'Pray for me, madame, pray for me.' That is all. I don't know anything more about her—she never came back."

"And the cure?"

"The cure, m'sieu'? It was like I thought. The bishop gave him a long penance, he went to the Silent Brotherhood, and he stayed there many years they say. He never came to Beaupre again. Perhaps he is dead, perhaps he lives—I know not. But he is pardoned, that I know. All the people prayed for him, and the good God heard those prayers for sure."

DOTTED MUSLIN WAIST.

The waist illustrated is of light blue dotted muslin. The fronts are composed of alternate groups of three tucks and bands of cream Valenciennes insertion, and are trimmed at intervals with five lengthwise frills of lace to match the insertion, one set down the middle and two on either side as illustrated. The back is pleated in three box pleats. The neck is finished with a standing collar, which is trimmed with two pointed tabs edged with lace frills. The sleeves are trimmed from the top to the wrist with bands of insertion and clusters of tucks.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

The nervous system, says Prof. W. H. Thomson, has a greater store of reserve vitality than all the other bodily systems together, and is the only texture that does not lose weight in death by starvation or other cause. It is the last to grow old. As to the mind, it need not grow old at all, provided it be supplied with the mighty stimulus called interest, by which it will grow steadily, even while bone and sinew are wasting through age.