

I'D LIKE TO BE A FARMER.

Oh! I'd like to be a farmer,
When the summer time so gay
Comes around with fragrant odors
Of the pumpkin and the hay;
In the field I'd like to follow
In the furrow long and straight,
As I picked the nodding cabbage,
As I dug the toothsome date.

I would cut the watermelon
From the watermelon tree,
And the corn from off the bushes
I would gather gleefully.
Oh! the joy of reaching deftly
For the apple on the vine,
And of rooting sweet potatoes
From the sweet potato mine.

I would like to be a farmer
In the country ozone fresh,
And go winning with a winnow,
And go threshing with a thresh,
Where the gentle cauliflower
Sends its fragrance from the trees
And the odor of the sweet hyacinth
Kiss is wafted on the breeze.

Where the squash grows in the hedges
I would like to go and stay,
And just live in sweet contentment
All the blessed living day;
And I'd fish and hunt and frolic,
And I'd shoot and run and climb,
If I only were a farmer
With a farmer's easy time!

—HENRY EDWARD WARNER.

The Luck of French Pete.

A Little Episode of Western Life.

By RHETA CHILDE DORR.

I knew him only as the fishman for some time after my actual acquaintance with him ceased. At the time I never thought of asking his name, and he never thought to mention it.

He was a Frenchman of a type not often met with. Very large of frame, muscular, slow moving, as awkward on his feet as a sailor ashore, and, above all, a countenance deeply, darkly melancholic. It was not exactly a sorrowful face, but looked as if its owner regarded life from a standpoint of settled pessimism. Victims of chronic dyspepsia sometimes wear that expression, but the fishman was no dyspeptic; he was as healthy as a king salmon. Nevertheless he was as melancholy as Jacques.

He sold fish—very good ones—from a pushcart in Seattle half a dozen years ago, when the first Klondike rush was lifting that picturesque town from financial depression to prosperity. Twice a week the fishman visited my neighborhood. The winding of his horn down the street was a signal for Paul and Virginia, the two black cats, to bounce from their slumbers in front of the open fire, and race out to the sidewalk, where they waited for the fishman to come up and throw them each a smelt. This he always did, and I think it was his attentions to my beloved cats that first drew me to him. I fell into the habit of buying fish myself instead of leaving the transaction to Hop Toy, who was under contract to "make every thing," including the marketing.

We soon established friendly relations, and when Christmas time came around I presented the fishman with a small fruit cake, wrapped in white tissue paper, tied with red ribbon and spray of holly. His reception of the modest gift well-nigh embarrassed me. He went crimson, and, snatching off his shabby hat, bowed half-way to the ground. "Madame," he said impressively, "you are the first lady who ever gave me a Christmas present."

And all that day I was miserable to think that I had not given the man something really worth while, a warm jersey, for instance, for I remembered that he had not seemed very well clad for the shivery wetness of a Puget Sound winter.

Soon after this the fishman ceased his visits. He disappeared abruptly, and after a week or so it occurred to me that he might be ill. I had no idea where he lived, but the versatile Hop Toy volunteered to find out, and succeeded. The fishman was discovered to live alone in one of a wretched row of shacks along the water front, in a neighborhood affected principally by Siwash—the Siwash being the Puget Sound apology for an Indian.

The fishman was indeed ill, with pneumonia, and when I sent the city physician to him he was in a desperate condition. No one had been near him since he was stricken, and he had gone without food or fire for days. There was no logical excuse for his being alive at all, but alive he was, and alive he continued, thanks to his amazing vitality and a dog's determination of his own not to die if he could help it. He assured the doctor many times that he must get well—there was something he had to do before he went, and this fierce will to live, with the doctor's kindly ministrations, finally put him on his feet again. He came to see me as soon as he was able to walk—a gaunt, chalky-faced, trembling object, holding to the back of a chair in order to stand upright.

"Oh, madame, I was ze seek man," he exclaimed feebly when I had made him sit down. "And oh! ze misery to be seek without a woman in ze shack. I say ovaire and ovaire to myself I will get me a womans as soon as I ave ze monnaie."

I suggested that wives were not exactly in the nature of extravagances to thrifty fishermen, but he made a magnificent gesture of

head and hand, silencing me. Then in broken English and eloquent French he poured out a highly colored and quite unbelievable tale. He was a fishman now, it was true, but that was not his calling. He was, in fact, a miner, and no ordinary miner either. By rights he should be a millionaire, for it was he and no other man who was the discoverer and rightful owner of a great mine famous in the Northwest.

"Jim Speedwell, he was my partnair. He was drunk in camp when I locate dat claim. Zen he chase me off with one shotgun, and he sell zat mine to a Yankee for \$500, and I nevaire get one sou."

I marvelled at the audacity of the romancer. The story of the mine, its discovery and sale by the supposed discoverer, who promptly converted the money into liquid form and swallowed it all in an incredibly short time, is well known on the Coast. The mine is unique, almost the entire island on which it is situated close to the surface of the earth being gold, of very low grade, but so easily mined and conveniently transported that the value of the property is something fabulous. It has been worked for years, and shows no sign of giving out. Men are at work there year in and year out, shovelling the coarse yellow clay, and sending it in carloads to the chlorination works, where the sparkling sands are separated from the clay that concealed them.

The island is the most forlorn looking place on earth—the abomination of desolation, reminding one of the landscape so vividly pictured in 'Childe Roland.' The gas from the chlorination works has destroyed every bit of vegetation for miles around. On the island there is not one leaf of grass or any growing plant or tree. Still it contains one of the great mines of the world, and the fishman bewailed it so eloquently that he almost made me believe in the story of his original ownership.

Drawing his chair nearer, his eyes flashing, his English vocabulary almost lost, he continued:

"For long time I want to die. I drink and drink, all ze time I drink. Zen I say—do not be one damfool. I stop ze whiskey, I go to work, I save ze monnaie. For listen, madame—I know there is another mine, much more rich, more extraordinaire, far away in ze island. Zis time I tell no one. I take no partnair. I save ze monnaie, and soon I ave enough to cros ze divide and claim my mine. I shall be millionaire. By gar, no one shall steal from me zat mine. I shoot any man who comes on my claim."

"Zen I come back here, rich man, and I come to your 'ouse, to your front' door, madame, if you will pairmeet, and to ze only lady who was evair kind to me when I was poor fishman, when I was seek man in dat 'orrible shack, I give 'alf my mine. You not accept it, madame, I die with unhappiness."

He departed, leaving me speechless but vastly entertained.

Thereafter he purveyed fish as before, no allusion to the Midas past or the dreamful future being made on his part or mine.

One day in April Hop Toy came upstairs and announced a caller.

"One man bottomsides; you go down," was his laconic formula.

I went down and there was the fisherman, transformed in his miner's garb; blue denim trousers tucked into high laced boots, flannel shirt, wide hat, and Hudson Bay blanket coat. He had had a bath and a shave and looked quite like a gentleman. The melancholy had left his dark face and he fairly beamed with energy and ambition. He was off at last, he said, and had come to say goodbye and to repeat that half the mine was to be my property when he returned. I shook hands with him heartily and wished him luck.

In May of the following year I took a jaunt up to Sitka, one of the pleasantest vacation trips one can take, let me add. The steamer halted at Juneau and Speedwell Island, and I visited the famous mine. Straightway, of course, I recalled the fisherman who had almost passed out of my memory.

On the return trip there were few passengers, and I sat almost alone at the captain's table. The captain of the Queen, then the largest boat in the Alaska service, was aboard as a passenger, his own boat being temporarily out of commission.

He and the captain of the Mexico, our boat, were a jolly pair of sea dogs. It amused them mightily to tell me tales of adventure that would have taxed the credulity of the veriest "cheechawka," as they call the tenderfoot out there.

"You do it very well," I said, after laughing at one of these extravaganzas, "but the largest story of that kind I have ever listened to was told me by a man who used to sell me fish in Seattle." And I related the fish man's tale.

The two captains looked at each other significantly.

"French Pete," said the captain of the Mexico. "I thought he died down in 'Frisco."

"The strangest part of that story," said the captain of the Queen, turning to me, "is that it comes pretty near being all true."

The Frenchman did locate that claim, and I guess it's true that his partner got most of the money and all of the glory, but I don't

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believe he buncoed Pete out of all of his share. The probabilities are that Pete was celebrating, and his partner did business with him when he wasn't just responsible." Then he added: "If Pete says he knows where there's another big mine I wouldn't be surprised if he does. They used to say that that fellow could smell gold. Besides he wouldn't stay sober for any length of time unless there was something big in it."

"And I'll bet you get your money," said the captain of the Mexico gallantly.

But truth, if it be stronger than fiction, is not half as artistic. I never saw the fishman again. Soon after that Alaska journey my Western home was given up and I left Seattle. However, if I never saw him again I have at least heard of him. I came upon a paragraph in a New York paper, a dispatch from Vancouver, B. C. It read about as follows:

"Mr. Pierre le Blanc, better known on the Coast as French Pete, who came down from the Klondike last fall with a fortune, the first clean-up of his wonderful discoveries on White Creek, has suffered a deep affliction in the death of his young wife, whom he crossed the ocean only a few months ago to woo and marry. Mr. Le Blanc spent a week in Seattle after coming out, and went from there directly to his childhood's home in France. There he met and married the daughter of an old friend. He started back to Alaska with his bride, his properties there demanding his personal attention. The young woman sickened mysteriously, and died here last night after a few hours' illness. Mr. Le Blanc is prostrated with his loss. After the funeral, and as soon as he recovers sufficiently, he will continue his sad journey northward."

Poor French Pete! His life seems overcrowded with disaster. I have never heard another word of him. Perhaps he too has gone. Sometimes I wonder if he tried to find me in Seattle. After all, though, he was as ignorant of my name as I had been of his.



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