

BUSINESS CARDS.

JOHN G. HALL, Attorney at Law, Ridgway, Elk county Pa. [mar-22-06-ly]

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July 25, 06-ly

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Selected Story.

POOR CHRISTINE.

"I remember it fifty years ago, Fred," an old man said to his companion, as they both stood looking up through the June sunshine at the great front of the Cathedral at Rouen. "Yes, fifty years ago I stood before it as we are standing now, and I think the very same birds were building their nests then up over the porch there. Look how they fly in and out! How many generations of them have lived there, do you think, my boy?"

They stood in the open square, with their backs to the *cafes* and the gay shops, the sunlight falling tenderly on the great gray sculptured walls before them, lighting up shaft and capital and niche with all their "kingly crowning" with all their wondrous workmanship of living form and clustered pinnacles.

"Fifty years ago!" he said again, softly. "Poor Christine!"
Fifty years ago Frank Liston had spent a summer holiday in Rouen; he was about nineteen then, a high minded enthusiastic youth. His father was dead, and he was educating himself to be an artist, and was looking forward with all the eagerness of a generous nature to the time when he should be able to remove his mother, who was poor now, above all want. Young as he was he had worked so hard already that he had more than once earned something for her, and with a flushing cheek had poured his golden guineas into her lap; and she, by hard pinching, had saved some of these guineas, and this summer, because in striving after such early wages he had begun to outrun his strength, she made him take a few of them again, and sent him across the channel to visit (what in his heart she knew he longed to see) some one or two of the old picturesque French towns.

It was bright June weather when he reached the first of them at which he meant to halt, Rouen, and saw from far away, the dark old city, towards which for years his artist's heart had tended, stretched out amidst the windings of the Seine. He had been laughed at by one or two before he started on his journey, and had been told that this old Rouen was nothing but a miserable town of grimy, tottering houses and blackened churches, but the youth had gayly returned laugh for laugh. He knew well what he had crossed the sea to seek and he knew that he should not fail to find it. Nor did he. He found it even in the midst of those decaying houses and mouldering churches; he found it in narrow streets and in neglected corners; and wheresoever he discovered it, whether in open square or hidden alley, he hailed it as men hail the sight of long sought, long unseen friends' faces.

He had brought his sketching board and all his materials for drawing with him, and, holiday though it was, he meant to work throughout it, but the novelty and the loveliness of everything about him distracted him so at first, that a few days had passed before he could do anything but roam and gaze around him. He had been for three days in Rouen before at length he took his post one morning before the west front of the cathedral and began to draw. It was a mild, warm summer's day, and the square was very quiet. Only a few people passing in and out of the church, and occasionally a child or two, attracted by curiosity to steal near and stare at him, disturbed him as he worked, and hour after hour passed happily over him. During hour after hour, too, there was one person besides himself who, having come to the square before him, remained till long after he had gone away—a girl selling rosaries and little images at the cathedral door. After he had been working for some time he noticed her. When his work was over, and he came forward before he turned homeward to enter for a few minutes into the church, he stopped when he came to where she sat in the cool shadow of the porch, and looking into her basket took up in his hand a little rosary of coral beads.

"How much?" he asked.
"A fraibe, monsieur," she said.
She smiled and thanked him as he

gave the money to her, and he took his beads and passed on. He thought for a moment: "what a pleasant smile she has!" and then he thought no more of her till the next morning, when he came back to resume his work, and found her in her place again.

That day he took note of how picturesque the quaint old Normandy dress looked on her, the great high up so scrupulously starched and white, the short petticoat so bright in hue. A trim, neat figure; too, rounded and light, and firm; a young, bright face, not beautiful, but pleasant as sunlight to look upon. He should like to make a sketch some morning of her, he thought, and that day when his work was done he went up to where she sat, and entered into talk with her. He had a frank, fearless, boyish habit of talking to every kind of person who came across him, man or woman, gentle or simple. For years already, ever since he had thought of becoming a painter, he had been accustomed to roam about the country, attaching himself sometimes in all simple faith to strange enough companions, falling into odd adventures, running occasionally some risks, and yet always, by some good guidance or insight, escaping scatheless from all; bringing his fresh, honest, trusting nature, that, thinking no harm itself, suspecting no harm in others, undimmed and unsoftened out of every trial. He went up to the girl and asked,

"Do you come here with your basket every day?"

They had already exchanged a little nod of recognition.

"Yes, monsieur, every day," she answered.

"Well; and don't you get very tired of it?" he said.

"Tired of it?" she repeated with a smile that showed two rows of even snowy teeth. "O no, monsieur; I know everybody who passes here, and I amuse myself with watching for them. There are hundreds who come every day, winter and summer, as regular as the clock there. Then I see all the strangers," she exclaimed, in a tone of gentle exultation; "there is not a creature ever comes to Rouen, they say, but he comes here."

"Well, if you look out for strangers you will soon see plenty of me," Frank said, good humoredly; "for I shall be here every day, I dare say, for the next two or three weeks."

"I saw monsieur the first day he came," she answered, with a smile; "he came and stood looking up there," pointing with her finger to the church front, "till I thought he was counting all the figures on it."

He gave a laugh and then colored a little; young as he was, he blushed for a moment at the thought that when he did not know it a woman had been watching him.

"Well, I was not counting the figures exactly," he said; "but do you know what I have been doing these last two days? I have been drawing the church—making a picture of it. I am a painter," he said, with youthful dignity.

"Ah! so?" And the bright brown eyes looked up into his face, not awestruck, but a little curious and wondering.

"I will show you my picture presently, when I have got on a little further with it, and then you shall tell me if you think I have made it like. Now when you sit here all day, hour after hour," he said, inquiringly, "do you ever think much about the church?"

"Monsieur!" she said, and the brown eyes opened wider.

"I mean, do you look at it much and try to find out what the figures on it mean? Do you ever think about the people who built it?"

She looked at him with a half-pitying smile, and said:

"Monsieur, the church is very old; they are all dead."

"All dead! I should think they were," he answered, quickly. "But what is to prevent you from thinking of them, though they are dead? You know they were alive once. Now one of them must have cut these little twisted shafts here once; have you never

wondered who he was, or what became of him?"

She shook her head placidly.

"What would be the use? I could not find out," she said.

"No, you could not find out; but you might try to fancy them all at work here, might you not? and how they came, just as you come, day after day, all these hundreds of years, and set up stone after stone, and carved figure after figure. Think how they must have watched their work and grown happy at the sight of it. Just think of them all here, with their hammers striking the stone, and the noise of every blow in the air, all of them talking in a language that would be almost like a strange tongue to us now. You know it all was so; why can't you think of it?"

"It may be easy monsieur to think of the dead," she answered, simply, "but for me I do not find it easy, unless it may be of the blessed saints," and she crossed herself; "but then we know that they lived; while as for those others—" she said, and slightly shrugging her shoulders, broke off her sentence with a dubious smile.

He had nearly burst into an answer about the saints that was more impetuous than reverent; but happily he checked himself in time, and, instead of speaking, stood looking for a minute in silence up over the great, dark, glorious church, frowning, and wondering at what she had said. Out from the gray, solemn stones there seemed a thousand voices that spoke to him: how could it be, he thought, that this girl had passed her life under the shelter of its shadow, and that to her every tone of it was dumb.

"Then you don't care for it?" he asked, abruptly, at last, turning to her again?

"Nay, monsieur is mistaken," she answered, gently. "See, it is like home to me here; when it is hot summer, I sit here in the cool shade; when winter comes, I shelter myself here within the poren. It is like a good friend to me; other things change, but it never changes. When I am glad I go in and kneel down and thank the blessed Virgin, and when I am sad I go there too, and say my prayers. No, monsieur is wrong; I care for it."

She raised her face with a sudden smile as she paused, and, eager to be lieve that all the world cared for what he loved, eager for a universal sympathy with his own enthusiasm, he looked with pleased contentment into the girl's clear, honest eyes, and—

"Well, I am glad you like it," he said, heartily. "I thought you could not have lived here so many years, and have cared nothing for it. You have lived in Rouen all your life, do you say? how long a time is that?"

"I am twenty," she answered.

"Are you? Why you are older than I am, then! And what is your name?"

"Christine, monsieur," she answered. Some one passing into the church had stopped beside her basket, and was beginning to look over its little stock of images and beads. She had to run round to attend to him, and then before his purchase was made another customer came. Frank lingered and looked on for a few minutes; then he said, "Good by," and the boy and girl smiled to one another, and parted with a friendly nod.

He went home, and there was something pleasant to him in the thought which crossed him once or twice during the remainder of the day, that in the morning he should see Christine again. Several times her face rose brightly up before him, with its contented, honest smile, and sent a kind of warmth into his heart; for, fair and dear to him was this old Rouen, yet he moved as a stranger in it, and no other lips than those of hers had given either greeting or kindly word to him. And so, when he went to his post again next day, and she, who had been watching for him, at once when he appeared nodded and smiled to him across the square, instead of staring at him in his accustomed place and beginning his work, as he had meant to do, he walked straight to her in a sudden impulse of gratitude for her cheery little tones of welcome, and, like

a thorough Englishman, put out his hand to her.

"You are the only creature that I know in Rouen!" he exclaimed, "except my handlady, and she is quite old. As I came along just now, I was wondering whether you would be here before me."

"Ah, monsieur," she said, laughing. "I have been here for hours. Look there, it is ten o'clock. Do you think I begin my day so late as ten o'clock?"

"Is it really ten? Then I must be quick and begin my work, too. By the way, I wonder—O, may I call you Christine?" he asked, abruptly.

"Certainly, monsieur; it is my name."

"Thank you. Well, I was going to say, I wonder, Christine, if you would let me make a sketch of you?"

"Of me?" and the girl blushed with sudden half-shy pleasure.

"I think I could do it, if you wouldn't mind sitting to me. I don't catch likenesses always very well, but I think I should succeed with yours. May I try?"

"But monsieur, could find so many prettier girls—"

"O, I don't want prettier girls; I would rather have you," he interrupted her bluntly. "You will let me do it, then, won't you? When may I begin? If I were to come early to-morrow—say, at eight o'clock—would you be here then? Would that suit you?"

"Any hour that suited monsieur."

"Very well, then; eight o'clock to-morrow morning. And now I must go to my picture." He turned half away, and then looked suddenly back. "Have you a father and mother, Christine?" he said.

"No father, monsieur, but I have a good mother. She makes up all my ransaries for me. I buy the beads and take them to her, and she strings them—so. She makes these crosses, too. She is very feeble but she does all that for me."

"And then you come and sell them, Christine?" he said, quickly. "Do you know, I have a mother, too, and I work for her. We are not very rich, and I make drawings and sell them."

"God bless you, then, monsieur," she answered, fervently; "you will never be sorry for doing that."

He was touched by her genuine tone of sympathy.

"No, I know I shall not. I would rather help her than do anything else in the world," and the color rose up to his cheek.

She smiled, looking in his face as he spoke. After a moment's silence she said, simply and earnestly—

"It is sometimes hard for me to earn a living, harder than I hope it will ever be to you, monsieur; but I would rather be just a poor girl as I am, and have my mother with me, than be the greatest lady in Rouen without her."

And then she glanced up with a sunny look that cleared away the tears which had risen for a moment to her eyes, and—

"But even me—the world does not treat very badly," she said, cheerfully. "It is a little hard to me now and then, and when it is, I go in there and pray to the dear Virgin, and before long the sunshine comes back again. It never stays long away. There are many good people in the world, monsieur, to keep the poor from starving."

She had a sweet voice, lower and softer than Frenchwoman's voices often are. The face, too, had sweetness in it. He saw that now, though he had only noticed its bright, pleasant honesty before.

"But I am keeping you from your picture," she said smilingly, after a moment's silence.

That was true; so with a few more words he turned away; and, stationing himself in his place, began to work. It was a calm, gray summer day, windless and sunless, yet with a softened brightness in it that shone through the thin clouds. He sat and worked, and, as the sketch went on and bit by bit he seized and made a possession for himself of the loveliness before him, in the very joy and boyish lightness of his heart, he could have sung aloud. He had worked so well yet upon no other day; all life seemed full of gladness to him, and his life especially, his glorious painter's life, so great and noble. He had no previous probably, this boy Frank Liston;

but his cheek could burn and his heart could beat with the love of all noble things. He never made the world ring with his name, but in his bright youth there were days—and this was one of them—when it almost seemed as if the power was given him to cut his way through the diamond gates.

He worked till it was growing late. All day, amongst the many things that had made him happy, one thing had been the presence of Christine. A bond of sympathy had sprung up between him and the simple, untaught, poor French girl—real human sympathy, such as made even the sight of her across the square a thing that kept his young heart warm. He liked to look up now and then and catch her smile; it was as good as sunlight to him. The old stones had their voices for him and tales to tell him, noble and sweet and sad, but while he listened to them it was good also to lift his eyes up sometimes and look upon a friendly, living face.

He knew it was; he knew as he sat at work that his day had been the brighter for Christine.

Nor was it the last, by many a one, that she helped to brighten for him. From this time forward she became his one friend and one companion in Rouen; and no gentler friendship, no more honest and pure companionship ever existed than that between those two stray wanderers—the girl, whose portion in this world was the selling of her beads at the church porch, and the boy, whose beckoning beaconlight was burning on the high hill.

He made his sketch of her. It was a feeble little sketch, yet like enough to her, and true enough to fill them both with pleasure and pride. She sat to him morning after morning till he had finished it. He drew her just as she was, in her common dress, with her basket by her side and the gray sculptured wall beside her, and he made her talk to him all the time he worked. She had tried to begin herself by sitting stiff and prim, with her eyes immovable and her lips closed, but he had soon laughed her out of that.

"I shall never make anything of you unless you begin to talk," he told her.

"But how can monsieur draw my mouth if I talk?" she added.

"O, never mind that; I'll tell you when I come to your mouth," he said, and by degrees he got her to talk, and presently she talked so cheerfully and heartily—for by nature she was no lover of silence, but could chatter and chirp like any bird—that she often altogether forgot that she was sitting for her picture, which was exactly what he wanted her to do.

And so at last the little sketch was finished, and they looked at it, holding it between them, with proud, bright, happy eyes.

"Ah, if my mother could see it," she said, with a sigh of simple delight.

"Well, why shouldn't she see it?" he asked. "Let us take it to her together, Christine."

"Would monsieur wish it?" she said, half timidly.

"I should like to see your mother, and she would like to see this, I am sure; and then—" he paused and looked at the little picture tenderly. "Well, you see, I don't think I could exactly give it to her, Christine," he said, "because I want so much to keep it myself; but I will tell you what I will do if she likes it—I will make a copy of it for her."

"O, monsieur is too good!" But the color flushed up into her face with pleasure.

"I should like to make a copy, and you know it would be unfair not to give you one; so that's settled. And now will you take me home with you to see your mother?"

They had, before this, had more than one walk together. She knew the old town well, and on several evenings, after the cathedral doors were closed, they had rambled side by side for a little while about the streets, searching out the old houses that he loved, or had lingered young and hopeful as they were, to look in at bright shop windows. But he never yet had gone home with her. She had talked about her mother to him often, but with intuitive delicacy she had never even hinted at a wish that he should go and see her in the poor home where they lived.

Yet she had no false shame, and when they set out on their walk together this evening she merely said to him once, simply and quietly, "It is a poor place, monsieur," and then without further ceremony she took him to it.

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