

A Dead Priest's Mass

By A. Le Braz

My grandfather, old Chatton, was returning one evening from Paimpal, where he had gone to receive some payments. It was on Christmas Eve. All day long it had snowed, and the road was quite white, and the fields and boundaries were white also. Fearing to lose his way in the snow, my grandfather walked his horse.

When he reached the old mined chapel which stands by the wayside, he heard midnight strike. Thereupon, there came a tinkling sound of bells, as if for Mass.

"Is it possible," thought my grandfather; "the Chapel of St Christopher must have been restored. I did not notice it this morning as I went past. I certainly was not paying much attention."

The bells chimed on.

He determined to go and see what was going on.

The chapel looked new and beautiful in the moonbeams, and it was lighted up with torches, whose bright rays shone through the windows.

My grandfather Chatton tied his horse to a gate at hand, and entered the church of the Saint.

It was full of people, and they were all extraordinarily absorbed in prayer. There was not even the noise of coughing, which continually breaks the silence of a church.

The old man knelt down on the flagstones at the entrance to the church.

The priest was at the altar. His server passed to and fro within the sanctuary.

My grandfather said to himself: "So, after all, I shall hear midnight Mass!"

And he began to pray, as he always did, for the relations he had lost.

The priest turned towards the people to give a blessing, and my grandfather noticed the strange brightness of his eyes. And strange too, to say, those eyes appeared to single him out amongst the crowd, and to fix themselves upon him. He felt rather uncomfortable.

The priest having taken a Host from the Ciborium, held it between his fingers, and said in a hollow voice: "Is there anyone here who can *receive*?"

No one answered.

Three times over the priest repeated his question. The same silence in the congregation. Then my grandfather rose. He was indignant at seeing all these people apparently indifferent to the priest's appeal.

"On my word as a Christian, Reverend Sir," he exclaimed, "I went to Confession this morning before starting, intending to Communicate to-morrow, being Christmas day. But if you desire it, I am ready at once to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The priest instantly descended the Altar steps, while my grandfather made his way through the crowd to kneel at the rails.

"May my blessing rest upon you, Chatton," said the priest when my grandfather had received the Host: "Once on a Christmas Eve, a snowy night like this, I refused to go and bear the Viaticum to a dying person. That was three hundred years ago. I could not be delivered from Purgatory until one of the living should consent to receive Communion from my hand. Thanks to you, I shall now be released, and all the Souls of the Departed

here present will also be released! We shall meet again soon, Chatton, very soon,—in Heaven!”

As soon as he had ceased to speak, the torches went out.

My grandfather found himself alone in the ruined building with no roof but the sky, amidst the rushes and nettles that grew in the deserted nave. He had some difficulty in getting through them. He mounted his horse and went on his way.

On his arrival at home he said to his wife:

“You must make up your mind to lose me ere long. I have received my Viaticum. But let it console you to know that this Viaticum will carry me straight to Heaven!

He died a fortnight later.

(Related by Charles Corre, Penvénast, 1885.)