



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 1865.

No. 15.

ROSE LEBLANC;
OR,
THE TRIUMPH OF SINCERITY.
CHAPTER III.

The next day, by six in the morning, a cart laden with fruit was standing at M. Dumont's door; some bright nosegays of flowers, and bundles of jasmine and myrtle were intermingled with the baskets of peaches, apricots, figs, and plums. Rose stood at the horse's head giving orders, assisting in the arrangement of her stores, and hastening the proceedings of the stable boy, who did not seem in as great a hurry as herself to set off for Pau.

How do you go, Aunt Babet; how is your rheumatism this morning? she asked, as the good lady, with her head covered with a shawl, opened the window of the kitchen.

Why, I have not closed my eyes all night, was the reply. That goose, Henri, who actually asked me last night if I would take your place, Rose, at the market-place! A pretty thing, indeed, at my age! He is not pleased with you, Rose; you are really too giddy; you come home so late; it is that which puts him out. Oh, dear me! young people are very aggravating; they have no consideration for any body.— They take such strange ideas into their heads. What should people say, I wonder, to see a woman of my years perched up on that narrow seat, for all the world like a hen on a garden wall?

Rose, who did not feel quite sure whether Babet's soliloquy referred to her own misdeeds, or to Henri's inconsiderate suggestion, hastened to reply.

People would be sure to say that you ought not to be exposed to the fatigue of going backwards and forwards, and to the bothers of the market-place. It is not all pleasure sitting at the receipt of custom, whatever Henri may think. I wish he'd go and keep the stall himself for one whole day. Mr. That is difficult to please; Mrs. That never finds any thing to her taste. There are people who would swear that a green gage was a damson and a peach a potato. You have to smile to one customer, to joke with a second, to curtsy to a third; to keep every body in a good humor, and lose your own temper just at the right moment. Oh, it is not all so easy as people suppose. It requires a deal of management. And my poor uncle, too! I wonder how he would like to die on dishes of my cooking.— Poor dear man! it would make him ill to a certainty.

Well, child, you are not deficient in sense at times. There is some truth in what you say; but you are not listening to me. Why are you in such a hurry? It has not struck seven o'clock yet.

Indeed, it must be past seven, aunt; the clock of the Franciscans is always slow. The sun is my time-piece. Good-bye, my dear aunt; mind you take care of yourself, and don't mind what Henri says.

Then, with a nod and a smile, she shook the bridle, flourished the whip, and the old horse, well accustomed to her ways, trotted off on the road to Pau.

She had dressed herself with a good deal of care that morning, the little fruit-seller of Jurancou, and she no doubt looked extremely well in her blue petticoat, her red bodice, and her gold chain. A large straw hat shaded her forehead and her bright violet-colored eyes. She was young and gay, graceful as a kitten, and merry as a bird. The sweet morning breeze fanned her blooming cheeks, and waved her glossy hair; the singing of the larks and the thrushes awakened gladness in her heart. She made a pretty picture, this little girl, seated amidst her flowers and her fruit, smiling, and, like Belinda, making the world gay with her smiles. But shadows occasionally passed over that expressive young face. The solicitudes of the maiden interfered with the instructive joyousness of the child. Anxious thoughts concerning Andre, the conscription, the approaching ballot, Henri's violence, his threats, and his sighs, came athwart her enjoyment of that summer morning, like clouds across a radiant sky. She looked back towards Jurancou, and the sound of the bells of its old church seemed to speak like a voice from her home; she looked at the little white house amongst the trees, the cottage of the De Vidals, and she fell into a reverie, and built a castle in the air, in which that aristocratic syllable played a conspicuous part. At the entrance of the town she turned into the street which leads to the Convent of the Ursulines. It was there that she had been at school, and had learned, at the same time as her catechism, to read, to write, and to sew. It was there, also, that she had made her first Communion. Leaving the boy who accompanied her to take the cart on to the market-place, she alighted at the door of the convent, and asked to speak to Sister Theresa, who had been her teacher in the class. She was shown into the parlor where the good nun was at work mending the linen.

How do you do, my little Rose? How are they all at Jurancou? she said, without interrupting her work. What beautiful weather we have now. Your fruits must be getting famously ripe.

Why, indeed, there is nothing to complain of in that respect; but I am in great trouble notwithstanding.

The nun raised her eyes quickly, and fixed them with a kind inquiring glance on the agitated countenance of the young girl.

What is the matter, my child? she gently said.

Why, the matter is, Sister—you will think it very strange, I know—but the matter is, that I have two suitors—that is, I have a suitor, and then my cousin who wants, whether I choose it or not, to marry me.

But, indeed, this is very shocking, said Sister Theresa, letting fall the stocking she was mending, I don't understand it all, Rose. I thought you were engaged to M. Lacaze;—and, if so, what business have you with other suitors?

M. Andre Vidal wishes to marry me, and I like him, and have promised myself to him; but my cousin says he will kill any body who makes up to me.

Do you mean the brother of M. Baptiste Vidal?

Yes, Rose answered, with downcast eyes. But they don't know anything about it at home. I never ventured to say that the reason why I had changed my mind about Henri was that I liked somebody else. And I never would let him talk to me before other people.

And you have done so in secret, Rose? asked the nun, with some severity of manner. Just a little now and then. But indeed, Sister, he is very good. Don't be angry with me. M. Andre has never said a word to me he should not; and he is as gentle as Henri is cross.

Sister Theresa took a letter out of her pocket and read it over attentively. After she had folded it up again, and put it by, she reflected for a few moments, and then said, I strongly recommend you, my dear child, to give up the idea of a marriage which your uncle would not approve of, and which would not be acceptable to the relations of this young man.

Rose looked very much put out. I don't know why you say that, Sister. Madame Vidal is very fond of me; and then, you see, I have now promised to marry M. Andre.

Without asking your uncle's consent? Without consulting your aunt? In spite of your previous engagement to your cousin?

But it is not my fault if, say what I will, he refuses to release me from that engagement. I have told him over and over again that I won't be his wife.

And why are you resolved not to marry him?

Because I don't like him, and that I like somebody else, Sister Theresa.

Are you quite sure of it, Rose?

I should think I was, indeed.

I remember that at one time you had a great regard for M. Lacaze. What has he done that you should change your mind?

He is so cross. He won't let me amuse myself.

That is indeed a very great offence, said the nun, with a smile. You don't know, Sister Theresa, how disagreeable it is not to amuse one's self. Nuns are always contented; they don't care about going to balls.

Well, that is not, I admit, one of our cares.

But for us girls it is not the same thing, you see. Now just put yourself for a moment in my place, Sister Theresa.

Well, I think if I was in your place, I should accept the husband which my uncle chose for me, and whose good qualities I was acquainted with; that his faults I would put up with, knowing that every body has some wrong or other; and that I myself was not free from them. I would try to make a good wife to him; to be gentle, obedient, hard-working, and very pious. I should try not to care so much about amusement; but, considering how short life is, I would try to make a good use of it, and so prepare for the next world.

But, Sister, M. le Cure at Jurancou says it is wrong for a girl to marry a man she dislikes, particularly if she likes somebody else.

But she must not like somebody else, persisted Sister Theresa.

That is very easy to say, answered Rose, twisting the corners of her apron between her fingers.

she ought to try and keep faithful to the man who has her promise. And then it is wrong, exceedingly wrong, to act by stealth, and to conceal from her parents or relatives these sort of affairs. You have sadly forgotten our instructions, my dear child.

You will not pray, then, I suppose, that M. Andre may get a good number? The ballot for the conscription takes place to-day.

I will gladly pray for him, for you, for every one concerned, that all may turn out for the best; and Almighty God knows far better than we do how that will be.

I will, in the mean time, say a rosary and burn a taper before the blessed Virgin's altar.— There can't be any harm in that.

No, indeed; it is always right to pray; but it would be all the better, if, after each Ave, you were to add, 'God's holy will be done.'

If I only knew...

What His Providence intends, you mean. Ah! that's the difficulty. But there is no alternative; we must make up our minds either to struggle in His hands like foolish, helpless children, or humbly to submit to what He ordains; making His blessed will ours, and bearing cheerfully the crosses He sees fit to lay upon us. Go, then, my child, say your beads with as much devotion as you can; try to be a good, modest, truthful girl, and our Dear Mother will help you.

Sister Theresa is a very holy woman, Rosa said to herself as, coming out of the chapel, she walked along the streets to the market-place.— She encourages you; she makes you wish to be good; and I am sure I will try to do as she says. But she is rather too severe, I think. After all, what great harm have I done? If it is a secret that M. Andre has been making up to me, it has only been because of Henri's jealousy. It is his fault, not mine. And then about the balls; I don't suppose she ever knew what it was to care about dancing.

What a long time to wait till twelve! I shall eat a pear to while away the time, and see if the peel, when I throw it up, will fall in the shape of a particular letter I am thinking of.— This experiment, a common one amongst young girls in France, did not apparently succeed according to Rose's wishes. The unlucky peel, as it fell upon the ground, did not assume the shape of an A or a V; it looked rather more like an L. She pushed it away without her foot, and ate her breakfast in silence.

CHAPTER IV.

Henri Lacaze stood leaning against the cart which had brought Rose to Pau, with a pipe in his mouth, and his eyes fixed upon the stall where she was attending to her business. He watched every look, every gesture of the young girl, who was growing restless and fidgety under his pertinacious gaze. She could not raise her eyes without meeting his; and if she tried to move away, or turn her back upon him, she still felt that she was observed, and could not escape the oppressive sense of that intolerable surveillance.

When the clock struck twelve a nervous shiver ran through her frame; her glance wandered over the place with an anxious expression, as group over group assembled about the door of the Prefecture. Suddenly she discovered Andre, who was smiling to her as he hurried across the empty space between the market and the official building. Her cheeks and her forehead became scarlet; and though she tried to smile in return, her quivering lips refused to do so. At last Henri also left his post against the cart, and walked up to the Prefecture. The two young men went in almost at the same time. Rose leant upon her elbow, staring at the windows of the council room, her hand in her pocket fingering her beads with a feverish rapidity, each minute appearing to her longer than an hour. Jules Bertrand came up to her at that moment. I say, Madlle. Rose, he whispered, in her ear. I am going to make my way into the balloting-room. I can slip through the gendarme's legs, or climb up to his window; but my name is not Jules Bertrand if I do not bring you the first news of what is going on there; and before Rose had time to answer he was off, and she saw him grinning at her from one of the windows on the staircase.

Just then a carriage was stopped at the corner of the Grand Rue, and two travellers, an elderly gentleman, and a tall, fair young lady, got out and walked into the Place du Marche. The latter was not only young and fair, but very tall and distinguished looking. It was impossible to see more beautiful features or a more graceful figure. Her hazel eyes were shaded with dark eyelashes, and formed a striking contrast with the extreme fairness of her hair and skin. The faint pink colour in her cheek was so delicate in its hue, that it hardly would have shown on a less dazzling white complexion. The loungers on the place, and even the working people, turned round to look at the strangers who went on foot to visit the church of St. Jacques. On their way back as they were passing Rose's stall, the young lady said in a low voice to her elderly companion, Oh, do look, grandpapa, at that lovely little fruit-seller. Do let us stop and buy some peaches. The old man smiled and gave his purse into her hands. She stopped and bent over the counter towards Rose, who asked in an absent manner, How many do you wish for, Mademoiselle? for her eyes and her thoughts were continually straying towards the Prefecture.

A dozen, if you please, Mademoiselle, in that little basket lined with moss. How pretty your baskets are. Do look, grandpapa. As she was lifting up the corbeille to exhibit it to her grandfather, Jules ran breathlessly across the Place, and rushed to the side of the corner where Rose was standing. 'It's all over with us,' he whispered to her, and looking up at the same moment she saw Andre coming out of the entrance gate.

He makes the sign of the cross, she exclaimed, and covered her face with her hands. But looking up an instant afterwards, she perceived Henri standing opposite to her, pale, motionless, with one hand on his hip and the other thrust into his waistcoat. He did not stir, but kept his eyes riveted upon her with a fixedness which struck terror into her heart. She trembled under his gaze.

Can you give me change for this Napoleon? asked the young lady, totally unconscious of the scene that was enacted before her eyes.

Rose took the Napoleon mechanically. She was dreadfully frightened at the expression of Henri's face, and felt afraid of speaking lest she should cry; for at that moment Andre was approaching. She quite lost her head. In Henri's hand, within his breast coat pocket, she thought she saw the handle of a knife. Her blood ran cold, and she shuddered.

Rese, Rose, said Andre, in an agitated manner as he bent towards her, it is all over. I have drawn a bad number.

What do I care. It is nothing to me, ejaculated Rose, who was trembling all over and scarcely knew what she was saying.

Andre turned red as scarlet, and the next moment very pale. His lips quivered, and he said with deep emotion, My mother will care. My mother will break her heart, and there will be no one to comfort her.

The lady who was standing next to him heard that anguished exclamation, and in a voice and with a tone which thrilled through the young man's ear as if it had been a whisper from Heaven, she said, 'God will comfort her.'

He raised his eyes, and saw that sweet, holy, gentle face turned towards him like that of a pitying angel. He felt astonished, soothed, bewildered; murmured a few unintelligible words, and disappeared amongst the crowd.

Come, my dear Alice, said the elderly gentleman to his granddaughter, 'Settle your account, and come away.' He had not paid any attention to the scene which had been going on under his eyes during the last few minutes.

Rose was not thinking of the Napoleon, which she still held in her hand. Jules whispered to her, 'They are waiting for the change.' She started like a person waking from a dream, counted out the money, and handed it to the young lady with some hurried apologies. It was received with a smile and a gracious acknowledgment.

Good bye, Mademoiselle, said Rose. I hope we may see you here again. Jules, my boy, that basket is too heavy for the lady to carry. Please to take it to her carriage.— There was no need of urging Jules to this little act of civility. His natural turn for gallantry, joined to the stimulus of curiosity, made him abundantly anxious to offer his services to the travellers. He joyfully seized on the basket, which Alice would not allow her grandfather to carry.

Can you tell us, my boy, asked the old gentleman, which is the way to the Ursuline Convent?

Certainly, sir. I will show it to you myself. It is a very fine building, one of the largest in the town. It is there that Mademoiselle Rose went to school.

Madlle. Rose? repeated Alice. Is that the name of the pretty fruit-seller from whom we bought these peaches?

Just so, Mademoiselle. She is the flower of the market-place, Madlle. Rose. The prettiest girl in the neighborhood. There are not two opinions on that point; and how the men do pay court to her, to be sure. It is a feather in a young man's cap if he can get her to accept a nosegay or to dance with him; and as to suitors, why she has as many as there are days in the year.

Who was that young man who spoke to her just now, when we were buying the fruit? He looked very much agitated. Is he one of her admirers?

Oh, that is M. Andre Vidal, M. Baptiste's

brother. He has drawn a bad number.

Alice gently pressed her grandfather's arm.

Do they live at Pau, those brothers you speak of?

No, sir. They have a cottage, a sort of a little cottage on the other side of the river.— People say they are gentlefolks, but not a bit the richer for it. Poor as beggars and proud as peacocks, as the saying is. But M. Andre is a very gentlemanlike young man, and talks like a book. M. le Cure says he is vastly well informed.

It certainly struck me, Alice whispered to her grandfather, that there was something particularly and even distinguished in this young man's countenance and manner of speaking.

Child, child, answered the old man with a smile, your fancy is already at work, I perceive.

This is the Ursuline Convent, said Jules, pointing out the door of the old monastic building which was next the church. Your caleche is standing at the end of the street. Shall I leave the basket with the coachman?

As Alice nodded assent he was hastening away.

Stop a minute, my boy, called the old gentleman, who was searching his pockets for a twenty sous piece. Madame Bertrand's nephew did not consider it suitable to his dignity or his social position to receive a pecuniary remuneration for his trouble; so gracefully waving his hand, he bowed, and disappeared round the corner of the street. The coachman whom he went in search of was not in the best of humors. He glanced superciliously at the peaches, and when Jules informed him that his master and the young lady were at the Convent of the Ursulines, he shrugged his shoulders, and muttered between his teeth, 'We shall be in pretty late this evening. Ladies, and especially young ladies, have no mercy on the horses. They think the poor animals can drag a carriage about all day long, and wait for hours besides. Really the poor creatures will get the fidgets standing here so long.'

Have you far to go to get home? asked Jules, who was dying to find out the name and the residence of the travellers.

I should think we have, seeing that we are obliged to sleep on the road.

Ah, you have slept on the road, then; at Rochefort I suppose? You live at Bordeaux, then?

M. le Baron lives at home, answered the coachman, in a consequential manner. His castle is as old as the tower of Babel, and as to the stables, why your Prefecture is a barn in comparison.

And what is the name of this fine castle? asked Jules.

Its name? Why, the same as M. le Baron's.

And M. le Baron's name is—

The same as his castle's, answered the coachman.

I think that fellow is making fun of me, thought Jules; but never mind, I shall get something out of him, or my name is not Jules Bertrand. And that pretty young lady, she is the Baron's daughter, I suppose?

His granddaughter, and the apple of his eye, too.

Is it to amuse her, then, or to look about for a husband that they travel?

A husband indeed? there is not much occasion to travel about in search of one. Plenty to be had at home, I can tell you. But we laugh at suitors. They are not the sort of people we want.

She is perhaps going to take the veil, this pretty young lady? Ay, I dare say, at the Ursulines.

Hold your tongue, sir. Do you suppose we have not plenty of convents in our own part of the world? If M. le Baron's granddaughter intended to take the veil, it would not be in a paltry old town like this, where the streets are so badly paved that the horses can hardly get along,—sharp stones that cut their feet like knives! None of your Basses Pyrenees, for me.

You are exceedingly rude, exclaimed Jules, wounded both in his personal dignity and in his patriotic feelings.

And you are a young scapegrace. This insult so deeply roused the ire of Madame Bertrand's nephew that he could scarcely contain himself, and a very animated repartee was about to lead the way to direct hostilities, when fortunately for the cause of peace, M. le Baron and his granddaughter appeared at that moment, and came up to the carriage. Jules withdrew to a little distance, with flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and his cap firmly drawn over his knitted brows. Alice recognised him, however, and the caleche, detained an instant by a cart in the way moved slowly forward, she made him a gracious bow, and said as she passed, 'We are

glad to see you.