



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIX.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MAY 7, 1869.

No. 39.

RASH PROMISES.

BY JACQUELINE.

(From the Morning Star.)

The next morning she was conducted to the school-room, and found her charge to comprise three girls and one little boy...

'See that, Miss Lambert! Now, if you make my children smart enough to win such an honor as that diploma, conferred on me, I'll ask nothing better, and they may snap their fingers at the world.'

Laura bowed her assent, and taking a last look at the flourishing tie issued by the Academy of N— to their beloved pupil, she bade them good-night.

Reaching her room she found a little darkie blowing up a bright wood fire in a chimney, big enough to hold an old time Christmas wassail.

Among the occasional visitors at the plantation was a Mr. Rockwell—the representative of the strongest political party in the State, and the desire of all the manoeuvring mothers who had daughters to dispose of.

It was not long, however, before this state of things, backed by various attentions in the way of books, papers, and flowers, became noised abroad, and produced a hard-earned tip of indignation among the scheming mammas and ambitious, jealous daughters.

That such a chit of a girl—a poor teacher—should presume to set herself up as the equal of their daughters, and practice all kinds of artful tricks, and affected innocence and simplicity to catch the best match in the country, was not to be borne; and Mrs. Lock must be remonstrated with upon the folly of employing such a child, as if she could teach girls nearly as old as herself.

Accordingly Mrs. Lock soon found but the one subject alluded to by her visitors, and though she stood up bravely for Laura at first, yet the constant insinuations in one quarter, and the outspoken sentiment in another, began slowly to take the desired effect.

One evening, as Mr. Rockwell was taking leave of the family, reaching the door, he suddenly turned, and addressed Mrs. Lock:

'By the way, Mrs. Lock, I had almost forgotten one of the objects of my visit here to-night; it is this. I have met several times a young gentleman in town, whom I would like very much to introduce to some of our resident families. He is a stranger in the country, and though I know nothing of his antecedents, still I will take my word that he is a gentleman.'

'Bring him, by all means; he'll be heartily welcome. And that reminds me that we are going to have a dinner company on Thursday, for our new minister, and a few others to meet him; so, Mr. Rockwell, will you not come too, and bring your new friend with you? It shall never be said of Sarah Lock that she shut her door in the face of a stranger.'

'You, hospitality, madam, is too widely known for any aspersion of that sort. I shall certainly be with you on Thursday; so now, ladies, au revoir.'

'What a strange way Mr. Rockwell has of bidding a lady good by,' said Mrs. Lock, when he was safely out of hearing.

'I have never observed anything very peculiar,' replied Laura.

'Why, don't you notice that his last words nearly always is, "O river?" I am sure I can't see any connection between us and a river, unless, indeed, he has a fancy for spending his nights in that direction.'

without Mrs. Lock suspecting her blunder to be the cause.

The day for the dinner party arrived, and children and governess, in honor of the occasion, were free from duty at twelve o'clock. Laura offered her services in arranging flowers for the table—a very novel idea to Mrs. Lock, who thought that only such things as could be eaten were proper.

Shortly after, Mr. Rockwell was seen approaching the house, and Laura felt the blood mount to her face as she recognized in his companion the handsome stranger of the Erin.

'Why,' exclaimed Mr. Rockwell, on seeing them meet as old acquaintances. 'I thought that I had prepared a treat of novelty for Miss Lambert. How is it, Mr. Hagan, that you never told me of your former acquaintance with this lady?'

'For the good reason, that as you never mentioned her name directly to me, I formed only a general idea of some very charming person, and not knowing what direction Miss Lambert had taken after leaving the boat, I couldn't know that I should have the pleasure of finding her one of your friends.'

'I can't say that I exactly believe you—but I'll accept the amende, and be more cautious next time.'

Unfortunately for Laura, her beauty and goodness, in winning on this occasion the partial attention of the most desirable gentleman in the room, only exasperated the other ladies of the party, who resented upon her what they chose to consider a slight to themselves.

Laura, absorbed in her own thoughts and feelings, was blessedly unconscious of the mining that was thus devising her destruction. Innocent of even a thought of wrong to another—striving to make herself equally agreeable to all, how could she dream of the relentless venom that envious, jealous hearts were pouring down upon her.

Mr. Briggs, the new parson had strolled out upon the gallery to enjoy a cigar, and Mrs. Lock, wishing to consult him upon some matter of family importance, had followed him. The conversation leading to her children's present course of study, brought the subdued ire of the reverend gentleman out in full force.

'How comes it? How is this, Mrs. Lock?' he said, in a sounding tone, 'I understand that the young lady has been employed to teach your children as a pupil, ma'am?'

'It is true, Mr. Briggs,' replied Mrs. Lock deprecatingly. 'But I assure you she has nothing whatever to do with their religion; and indeed, sir, I must say that I find her as good a girl as ever I came across.'

'That may be so, madam—that may be so; I won't say that it isn't. But, madam, it won't do. It is a dangerous precedent; for these Papists have a wonderful faculty of winning young people, especially, over to their way of thinking, and they are all taught that to spread their faith and exalt their church is the surest way of saving themselves.'

'Lors a mercy! Mr. Briggs, I never thought of that. Whatever am I to do? I do like the girl, that's a fact; but the idea of my children ever learning to worship images is dreadful.'

'Well, madam, the remedy is very simple.—There are numbers of estimable, highly educated women of our own denomination who would be glad to get such a desirable place as Miss Lambert now occupies. Indeed, madam, I look upon it as your duty—your clearly defined duty to the Church and to society—to patronize one of your own faith. St. Paul, though commending charity to all, yet specially obligates it to those who are "of the household of the faith." I should be sorry, very sorry, madam, to have the bishop, on his next visit, find one of my parish—me, too, of our leading members, so wanting in the observance of these grave and vital considerations.'

After which peroration, Mr. Briggs stalked majestically away, leaving poor Mrs. Lock feeling not only convicted of a heinous sin, but at her wits end to devise a remedy. The threat, however, of the bishop's visit, the discontent of

her neighbors, whom she feared would throw her from the position which she held as the richest lady in the brake, if she retained Laura in her post, were considerations that kept her awake all that night, striving to devise means to extricate herself from the dilemma without sacrificing Laura and the good will of her admirer, Mr. Rockwell. She knew that it would be useless to consult her husband; for he had long since taken a stand never to give even an opinion upon questions that belonged to her department.

'No, Miss Laura, I can't say that, because it isn't true. Indeed, I do like you very much, and I am sure you have done wonders with the children, and they are ever so fond of you. But what can I do? I must please my minister and serve my church—and they do tell such dreadful things about you Catholics, though, never knowing much about them, I can't just say whether it is true or false. But you can't go, of course, till you finish your second month, which is most out now, and that will give you time to look about elsewhere.'

'Thank you, madam,' replied Laura, with much dignity, keeping down the rising tears.—'As you dismiss me without cause, I shall choose my own time of going; therefore, if you will allow me the use of the carriage, I will go into town to-morrow morning.' And not waiting for a reply, she went rapidly to her own room, threw herself upon the bed and wept convulsively.—Her heart had been already full by news received that morning of her father's increased illness. She was bewildered with this new and unexpected trial—one, too, that involved so many material considerations for the welfare of those at home—those dear ones, for whom she must endure even greater humiliations than this one.—What to do, she knew not, but remembering that she must be her own sole reliance, she felt that tears and despair were but weak weapons in so tough a battle.

Mr. Rockwell could scarcely control his indignation. 'These meddlesome women and sanctimonious parsons are at the bottom of half the trouble going. I have been watching and understanding the game my dear lady friends have been playing, but had no idea that they would make you poor child, the victim of their revenge upon me. As for the parson, I shall take the first opportunity of advising him to attend to his vestry and pulpit; or before he knows it he will learn the modus operandi by which Mississippi men get rid of troublesome customers.'

'Oh, pray, Mr. Rockwell!' exclaimed Laura, dreading the consequence of his anger, and having a vision of pistols and bowie-knives before

her, 'pray, don't say anything about it, but let me get away as quietly as I came.'

'Laura,' he said, abruptly, looking hard at her, then suddenly dropping into a seat at her side.—'Laura, there is a way out of all this trouble, which will not only put you in a better position, but will give you the means of doing everything for the family you so dearly love that your fondest wishes can prompt.'

'How can that be?' exclaimed Laura; 'only tell me what it is, and I will go through any amount of fatigue or work to accomplish it.'

He looked steadily down into her glowing face for a few seconds, then raising her hand to his lips, slowly said, 'Be my wife.'

Laura fairly jumped from her seat in utter amazement; then, feeling the full import of his words, settled it in true girlish fashion by bursting into tears.

Mr. Rockwell walked to the window until the storm should spend itself. Seeing her calm again, he continued: 'I know that I am too old for you, and not exactly the ideal of a young girl's lover; but I am not too old to be insensible to your many charms, and to love you very dearly. I can give you a handsome home, and, I believe, make you very happy; provided—and of that you must be very sure—that there is no other image in your heart, to come between yours and mine.'

What a refuge—what an ark of safety was here open to her. Should she accept it?—Why not? She had always liked Mr. Rockwell, and now she thought she almost loved him. Would she ever know any feeling deeper, stronger than this? Why had he suggested the idea of her liking any one else better, and why, at the same moment, did the image of the handsome stranger rise up and confront her. 'Pshaw!' she thought, 'I am dreaming.'

Then brushing away the gathering mist, she said: 'You have been so kind to me, Mr. Rockwell, and there is no one that I like better than you; but this is all so sudden, and I am so bewildered, that I don't know what to say. I can make no decision until I first write to mamma for advice.'

'You are right; let it rest so then. Love is patient when it is deep; and I would not for the world, take any advantage of the present state of your feelings. But what are you going to do? Not stay here, I hope?'

'No, indeed; I am going to-morrow morning to G—, and will remain with my friends the Misses Brandon, until I hear from home, and decide on my future course.'

'I would like to take you there in my own carriage,' said Mr. Rockwell, 'were it not for these meddlesome gossips. How distracted they would be at such a finishing stroke to their fears?'

Laura received a warm welcome from her friends, and was greatly cheered by the hopes they held out of being able to procure a much better post than the one she had lost. They had relatives, they said, in New Orleans, to whom they would write, and in the meantime she must make herself perfectly contented with them.

'It is a dull place for a young lady,' said Miss Emily, 'as a general thing; but just now, Laura, your visit is happily timed, for we have a lion in town that is driving all the girls crazy, and the husband-catching mammas are making the town gay with a run of rival entertainments.'

Laura rather suspected who the lion really was, but she never betrayed herself, but quietly asked what he was like, and if he really was worth so much trouble.

'Yes, indeed,' replied Miss Lucy; 'he is a splendid fellow, and what is better, a good Catholic. Father Lubin knows all about him, though he keeps very mum, and it was he that introduced him to us. As we are such plain home people, and old maids in the bargain, he seems to feel freer to come here than anywhere else. But he will be here to-night, and then you can judge if he is "all my fancy painted" him for yourself.'

'Well,' said Laura, 'you are sufficiently enthusiastic over this Ulysses; but you haven't told me his name yet.'

'Oh! sure enough—I forgot it. It is Hagan, Charles Hagan, and I think he is an Englishman.'

'And I,' here broke in Emily, 'declare he is an Irishman.'

'He is no such thing!' cried out Laura very much excited, and quite thrown off her guard.

'Why, good gracious!' exclaimed both sisters in a breath, 'what do you know about him? Where did you ever see him?'

But Laura had fallen into such a fit of laughter, at the comical surprise of the sisters, that she couldn't speak for a few minutes.

'I met him first,' at length she said, 'on the Erin, and Mr. Rockwell brought him out to Lock's on several occasions.'

'How strange that we never thought of speaking of you to him.'

'Not at all. But tell me, Miss Emily, what makes you suppose him to be Irish?'

'Oh! a good many things. Intuition for one, and some of his idioms for another. Then he calls his own name as only they do in Ireland, dividing it in two syllables, thus, Char-les.'

'I don't believe a word of it,' said Laura, quite petulantly. 'He is too cultivated and elegant to be of that race; and I do believe, when I know him a little better, that I'll ask him to settle the question.'

'Perhaps he is ashamed of his country, that he is so reticent on the subject,' said Emily; 'I have given him several hints of my curiosity in that quarter.'

'Well, well,' said Miss Lucy, 'let him rest now, and come in to tea. He will probably be here to speak for himself this evening, and in the mean while, as you grow older, Laura, you will learn that cultivated manners are not the only ingredient of a gentleman. Somebody says that an "honest man is nature's nobleman," and this you will as often find under an Irish frieze coat as under English broadcloth or French primrose kids.'

And he did come that evening, and seemed never tired of repeating his visits; and Mr. Rockwell, too, was there nearly every day, and began to fear his chance of a favorable answer rather dim. Laura, too, was reading her own heart by the new light shed over it, and felt now that should she accept Mr. Rockwell, that another presence would indeed stand forever between them. Yet she combated the dream, and tried to be philosophical and practical, and above all strove to keep her feelings from wandering in forbidden places. In the meantime she received letters from home which decided her affair with Mr. Rockwell. Her mother understood her position perfectly, knowing how readily a young, susceptible heart is to yield to affectionate kindness, and continue it into a sentiment of genuine and lasting love, often, alas! living to suffer and repent for a life.

'No, my child,' she said, 'you have not the love for Mr. Rockwell that will make you a happy wife. For a few years you might imagine yourself such, but the disparity in your years is too great, and you would wake from your dream some day to find yourself, instead of the friend and companion of your husband, only a house-keeper and nurse to the caprices of a "blaze" man of the world.'

So Laura, with many grateful expressions, but with joy in her heart, submitted the decision to Mr. Rockwell, who accepted it gracefully, yet not without a pang of regret—for the old trees love to have the young, sweet violets growing round their feet, and the tender, green ivy clinging and covering their decay.

'Be it so, Laura,' he said; 'but since I can't claim a nearer tie, you must promise always to look upon me as your friend.'

'I will, indeed,' replied Laura, with emotion, 'and never forget that to you I owe my first release from a home-sick, friendless malady.'

She could scarcely realize her own emotions when this matter was settled: neither could she quite understand why it was that she should feel and enjoy such a sense of perfect freedom.—Miss Emily bantered her upon the double conquest, and not knowing that one suitor was already settled, advised her by all means to secure the beau whose bank account was the largest.

But Laura astonished her by declaring that money thus won had 'no attractions for me, and I deserve some kind of punishment now for being in such danger of breaking my resolve, by marrying a rich man.'

'Then, I think,' said Lucy, 'supposing you to be speaking the truth, which of course I am not so verdant as to believe that our young friend may hold up his head, for I don't believe that he is overburdened with this world's goods.'

'What makes him stay so long, then, in this stupid place?' chimed in Emily. 'He certainly is not adding to his possessions here; and dear knows it wouldn't take much of a fortune to buy the whole place out.'

'Oh! laughed Laura, 'how that poor man's ears must burn! His fate should give him no concern, if he only knew how ready his friends are to dispose of him and regulate his affairs.'

Thus two weeks had passed away, pleasantly and hopefully, when a letter arrived from the relatives of the Brandons, in New Orleans, inviting Laura most cordially to make them a visit prior to accepting a most excellent and lucrative situation they had secured for her a few miles down the coast. Laura felt that she had no right to refuse so providential an offer, and as she had already lost time, made herself ready at once for departure.

The last evening was spent quietly at home. Mr. Rockwell called to bid her adieu and remind her of her promise. Mr. Hagan lingered until the last moment. As he rose to leave, Laura extended her hand, making some rather involved remark about not seeing him again. He held it for an instant, then, dropping it quickly, said, 'I