



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 21, 1865.

No. 50.

ROSE LEBLANC; OR, THE TRIUMPH OF SINCERITY.

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

The Colonel, to whom the Baron had often confided his projects, quite entered into Alice's feelings and wishes; and he thought it better in every way, as the matter was of so delicate a nature, that Andre's fortune should be finally settled upon him before there should be question of a marriage, which, however much he might wish it to come to pass in the end, at present would only serve to complicate matters, and put both Alice and Andre in very difficult positions.

Alice appreciated his kindness and sympathy, and thanked him from her heart. Later in the same day, she came and sat with Andre on one of the seats of the terrace, whence her grandfather was wont nearly every evening to watch the sunset.

'Dear Andre,' she began, with great gentleness, 'we have spent some very sad days together. I do not think we shall ever lose the remembrance of them. And now that we must part...'

Andre trembled and turned very pale. 'Let us resolve at least to walk with a firm step in the path that honor and duty shall point out to us; not pausing before any obstacle, not shrinking from any sacrifice. My dear grandfather's last thoughts rested on the hopes of seeing you bear worthily the name of his ancestors.'

'He had not time,' she went on, 'to bring about himself all that he longed to do for you, but fortunately his friends and yours, Colonel de la Feroniere, is as well as myself fully acquainted with his intentions even to the very least details; and now, knowing his wishes, there is nothing left for us to do but to put them in execution as speedily as possible.'

'And now, dear Andre, let there be no secrets between us; true affection should be frank and open. I know that you love a charming young girl, and that she dearly loves you in return. I know what her affection, her devotion to you has been, for I have here the most touching proof of her patient and faithful love, and so long as she lives, she will be true to you.'

Andre sat perfectly motionless, like one stunned. He felt as though a weight like that of a mountain had fallen upon his heart. Despair, rendered more bitter by pride, filled his whole being, but not for the world would he have betrayed by a sigh or a look the agony that Alice's words had caused him.

'It is the fruit of the toil and sleepless nights of your promised bride, and contains the sum that was to have procured you a substitute. Day and night she worked to earn this money, till at last she fell ill from fatigue and grief. Then a noble and generous heart came to her aid; one who loved her with a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, which yields to no selfish consideration, and proves an incentive to the highest virtues, supplied what was wanting to fill this poor little purse, which has been doubtless often wetted by tears.'

'You want me to marry her then?' said Andre, in a constrained and hollow tone. 'Yes,' replied Alice gently; 'you could not think of abandoning now one who loved you so faithfully when you were poor and unhappy.'

'No, no,' cried Andre, with an accent of mingled anger and emotion. 'I will not abandon her, for she does indeed love me. I will marry her, for she never deceived me. Poor Rose!—She never showed me a glimpse of heaven only to plunge me afterwards into the lowest abyss of despair.'

'No, indeed,' said Alice, with heartfelt earnestness; 'she has been to you what a flower is to the prisoner, or a cool spring to the thirsty traveller. Her sweet face...'

'Do you know her then?' 'We knelt together at the Cross of Betharam, and I had seen her once before at Pau.'

'Ah, that was on the day I first saw you!—Yes, you are right; I must marry her, for love and sorrow are strong as death, and the sea itself will never quench the thirst of a soul that loves. Yes, I will marry her! I will die rather than forsake her.'

Alice trembled without exactly knowing why; she did not know what to say in order to calm the nervous excitement which was apparent in Andre's words and manner.

'This man of whom you were speaking just now,' he continued, in a tone of suppressed irritation, 'that Henri Lacaze—what does it signify to him whether I marry her or not? and by what right does he come and interfere with what concerns Rose and me alone?'

'It signifies to him that she whom he loves should be happy,' said Alice, lowering her eyes. 'It is a noble and tender heart that beats in that manly breast; I honor that man with all the strength of my soul.'

'In that case I envy him,' murmured Andre, but too low for Alice to hear, 'with all the strength of my despair.' Again there was a long pause. Andre was calling to mind the thousand proofs of affection that Rose had given him, and his heart was deeply touched as he remembered how tender, how faithful, and how trusting had been her love for him.

Alice silently watched his emotion; she saw his tears fall, and heard the broken words that escaped his lips, and if her woman's heart bled at that moment, the angelic spirit within her rejoiced. 'God be praised!' she murmured, clasping her hands, 'God be praised! he loves her, and I shall be the only one to suffer.'

Andre turned to her at last with a more composed face. 'Alice,' he said, 'you have taught me a great deal during the days that we have spent together. I shall always thank God for having allowed me to know you. I look upon you as the guardian angel of my life and of my destiny, and under your protection I place all the resolutions that I have made. I accept your bounty also, Alice; it is the simplest as well as the most fitting way of showing my gratitude for a generosity which you have tried to disguise under another name. I shall go to Rose, and thank her for all she has done for me, and promise to make her happy. Poor child! she well deserves it.'

with her face all bathed in tears, 'let us ever keep in mind those lines of Metastasio, which we were admiring together a few days ago, and of which Henri Lacaze always reminds me:—'

'E proviamo al mondo che nato in nobil cuore, Sol frutti di virtù produce amore.'

Alice had been two days at the Ursuline Convent, when one morning she was told that Rose Leblanc was asking to see her. She went to the parlour and welcomed her cordially. 'How glad I am to see you, dear Rose,' she said, making her sit down beside her. 'You will allow me to call you so, will you not? and I hope you will call me Alice instead of Mdlle. de Morlaix, as you did just now. Is not Andre with you? I was told that he had left Bordeaux some days ago.'

'He is gone, Mademoiselle, gone to Italy.' 'To Italy?'

'Yes. It is a long way off, is it not? almost as far as Algeria?'

'And what was the reason of this journey?' said Alice with a troubled expression, and playing with the leaves of a book that was lying on the table.

'It was on account of his health,' answered Rose. 'He was never very strong, and it seems that his military duties were too much for him. They used to laugh at him and call him the gentleman, and he wanted to show that he was as good as the best of them, and outdid them all.—He was as thin as a skeleton when he came back and almost immediately after his return fell ill. He had a fever and never slept at night, and would hardly eat anything. His poor mother was very miserable about him, and although he is now so rich, which naturally would make them all very happy, his sad and absent manner distressed them extremely. His elder brother, M. Baptiste, who loves him as if he were his son, insisted on his seeing a doctor. 'Now you are rich, he said, 'you must take care of yourself as the rich do.' So they sent for M. Douleau, who is the cleverest doctor in the town. He said at once that his lungs were affected, and strongly advised his spending the winter in Italy. M. Andre was good enough to come and ask me whether I objected to this. I said that, on the contrary, he ought certainly to go since the doctor ordered it; and so he went, as I had the honor of telling you before, and it will be a week to-morrow since he started.'

'And what does the doctor say?' asked Alice, turning pale; 'does he hold hopes of a speedy recovery?'

'Yes; he says that travelling and change of scene will do him good, and that with care he will soon get better. Andre has divided his fortune between his mother, his brother, and himself; so they are now well provided for, and very much pleased with him.'

'And you, dear Rose,' said Alice, with a forced smile; 'you must have been very glad to see him again.'

'Oh, yes; of course,' replied Rose, twirling the corners of her apron.

'And your uncle and aunt are no longer opposed to the marriage?'

'They say that it is all right now that we shall have enough to live upon, and that I am old enough to choose for myself.'

'This winter will seem very long,' said Alice, with an involuntary sigh.

'Ah, yes; very long, as you say. Now that I no longer go to market, and have not to work for a substitute, the day appears very tedious.—There is nobody at home now but my uncle and aunt, and since Henri went away they have become so gloomy and so cross that it is quite unbearable.'

'M. Lacaze?'

'Yes; my uncle's adopted son. He went to Brittany to see some new kind of oxen, and also some ploughing machines. He has invented one himself, and he wanted to compare it with the others. They say that he is very clever about that sort of thing. Henri cannot talk as well as many others do, but for doing work well there is no one like him in the whole country.—Now that I do not go to market I take care of the cows; we have got some very fine ones—a home, and one in particular, a white one, with long pointed horns. Henri showed me how to manage them just as if he had attended to them all his life. When I was ill it used to amuse me to watch them out of the window. I am very fond of animals, and so is Henri. Some people are like that, and others do not care about them at all.—M. Andre, for instance. He always began to yawn when I talked to him about our cows.'

A slight smile crossed Alice's lips. 'Well, then,' she said, 'tell him, when you write, that he is to bring you a pretty little Italian greyhound.'

write so badly, but the spelling I cannot manage. Just think how difficult it must be when one is out of practice. I never was very good at grammar. If you ask the Sisters, they will tell you that I always got good marks for reading and sewing, and sometimes even for arithmetic; but never for grammar. It is like being fond of animals. It comes naturally to some people and not to others.'

'Oh, I do not quite agree with you there, dear Rose; with a strong will one can conquer these sort of difficulties.'

'Do you think so?—even those about spelling?'

'Most certainly. And do you know, dear little Rose, that that is just what you must learn to do. With your natural cleverness and lively disposition you might do very well without education in a little village like Jurancon, but when you marry Andre, you will find yourself in a position in which it will be necessary for you to be able to write easily, and without making mistakes in spelling.'

'It is for that reason,' said Rose, 'that I begged Henri to take the money for the substitute to you himself. I had begun three or four letters to explain about it; but there were so many mistakes in all of them that I could not help crying. It was so tiresome to begin over and over again, and never to succeed. And when Henri saw how vexed I was, he said he would deliver the message himself. If he was at home now, he would help me to write to Andre.'

'Rose!' cried Alice, with an involuntary gesture of astonishment, 'how can you think of such a thing? but seeing the calm and unconcerned expression on the girl's face she was silent.—'

'Has Henri ever helped you?'

'No; he went to Brittany two days before Andre came back. I can write to him easily enough, for he does not mind mistakes in spelling; and besides, he likes to hear about what goes on at home. I tell him all about his dog and the cows.'

Alice did not answer; she was thinking over a plan which her conversation with Rose had suggested to her. After a little reflection, she said, 'My dear little Rose, I have a proposal to make which I hope will not be disagreeable to you.—Do you not often feel that you ought to inform yourself about things, and to acquire tastes that would help you and Andre to have more occupations in common? The time that must elapse before Andre comes back seems appointed for the very purpose of enabling you to attend to what I may almost call a duty. Will you come and stay two or three months with me at La Roche Vidal? I shall soon be back there, and a visit from you would be a real interest and pleasure to me. Try and make your uncle consent to this plan, or rather I will go and ask him myself. You will find a fine herd of cows there that I am very fond of.'

'Oh, how nice!' exclaimed Rose joyously.

'We will read together; we will try to like books, because Andre is so fond of them; we will write—'

'Ah, you will write to him for me!' cried Rose.

'No,' said Alice, blushing deeply; 'but I will teach you how to write to him.'

'Oh, how kind you are, Mademoiselle! how I love you.'

'Call me Alice, then.'

'No, I cannot take such a liberty as that, but if you will not let me call you Mademoiselle, I will call you my good angel.'

'You consent to come, then?' asked Alice.

'With all my heart; only—'

'Well?'

'If I knew—'

'Supposing I were wanted at home, I could always go back, could I not? When there is no one there but my uncle, aunt Babet has not much to do; but—if—in short, I might always go home if I was sent for, I suppose.'

suffering that has become dear to you, you will plunge still deeper into your heart the sword that has pierced it. You will doubtless have courage to conceal the wound from the eyes of others, but shall you have strength to endure it to the end?'

CHAPTER XVI.

Rose had been established for some weeks at the castle of La Roche Vidal. She was one day sitting by the fireside, holding a book in her hand, which, however, she constantly allowed to fall on her knees, and exclaiming, from time to time, 'Good heavens, what weather! What torrents of rain!' Then getting up, she went to the window, and put her face close to the pane against which the rain was driving furiously, and listened to the hurricane which was blowing through the arches of the castle, and seemed to threaten to uproot the trees in the park. Then she returned again to her place, and taking up her book with a yawn, hastily turned over the pages, all the time following with her eye the movements of a half-behumbled fly which was slowly crawling along the floor.

'What are you thinking about?' asked Mdlle. de Tournfort, who for some hours had been working at her embroidery with a great show of assiduity, as a sort of protest against Rose's idleness.

'I was thinking about the rain,' answered Rose, leaning back and shutting her pretty black eyes as if to pursue more at ease her meditation on this seemingly prosaic subject, which however seemed to have more interest to her than the Adventures of Telemaque, which Mdlle. de Tournfort had recommended her to read.—Was she musing on the dangers which Andre might then be encountering at sea, for in his last letter he said that he was on the point of leaving Naples for Sicily; or was she thinking on the when the storm overtook her on the banks of the river at Pau? or was she merely indulging in one of those half-mournful reveries into which we are so apt to fall while listening to the raging of a storm from whose fury we are sheltered? It was not that what the Germans call *schmerz*, or what with us goes by the name of *spleen*, had any part in her character. She was naturally as gay and as free from care as the birds of the air, and if sometimes a shade of sadness crossed her brow for a few instants, the cloud was easily dispelled. But Rose nevertheless was not entirely happy. She almost always sighed when Andre was mentioned. Whether it was that she had some vague suspicion of his feelings towards Alice, and of the change in his affection for herself, or that his letters were becoming shorter and more rare, so it was, that she always seemed distressed and unhappy after receiving them; though her natural liveliness soon regained the ascendant. Alice had ceased to wonder at Andre's liking for the attractive young peasant girl. She found it impossible not to love her for her simplicity and untaught grace. And indeed Rose was a great darling. Nothing could be more winning than her bright smile, and playful ways, or more lively and original than her rejoinders; and her clear liquid eye, and the soft silvery tone of her voice won the hearts of all who approached her; while her little tempers and innocent rebelliousness only made her a thousand times more attractive. She would coax Mdlle. de Tournfort just as she did her Aunt Babet. That worthy lady did all she could to withstand the seductions of this fascinating village girl, but the dignity of her sixteen quarters melted like snow in the sunshine before the gay spirits and playful enticing ways of Rose, who carried by storm, one after the other, all the bulwarks behind which she had entrenched herself, in order not to be forced to love the little peasant who had dared to think of marrying a De Vidal. As to Alice, she could scarcely find it in her heart to speak to her about study and education. She was afraid she should only injure, by trying to improve upon it, one of those masterpieces which nature is sometimes pleased to create in order to show how exquisite her work is when she produces one of her best specimens. 'What does it matter,' she would say to herself, 'whether Rose knows grammar or not, when without it she can warble out the prettiest language in the world, and enchant all who hear her? What is the good of wearing her with books that will never make her cleverer than she naturally is, or of teasing her with lessons when nature has taught her how to win the hearts of all who approach her?' Alice's reasoning was false; but her instinct was a true one, when she felt that by seeking to elevate Rose to Andre's level and to inspire her with his tastes and feelings she ran the risk of destroying the peculiar charm of her character, and that by trying to mould her disposition to another model she might only transform a graceful original into a feeble copy. Alice had hoped to give her what she herself possessed, and by dint of zeal and perseverance to communicate to her some of the gifts of mind and of soul by means of which she had been able to exercise such a beneficial influence