



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XV. MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 1865. No. 44.

ROSE LEBLANC; OR, THE TRIUMPH OF SINCERITY.

CHAPTER I.

'Oh, dear me! how tiresome men are!' This was Rose Leblanc's exclamation as, on a fine evening in summer, she stood upon the bridge at the entrance of the town of Pau, surrounded by a number of young men, chiefly laborers or artisans, who generally contrived to be stationed there at the hour when she passed on her way from the market-place of the city to the pretty village of Jurancon, where she lived. Rose was considered the prettiest girl of the town and of its environs; and this was saying a great deal, for the old capital of Bearn, the birth-place of Henry the Fourth, is not deficient in women whose beauty might vie with that of their Spanish neighbors. Her personal attractions, the untutored grace and charm of her manners, the vivacity of her rustic wit, drew a variety of customers to her stall on the Place du Marche. Her bon mots were as much in repute as her peaches, and her smiles as much sought after as her nose-gays. But on this particular evening in June, 18—, neither Jean Renaud, the miller's son, nor M. Charles, the watchmaker, of the Place Henri Quatre, nor Jules, the nephew of Madame Bertrand, the milliner of the Grande Rue, nor M. Firmin, the valet of the Comte de Millefort, succeeded in drawing into conversation the little fruit-seller, generally the life and soul of these evening reunions, but who on this occasion maintained an obstinate silence, and persisted in frowning down all their efforts to enliven her.— Jules Bertrand, the youngest of the party, lost patience at last, and exclaimed, 'What a bore it is when people won't be pleasant. It is a downright shame to spoil sport in that way;— I call it quarrelling with one's bread and butter.' 'Mademoiselle is out of spirits,' sighed M. Firmin, with a sentimental air. (His neighbor, Madame Victoire, pronounced him to be a person of great sensibility; he had shown so much feeling, she said, when her canary bird died. 'Then it must be on account of your flirtation with a lady who shall be nameless,' cried Jules, who delighted in tormenting the most faithful and most ill-used of Rose's admirers; 'you are such a gay deceiver, M. Firmin.' 'Hold your tongue, child,' said Rose, struggling at the same time not to smile. 'There now?' exclaimed Jules triumphantly. 'I have done what none of you could accomplish; I have made her speak, and all but laugh.' 'Well, then, M. Jules, if you possess the art of obtaining answers from ladies, will you please to ask Madlle. Rose with whom she intends to open the ball at the Three Elms on Thursday next?' said Jean Renaud. 'I claim the first contredanse,' cried M. Charles. 'It is a long-standing engagement.' 'And I the second,' modestly put in M. Firmin. 'And I the last,' Jules called out; 'it is always the merriest.' 'Mademoiselle does not dance with children,' sentimentally observed M. Giraud, the son of the postmaster at Jurancon. 'When I saved your kitten, Madlle. Rose, from the ruthless hands of a parcel of school-boys, you promised to open the ball with me on Thursday next.' 'She shall do no such thing,' indignantly exclaimed M. Charles; 'did not you hear me say that Mademoiselle was engaged to me?' It was at that moment that Rose, quite worn out with the contest between her admirers, gave vent to that unflattering soliloquy with which our story opens— 'Dear me! how very tiresome men are! Please to let me pass, gentlemen.' 'But, Madlle. Rose, ...' 'But, really, Madlle. Rose, ...' 'But, indeed, Madlle. Rose, ...' 'But, upon my word, Madlle. Rose,' was reiterated on all sides. 'Can there be anything more ridiculous, I want to know, than to come here evening after evening just like a set of gables, to watch the river flow, I suppose; stopping the way, making people lose their time?' and so saying she stamped her little foot, and tossed her pretty head.— But as the young men seemed bent on detaining or accompanying her, she was forced to have recourse to another expedient. 'Well, now, I'll tell you what, I shall open the ball with the one amongst you who shall arrive first at the Croix de la Mission, at Jurancon. I am going to clap my hands; the third time I do you are all to start. One, two, three, and be off. What! does nobody mean to try for it? O very well, gentlemen, please yourselves by all means; but you may wait long enough before I dance with any of you at the next ball, or indeed ever again. There are plenty of partners to be had in and near Pau. No need to go a-begging for them.' 'Well, but stop a minute, can't you?' cried M. Charles. 'We must agree on the condi-

tions. It is a bargain, then, that you open the ball with the winner of this new sort of race.' 'This steeple chase,' suggested M. Firmin, whose master was a member of the jockey club. 'And that is even if M. Andre should ask you?' whispered Jules to Rose, who blushed and turned away. Then addressing herself to the others, she said, 'Well, I suppose you do not mean to accept my offer. It does not signify; but remember that I do not dance again with any of you, except with Jules, perhaps.' 'Ah, my little queen of peaches,' said Jules to himself, 'you are trying to make friends with Jules Bertrand; that is a proof that I hit the right nail on the head just now.' 'Come, then, let us have this steeple-chase, as Firmin calls it,' cried the watchmaker. 'Ay, ay, I am all for the race, said another. 'Stand in order!' cried a third; Mademoiselle shall give the signal.' 'Stop a moment,' said Rose, 'I have something more to say. You must all promise to wait for me at Jurancon; no one is to come back to meet me.' 'I dare say not,' again whispered Jules. 'Not the conqueror?' exclaimed all the young men. 'No, not the conqueror, or he will forfeit his claim to the first contredanse. My mind is made up, and it is of no use arguing with me.' 'We all know that very well,' cried the watchmaker. 'You are a regular little tyrant; but I suppose, like other tyrants, you must be obeyed.' 'Well, do not keep us waiting too long,' good-humoredly added M. Charles. Rose gave him one of her bright smiles, clapped her hands, and in an instant all the young men were running along the road or across the meadows in the direction of Jurancon. She watched them for an instant, and then turning towards Jules, who had not stirred from the spot, she gently pushed him by the shoulders, and said, 'And do you not intend to compete for the prize, Jules?' He put on a stubborn look. 'If I was to win you would not dance with me.' 'Why not?' 'Because, as I said before, M. Andre might ask you, and then you would throw me over.' Rose blushed deeply, and tears came into her eyes. 'Oh, for heaven's sake, Madlle. Rose, don't you go and cry. I only said that to tease you a little: I would not vex or annoy you for the world.' 'Well, but it will be a real annoyance and vexation to me if people should talk of M. Andre's making up to me.' 'And why so, Madlle. Rose? I am sure if I were you I should be quite proud of such a sweetheart. M. Andre is so handsome and agreeable; I declare he looks quite like a real gentleman.' 'And so he should, Jules. For all that they are so poor now, his grandfather was a nobleman. Between you and me, I always fancy that is the reason that my people at home cannot bear him.' 'Oh, then, your friends don't like him. The more shame for them, I say, I'd bet anything it is all M. Andre's doing. He has always had a spite against him, I know. Pretty manners he has, to be sure! why, he looks for all the world like a country bumpkin. And then he is as jealous as a Turk! every body knows that.' 'Hush, Jules, you don't know what you are talking about.' 'I beg your pardon, Madlle. Rose; I always know what I say, though I don't always say what I know. Good night, Madlle. Rose; now I shall endeavor to overtake the racers. I know a short cut across the meadows that will give me a good chance.' When Rose was left alone, she turned down a path on the opposite side of the bridge from that which the young men had taken, and walked for some time alongside the river, or Gave de Pau. The setting sun was shining on the snowy summits of the Pyrenees, and the evening breeze rippling the surface of the stream and waving to and fro the branches of the alders and poplars that lined its banks. After a few minutes' walk she reached a cottage overshadowed with acacias in full bloom and covered with white roses, the perfume of which scented the air to some distance. A young man was leaning against a tree with a book in his hand, but at the sound of Rose's light footstep he sprang forward to meet her. 'Ah! here you are at last, my sweet Rose, my dear little Pomona.' 'None of those strange names for me, if you please, M. Andre; you know that I do not like to be called after heathen goddesses.' 'Indeed! and how did you find out that Pomona was not a good Christian, my darling? I did not know you were so learned.' 'M. Firmin told me so.'

'So you still continue to gossip with footmen.' 'Why not, M. Andre? I talk to every body who talks to me.' 'I am afraid so,' answered the young man somewhat dryly. 'Do not quarrel with me to-night, M. Andre; I am unhappy enough as it is.' 'Well, I suppose there is nothing to put me in spirits, Rose; for if I draw a bad number to-morrow I must go away, I must leave you for heaven knows how long—you, my betrothed, you whom I love more than I can express.' 'If we had only money enough to pay for a substitute, as my uncle is going to do for Henri, supposing the worst comes to the worst, and he draws a bad number. What a lucky fellow Henri is!' 'My mother and my brother are just as poor as myself. There is scarcely a peasant in the neighborhood that is not better off than the De Vidals; and yet our ancestors, they say, were amongst the noblest and wealthiest seigneurs of this province.' 'I know they were, M. Andre; and, though it is a weakness perhaps, I believe it is just because you are of a high family, and at the same time so poor, that I have a regard for you, and that I am determined to be your wife.' 'Well, I do not see any advantage in being born a gentleman if one is the same time as poor as a rat, and obliged to live in the same manner as the village laborer.' 'Oh, well I like to feel that you are a gentleman. It is not the clothes a man wears, or the kind of food he eats, that makes the difference. When we are married, it will be my business to work for you, to wait upon you, to keep things straight in the house while you read and write and study in those great books which M. le Cure lends you. You will sit on the bench near the door looking at the sky, at the hills, at the stars, and at your little wife, too, now and then.' 'Oh, very, very often indeed, Rose, at my dear little wife?' 'Not too often though, for she will have to be very busy about the house; there will be the kitchen to attend to, you know, and the wash-house, and the chickens, and the pigs, and the garden.' 'Ah, my darling, you are going on like Lafontaine's milkmaid.' 'What milkmaid do you mean? I never heard of her before. Does she live at Pau or Jurancon? I have never heard of the village of Lafontaine.' 'No, no; the milkmaid I mean is the creation of a great writer's brain, the heroine of one of the prettiest fables that ever was written.' 'Oh, as to fables, I do not care for them at all. I like a song twenty times better. Then is it really at twelve o'clock to-morrow that the dreadful balloting for the conscription takes place?' 'Alas! it is so.' 'At the Prefecture?' 'Yes, in the Salle du Conseil. Shall you come to market as usual?' 'Of course I shall. The fruit cannot be left to take care of itself. I should be bored to death, too, if I stayed all day at home. I had much rather hear the worst at once. If you draw a good number, M. Andre, mind you make some sign as you come out that will make me know at once what has happened.' 'Suppose I have been fortunate, I will lay my hand on my heart; and in the contrary case—' 'Well, you had better then make the sign of the cross, there is always a little bit of comfort to that. But I forgot they are all waiting for me at Jurancon.' 'Who are waiting?' 'The young men you know that meet on the bridge every evening. I was obliged to play them a little trick in order to get rid of them.— They have been running a race, and I am to open the next ball with the winner.' 'You are always flirting, Rose; always laughing, talking, dancing with those vulgar people.' 'As to laughing, talking and dancing, where is the harm? And as to flirting, ... but you are very unjust, very unkind, M. Andre.— Those vulgar people, as you call them, are my friends; and they are much kinder to me than you are.' And Rose wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. 'Forgive me, dearest, forgive me,' said Andre in a pleading voice. 'I do believe you care for me.' 'I should think you did, indeed,' Rose indignantly exclaimed; but softening again, she said, 'And your mother, M. Andre; she must be very unhappy, poor woman; and M. Baptiste, who is so fond of you, and his pretty little girl who follows you about like your shadow. Well, we must make the best of a bad affair, I suppose, and not torment ourselves beforehand.'

'If I draw a good number, I shall immediately speak to your uncle, and ask him to consent to our marriage.' 'Oh, no indeed, M. Andre, you must do no such thing; my uncle will not hear of it, I am sure; and Henri, dear me, he has no idea that you are courting me.' 'Well, it is high time he should know something about it then. Why have you always made such a mystery of it, I am sure I cannot tell; forbidding me to speak to you coming out of church, or on the promenade, or in the market-place. And then I am never to ask you to dance at the balls. Why if you had not been such a little coward, who knows but we should be by this time married and safe from this horrid conscription; whereas now I may be in for it for seven years—a pretty look out for a pair of engaged lovers.' 'Well, I can only repeat what I have always said, M. Andre. It would not have done us any good to have set people talking. My uncle would have forbidden me to speak to you, and I should not have had an instant's peace at home. You have no idea how savage Henri Lacaze is about the people who make up to me. I assure you I quite tremble to think of it. He might take it into his head to quarrel with you.' 'Well, it must come to that at last, I suppose, and it is childish to go on in this manner.' 'If Henri hears of it, he will be in such a passion. We shall not be allowed to marry, and in the meantime I shall be scolded from morning to night by my uncle, my Aunt Babet, and Henri.' 'And what right, I should like to know, has M. Lacaze to interfere in the matter?' 'He will not listen to reason. It is of no use. It is just like talking to a wall. It is now more than two years since I told him that I would never be his wife. He will not give it up. He keeps harping upon my having promised to marry him. It is so absurd. As if a promise made by a child could bind a woman.' 'Then you did once promise?' 'Well, M. Andre, I will tell you just how it happened. We were brought up together.— Henri is the son, as you know, of my uncle's deceased wife, and he was always as fond of him as if he was his own child, and to me he was as a brother. When we were children he used to call me his little wife, and I called him my husband. He carried me in his arms long before I could walk; and, later, he used to take me out into the fields and meadows. Well, about four years ago, he said to me one day, 'Rose, in two years time I shall marry you.' 'Shall you, indeed?' I answered, quite surprised. 'My father agrees to it, and so does Aunt Babet; I suppose you have no objection, Rosy?' 'Well, I have no particular objection,' I said; 'and if you all three wish it, I don't mind being your wife.' 'But you must let me amuse myself for some time first, and dance as much as I like before I marry.' 'Then it is a promise,' he said, and he kissed me on both cheeks. I did not think much of this at first, and when they talked about it, it gave me neither pain nor pleasure.— At that time I began going to the market with Aunt Babet, and the following summer to the village balls. I liked to dance, to laugh, to amuse myself, and the young men were all very civil to me. Then a great change came over Henri, who had always been so kind to me up to that time. He was always scolding, finding fault, and tormenting me about everything. I got very angry sometimes. I would not listen when he tried to make it up; and in order to provoke him I used to say that I would never marry him. This always put him into a passion. He used to raise his hand as if to strike me, but he never did though; and I went on plaguing him in this way to pay him off for his scoldings. On my seventeenth birthday he said we must marry. 'Thank you for nothing,' I answered, 'I do not intend to marry at present; and when I do it will not be a cross tyrannical man like you. I choose to amuse myself with my friends and acquaintances, to go to the balls, and chat with my partners without being scolded and interfered with.' I kept firm to this, and desired him not to think any more of me, but to look out for another wife. He looked at me so strangely when I said this that I felt quite frightened.— 'Very well,' he growled out at last, 'I can't help it if you choose to make a fool of yourself. I'll be patient and wait; but for God's sake don't go and lose your heart to any of these youngsters; for, mind you, I'll kill the man who thinks to marry you.' Well, M. Andre, we are always in the same state. He says that he is waiting; that he lets me have my own way for a time till I am grown reasonable. He is cross sometimes, but not really unkind; only if even in joke I say anything about marrying somebody else, his manner quite frightens me. His eyes flash like lightning, and I have seen him once break an oak stick in his hand as if it had been a willow cane. He was as pale as—' 'But,' exclaimed Andre impatiently, 'there

must be an end of all this. M. Henri must be brought to reason.' 'Oh, but he is so fierce, so violent, and you, M. Andre, you are so gentle.' A crimson flush overspread the young man's face, and he said in a voice which faltered with passion, 'Do you suspect me of timidity, Rose? Do you think that I dread the coarse violence of an ill bred fellow who awes you by his brutality, but who, should he dare to insult me, will find in his cost that a man with noble blood in his veins can match by courage and skill mere physical force.' 'Don't be angry, M. Andre; pray, pray compose yourself. All will go well if you are not too precipitate. But, I declare, if that is not the angelus ringing. What will those youths say, and my uncle and Henri? Some of them will be coming back to look for me.' 'Always Henri!' cried Andre impatiently, for the name of young Lacaze had become intolerable to him. 'Forgive me, dear Rose, forgive me. Do not look so anxious, dearest; I will accompany you part of the way.' 'Not further than the bridge, M. Andre.' 'Ah! those tears of yours again, they vex and offend me.' 'Oh, dear me, how very tiresome men are!' Rose sighed out for the second time that day, but in a more gentle and melancholy tone than before. She smiled a little mournfully as Andre took her hand and kissed it, and then walked away towards Jurancon, while he sat down on the bank, under the acacia-trees, and fell into a long reverie.

CHAPTER II.

The house which M. Dumont, Rose Leblanc's uncle, owned in the pretty village of Jurancon was one of those old-fashioned buildings which are often seen in the southern part of France.— Half farm and half cottage, it covered a large extent of ground; but a portion of the walls were falling into decay, and the rooms which were inhabited by the family were fewer in number than those devoted to extraneous purposes connected with the owner's business as a market gardener and small farmer. At the back of the house there was a garden full of aromatic plants and China roses in full bloom. A variety of fruit trees were nailed against walls fringed with the blue flowers of the iris, and the dark blue larkspurs. Beyond this enclosure a grove of Spanish chestnuts, and on the other side a rich luxuriant meadow, watered by a little stream, and studded with alders and weeping willows, fringed the banks of the Gave de Pau, and commanded a lovely view of the valley beyond it, and of the glorious range of Pyrenean mountains, purple as the Apennines, and snow-capped as the Alps.

The daylight was beginning to wane when Rose entered the village of Jurancon, with a heightened color and a hurried step, which betokened some degree of uneasiness of mind. The young men, who had been waiting at the Croix de la Mission for nearly an hour, hastened to meet her. Jean Renaud had won the race, and came forward to proclaim his victory. She complimented him gaily, and after little talking and laughing took leave of the 'bande joyeuse.' M. Dumont and his sister Babet had also been for some time impatiently looking out for Rose. He was seated at the kitchen table, opposite the chimney, with a large leathern pouch before him, standing ready to engulf the proceeds of the little bag in which his niece deposited every day the money she brought back from market. 'You are late, little one,' he called out as she came in. 'You play truant, I suspect, and stop to chatter with every idle body that comes in your way. I never knew such a girl for talking. Little Jules Bertrand is nothing to you, although the boy has a tongue that would set twenty mills going. Let us hear what you have done in the way of business to-day. What did the peaches sell for?' 'Ten francs; and here are six for the peaches and apricots. Are you satisfied?' 'Pretty well, little girl.' 'Then I am sure you will give me five francs. I want a new apron, and a lace fringe to it.' 'Mercy on us! she does not mince matters,' exclaimed Babet. 'Fringed with lace indeed. I should like to know if ever I wore aprons fringed with lace. What shall we come to at last.' Old Dumont pretended to frown, and tapped Rose's fingers, which were fumbling in the bag for a five-franc piece. 'You are an extravagant little minx; if this goes on I shall end my days at the Little Sisters of the Poor. You will run me, child.' Rose kissed his forehead, and dropped back into the piece of money she had laid hold of. 'What are you doing, you silly puss, can't you understand a joke, child. Take your five francs, my girl, and make the most of them. Your old uncle likes to see you smart.' 'Her old uncle would do much better not to encourage his niece in such vanities,' exclaimed Babet. 'The child is conceited enough already