

ROSE LACROIX.*

BY NED F. MAH.

This is the story of Rose Lacroix, Rose Lacroix of Quillebeuf. Told at her tomb by a tiny child Whose feet were bare, and whose hair was rough.

Rose, said the small one, in sing-song tone. Had played, since first they could run alone, With Guillaumin, and they loved each other. And it was no secret, but father and mother Thought him too poor, so he went away To earn money, and Rose swore that she would stay Single and wait, though her hair turned grey Before his return. And they thought him dead. And the curé told her she ought to wed A lover her parents chose, and said Disobedience would lose her soul forever. But Rose was firm and vowed she never Would wed, and lose her soul for the sin Of forswearing her oath to Guillaumin.

And it happened one night, in coming back From Tancarville, where a fishing smack Had been christened by Rose, a sudden squall Struck the small boat, and so frightened all, That none of the party perceived, at first, Rose was washed away when the squall had burst: And her father, landing at Quillebeuf Found Guillaumin waiting, now rich enough Proudly to claim his Rose's hand. And the strong man sank down on the strand Stunned—till the good God made him weep, And his reason came. Then he gave, to keep In trust for him who should bring back Rose, All his wealth to a lawyer. And, next day, those Who owned any kind of boat, went out Two hundred strong, and dragged about To find her body—without avail.

When Guillaumin saw the search must fail, He sat, as one mad, on the bank of the Seine, In the spot where she bowed, till he came again She would wait, till grey-haired, through the seasons long.

And no prayer so urgent, no force so strong Could induce him to move. And he now moaned sad.

With the purpose fixed of one who is mad— "Here she swore to await me," she kept her word, Now I swear to await her—and God has heard."

And the fishers waited, with patience meek. Till his long watching should make him weak. But before that, God, in his great compassion, Made the corpse of Rose, in miraculous fashion, Float up to her lover's feet. In her hand A bunch of white roses she brought to land.

And they buried her here. And Guillaumin Calmly helped to lower her coffin, and in To her grave the first spadeful of filling threw. When all was finished, he quietly drew A pistol and, firing, himself he slew.

And he left a will. And his estate He gave the first youth or maid whose fate Was cursed by lack of cold like his. And thus secured their wedded bliss— But left it saddled with this condition— That those whose love thus reached fruition Fifty white roses should ever cherish On Rose's tomb. And, since to perish His soul was doomed by suicide, And Rose a virgin saint had died, Needing no prayers, God's heaven to taste— No gold in masses should go to waste; But that some trophy should be placed O'er her remains, where should be traced In marble pure, an allegory Of her sad end and touching story. That lovers true might learn her fame, And on her shrine inscribe their name.

This is the legend of Rose Lacroix Rose Lacroix of Quillebeuf. I wept when the child had ended, for The tale, in truth, was sad enough.

Meantime the small one had scaled the rail That guarded the milk white virgin stone, And was plucking a posy of roses pale, When I called to the little Goth. "Let them alone.

A grave-yard is not a garden, dear!" But the child replied with laughter—"Rose, Rose was my sister. To gather a nosegay here Will never trouble her soul's repose."

The imp sacrilegious with small feet bare Bobbed me a courtesy as children do, And, glancing up through dishevelled hair, Said—"If you please, sir, I leave it to you."

MILLY.

The Rev. Archibald Bland, M.A., Rector of Weston Parva and Honorary Canon of Cotswold, considered himself a much-worried man and the victim of his surroundings. Travelling tourists of modest ambitions, noting, with an appreciative eye, the pretty whitewashed cottages, with their plump rosy-cheeked inmates, and the gray walls of the venerable old church, which Father Time had painted with soft many-colored lichens, and catching from the top of the stage-coach a glimpse of the ivy-clad gables of the Rectory, with the roses peeping in at the quaint diamond-paned windows, the smooth well-kept carriage drive, and the velvety emerald-green lawn, with its famous laurels and gigantic magnolia, were wont to expend some unnecessary envy over the Rector's happy lot, and to declare enthusiastically that mortal man could wish for no happier fate than to spend his life in this peaceful home, writing out his weekly sermons under the purple shadows of the majestic mountains, overlooking the morals of a naturally virtuous flock, and finally sleeping peacefully under the daisied sod of the quiet God's-acre, followed by the tender regrets of his tearful and reverent parishioners.

Apparently, the Reverend Archibald himself could not always take this roseate view of his condition, and generally made the most of his crumpled rose-leaves. The prospectively tearful parishioners he was well content to leave in the obscurity of some vague far-distant future, while in the more important present he was undergoing the sufferings of a rigid antiquarian

and archaeologist of severely cultured tastes condemned to preach twice every Sunday in an early Norman Church with the painful anachronism of pointed Gothic windows. Then the miserly Squire of Weston Parva was wont to emphasize his Low Church views unpleasantly whenever the poor Rector advocated some improvement in the ritual; and now, finally—worst grievance of all—his bright, capable, pretty Milly had taken it into her head to imagine herself in love with that unpleasant Squire's scapegrace son, Stephen Corcoran—"muscular idiot," Canon Bland mentally designated him. It was an aberration of taste unaccountable in his daughter.

The young man had called on the Rector in the morning, and, with much confidence, requested his permission to pay his addresses to his daughter, Miss Millicent Bland, and had seemed decidedly surprised what that permission was emphatically refused.

"You are barely twenty-two, Mr. Corcoran, and have not yet taken your degree, and Milly is only nineteen," said the Rector impatiently. "Pray do not let me have any repetition of such childish nonsense," and poor Stephen, considerably crestfallen, had reluctantly withdrawn.

Milly was the eldest daughter; and this fresh worry was so novel and unprecedented that the Rector decided upon taking the unusual step of consulting his wife and seeking advice and consolation in that rather hopeless quarter; so he made his way up-stairs to the charmingly æsthetic little boudoir where Mrs. Bland carefully withdrew herself from vulgar household cares and sought distraction in the last fashionable three-volume novel.

The Rector's wife was a lady who had never forgot that she had been a beauty and an heiress, and expected other people to have equally retentive memories. She had been suffering for the last two years from an imaginary complaint with mysterious complications, and the cares of the family had fallen on the slender shoulders of energetic, fair-haired Milly.

The poor Rector, seated on a Chippendale chair with uncompromising angles, poured the tale of his woes into his wife's unsympathetic ear, and, as the recital lengthened, his jolly countenance gradually assumed the woebegone expression of some long-suffering medieval saint.

"It is really unaccountable to me how any girl of mine—and of yours, my dear," added the Rector, glancing round the pretty room, "should have such very bad taste!"

"He is the only young man she has ever seen in this wretched little hole," answered Mrs. Bland.

"She certainly hasn't seen many," acquiesced her husband. "But what are we to do about it?"

"You had better send Milly away for a few months," at length suggested his wife.

The Canon's face lengthened considerably. Milly was his pet and comforter, his right hand in all parish work, and this prescription seemed to him infinitely worse than the malady.

"But where shall we send her?" he inquired pathetically.

"Margaret is very fond of her, and will be glad of her society; let her go there."

Margaret was an elder unmarried sister of Mrs. Bland.

"If only young Corcoran weren't such a scapegrace!" murmured the Rector, as though reconsidering his decision. "But Fred told me some very awkward stories of his Oxford life which one can't, of course, repeat to Milly, though you might just hint to her, my dear."

"Yes; and then he's got red hair!" said Mrs. Bland, as though that effectually closed the discussion.

And so the important question was settled within the closed doors and velvet portières that screened "mamma" from her unruly children. Miss Buckley was consulted in a lengthy epistle from Mrs. Bland, and expressed herself delighted at the prospect of a lengthy visit from her "dear little Milly."

Milly shed a few mischievous tears when told of the projected visit, and poor Steve vented his wrath in a little strong language against the unconscious Rector; and the lovers indulged in a very pathetic farewell interview, when Milly protested her undying faith, and spoilt her blue eyes, and made the tip of her dainty little nose unbecomingly red, while Steve solemnly placed a little turquoise ring on her finger, at the same time expressing his regret that he was so "confoundingly short of cash" and could not afford diamonds; though, to atone for that deficiency, he presented her with a lock of that auburn hair to which Mrs. Bland had so unfeelingly alluded.

Milly was however naturally too amiable to sulk long over the parental decrees; besides, she was very fond of Aunt Margaret, and a visit to her charming cosy house was generally a welcome change from the round of Milly's rather hard-working life.

"Poor papa! How will you manage without me?" she asked, on the evening before her departure, gently rubbing her soft peach-bloom cheek against the Rector's stalwart shoulder.

"I shall miss my little girl very much," replied the Rector, stroking Milly's golden hair; "but I shall console myself by thinking how much she is enjoying aunt Margaret's society. I have the greatest respect and admiration for Miss Buckley."

"Yes, she is a darling!" responded Milly heartily.

"When they were girls at home, your mother was supposed to represent the beauty and Mar-

garet the talent and common-sense of the family."

"And you chose the beauty?" rejoined Milly, rather silly.

"Yes," answered her father, with a faint sigh; "I chose the beauty."

It was a bright sunny September morning when Milly started, and, notwithstanding the melancholy of the occasion, she could not help feeling bright and sunny in sympathy, except when she remembered how unhappy poor Steve must be feeling at that moment, unable even to anticipate the faint consolation of gazing at his divinity in church every Sunday; and then she called herself "an unnatural little wretch" for feeling even moderately happy, though, could she but have known it, Steve was at that moment consoling himself with the smiles of the boxom barmaid at the "Red Lion" at Cotswold.

Her father had intended to accompany her, but had that morning received a note from the Bishop requiring his presence at Cotswold; so Milly was travelling alone, and "the boys" at home had been improving the occasion by relating for her comfort all the tales of railway horrors they could collect, and, when the supply ran short, supplementing it by blood-curdling inventions that did much credit to their powers of imagination.

Of course Milly had professed to scorn the idea of being frightened; but that did not prevent her from looking out in alarm at every stoppage and feeling much relieved that nobody came into the compartment where she sat in solitary dignity. Upcott Junction was specially alarming, because here the local trains joined the London line; and Milly, as she saw the guard preparing to give the signal to proceed, was just beginning to congratulate herself, when there was a hurried scamper.

"First-class! This way, sir"—from an obsequious porter.

"Look sharp there!"—severely from the guard; and a male being, with all his various impedimenta, was bundled into her carriage; and the train would not stop again for another hour. Poor Milly!

Haunted by confused memories of Muller and Lefroy, it was several minutes before Milly ventured to steal a glance at the ogre, who was apparently engaged in the pages of the *Field*.

"Really he does not look so very alarming," was her verdict; but then he might be what the boys called a "swell mobman." "What a delightfully long silky moustache!"—and Milly remembered with regret that poor Steve's was, as yet, conspicuous by its absence. "Nice dark eyes too!"

Here this critical inspection came to an abrupt termination as she found with sudden dismay that the eyes in question were looking at her with some amusement in their gray depths.

"Would you like to see *Punch*?" asked the owner of the eyes, politely handing her that periodical.

"Thank you," said Milly meekly, glad to hide her blushes behind its friendly pages; while the stranger opposite noted with critical approval the dark-brown tailor-made costume that did full justice to the graceful girlish figure and the brown felt hat contrasting so well with the fair golden hair; man-like, too, he took special notice of the well-shaped hands in the small four-button suede gloves, and of the dainty Pinet boots.

Punch was handed back when Milly felt her cheeks a little cooler.

"Tenniel's cartoon is rather good this week," remarked the gentleman, with the same amused twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes—very," she answered feeling that she must appear like a stupid little schoolgirl.

Here Milly, who was blessed with a sense of humor, felt suddenly struck with the absurdity of the situation. To be sitting calmly discussing Tenniel's cartoons with a possible murderer already armed with the necessary weapons for taking her life!—for Milly had been furtively regarding the baize-covered breech-loaders, but had consoled herself with the reflection that revolvers and pistols were generally preferred by such people; and, as she tried to hide the sudden smile under a cloak of lady-like impassiveness, she looked so charming, with the sparkle in her violet eyes, and two tantalizing little-dimples playing hide-and-seek in the rounded cheeks, that the young man opposite, admiring it all, said to himself—

"What a little darling! I should like to know her name."

Somehow they seemed to be good friends after that, and chatted gaily, with the freemasonry of youth and high spirits, while the train dashed on, past busy corn fields, where swarthy sunburnt men tossed the golden sheaves on to the nearly-laden waggon, while the strong patient horses dozed lazily in the warm sunlight, and the reapers in their pink or white sun-bonnets lent color to the scene, then rushing noisily into some short tunnel, and emerging upon a quiet woodland lane with its tall shady hedgerows.

"Three o'clock!" exclaimed Milly, glancing at her venerable silver watch. "How quickly the time passes! We shall be at Sherborne in ten minutes."

"Sherborne!" repeated her fellow-traveller, with a quick inquiring glance. "Do you get out there too?"

"Is it your station then?" asked Milly in her turn, with a light laugh. "What a queer coincidence!"

"It is a very charming one," he answered

politely. "I hope you are making a long stay in our little village?"

"Then he is evidently a native," she reflected, drawing her deductions with feminine celerity. "Oh, yes!" she answered to his question, with a most melancholy sigh at the sudden recollection of Steve's forlorn condition.

"You are not very flattering to us," he remarked, with a smile. "I suppose you have suffered so much during the past hour from one native that you draw the most melancholy deductions?"

"Oh, it isn't that!" Milly hastened to assure him. "I have always found Sherborne charming. Ah, there is aunt Margaret!" she cried suddenly, as the train slowly drew up at the quiet little country platform.

"Ah, Milly dearest—so glad to see you have arrived safely!" Then, turning to Milly's fellow-traveller, Miss Buckley greeted him cordially. "I did not know you were coming down, Mr. Verschoyle. Of course"—glancing at the breech-loaders as the young man brought them out of the carriage—"to-morrow is the first! How could I forget so important a date! Weren't you afraid he would shoot you, Milly?"

"I was indeed," answered Milly, so emphatically that her companion laughed.

"Mr. Verschoyle—my niece, Miss Bland." Miss Buckley performed the necessary introduction, while Milly and Mr. Verschoyle smiled simultaneously.

"I think we have already struck up an impromptu acquaintance," said the latter as he walked with them to Miss Buckley's pony-carriage, with its pretty pair of ponies.

There was also a dog-cart with a powerful bay horse standing in the country lane; and a smart groom touched his hat respectfully to Milly's imaginary "swell-mobman."

"I will only say *au revoir*," said Miss Buckley, as the ponies set off at a smart trot.

"You must come up and see us," and Milly's smile strengthened the permission.

"And so you have been doing sad execution with your *belle peur*, naughty girl," said aunt Margaret that evening after dinner, as they sat in the soft summer twilight—and she gently stroked the fair hair resting against her knee, as Milly sat on the soft rug before the French window, nursing Toby, the asthmatic pug—"and you are sent to your stern old auntie to be kept out of mischief."

"Don't you think papa and mamma are very cruel?" asked Milly insistently.

"You certainly seemed to be feeling it acutely when you were chatting with Anthony Verschoyle," said Miss Buckley, with a smile; and Milly blushed. "Is this young Weston Squire so very irresistible?" continued Miss Buckley.

"He's not the young Squire," replied Milly, finding it convenient to ignore the question. "He has an elder brother in India with his regiment."

"And of course the silly boy hasn't a shilling he can call his own, while you are equally impecunious!" exclaimed aunt Margaret. "Oh, you comically disinterested children!"

"Will the love that you're so rich in Light a fire in the kitchen, Or the little god of marriage Turn the spit, spit, spit?"

"It might be sufficient for the kitchen fire, but scarce for the drawing-room," answered Milly, with a smile.

"Ah, *ma belle*, you must have all the rooms of your cottage warmed, or Cupid will catch cold and die of influenza! Our nineteenth-century deities are so prosaic," added Miss Buckley sententiously. Then, rather inconsequently, she asked, "How do you like Mr. Verschoyle?"

"I like him immensely," answered Milly; "and I hope he'll remember 'the beggar at his gates' and send us some partridges," added the practical young gourmet.

Anthony Verschoyle was lord of the manor and envied owner of Sherborne Chase, a delightful red-brick mansion of the days of Queen Anne; and Miss Buckley was his tenant, occupying the quaint ivy-covered dower-house just outside the ponderous wrought-iron gates.

As Milly kissed her aunt before going up stairs to her cosy bed-room, that astute woman of the world, lightly touching Steve's shabby little turquoises, remarked carelessly—

"I don't think your father would like to see this, Milly."

"Papa never objected," pleaded the young lady.

"Ah, your papa never noticed that sort of thing!" said auntie, with an amiable contempt for the short-sightedness of the general run of papas and of Mr. Bland in particular. "But will you—as a favor to me, *petite*—cease wearing it while you are my visitor! It is always bad form, you know," she added, "to parade an engagement—especially when it's so ineligible," subjoined Miss Buckley mentally.

So Milly dutifully locked up her treasure, reflecting, with a pensive sigh, on the general "contrariness" of parents and guardians.

In other respects some of Milly's wishes were speedily realized. She was in the drawing-room on the following afternoon, playing softly to herself, and had just begun Schumann's dreamy pathetic *Träumerei*, when Anthony Verschoyle walked in with the ease of an old friend who needed not to be announced. He explained rather elaborately to Miss Buckley, who was knitting in the open window in a state of sleepy contentment, that he had just called in, on his return from a successful day's shooting, to bring some birds; he also hoped that Miss Bland felt none the worse for her journey.

* This legend is to be found at length in Henry Murger's *Bucurs D'Eau*.