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ROSE LEBLANC; OR, THE TRIUMPH OF SINCERITY.

CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

'Ab, my dear Alice!' said her grandpapa, one evening as he walked up and down the terrace leaning on her arm, 'a great many centuries have passed since our ancestors first inhabited this country. It may be weakness to attach much importance to a name that was once illustrious, and to glorious recollections. They are things that are little thought of in these days. Our ancient walls are despoiled, and the noble deeds of the past little thought of. But I did not see that we got on any the better for it. I confess to you, my dear child, that my old heart would rejoice with all the strength and all the life that is left in it, if the dream that I have been cherishing now for a year and more were ever to be realised.'

Alice answered, with some emotion— 'I am like you, grandpapa; I like the past better than the future. Tell me about your youth... about your brother,' added she, with some hesitation. 'When you relate to me your past life, I seem almost to live through it in thought.'

'Well, then, my child, in those fearful days when France was struggling in all the agonies of revolution, my brother and I, as I have often told you, were separated; he followed the bloody phantoms called Liberty, while I remained faithful to my father and my standard, and emigrated with him and the rest of our party. Andre soon became a hot republican, and renounced his family and his rank. I never saw him from the day when he left us to take his seat in the assembly Nationale.'

'Never!' said Alice sadly. 'Never!' repeated the old baron who had seated himself on a bench, and was leaning his trembling hands on his gold-headed stick. A thousand sad reminiscences were crowding into the old man's thoughts. He recalled the days when he and his brother played together under the old chestnut-trees which shaded that same terrace. He seemed to see once more that brother whom he had once so fondly loved, with his fair hair falling over his shoulders, and his blue eyes sparkling with pleasure, as he sat on the stone dolphin in the middle of the fountain in the flower garden, and called him with joyful shouts of laughter to come and share his sport. His heart was filled with sorrow when he thought of the wrongs, and misfortunes, and disastrous events that had first cooled their affection, and finally destroyed it entirely. As Coleridge says in those beautiful lines—

'They parted, never to meet again; But never either found another To soothe the hollow heart from pining. They stood aloof, the scars remaining, Like cliffs which had been rent asunder.'

Andre de Vidal had embraced the cause of the Revolution fanatically. He had leagued himself with the chiefs of the so-called Friends of the People, drawn on by party spirit, and also enticed by the beauty of a young girl, the daughter of one of the most frantic of the Republicans. He had ended by marrying her; thus linking himself, by the closest ties, to one who had voted for the death of the king, and the exile of all the priests who remained true to their religion. When his father, Baron Charles de Vidal, heard this fatal news, he cursed the son who had disgraced his family, and stained his name with dishonor. He never saw him again; nor would he allow Andre's name to be mentioned in his presence. And when, two years later, the news reached him that his son had died on the scaffold, by order of the infamous Lacombe, the Robespierre of Bordeaux, he gave no sign of grief, nor shed a tear; but from that day he was never seen to smile. He made no inquiries about Andre's widow, and a son whom he left; and never spoke of them either to his wife, or to his eldest son, who had followed him into exile, and who, like his father, tried for a long time to stifle in his heart all remembrance of his brother. Thus, it was not till many years later that a longing came over him to find among Andre's grandchildren, for his own son had died young, an heir to the name that was so dear to him, and which seemed in danger of becoming extinct. After the death of his wife, of his only daughter, and of his son-in-law, the young Comte de Morlaix, he seemed to have lost all interest in every thing out of the child that his daughter had placed in his arms when on her deathbed. He was already an old man, though sorrow more than years had aged him, when he began a new life as it were, in seeking to make his little Alice happy. He had unexpectedly recovered possession of the inheritance of his ancestors. An old bailiff had bought the castle of La Roche Vidal and the property belonging to it at the time of the revolutionary confiscations, and bequeathed them to him during his stay in England. This

man, although much attached to the Baron's family, and very conscientious, was strongly imbued with the new and fallacious ideas respecting the Rights of Man. He had loved Andre de Vidal devotedly, almost passionately; and it was generally supposed to have been from conversations with him, and from books which he had lent him, that poor Andre had imbibed his revolutionary tendencies. Either from remorse, or from real attachment to a family which had loaded his own with favors, he made a will some months before his death, by which he left to the Baron de Vidal the whole of the property that had formerly belonged to his ancestors. It was just after he had lost, one after the other, nearly all those he loved, that he received the news that his inheritance was restored to him in so unlooked-for a manner. Then the home of his childhood and youth rose before his imagination with an indescribable charm. The idea of transplanting the poor little flower that had budded in a foreign soil to the shadow of those same walls that had sheltered his own childhood, comforted him in the midst of his bitter grief.

'Alice,' he cried, pursuing his reverie aloud, and pressing his grandchild's hand to his breast, with the tenderest affection, 'Alice, I have watched you grow up, my darling, and become daily more beautiful, and the recollections of past ages, like that pretty blue-bell on our old archway. You have taken root in our valleys and mountains.' And the old man pressed her to his heart, whilst she glanced lovingly at the purple moors, and the fields, and hills, and meadows, now gilded by the last rays of the setting sun. 'Well,' my child, continued he, 'whether time changes our ideas, or that sooner or later nature will have its way, for the last year I have had the strongest wish to find amongst my brother's children an heir to the name that is so dear to my heart. I would have them near me, so as to occupy myself in some way or other about their future destiny, and to obtain for them a position in society suitable to their rank, should they be worthy of it. The eldest, they tell me, is married, and lives at Pau. The youngest...'

'Andre?' said Alice, in a low voice. 'Yes, it was that young man whom we saw for an instant. I remember your remarking that he seemed superior to his present position. The Cure of St. Jacques and the Comte de St. Remy were loud in his praises, and Sœur Therese, who is his mother's oldest friend...'

'Spoke of him in the highest terms,' put in Alice quickly.

'I hear he has lately joined the 3rd Regiment of the Line, as a simple private, of course; but in our country, thank God, it is no disgrace to wear a uniform, and the sons of some of the noblest families of France have served as conscripts. However that may be, here are two letters which I shall send by to-night's post.— One is to Andre de Vidal, my brother's grandson. In it I have informed him of our relationship, and have told him to ask for leave, and to come here and stay with us a few days. The other is to his Colonel, who is the son of an old comrade of mine, to beg him to grant his leave, and to send him here, if it be only for a day or two; for I long to make acquaintance with my nephew. And, should he prove worthy of his birth; should his sentiments be lofty enough to match the name he bears—in short, if his character, his disposition... My darling, you must forgive me, for I did not mean to say anything about it, but my secret weighs upon me like a load, and get rid of it I must. Besides, I have got so into the habit of telling you everything... Well then, if this Andre de Vidal should turn out worthy of our esteem and affection;—if his appearance and manners...'

'Should answer your expectations and your recollections, grandpapa,' broke in Alice, 'oh, what happiness it will be for you, and for me, and for everybody. You will have a successor to your name, almost a son, who will lighten all your troubles, and take part in all that interests you. Oh,' she continued, clasping her hands and raising her eyes to heaven, 'I prayed for this on my knees on the mountain of Betharam. My God, I thank Thee for having heard me.'

The baron was somewhat surprised at her enthusiasm, and said, smiling and taking her hand in his, 'Suppose you should be willing to share everything with him some day.'

'Oh, there must be no sharing or dividing, grandpapa,' she answered quickly. 'You have often told me that your predecessors never alienated their lands.'

'What am I to say? I must speak plainly if you will not understand. Suppose that some day you were to marry Andre.'

'Oh, I do not see that there is any necessity for that,' cried Alice, blushing, 'and certainly it is not what I prayed for.'

'And do you imagine that I should ever consent to disinherit you; you, my own beloved child, my darling, my treasure? And, besides, I am sure that you could never endure the thoughts of leaving the home where your happy

childhood was spent, and where we lived together in the midst of our people, and surrounded by objects that constantly recall the past. No; I would sooner let the name of my ancestors become extinct a thousand times.'

'I will never leave you, never quit these ancient walls and this beloved valley; but, as far as I am concerned, I do not care whether I live in a castle or a hovel; whether I am surrounded by gardens or in the middle of a moor; a cottage on the borders of the forest, with plenty of sun and air, and in sight of the turrets of our dear old house, is all the happiness I wish for on this side of heaven; the poor are everywhere; our church, God's dwelling place, is always open; and what more can we want to make us happy?— You know that I always had a great admiration for the lady S. Francis speaks so much about, his *Madama Poverty*, and so saying she smiled and laid her pretty, fair head on her grandpapa's shoulder.'

'That is all very fine, but it is not to the point,' said the baron, trying to frown; 'you know as well as I do that I will never consent to your being deprived of a single rood of this estate, or of a single stone of these ruins; but I confess that if you should approve of my brother's grandson; if he should prove worthy of worthy of the destiny that I hope will be his; and, oh, my darling, if I might one day see my great grandchildren playing on this lawn...'

'Castas in the air, good grandpapa!' cried Alice, pointing to the clouds which were sailing above them.

'Then you refuse to listen to my projects,' said the baron with a sigh.

'Man proposes,' said Alice softly.

'And woman opposes,' rejoined the baron, striking the earth with his stick.

'No, dear grandpapa,' she answered, throwing his arms round her neck, 'but God ordains.'

'May His holy will be done!' added the old man fervently; and putting his arm through Alice's he rose, and they went together towards the castle.

CHAPTER XI.

The Baron de Vidal's letters very soon produced their effect. Andre lost no time in applying for leave, which he obtained without difficulty, started from Bordeaux on a lovely morning autumn with all the delight of a schoolboy going home for his holidays; and, after a few hours' journey, the diligence set him down at the entrance of a village within a short distance of the castle of La Roche Vidal. Here a path was shown him which led straight through the forest to the gates of the park.

Andre had been more surprised than pleased when he received an invitation so unexpected and so flattering to his pride. Hitherto he had lived entirely out of reach of those prejudices of birth and caste which hold persons of a certain class in such complete subjection; and what is very uncommon in these days, he never cared for a high position in society, nor even for the more material employments which riches afford. The natural indolence of his character, which fault was quite compatible with a certain amount of energy which was latent in his soul, a mind somewhat morbidly inclined to melancholy, and a disposition at once ardent and timid, combined to protect him from the petty cares of a vulgar ambition, while they often exposed him to annoyances of another kind. His dreams of happiness, whether at home in his mother's cottage or in the barracks at Bordeaux, had never gone beyond the idea of a peaceful life with Rose in some rural retreat, where he might pursue his studies in perfect quiet, and of some attempts and perhaps successes in literary achievements, of which he did not wish to hear more than the distant rumor. These desires, which were constantly before his mind, made the life of towns and barracks seem hateful to him. A passionate love for the beauties of nature, a spark of the sacred fire which is called genius only when it reveals itself externally, but which does not the less burn in souls gifted with poetic feeling because it does not find a vent in words or action, made him detest the simply practical side of life. He despised its pursuits and useful occupations because he had not yet learnt to discern what is really good and great about them.

On emerging from the forest the young soldier beheld spread out before him a vast plain, bounded on one side by the white line of the sea, and on the other by the snow-crowned tops of the Pyrenees. On the side of the hill, surrounded by magnificent woods which began already to show the warm tints of autumn, appeared the old feudal castle, uninhabited by the relations of whose personal characters, and habits, he had formed so little idea. He felt a little uneasy at the prospect of the first meeting, and began to rack his memory for scenes of a like kind which he had read of in plays and novels, and as he walked along he arranged beforehand what he should say and do when presented by the Baron to his

family. But when once he found himself on the threshold of the castle he was fortunate enough to forget all his set speeches and studied gestures. The sight of the massive porch, of the towers festooned with ivy, and of the walls in which time had made more breaches than the fury of contending parties, made a strong impression on him. The scene appeared a familiar one, though he had never set foot on the spot before. The twittering of the birds as they flew hither and thither over his head, the sound of the wind as it sighed through the long arcades in the court yard, the scent of the wall flowers as the breeze shook them on the walls, combined to plunge him into a fit of abstraction, from which he did not rouse himself till the castle clock struck five, when for the first time he thought of presenting himself at the door. The old servant, who had been told the name and the relationship of the young soldier who was expected, bowed low, and showed him into a room on the ground floor, whose only furniture consisted of some family portraits, and a few arm chairs, surmounted by coats of arms, for the most part broken. Andre went to the window which looked out upon a garden filled with flowers. The somewhat desolate grandeur of the room, the silence, the complete contrast, in short, with the scenes he had left only that morning, impressed him deeply. He had had much to bear since entering the army, where his tastes, his feelings, and ideas were perpetually chafed and irritated. The refinement of his nature showed itself now, and he felt that he was born to live the life of those among whom he had now come. His reflections were soon interrupted by the Baron, whose voice was heard on the terrace, and immediately after the door opened.

'Where is he? Come here, that I may embrace you, my dear boy.' This was the uncle's reception; a few inarticulate words, which were stifled by this paternal embrace, were the only reply of the nephew. 'Come out of doors,' said the Baron, leading Andre towards the garden; 'we shall talk more comfortably under the shade of these great trees, than with all those grand gentlemen in wigs, and powdered fine ladies staring at us,' added he, pointing to the portraits of his ancestors. As he leant on his nephew's arm, he thought, 'What a nice looking youth, and how like my poor brother!' while Andre, who was delighted at the loving reception his uncle had given him, was saying to himself, 'What a fine-looking man, what a benevolent countenance! The old royalist noble, and former emigrant, and the youth of twenty-two, who till he joined his regiment at Bordeaux, had never left his mother's cottage on the Pyrenees, soon got into conversation. Andre's answers to the Baron's numerous questions showed him to be intelligent and full of good feeling. The good humor and cheerfulness which reigned in his uncle's words and manner soon put him quite at his ease, and it was perhaps the first time that he had ever felt thoroughly so. It sometimes happens, by one of those inexplicable chances which produce the most striking contrasts between persons who have been brought up under the same conditions and influences, that one member of a family finds himself almost a stranger to his own relations as well as to his companions and neighbors. It had been thus with Andre. His good qualities and his faults contributed equally to keep him in a constant reserve with those among whom he lived. He possessed a great deal of tact, which, with an innate good breeding, and a natural and genuine love of the beautiful in whatever form it might present itself, gave a certain shade of seriousness and refinement to his character; and supplied in great measure the defects in his education, which after all did not amount to much more than a certain ignorance of the conventionalities of society; and as to education, he was at least as well informed as most young men in the upper classes. Every now and then, while talking to his uncle, he would let fall some observation which showed how thoroughly he enjoyed the sight of the views that met his eye on every side; the picturesque outlines of the old castle, the thatched roofs of the village, half concealed by luxuriant clusters of ivy and jessamine, the river winding along the valley through the rich meadows, the forests of oak and chestnut, whose tops, gilded by the last rays of the sun, seemed to stretch like a sea of verdure from the mountains to the ocean. The Baron enjoyed the young man's enthusiasm, and said, striking the ground with his stick, 'The De Vidal's have always had the greatest love for this country, and my granddaughter is quite faithful to the traditions on that score. She would not exchange one of these trees, nor one of those cottages, for all the gold or all the palaces in the world.' As he spoke a confused sound of approaching footsteps was heard, and joyous shouts of laughter pealed from the road under the terrace where they were sitting. 'These she is with her troop of brats, I'll wager,' said the Baron, 'they follow her like her shadow.' He was right, and the next instant Alice de Morlaix ap-

peared at the end of the avenue leading to the castle, accompanied by a whole army of children of all sizes, who capered round her with shouts and gambols. This playful and noisy party, these little creatures who pressed round her with their bright colors, their hair streaming in the wind, and their animated gestures, contrasted strongly with Alice's tall and slender figure, her slow and graceful step and delicate coloring. They seemed like a swarm of butterflies fluttering about a stately lily. The elder ones ran on before, the little ones clung to her dress, and all offered her flowers which they had gathered by the roadside.

'Thanks, thanks!' cried she laughing. 'I have got plenty for one day. See, the swallows are going to bed, and so is the sun; you too must be off to your nests, my little birds; and as she spoke she unfastened a door in the garden wall which opened on the village green, and the merry troop bounded towards the village shouting and leaping.

'Here she comes,' said the Baron, in a low voice, as Alice approached the bench on which he was sitting with his nephew. He had just been praising her to Andre; her name was almost on his lips. He could not help speaking of what was next his heart, and could never keep a wish or a project to himself; perhaps he had never tried much to conquer this inveterate frankness, in any case he had not succeeded. As he said, 'Here she comes,' Andre also murmured, 'Here she comes,' for he instantly recognized the young girl he had seen, though but once, in the market place at Pau; and of whom he had so lively a recollection. He had often recalled her kind glance and sympathising words on the day when he was tempted to curse his fate, and had often seen her in his dreams. When meditating on the legends of some saint of the middle ages, or imagining the history of some Christian queen of old, he always seemed to see the face of the beautiful stranger, whose name he had not been able to discover. The adoration which he paid to this transient vision did no wrong, he thought, either to the object of it or to his betrothed; and if any one had reproached him with this ideal and poetical infidelity, or if his own heart had reproved him for it, he would probably have answered in the spirit, if not in the words of Shakespeare,—

'It were all one That I should love a bright particular star, And think to wed it, she is so above me.'

But now, by one of the strange caprices of chance, or rather by one of the mysterious signs of Providence, he was brought in contact with the vision of his dreams at the very moment when a new future seemed to be opening to him. The Baron made his granddaughter sit down beside him, and with one hand drew her close to him, while he held Andre's hand in the other.

'My children,' he said, in a voice which trembled with emotion, 'at last I am happy! How pleasant it is to wipe out painful reminiscences and thus to renew the good old traditions of the past. We are old acquaintances already, Alice,' added he, pointing to Andre; 'we have been talking for nearly an hour, and we know each other as well as if we had always lived together.'

Andre looked at Alice without venturing to speak to her; but life, which till then had appeared cold and dull and monotonous, now seemed clothed with a thousand bright tints, whose radiance eclipsed the recollections of the past just as the first rays of the morning sun dissipates the vague fancies of a dream. At dinner, and during the evening, the Baron never ceased questioning the young soldier about his family, his studies, his projects, and his hopes. The modesty of his replies, and a certain amount of originality in his remarks, the poetic turn of his ideas, and the refinement of his language, were not unnoticed by Alice, who, though she did not take much part in the conversation, showed by her expressive glances, and by the interest with which she listened, that it was not lost upon her. This sympathy of hers did not escape the notice either of Andre or of her grandfather, and the first evening seemed very short to them all; Andre's week of leave went by very rapidly likewise. A week is soon passed, but often there are days in a man's life, in the life of his soul rather, which tell more upon him than years. During those beautiful bright autumn days, surrounded by grand and sunny landscapes, and in constant intercourse with beings as good and amiable as Alice and her grandfather, Andre learnt something that neither books nor solitary meditation had been able to teach him, namely, the secret of true happiness. Alice would have taught him this lesson in a garret, in a prison, or a desert, anywhere where she could have opportunities of showing forth the gifts with which God had endowed her; but in the midst of riches and happiness, with a cloudless sky above her, and surrounded by all that is beautiful in nature, her character struck the imagination with still greater force. Ah! how many more people might be happy in this world, and how easily