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REMINISCENCES OF ROSA BONHEUR

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

All available information respecting the Bonheur ancestors represents them as having cultivated the culinary art from father to son. Jean Bonheur, who lived in the time of Louis XIV, was a cook at Toulouse, then the cultured capital of Languedoc, the finest province of southern France. His son, Guillaume, exercised the same functions in the grand establishment of Mme. de Cazalès, one of the aristocratic ladies of the period. Guillaume's son, François, mounted a step higher in the quality of his employer, though still remaining faithful to his sauces and his sauce-pans. He became head cook of the celebrated Cambacérès family, whose members have made a reputation in pulpit oratory, law, and statesmanship. Here, however, the tradition was interrupted, for the next descent was destined to produce the head of a race of artists.

Francois Bonheur, who lived from 1753 till 1829, married the daughter of an old invalided soldier that had warred in Germany under Louis XV. Her name was Eléonore Marie Pérard. By her he had two children, the aunt and the father of Rosa Bonheur. The aunt, Elisabeth, better known in Rosa's letters, as we shall see, as "Tatan," was probably born in 1780, although the lack of careful registration in those days makes the date somewhat uncertain. "Tatan," it may be added, never married and lived to a good old age, dying only in 1873. "She was a woman of lively imagination, of energetic character, and not always easy to get on with," writes her grand nephew, Hippolyte Peyrol, the sculptor, who was a boy of seventeen at the time of her death.

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The second child, Rosa Bonheur's father, was christened Oscar Raymond. His mother, herself a woman of some education, remarked her son's natural abilities, and did her best to cultivate and develop them. The young Raymond showed his first aptitude for drawing by imitating the ornaments in butter and sugar which his father executed in the Toulouse kitchen for the dining table of the Cambacérès family, a curious example of Taine's favourite doctrine of the influence of surroundings on budding intellect. His parents then sent him to the drawing school at Bordeaux, where, under the clever tuition of Lacour, of whom more will be said farther on in this biography, he quickly became a distinguished pupil; and, after completing his studies, he began, while still young, to teach in his turn. It was a modest existence that he entered upon; for, at that time, artists did not enjoy the favour accorded them to-day.

Among Raymond Bonheur's pupils was a young orphan girl, who was being brought up in a well-to-do Bordeaux family, that of M. Dublan de Lahet, son of a royal treasurer under Louis XV, and who had been a page of Queen Marie Antoinette. Her name was Sophie Marquis; and she had been born at Altona, near Hamburg, in 1797. Soon the professor and his pupil fell in love with each other, and on May 21, 1821, they were married. In the following year, on March 16th, a daughter was born of this union, and was baptised by the name of Marie Rosalie. This babe was the future artist, Rosa Bonheur.

It will be noted that the maiden name of Raymond Bonheur's bride was Marquis, which is, perhaps, the origin of the statement which has often been made that Rosa Bonheur sprang from a titled family. On this point she used to say proudly: "The only thing noble about my parents was their character, which is more than many so-called aristocrats can boast."

The foregoing information concerning the mother of Rosa Bonheur was communicated to me by M. Peyrol, and he thinks that this is all that is sure. But Miss Klumpke, the friend and confidante of Rosa Bonheur during the closing months of the

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latter's life, gives a more mysterious account of the origin of the artist's mother. "A veil hangs over her birth," Rosa Bonheur is declared to have stated, "which I have never been able to lift. The marks of esteem which I have received at different epochs from several crowned heads are such that I cannot, in conscience, attribute them uniquely to my talent." Yet the birth register of the Altona Catholic church mentions Rosa Bonheur's mother as "a legitimate daughter," though her marriage certificate describes her as "the daughter of an unknown father and mother." But on his death-bed, M. Dublan, who had always called her his niece and ward, and had brought her up with his own children, informed her that he was her father. When she asked for the name of her mother, he replied: "My child, I promised never to reveal it, but you will find in my writing-desk papers which will tell you." After the funeral, when she went to open the drawer of the desk, she found that the lock had been broken, so that she had no claim on the estate and was left in total ignorance of her maternal origin. The Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who died in 1904, was a warm friend of Rosa Bonheur, and Miss Klumpke reports the artist as saying: "Perhaps this noble woman knew the secret of the birth of my mother."

At the time of Rosa's birth the position of the young couple was fairly comfortable. Raymond earned about enough to pay his way; his wife, who was a good musician, added to their income by giving piano lessons, one of the accomplishments which she brought with her from her life in musical Germany; and, though the aged Francois Bonheur had to be helped by his son, his wife was able to requite this pecuniary aid by relieving Sophie of much of the housework. But with each fresh year of married life the burden to be supported grew heavier. A second child, Auguste, was born in 1824; a third, Isidore, in 1827; the grandfather needed more and more assistance, the grandmother was less and less able to look after the house.

It was the embarrassment resulting from this state of things which led Raymond Bonheur to form the plan of leaving Bor-

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deaux for Paris, where his elder sister Elisabeth—though "Tatan" in the family was nicknamed "Ophélie" by Rosa Bonheur—had been settled since 1823, and was engaged in teaching. He hoped that in the capital there would be greater facilities for earning money, and more scope for developing his own artistic talent. Nor was he mistaken in this. Though money never flowed into the Bonheur household, the art development of himself and his gifted children owed everything to this change of residence. If Raymond Bonheur had continued to vegetate in a provincial city, the genius of Rosa Bonheur might never have ripened.

Raymond Bonheur, therefore, quitted Bordeaux toward the end of March, 1828; and, leaving his wife, children, and parents until he could make a new home for them, he arrived in Paris at the beginning of April, where he was kindly received by the Silvelas, members of the celebrated literary and political Spanish family of that name, this branch of which had once resided in Bordeaux, but was now keeping a boys' boarding school at the French capital. They hospitably invited him to stay with them, pending his future arrangements, and did much to accustom him to his new and rather lonely surroundings. What these surroundings were and what Raymond Bonheur's feelings were at this time are tenderly revealed in the correspondence then exchanged between husband and wife.

In a letter addressed to Mme. Bonheur and dated from Paris on April 1, 1828, occurs this passage:

I have just arrived after an excellent journey. I went first to my sister's lodging, where I deposited my trunk, and am now with the Silvelas, who are most kind to me. But neither their kindness nor the noise of Paris can fill the void I feel away from you and all my loved ones.

In a second letter, on the morrow, he wrote:

I have had a glimpse of the Tuileries. It is quite fairy-like. But how much more fairy-like it would seem to be transported to

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your side, dear one, and to be with poor mother and father and my darlings, Rosalie and Auguste. Kiss them for me.

It was, in fact, a hard trial for Raymond Bonheur to bear the absence of his family. In most of his letters at this time he alludes to the separation, and in his wife's replies the allusion finds an echo. Week after week passed by without there appearing any likelihood of his being able to establish a permanent home in Paris. It was the inevitable struggle in a new place. He was compelled to observe the strictest economy. "Sixty-nine francs per month for board," he writes to his wife, "and nine francs sixteen sous for lodging," a total of seventy-eight francs and sixteen sous, an exceedingly low figure, though under the Restoration and Louis Philippe living in Paris was much cheaper than it is to-day. Lessons were few and poorly paid; and for some months his wife remained with the children at Bordeaux, receiving all the money her husband could spare, after paying his own expenses, and supplementing the resources he furnished by whatever she could earn with her music teaching. Thus a year passed away, when, at last, Raymond was able to write announcing that a home was prepared. The old grandfather—"Pépé" little Rosalie called him—was left behind in charge of a trustworthy person, being too infirm to undertake the journey; and the rest of the family started. Just before their departure, Raymond Bonheur, on the 16th of April, 1829, sent them a letter containing the following lines:

Be sure, dear mother, to take every precaution during your three days' journey. Here, we will try to forget our troubles. And you, dear Sophie—I think of your present fatigue. Try not to be too sad in leaving the old place. Think of my having been alone so long, and of our meeting again. And you, my little ones, try to be good. Look round and fix in your memory the spot you are leaving, for many years may go by before you see it again. At last you are about to become Parisians!

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The new home was in the Rue St. Antoine, that broad, dusty, and rather shabby and populous thoroughfare, the continuation of the Rue de Rivoli and the link between the somewhat better quarters of Les Halles and the Châtelet and the old revolutionary district of the Faubourg St. Antoine. This part of Paris is much the same to-day as it was at the epoch when the young Rosa Bonheur inhabited it. The surroundings were not uncongenial to artists. On the opposite side of the street and almost visible from the very windows of the Bonheur apartment is the striking old front of the church of St. Paul, built back at the very beginning of the seventeenth century, with its handsome Renaissance portal, and into which the child Rosa may have more than once strolled to gaze at the numerous paintings hanging in the dimly lighted chapels, among which is an early work of Delacroix. On the same side of the street with the Bonheurs and but four or five numbers away stands the ancient Hôtel de Béthune, the former residence of the famous minister of Henry IV, the great Duke de Sully. The elaborate sculptures in the court, the vaulted roof of the entrance, and the imposing street-front were before the eyes of Rosa every time she went out into the city. In fact, historical buildings, picturesque effects, and glorious memories abound in this part of Paris. They are known to have had their influence on Raymond Bonheur, susceptible to a degree, who must have transmitted his impressions and his enthusiasm to his equally impressionable children, whose art education he directed and inspired.

In 1897 Rosa Bonheur related some of her souvenirs of this time, which her nephew has revised for this chapter. "Our apartment in the Rue St. Antoine," she writes, "was over a private bath establishment. The house still stands. I shall always remember the pork butcher's shop that was opposite our windows, because of its sign, a boar in painted wood. More than once when I went out I stopped to caress the poor animal! This was, perhaps, one of my earliest manifestations of a love for the dumb world!"

This house not only still stands, a good example of the un-

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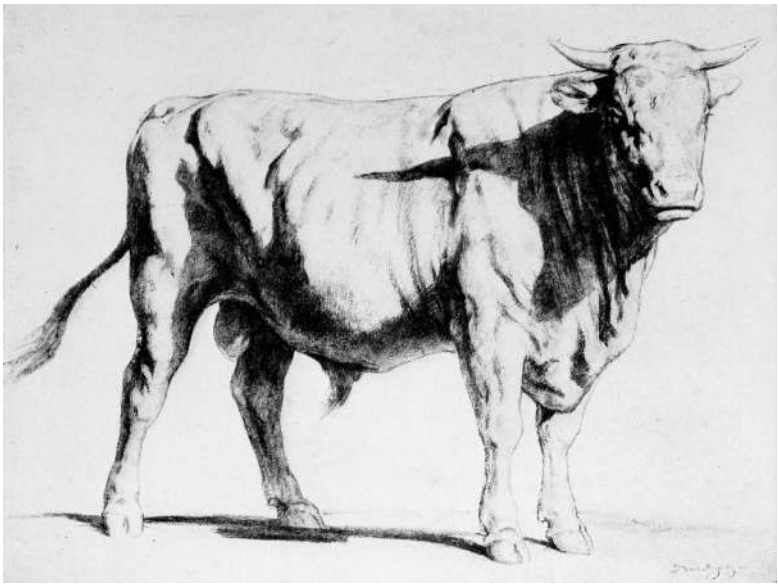

STUDY OF A BULL.

THE SIGN AT NO. 49 RUE ST. ANTOINE.

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changeableness of the quarter—it is No. 50—but the bathing business is still carried on there, though transferred to the portion of the edifice at the back of the court, where, probably, was held the school mentioned farther on in these souvenirs. The pork shop over the way—No. 49—is also still there, and the wooden boar, too, a formidable-looking animal that might well have awakened the wonder and admiration of a sturdy child, such as was Rosa Bonheur at five or six.

The souvenirs continue:

The change from Bordeaux to Paris was at first hard to bear. I didn't like the great capital. Even the bread seemed insipid when compared to our southern loaves, which were salty and so to my taste. Moreover, I yearned for the sun of my native town, especially as the early spring days of that year were cloudy and chilly.

In the same building where we lived was a school kept by a M. Antin, who was a Jansenist, and who became a good friend of ours, my father showing thus early a tendency to break with established things in spiritual matters, a tendency which grew with the years and which has always left its stamp on me. Old Father Antin, as we all called him reverentially, remarking that I was unoccupied, proposed to my father to take me as a pupil; so I entered the little boys' class with my brothers Auguste and Isidore. This was, I believe, the first pronounced step in a course which my father always pursued with us children and which in modern times has been named co-education. The influence which it had on my lifework cannot be exaggerated. It emancipated me before I knew what emancipation meant and left me free to develop naturally and untrammelled. I well remember that I was not at all shy because my only companions were boys. When, during the recess, we went to play in the garden of the Place Royale—to-day, Place des Vosges—I was generally the leader in all the games, and I did not hesitate now and again to use my fists. So from the very start, a masculine bent was given to my existence. This school life, which did so much for me in so short a time, continued till 1830.

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The cannons of the Revolution of July were thundering at the moment my sister Juliette was born. I do not exaggerate in employing this expression; for in front of our door a piece of artillery had been stationed, which opened fire on the Place de la Bastille, not far away. Indeed, I had a narrow escape from being a victim. My father had climbed on to the big street entrance door of our house so as to get a better view of the cannonade operations; and at the first discharge the door was so shaken that he fell off close by me. I recollect very well the charge of the royal guard, the shouts of the victorious combatants who drove them back; then, we heard that the king had quitted Paris.

After 1830 we found it more difficult to live. My father could get no lessons, and in 1832 the cholera came to make things worse. It was dreadful. Carts filled with corpses were continually in the streets. Every one was terror-stricken. But just before this—in October, 1830—we went to live in the Rue des Tournelles, in the same quarter, in an old house dating back to the time of Louis XIII. A big stone staircase gave access to our apartment. It was so gloomy that I was frightened to go up it alone, especially as underneath us lived an undertaker's man. His wife made shuttle-cocks and other children's toys. She bought the skin from a Mme. Micas, who had a little girl whom I had met in the garden of the Place Royale. We often used to come across the poor, pale-looking child with her comical hat that made us laugh, and with a green shade over her eyes to protect them. All the pupils of M. Antin's school were just at the age, as La Fontaine says, that knows no pity. We made fun of her on account of her weakly, sickly air. And yet this small suffering creature was Nathalie Micas, fated to become later my dearest and best friend!

It was about this time that Saint Simonianism was flourishing. My father, whose nature was impressionable and enthusiastic, hastened to adopt the new doctrine. He was so carried away with it that he even partially separated himself from us in order to take up his abode with the brethren at Ménilmontant. But my mother was heart and hand with him in this effort to "regenerate humanity," as they used to say. Every Sunday we all went to pay him a visit at "the convent." The street boys would some-

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times mock at my Saint Simonian cap with its big tassel. Some of them even threw stones at us. This touch of persecution made us all the more ardent supporters of the sect, where my father made the acquaintance of such men as the Péreires, Arlès-Dufour, Carnot, father of the future President, Le Verrier, Talabot, d'Eichthal, Enfantin, Michel Chevalier, Stéphane Flachat, Olinde Rodrigues, Bazard, Auguste Comte, and Félicien David, the composer, all superior minds in different fields and most of whom were open supporters of the young faith. We children came to know the children of many of them, and we were all—parents and children—elevated by these choice associations. This Saint Simonian episode in our life had influences that I now perceive were much more far-reaching than any of us imagined at the time. Reforms and reformers are a fine atmosphere for young people to grow up in. There was of course "no money in it"; but the money came later. The moral brace which I received from Saint Simonian connections has remained with me to this day.

In 1833 Raymond Bonheur had the misfortune to lose his wife, "my dear Sophie," prematurely worn out by the trials of a precarious life. He had lost his father in 1829 and his mother in 1831; so that he was now left alone with his four little children, Rosa, the eldest, being still under twelve. For some time, being unable, on account of his enforced absence from the house, teaching every day, to look after them properly, he confided them to a friend of his sister's, Mme. Pélérin, who lived in the same street where he then lived—the Allée des Veuves, in the Champs Elysées of those days—and who also took charge of some other children. This arrangement was finally modified by another change of residence—"in my early youth we used to migrate with the birds," Rosa Bonheur once remarked—and Raymond Bonheur, who had gone to live on the whilom Quai de l'Ecole, had his children back home again, much to his own and their delight.

Rosa Bonheur in her revised souvenirs writes:

This new home was a few yards from "The Parnassus," the well-known café of that time, kept by the old carpenter whose

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