

Francois Lacharme's Noisette Roses

-- Odile Masquelier

Francois Lacharme was born in 1817, at St.-Didier-sur-Chalaronne (Ain) some 50 km from Lyon, into a farming family. As a young child, he was passionately attracted to flowers, especially roses, and wanted to study horticulture. Despite pressure from his family, Lacharme held out, and decided that he would never become a farmer. In 1836, at the age of eighteen, he overcame family prejudice, by becoming an apprentice with Poncet, a nurseryman in Lyon, who was himself a rose breeder ('Princesse Joinville,' 1847, 'Pauline Bonaparte,' 1847).

It is very likely that, during Lacharme's stay with Poncet, he met Plantier, with whom he struck up a friendship. Francois often visited Plantier in his garden, where Lacharme would tell him of his longing to be able to travel, and especially to be able to meet the rose growers of Paris. In 1838, Plantier gave Lacharme a letter of introduction to his friend Pirolle, in Paris, publisher of *Le Bon Jardinier*. So, young Lacharme met Victor Verdier, and was also introduced to Hardy pere, then Director of the Jardin du Luxembourg[1]. Eugene Verdier tells us that young Lacharme would often visit Hardy, listening attentively, taking notes, and standing for hours, silent, lost in thought in front of the garden's tremendous collection of roses – the most complete at that time, since the long-lost rose garden at Malmaison.

But in Lyon, Plantier was offering to hand over his nursery to Lacharme. In 1840, Francois Lacharme took charge of Plantier's establishment, and with his help as a mentor and a friend, started to sow seed and breed roses. His third introduction, 'Mathilde de Jourdeuil,' was marketed in 1846, to be followed by more than one hundred new roses.

In 1854, Lacharme produced 'Salet,' a remontant Centifolia Moss that is still in every rose lover's garden. In 1859 came 'Anna de Diesbach' (Hybrid Perpetual, color shaded crimson) and 'Victor Verdier' (Bourbon, also shaded crimson). Both of these roses were propagated by the thousands, and grown all over the world. Victor Verdier (who we must remember was the nephew of Antoine Jacques) was very highly thought of and greatly admired by Lacharme and the other rose breeders of Lyon. In fact, it was to Victor Verdier that Jean-Baptist Guillot applied in 1834, to obtain a complete collection of roses in existence at that time.

The year 1859 also saw the introduction of Lacharme's first Noisette Rose, 'Coquette de Lyon,' the forerunner of a prestigious line of Noisettes.

In 1907, Pierre Guillot listed the best Noisette Hybrids "continually in bloom" as follows: 'Louise d'Arzens' (1861), the exquisite 'Mme. de Rougemont' (1862), 'Mme. Gustave Bonnet' (1864), and 'Boule de Nieve' (1867) – all by Lacharme.

At the same time, Lacharme was breeding some superb Hybrid Perpetuals. Among them were 'Charles Lefebvre' (1862), and 'Souvenir du Dr. Jamain' (1865), shaded dark red. But he was particularly attracted to Noisettes – 'Baronne de Meynard' (1864), 'Coquette des Alpes' (1868), and 'Perle des Blanches' (1872), are the evocative names of delicious white roses.

Lacharme sent out 'Louis van Houtte,' a Hybrid Perpetual, in 1870, and more importantly, 'Captain Christy' in 1873. The latter was dedicated to a Londoner, a great lover of roses, at the suggestion of William Paul (another rose breeder). "It will be planted throughout the world, and seen in every flower

market,” wrote Eugene Verdier.

An extremely self-effacing man – a quality rare in the Lyon region – Lacharme saw no reason to perpetuate his own name by giving it to one of his roses. He was a workaholic, continually sowing his future roses, attending local meetings, and contributing regularly to “Le Journal des Roses,” edited and published by Cochet and Bernardin.

Although very modest about himself, Francois Lacharme was by no means timid. He became embroiled in an outspoken and animated argument with Joseph Schwartz, a former apprentice, and successor to the establishment of Guillot pere. (Due to a family quarrel, the gifted son, Jean-Baptiste Guillot fils, had left to set up his own rose nursery elsewhere.) Schwartz was an ardent defender of propagation by budding on the roots of a briar seedling, while Lacharme recommended roses on their own roots. This argument was laid out in “Le Cultivateur de la Region Lyonnaise,” and “Le Revue Horticole Belge.”

When one reads English catalogs and magazines of the period (1878), it seems that Francois Lacharme was one of the favorite rose breeders of our friends across the channel. Shirley Hibberd, in an article in the “Gardener’s Magazine,” “Roses of the XIXth Century,” mentions 1,478 “interesting” varieties, and cites Lacharme first with 9 roses selected, compared with 7 from Verdier, 3 from William Paul and Guillot fils, 5 from Levet, 3 from Granger, and 2 each from Pernet, Guillot pere, Laffay, and Fontaine.

This infatuation in Britain as regards Lacharme’s roses may, perhaps, explain the reluctance to probe into a mistake in every English-language rose catalog, book, or magazine, as regards the correct classification of his rose, ‘Boule de Niede.’ Correctly, this should be a Noisette Rose. As regards the U.S.A., only Stephen F. Hamblin, in The American Rose Annual of 1930, when writing about these roses without prickles, lists the following as Noisette Hybrids: ‘Mme. Plantier,’ ‘Boule de Niede,’ and ‘Coquette des Alpes.’

Everywhere else, ‘Boule de Niede’ is given, at best, as a Hybrid Perpetual, and generally as a Bourbon – as opposed to the French rose growers, who have always listed it as a Noisette in their catalogs. WHY?

‘Boule de Niede,’ says Peter Beales, derives from a seedling of ‘Coquette des Blanches’ (Lacharme, 1865) pollinated by ‘Sapho’ (Vibert, 1842). But what was ‘Coquette des Blanches?’

[1] Luxembourg Gardens

In the February issue of the “Journal des Roses,” 1885, p-Ph. Petit-Coq (Ph Cochet) clearly explains the origin of ‘Coquette des Blanches.’

‘Coquette des Blanches’
(Noisette Hybrid)

“According to a note given to us by Mons. Francois Lacharme, he says he found ‘Coquette des Blanches’ in 1860, as a seedling from a batch of seeds of the rose ‘Blanche Laffitte,’ pollinated by the continuous-flowering ‘Sapho.’ This new rose, bred by the great sower of rose seedlings in the Lyon region, is indeed what is rightly called a “Noisette Hybrid.”

'Blanche Laffitte,' which he (Lacharme) states is the seed parent, has medium-sized or small flowers, full, white, slightly tinged with blush; according to the classification given in well-known rose-breeders catalogs, it is a variety which is almost a semi-rambler of the Bourbon Rose family, marketed by Mr. Pradel in 1851.

'Sapho' comes from the famous Vibert rose nursery, which is now in the hands of Mr. Moreau Robert. It flowers in Corymbs, with medium-sized or nearly large flowers, which are double, white in color, and it forms part of the Portland Rose section, flowering continuously.

From what has been stated above, and admitting that the specific identity of the father and mother of 'Coquette des Blanches' is exactly as we have described it, the result would be that from a Bourbon rose, pollinated by a Portland Rose, would come a sort of mule of a third family – the Noisettes. We cannot admit this fact.

Mr. Francois Lacharme states in his notes that 'Coquette des Blanches' comes from the seeds of the Noisette Rose, 'Blanche Laffitte.' But given such important contradiction between eminent rose growers as regards the classification of this particular rose, we wished to form our own opinion by an examination of the actual plant itself, to determine its specific features.

Without hesitation, we can state that the characteristic features of this plant are sufficiently clear for us to see at first glance that it is an almost pure Noisette. Its status established, let us now examine its daughter, 'Coquette des Blanches.' This easily-grown and well-developed plant soon forms a strong bush, bearing fairly large, dazzling white, flowers on strong stems, perfectly set-off by the beautiful green foliage."

From the above, we might be reading the description of 'Boule de Neige,' worthy daughter of 'Coquette des Blanches,' marketed by Francois Lacharme in 1867 – a rose often seen in rose-lovers' gardens, which we hope will now be classified as a Noisette in all catalogs.

Lacharme, despite all the ferment of the buzzing city of Lyon, continued quietly and peacefully sowing his rose seedlings. His last varieties were introduced in 1886 and 1887, and in November 1887, he died, regretted by all his colleagues in Lyon, in Paris, and abroad.

A "Lacharme Committee" was spontaneously set up as a link between Paris and Lyon, to honor and keep alive the memory of a great rose grower, a great producer of Noisette Roses, and a great lover of roses.

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Editorial Comment from Sharon van Enoo:

"There are three Lacharme roses at the Huntington, and all of them are located in Bed 1 (Old Roses Bed). Just as Mme. Masquelier states, the class designation is different in the U.S.A. 'Salet,' a repeating Moss from 1854, is medium pink (light pink in my garden) and is subject to problems with mildew, but it doesn't affect the beauty of the blooms. 'Boule de Neige' is listed as a Bourbon from 1867, and

produces small white blooms while growing on a vigorous bush that grows to six feet. It takes several years to establish, and start blooming freely. 'Souvenir du Docteur Jamain,' 1865, is listed as a Hybrid Perpetual, producing dark red blooms.

Judy Miller has been promoting her free-flowering 'Coquette des Blanches,' 1871, for several years. It is listed as a Bourbon. This is a heavy bloomer, particularly in the winter, covering itself in small white flowers. It too is a vigorous grower to six feet, and is extremely disease-resistant.

I look forward to the time when genetic printing becomes sophisticated enough to clear up many of these mis-classifications. I will now add 'Boule de Neige' and 'Coquette des Blanches' to my list of other frustrations such as 'Colonial White' vs. 'Sombreuil' and 'Pink Gruss an Aachen' vs. 'Irene Watts.'"