

SWEET WILLIAM,

OR THE CASTLE OF MOUNT ST. MICHAEL.
By Marguerite Bouvet.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued).

"Oh, I wish they were no dungeon towers at Mount St. Michael! Think of it, good nurse! The poor lady has walked for days across the moors only to be with them, and now they will not let her go into the tower to see them; she says she will die of grief. But Francis must not let this be done; he must not shut them up in that black, black tower, must he?"

Lasette longed to say no, and to ease her child's anxious little heart; but she could not. She could only take her in her arms and stroke her fair hair soothingly.

"These good men must be set free," the little girl went on. "I am sure they have done no wrong; for they are noble and princely-looking, like my dear father himself. He would let them go if he were here. I must seek Francis and tell him so." And she bounded away with a face full of determination.

"Nay, nay, Constance!" cried Lasette in alarm, "you can do nothing. Francis is doubtless doing what is right, and my lord your father's will. These things must happen in war—and indeed I would there were no wars. But we can do naught but wait, and comfort the poor lady, and bid her hope for their release some time."

"But she says they will never be pardoned, Lasette,—that they are doomed to die. It is a fearful thing. It must not happen at Mount St. Michael; and we will not let it, will we, dear nurse?"

"Ah, Constance," thought the good Lasette, "many fearful things have been done at Mount St. Michael of which your tender little heart knows nothing. Would there were more like you! there would be less suffering and sorrow in the world."

"You do not answer me," said Constance, fearing her nurse was falling into one of those long and sad reveries which the little girl could not understand, and which always troubled her. "Tell me what are you thinking of when your dear eyes are looking away off at nothing, like that? Are you thinking of the poor prisoners, and of how we can help them?"

"It is needless to think of that, my sweet Constance. I fear we never can."

"O nurse, we must! I will never love you again if you do not say we can." And she kissed and caressed Lasette in a way that plainly belied her words. "Come, let us go and find Francis, and I will tell him how it is, and that he must let them go before nightfall; for they have a long journey before them."

Lasette allowed herself to be led away. It was impossible to hold out long against Constance. She had such simple, childish trust in the kindness of others that no request seemed to her too daring. She was a wise child for her years, and could often be made to recognize her wilfulness whenever her little wishes were unreasonable—as they not infrequently were. But she took no refusal when she felt inwardly sure that some great good for others would come of what she asked.

A great deal of talking went on with Francis, who at first laughed at my lady, and then tried to reason with her. He told her that these noble gentlemen were dangerous prisoners and powerful enemies of the king; and that the duke her father was doing his liege a great service by keeping them safely out of the way. But Constance could not be convinced that two such noble-looking persons could possibly be dangerous, or could in any way deserve to be locked up in a tower and made miserable. She used all her wiles on the good steward, and finally recalled her father's words to him, asking him if he were not ashamed so ill to keep his promise.

This was bewildering, and Francis hardly knew what to do. My lord would certainly be furious if he found his captives gone when he returned; my lord would be furious if he knew that Constance had been thwarted or grieved in any way; in fact, my lord was such a strange man that he would be furious whatever was done; and Francis felt for this once only, that my Lady Constance was as hard to serve as her father.

"By the great St. Michael!" he exclaimed, "I love the little lady dearly, but I can ill spare my head at five-and-forty."

But her ladyship seemed to have no thought of this. Indeed she went alone to visit the unfortunate prisoners and to comfort them. She assured them, in her bright and hopeful way that Francis would not be obstinate long, and that ere another dawn they would be on their way homeward. She did not know why they smiled so faintly, and why they seemed to take more pleasure in looking at her glowing little face and touching her fair hair than in the glad news she brought.

St. Michael was a well known and dreaded fortress. Every one had heard of its great, deep dungeons, which for centuries had scarcely been idle. Every one knew of the fierce old duke, and his love of wickedness and revenge. But every one did not know of the little girl who had lately grown up at Mount St. Michael, and in whose small person was so much power, but whose power was love.

I cannot say whether Constance would have carried the day with Francis, or indeed what would have happened, if at this supreme moment my lord himself had not appeared, and just at the time to witness the most interesting part of the struggle between them. All the castle-folk were in a state of great excitement, of course. Such a strange thing had never been heard of at Mount St. Michael. Little girls were not wont to interfere with the affairs of the kingdom, nor to release prisoners of war. It was an extraordinary event; and every one felt it to be an anxious time—most of all the good Francis, who afterward declared frankly that for the first time in his life he was truly glad to see Duke William's lordly face turned toward Mount St. Michael.

And Constance was happier than she had ever been at the sight of his lordship. She knew very well that Francis would never dare to dispute with him as he had done with her, and that with such a great and powerful person as her father all things were possible.

She did not wait for the usual evening confidences around the fireside. Before my lord had fairly alighted from his horse, she had related the whole story to him in her eager and impulsive way—pictured the distress of the young mother, praised in glowing terms the brave courage of the unhappy prisoners, and expressed her own grief that they had met with such uncourteous treatment at Mount St. Michael. There was not the shadow of a doubt in her words as she took her father's hand and said,—

"I knew, dear father, that you would not let this thing happen at your castle. Now the gentlemen may go, and the dear lady with them, may they not?"

A terrible look came into my lord's face—a look of mingled rage and fear. Yes, he was afraid of those simple trustful words—afraid lest that dear, childish faith in him should be shaken, or perhaps lost for ever; angry that he had been unconsciously trapped by her in one of his wicked designs and caused for one moment to lose sight of his own selfish ends. Francis understood the look, more especially as it was directed to him, and freighted with terrible meaning; but Constance did not. She fancied my lord was displeased at the wrong that had been done in his absence; and she began to fear she had spoken too severely in poor Francis' behalf, and might be now calling down untold evils on his faithful head.

"My lord," she cried, looking up at him with anxious eyes, "you will pardon the good Francis; he did not understand as we do. Let him go and release the prisoners and make them happy."

"Francis hath ill obeyed his orders and deserves no such honorable task," replied Duke William, directing his answer to the good servant. "What has the Lady Constance to do with affairs like these, or to be troubled with them?"

Francis made no protest.

"My father," returned the child, with a tender little look that was almost a caress, "the Lady Constance has troubled herself with this affair, and Francis is really not to blame. He would have hidden it all from me, but I would not let him. And, indeed, I saw the lady myself, and she told me everything. You must see the sweet lady, dear father; and she will tell you, too, what great good men her husband and her brother are, and how innocent they are of any guilt."

"I have no wish to see the sweet lady or

her noble relatives," rejoined my lord, with a grim effort at a smile. "I know the story of their innocence perhaps better than my little daughter. I only wish that she will not trouble herself with matters so much beyond her years, nor give her father cause to make her unhappy. Take," said he, turning to his servant—"take the child away; she must hear no more."

But Constance was not to be baffled even by this first approach to a refusal.

"But I shall be very unhappy if I do not know more. Tell me, dearest father," she cried, clinging to him appealingly, "must these gentlemen die in the dungeon? Oh, I cannot think of it! It is a fearful thing to die, is it not?"

"We must all come to it, soon or late," returned my lord, dryly; "and these gentle will scarcely be the worse for it a hundred years hence."

"But think of their wives and their dear little children who must live on without them. I should grieve so if any one took your life; I should want to die too." And Constance looked up at him with blue and tearful eyes.

The sight of her grief, of her tenderness for him, stayed my lord's displeasure. He laid his hand on her fair hair and stroked it gently.

"And, sir," she went on, "is it not a wicked, wicked sin to take little children's fathers from them? And would not the good St. Michael, who loves all little children—would he not be angry with us all if such a thing were done at Mount St. Michael?"

Duke William felt a cold stream about his heart. What memory did those clear, childish words recall to him? What was it that held him, that made him tremble—he so strong in wickedness ever before, so immovable in his purpose—when those trustful, innocent eyes looked straight into his? All at once there rose in his mind a strangely-mingled picture of his young wife, with her sweet face and angel smile, and of the youthful brother upon whom he looked in cold blood on that dismal battlefield. A shudder ran through his frame.

"Bring me the wine!" he cried; "my blood is cold.—Ah, Constance, Constance! that look hath made a coward of your father!" And his head dropped in silence on his breast.

He was thinking, not of the wrong he had meditated, nor of the sorrow he would have caused, nor of the wrath he might be calling down from heaven upon his head; indeed he had so long lived in total disregard of any power greater than himself that he never thought of the vengeance of a just Providence. He was thinking selfishly, as he always did, of what he himself was in danger of losing—his trust, his admiration, this perfect childish love, which was more to him than all his hopes of former years.

He felt the little girl's hand nestle softly within his, and the spell was broken. "Go," said he to one of his attendants—"go, release the prisoners, and say it is the Lady Constance gives them their liberty."

Such glad, glad words to the ears of the little Constance! Such startling news to weary, hopeless captives! And, oh, such rejoicing as there was at Mount St. Michael that night; and such praises to the good patron saint, that Duke William had at last found something to warm his hard and bitter old heart? And such secret hopes as rose in the bosoms of the good nurses for that other child—the dear little prisoner whom every one loved, but for whom nobody dared to intercede!

Everybody was so happy, and wore such a bright and smiling face, at the thought of this first good deed of my lord's, that Duke William did not feel quite at home in his own castle. The thought of his good deed did not impress him as favorably as it did the rest. Indeed, after having slept over his amiable resolutions, he considered them only weak and cowardly, and concluded that the genial influence of love and virtue was unfitting him for his knightly duties.

Several hours before dawn my lord left the fortress, following close upon the footsteps of the luckless noblemen, and was neither seen nor heard of for many a long day. He went, he said with a wicked smile, to see them safely on their way; but how they fared in my lord's kindly custody, or whether they ever reached the

end of their journey in safety, neither my Lady Constance nor any one else at Mount St. Michael ever knew.

CHAPTER VI.—YEARNINGS AND DREAMS.

Sweet William had no knowledge of all this. Why should he—a little boy living away in a lonely tower, seeing no one but his good, kind nurse and his merry old keeper, who both kept from him anything that might disturb his sweet contentment? William had never heard of wars nor of captives. He did not even know that he himself was one. He did not know that there were people in the world who were doing cruel and unjust things, and spending the best part of their lives in making other people unhappy. He did not know that such a person, very nearly related to him, was living hard by at the castle, and had for long years been cherishing evil and malicious designs against his own innocent little self. But he did know that in this same great castle there lived another child who like himself had lost her dear young mother—a little girl who had been born on the same day with him, and who Mathilde had said was good and beautiful. He always spoke of her as "my fair cousin Constance;" and without having ever seen her face, her image was enthroned in his young heart, and he loved it in a vague and indefinite way, as one loves a fair ideal or a dear memory.

He often wondered if he would ever really see her, and be permitted to kiss her hand and do brave deeds for her sake as cousins always did in the lovely fairy-stories his nurse told him. And she would always say,—

"Some day, Sweet William, some day you will surely live at the castle with the Lady Constance, and be happy. Oh, may the good God will that it be soon!"

"And may I then see my fair cousin every day?" William would ask; "and will she sing with me as you do, nurse, and let me play with her?"

To which Mathilde would always reply, with a kiss and a hopeful smile, "Doubtless, sweetheart, doubtless."

"And what games would please a little maid like her, do you think? Surely 'twould frighten her to hear Guilbert roar like the lion when we have our tournaments;" for in his tender heart he was ever building very light and airy little castles for that happy time when he would go forth into the big world as other children did, and see the many strange things he had only heard of as yet, and learn much that would make him good and wise and teach him to make others happy.

Thus he and Mathilde would talk and plan for hours together, and devise a score of pleasing and impossible things for those happy days to come. And they took so much pleasure in these innocent hopes that Sweet William never wearied of his solitude. Indeed he loved it, and would have been sorry to leave the dear old quietness of the tower, and the drowsy murmurs of the sea beneath it, and the merry chirp of the birds at his windows, and all the simple tokens of love in which his captivity was so skilfully concealed from him, had he suddenly been taken from them all.

He knew—for his good nurse had told him—that for some reason which he was yet too young to understand, he must live in the tower and never ask to leave it; and he never did, being blessed with a sweet spirit of submission that made his childish trust and all faith the more pathetic. He knew that his nurse loved him; and he listened to her hopeful words, and looked forward to that strangely distant future, of which they so often spoke, much as we look forward to a glorious hereafter while still loath to leave this less lovely world.

(To be Continued.)

STARTS SERIOUS THINKING.

The article, "Hereditary Insanity," published by an eminent specialist, Dr. L. D. Mason, consulting physician to the Fort Hamilton home for inebriates, should start some serious thinking as to whether alcohol is not responsible for a good many of the deformed bodies, shortened limbs, defective eyesights, imperfect nervous constitutions, weak minds and early deaths observed daily in almost every community. The offspring of alcoholized dogs show all these defects, why not the offspring of alcoholized human beings, who are so much more highly organized than dogs?—Voice.