

was with strange emotions that the Pere Rudel stood once more in the home of his childhood. When a careless boy there with no very practical plans for life he had loved with a boy's romantic love, the beautiful Clemence. He was something of a dreamer and poet; she had been the queen of his reveries. He was a child of a vassal and she of noble birth.

This thought saddened him and many were the ditties wherein he bewailed, in true troubadour fashion, this mournful fact; but though he was a boy of twelve when she was a girl of seventeen did not at the time occur to him. After he had gone to the university he heard of her departure from her father's castle and the old man's unforgiving anger against her.

The thought of her grief kept the remembrance of her in his heart, and now though he could laugh at those old dreams of romance—he could love her with a nobler love. He knew the baron's former predilection for himself, and he prayed daily to heaven that he might once more see her restored to her father's hall. At the chateau he was the baron's constant companion. He led the old man little by little, to interest himself once more in the duties of life—in plans for ameliorating the condition of some of the poor vassals—in some improvements in the chateau. Before two years had passed the old man seemed to love him like a son. Yet often a cloud passing over his face, a deep sigh, a sudden indifference to all earthly things betrayed the life-long grief of the baron's heart, and the thought still kept of her whom that heart so truly loved, but would not pardon. It was drawing near to the Christmas season, when one day Pere Rudal said to the Baron: "My Lord, more than a year have I been with you, and although you have heaped many favours upon me, I have never yet solicited one; now I am going to ask one." "My dear friend and companion," replied the baron, "whatever is in my power, you know that you have only to ask." "In the old days," continued the priest, "this chateau of yours saw many a gay feast, especially at the Christmas tide; then there were nobles and ladies here; now it has grown gloomy and silent. What I ask, is that this Christmas you give an entertainment, but one of a novel kind; let the halls be opened and a banquet be spread, and invite all your poor neighbours, your vassals, your retainers, their wives and children; and none be omitted; do this for the love of that little Child