

SWEET WILLIAM,

OR THE CASTLE OF MOUNT ST. MICHAEL.

By Marguerite Bouvet.

CHAPTER IV.—LADY CONSTANCE.

Another babe was growing up all this while at Mount St. Michael—a very different child, indeed, from Sweet William. In the first place, she was a little girl, with fair hair and merry blue eyes, and the happiest of little dimples for ever playing about her rosy bud of a mouth. She was always gay and bright and full of life, and she was so quaint and sharp that sometimes she quite astonished her nurse Lasette with her roguish little ways. Then she lived in the great splendid castle, where everything was beautiful, and where a host of servants seemed to have nothing else to do but to look after her little wants and comforts. Everything that was calculated to make a child happy at Mount St. Michael was hers. The bright flowers in the castle gardens; the lovely deer in her father's parks; the hounds and the horses of which she was so fond; and better than all, the free, pure air of the hills, and the clear blue sky above her, and the warm sunshine,—all were hers to enjoy.

My Lady Constance, as she was always called, lacked nothing to make her the bright and sunny little creature that she was. She ruled, without knowing it, the castle and all its inmates—even the stern old duke, her father, who had for many years refused to see her and to love her.

You have heard enough about Duke William to know that he was a strangely heartless man. When his young wife died and he was told that she had left him only a little daughter, he was furious. He wanted a son, of course—a son to inherit his title and his lands, and to bear his name down through the ages. But the fates were unkind to him—as they had always been, he said—and had given to his brother the son that should have been his, and left him with only a girl for an heir. This was a great disappointment to him; and he showed how bitterly he resented it by never seeing Constance or inquiring after her, so that for many years she hardly knew she had a father.

Duke William spent little of his time at Mount St. Michael. Indeed he was never there unless he had some wicked thing to hide from, or grew uneasy about the little boy in the tower, lest he might in some way have escaped him. And when he had reassured himself, and found everything going on as usual, and saw that he had given himself all this trouble and anxiety in vain, he would find fault with everything he could, and scold the good Francis, and make himself so disagreeable that every one kept out of his way who could; and all were glad enough when he was off again.

But one day in the early summer, when my lord was returning from some glorious warfare in unusually good spirits, he saw something that surprised him.

A little girl was just emerging from one of the narrow wooded paths that led up to Mount St. Michael. She was a pretty child with bright flowing hair; and she leaned caressingly against a beautiful and stately horse. One of her little arms was wound tenderly about his neck, and she looked into his strong, noble face without a trace of fear. She was talking to him in the most earnest and loving little voice.—

"You would not be wild with me, would you, dear Roncesvalles? Jacques says you are too big and too fierce for a little maid like me; but Jacques is such a simple old soul—he does not know the ways of little maids. I care not what he says, I will have no other horse; for there is not in all Normandy another horse as beautiful as you. I loved you the very first time I saw you, and Nurse Lasette herself says that is the best kind of love. I could not help it, Roncesvalles; you were so tall and so white, and you held your lovely neck so well. You must forgive me, but I love you more because you are fierce and wild sometimes. I would not tell you this if you were not always gentle with me. I wonder what makes you so knowing. Dear, good horse, if they take you from me I will never love another horse." And she hid her rosy face in his long white mane.

Duke William thought he had never seen so pretty a picture. "She is beautiful, my daughter, and fair," he said to him-

self with pride; and he rode up where Constance and her friend were standing.

Constance was a strangely fearless child. She had never seen her father, but had heard much of him, and had gathered all sorts of queer ideas about him in her little head. Sometimes she thought he must be a kind of god, because he seemed to rule Mount St. Michael without ever being there, and because such great and powerful persons as Lasette and Francis and even old Jacques seemed to stand in such awe of him, and spoke his name only in whispers.

She had often been curious to see Duke William, for she fancied he must be a different being from any one she had ever known. She wondered if he was a huge creature like the dreadful giants Nurse Lasette had told her of. She thought that his voice would be like rumbling thunder, and might shake even the rocks of Mount St. Michael when he spoke. Still, she had never thought that she might be afraid of him. And when my lord really and truly did look down at her from his high horse, and said in quite a natural voice, "Roncesvalles is yours, my little lady, and neither Jacques nor any one else shall take him from you," she looked up at him with wide blue eyes and said,—

"Your lordship is very good to me. I am the Lady Constance; pray what is your lordship's name?"

"William of Normandy," replied the duke grimly; for it struck him oddly, perhaps unpleasantly for the first time, that his own child should not know him.

Constance was not at all intimidated. She was only a little surprised to find that her father was very human in appearance—in fact, not so very unlike Francis, except that his eyes were blacker, and his beard longer, and his brows more wrinkled, and that he wore a wonderful coat of mail and a bright shining sword at his side. She studied him for a little while, and then the dimples played about her small mouth again, and she said with her most engaging smile,—

"I have wished all my life to see your grace, because I have heard my nurse say that you were a great and powerful man, and that you could be fierce sometimes. And I knew I would love you, because I love fierce people best; that is why I love Roncesvalles."

Duke William was not accustomed to have little maids tell him that he was fierce, much less that they loved him. He was quite startled for a moment, and scarcely knew what to say.

"And what know you of fierce people, and how came you to like them so well?" he said at last.

"Oh, Nurse Lasette has told me all about them; and though they do not always do what is right, I cannot help liking them. They are so strong; and sometimes they can say whether a person shall live or die. That is a great thing for a person to say, is it not?"

Duke William's black eyes glistened, and he looked fiercer than ever, as he said,—

"You have been well taught, I see, my Lady Constance."

But she did not notice the cloud that came over his face just then. She had turned to Roncesvalles again, and was telling him of his good fortune.

"Have you heard, good horse? The duke, my father, has said that you shall be mine. We will join in the great chase now, and you shall be the swiftest horse and I the best horseman among them. Tell me that you are glad, dear Roncesvalles."

The great white steed arched his beautiful neck and looked at her lovingly, and she seemed satisfied.

"Now come closer, and let me mount you, and we will show my father what good friends we are."

But the duke quickly alighted from his own horse, and gallantly helped the little girl herself; and they rode away to the castle together—an odd-looking pair; indeed, to those who might have seen them—her graceful and airy little figure sitting so straight on the noble Roncesvalles speeding away between the thick trees, and her clear voice ringing out in merry laughter through the woods; while Duke William's tall and stately form followed in thoughtful silence, like a dark shadow after a bright ray of sunlight.

From that day Duke William began to be more concerned about his little daughter.

In all his long and selfish life he had never had any intercourse with children. He knew little of their sweet and winning ways and of the power which they often have even on such hard hearts as his own; and for this reason he fell an easy prey to her artless and gentle influence. It pleased him to see that she was gifted with beauty and grace and brave courage. He was proud to find in his child the attributes which he did not possess; for these virtues never fail to exercise an influence over us, when their owner is so sweetly unconscious of them all.

(To be Continued.)

UNCLE JOHN'S TALKS.

HE TELLS OF THE TREES OF SCRIPTURE AND OF ABRAHAM'S OAK, NEAR HEBRON.

When Uncle John, a few days ago, announced that the big cutter would be ready at four o'clock for a six-mile run, there was a shout of delight. At the hour appointed all were ready, wrapped in heavy coats and furs. Tom and Ned and the sisters were soon snugly ensconced, and Uncle, with his great beaver collar standing so high that it met his otter-skin cap, grasped the reins, whistled to the pair of browns, and off the party went over the crackling snow, to the gay jingle of the sleigh-bells.

As they flew along past the frozen brook, and the snow-laden trees that bent under their fleecy weight, they were a very merry party indeed. At a point where the road made a sharp turn, stood a giant oak of great age, its wide-spreading snow-wrapped arms reaching far out over the highway and drooping so low that the twigs almost brushed the faces of the occupants of the sleigh as they swept past.

"That oak," said Uncle, "is an ancient fellow,—old enough possibly to have witnessed the red men skinning about on their snowshoes before the whites came to these parts."

"That would make it twice a centenarian, wouldn't it?" inquired Ted.

"Possibly," was the reply. "But there are trees of far greater age in existence; some in our own land and many, well authenticated, in the Old World. Probably the oldest of all is the famous tree at Hebron, in Palestine, known as 'Abraham's oak.' It is a magnificent terebinth of the prickly, evergreen variety, and though there are some finer oaks in Lebanon there are hardly any larger."

"Was it really planted by Abraham?" asked one of the sleigh-riders.

"It is impossible to tell, though the probability is that ages elapsed between the patriarch's day and the planting of the oak that has been named after him. Yet it is very ancient; it is known to have been venerated at least three hundred years, and the spot upon which it stands is said to be the place where Abraham pitched his tent at Mamre. This great tree is growing very old, and during the last twenty years has lost half its branches. It may

live a few generations more, however, for it is quite vigorous in some parts, though many of the boughs seem to be dead."

"Is it as large as the great California red-wood trees, Uncle?" inquired Tom.

"No, neither in height nor circumference can any of the trees in the Holy Land compare with the giants that grow in our forests beyond the Rockies. Some of the latter are said to be over forty feet in girth around the trunk, while Abraham's oak measures only thirty-two feet in circumference at the largest part. At a height of about twenty feet from the ground it begins to branch out its great limbs, each of them equal to a fair-sized tree."

"Hebron was Abraham's city," observed one of the party.

"Yes, and it is still known as such," rejoined Uncle John. "It is approached through a rocky and somewhat desolate-looking district, but as one gets near Hebron, the barren rocks and dry brushwood, with only here and there a patch of grass, give way to orchards and vineyards. About a mile distant from the patriarch's city, on a slope among the vineyards, is a Russian hospice, where pilgrims of the Greek church may be found in great numbers at certain seasons of the year. They go to visit a place known as Jutta, where, according to tradition, John the Baptist was born. The hospice is a flat-roofed building of stone, of a somewhat rambling style of architecture, but a great boon to the pilgrims. 'Abraham's oak,' which I have just described to you, stands a little way off from the hospice. Traditions are everywhere in Palestine, and Hebron has its share. One tradition declares that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are buried there, but the Bible declares that they were buried at Machpelah. The Arabs have named the city 'El Khalil' (the Friend) after Abraham, who was the 'Friend of God.'

Repassing the old oak, whose great arms now stood sharply defined against the sunless sky, the children looked at it with a new reverence, feeling that it, too, might have a history running back to long departed generations if it could but give it voice.—*Christian Herald.*

THE RUSSIAN SOLDIER.

During the continued shocks of an earthquake which destroyed a little Russian village not long since, there stood a private soldier who had been stationed at that point, and directed not to move until ordered to do so.

Buildings all about him were trembling and falling, but he stood motionless, his hands upraised as if in prayer.

Not a moment too soon, to save the soldier's life, a superior officer dashing by, saw him, took in the situation, and shouted his order to "Move on." The soldier gladly obeyed. The Emperor of Russia has rewarded the man for obedience. The thought which comes to me, is, How many soldiers of the great king are thus faithful?—*The Pansy.*



ABRAHAM'S OAK AT HEBRON.