

# THE TWO WIVES OF THE KING.

## CHAPTER I.

On the first day of March of the year 1202, towards seven o'clock in the evening, two travellers, who seemed harassed and fatigued, descended the abrupt hill, at the foot of which lay grouped the confused set of buildings, which formed the Lazaretto of St. Lazarus. From the Lazaretto to the wall of the city was reckoned a half league, if not more, and our two travellers, whose clothing was all covered with dust, had been on foot since sunrise.

One of them, the youngest, was much to be pitied, being a graceful and delicate child, who appeared to be scarcely fifteen years of age. He wore the costume of a cavalier, but his soft voice and graceful figure seemed to denote that he was but a page. The darkness of the night rendered it impossible to distinguish his features, which were further concealed by the beautiful tresses of his fair hair.

The other traveller, on the contrary, was tall and robust. His limbs admirably knit, though not deficient in grace, were more remarkable for their vigour. In spite of the obscurity, one could see that he bore upon his shoulder a wallet at the end of a staff. There were no arms in his girdle; a sort of white leather apron descended to his knee, and upon that appeared a triangle of bright copper, which, in short, was a mason's trowel.

Some lights were visible at the narrow windows of the Lazaretto, and the youngest of our travellers, believing himself at the end of his journey, gave a long sigh of relief.

"Eric, my poor Eric," said he, "I do not believe that I could have taken another step!" seating himself at the same time on one of the steps of the door, which led to the Lazaretto. Eric also stopped, but shook his head with an air of tender commiseration.

"Thou art then very tired, Eve," said he.

Our beautiful child with the fair hair was called Eve. You would not have had to wait the reply of Eve, to recognize that it was a young girl who spoke—her soft voice would have convinced you of that, and Eve replied—

"I dared not tell thee how much I suffered, my good brother, for thou wouldst have desired to have carried me again, and thou hast already too great a burden, in thy heavy stone hammer;

but the flints in the road have torn my feet, and I repeat that I could not have gone another step."

"Then," replied Eric, approaching suddenly to take the young girl in his arms, "I must carry thee, my dear Eve, for we are not at the end of our journey."

The fair head of Eve fell upon her breast, "Oh, my God, my God!" murmured she, "shall we then never arrive there?" and when Eric wished to take her, she escaped from his hands.

"No, no!" said she, while making an effort to run, "we have been walking since the break of day, and thou must also be very tired, my brother."

Eric wished to protest; but in running after his companion, he tottered himself over the rough parts of the road. Eric was young and strong, and his day's task must, indeed, have been long, thus to have exhausted his vigour; and besides, as Eve had truly said, more than once on the road, Eric had carried her like a child, whenever she wept—discouraged by the sight of her poor little bleeding feet.

They had come from a great distance, Eric and his sister Eve—a very, very great distance!

The path which led from the Lazaretto of St. Lazarus to the gate of St. Denis, wound about through the tall forest before reaching the marshes, at this period already cleared as far as the Rue de Paradis. At one turn of the road Eric perceived, all at once, a great number of lights spread over the plain, and gave vent to a loud cry of joy.

"A last effort, my sister," said he; "for see here is Paris—Paris, the object of all our journeyings."

Eve looked at those luminous dots, twinkling in the night, and with her hands crossed upon her breast and her voice trembling with tears, repeated—

"Paris! Paris! where our Queen should be, our well beloved angel! Paris, where she is unhappy. Paris, where she is a prisoner!"

"God will help us!" said Eric, rising to the full height of his tall figure. "Had not God been with us, we should have perished ten times over from the perils of the land and of the sea." Eve, with her eyes fixed in the direction of Paris, knelt down upon the grass, moistened by the dews of the evening, and offered a fervent prayer to heaven. When she rose, she found she had