

SWEET WILLIAM,

OR THE CASTLE OF MOUNT ST. MICHAEL.

By Marguerite Bonvet.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

Their thoughts were travelling in different directions; and while the count stood musing, Constance pursued her own without interruption.

"If you think there is no wrong," she said, "I will tell you all about my cousin Sweet William." And she laid her hand on his arm with a confiding little gesture, and an air of secrecy that was quite captivating. "I love to speak of him though I seldom do to any one but nurse. He is the dearest cousin in all the world, and so beautiful! I think you have never seen any one quite so beautiful as Sweet William. His name is Sweet William, but I call him Prince William sometimes. In truth, he is more like a prince than any of these noble lords." And she emphasized her ruthless assertion by a wave of her little arm that took in the entire assembly. "Do you know, I often wonder how Sweet William will look when he too is a great lord."

"That is a serious question," said the count, laughingly.

"He will not look like you," she added eyeing him critically; "for his curls are very brown, and his eyes are big and dark. Sometimes you would almost think they had tears in them, they shine so. But his sweet mouth tells you they have not. Sweet William is always smiling. I have never seen him weep, and I think he never does. He is so very good I am sure he has no reason to shed tears over his sins, as I have."

Count Philippe smiled involuntarily; but he was fain to check himself with speed for my little lady was quite serious.

"And you say this lovely Sweet William is shut up in a great tower?" he asked.

"Yes; but he is quite happy, for he has his good nurse always with him. He is only quiet and thoughtful, and his cheeks are not so rosy as mine. I think it is because he wonders a great deal. We are very different—Sweet William and I. Nurse calls us the Shadow and the Sunshine."

The young count thought what a pleasant picture to see the two beautiful children together—the sprightly, elf-like little maid and the gentle, winsome boy. There was something singularly attractive about Constance, and his interest grew deeper every moment. Without wishing to seem curious he felt a desire to know more of this little twin-cousin in the tower, and to look into the strange mystery; for a mystery he was sure there was.

"And what has Sweet William done that he should be put in a tower?" he inquired.

"I do not know—no one knows," replied Constance, artlessly; and she was a little puzzled because the Count Philippe looked incredulous. She was quite sure, however that Sweet William had never done any wrong, and she told the young count so. She believed in her little cousin so thoroughly, she trusted him so implicitly, that she felt some anxiety lest any one might form wrong impressions of him. They were all waiting, she said,—waiting and hoping; and some day something would happen—she did not know exactly what—that would give Sweet William leave to go from the Great Tower; and then they would all live happily at the castle. Constance thought this "something" must happen very soon now, for she had been waiting nearly a year.

"And Sweet William," she added, "has been waiting ever since he was a baby. That is nearly nine years ago. Sweet William and I were babes together then."

And, pray, what was the good Lasette doing while all this was going on? She must surely have fallen asleep, or been too rapt in the marvels that greeted her honest eyes; for never before had she watched so ill over her fair young charge. True, something unusual had just occurred. The young King of France had engaged in a playful hand-to-hand encounter, and come off victorious. Every one had been intensely interested but my lady and her friend the count. But now the mad applause that rang through the crowd, and the great commotion that was made, put an end to any further conversation between them that day.

After that my lady and the count grew very intimate. They saw each other every day at the games, and Constance went with him to see his beautiful charger—he having heard of her fondness for horses, and all about the favorite Roncesvalles, and indeed about everything at Mount St. Michael that she thought might interest him. Count Philippe spent little of his time in the gay society of the lords and ladies of the court; he seemed quite content to be with little Constance. Every day he grew more and more attracted to her; and every night, as he stood alone in his chamber, he grew more and more puzzled by his own reflections.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE COUNT AND THE SAILOR.

At last the great tournament came to an end, and many of the noble guests were leaving reluctantly the scene of all these splendid festivities; but Count Philippe seemed more reluctant than the rest, and he lingered on as long as Duke William of Normandy and his little daughter were to be seen about the pleasant valley. One day, when he had not seen them at all, he went to his tent in the evening feeling very lonely and dispirited. He sat thinking a long time—thinking of the days when he too was a little child like my lady's cousin Sweet William, and when he loved a little girl almost as fair as my lady herself. And he grew so sad thinking about these things that he was fain to draw from his breast a little locket, the sight of which seemed to comfort him very much. It was a locket brought to him years ago by a poor sailor, the only living soul saved from a terrible wreck. There was a pretty face in the locket, and the count looked at it long and earnestly.

"You are wonderfully like her—wonderfully like her!" he repeated, half aloud.

Then he kissed the sweet face tenderly, and was about to restore the locket to its place, when it slipped from between his fingers and fell to the floor. As it did so, a hidden spring flew open, and something fell out from the back of the little locket—a slip of paper, worn and creased, with only a few dim words written upon it. Count Philippe had never seen it before. He took it up, and read it a great many times over, I think; for the few hurried words could not have held him there so long in silence. Then, little by little, the mystery became clearer, and suddenly a fearful truth flashed upon him like daylight. He sprang to his feet. What could he do? Nothing then, for the night was already far spent. He would have need to wait till the morning. Then he would see the little girl once more; he would speak with her nurse, and learn more of this little child in the Great Tower.

But at that very hour my Lady Constance and her nurse and all of Duke William's company were once more on the gallant ship; and while Count Philippe was spending his night hours walking restlessly about his chamber, and his feverish brain was at work over his strange discovery, her little ladyship was sleeping tranquilly, as every wave bore her nearer and nearer to the old fortress-home in Normandy.

Some nine or ten years before, when Count Philippe was but a very young knight indeed, he had met with a great sorrow. He had loved a lady very much, and another knight, scarcely older than himself, had come and taken her away. That lady was his sister. He thought at first he could never bear to part with her. They had played together as children, and grown together out of childhood, and never been separated an hour until that luckless day when this gallant courtier had come and married her. It was true the young husband was good and brave and handsome, and the lady loved him very much, and was willing to go anywhere in the world with him; but this last thought was scarcely a comforting one to the young Philippe. I cannot tell you how much he missed his sweet sister. Only brothers who have loved and lost their dear sisters can know what a sad thing it is. After she had gone, he spent much of his time in writing long letters to her, which she rarely received, and which she as rarely replied to; for in those early days young ladies, though lovely and accomplished in many ways, were not as well versed in the art of letter-writing as they are now; and besides, traveling then was so uncertain that sometimes

it was years before families that were separated had any news of one another.

So time went on without Count Philippe's ever hearing a word of his dear companion; and he was just beginning to be reconciled to her absence, when a terrible thing happened.

A Norman vessel bound for France was wrecked in a fearful tempest, and every soul on board perished but one poor sailor. That sailor would rather have died a thousand times than have been the one left to tell the dismal story; yet he alone was spared. A fair lady had been intrusted to his care by some good and faithful Normans; and when the storm was raging highest, and the ship was sinking fast, and the voices of a hundred human souls rose up in agony, he had heard no voice but hers, and had tried to save her alone. For some hours he swam bravely, bearing her in his arms, and clinging to the end of a broken oar that supported them; but at length the poor lady grew so weak and exhausted and chilled with the cold that she was very faint, and knew that she could not live much longer.

"My good friend," she whispered faintly, giving him something she held fast in her hand, "I have not strength to live. If you reach the land, in Heaven's name find my brother Philippe of Chalons, and give him this; it will tell him all. The good God keep you!" And she sank to the bottom.

The sailor was rescued by some good fishermen, and in the early morning he reached the land in safety; and never a day or a night did he rest till he had found the Count Philippe, and given him the little locket, and told him the fate of his beloved sister. And from that day the faithful Norman had wandered about homeless and friendless, never again serving on the treacherous sea nor daring to show his face in Normandy.

Many and many a time had Count Philippe looked at the dear face in the locket, and kissed it lovingly; but never before had he known that through all these years his sister's dying message to him lay hidden away there unheeded. And now, when his sorrow was almost sleeping, a light broke in upon him in the person of a sunny-haired little girl, whose love for her dear cousin had reminded him of his happy childhood. By some singular fancy he thought he saw a resemblance between her and the little sister he had loved long ago. He had seen it that first day at the games—in her little dimpled smiles, in the blue depth of her eyes, in her waving golden hair; and the thought had grown so strong that it haunted him day and night. Every day had brought something that seemed to confirm his conjectures about her, and every night he had resolved to lose no more time in waiting, but speak out all that was in his mind. And yet in some unaccountable way the days had come and gone, and the bright little apparition with them; and now the truth was revealed to him when it was too late. He had made a discovery which had sent the hot blood rushing to his brain with anger and indignation one moment, and tortured him with fearful doubts the next. The mystery he had thought solved at first now grew more and more intricate. The words on the little slip of paper in the locket said, "My little child is a prisoner in the Great Tower. O Philippe save!" And the rest was so dim and blurred that he could read no more. The little boy in the tower must be his sister's child; and yet Constance was so like the lady in the locket he would have sworn they belonged to each other. There was a dreadful mystery; he knew it, and he was the one appointed to clear it, not only from choice, but from duty.

Like an energetic young nobleman as he was, Count Philippe lost no more time in meditation. He set out to find the good mariner who had brought him the locket, and on whom he had never laid eyes again. It seemed a weary task, and almost a hopeless one at times; and it took so many days and weeks that the young count grew discouraged more than once. But there is a gracious Providence that brings about even things which seem impossible in a most astonishing way. Quite unexpectedly, and after what appeared to Count Philippe a weary time to wait, the good sailor was found and made to relate all that he knew of the story of Mount St. Michael. It was a long narrative, often broken by

sighs from the honest lips that told it; for the Norman sailor remembered it all as if it had been yesterday. It was not until then that the young count learned all that had really happened to his dear sister—all the grief she had had, and what she had suffered at the hands of the cruel Duke William. It was then he learned the fate of the little child who had been wronged to satisfy the cravings of a wicked revenge. Oh, if he had known it all, what a deal of suffering might have been spared to many innocent hearts! Would not the years and best efforts of his early manhood have been spent in righting this great wrong!

But the good sailor had never dreamed that the little locket would remain unopened for nine long years. Indeed he had thought more than once that, save for the loss of their beloved lady, peace and contentment must long ere this have been restored at Mount St. Michael. He had often wondered what had been the fate of the implacable old duke when found out by the young count in all his wickedness. He had hoped, too, that sometime the good Normans would forgive their poor countryman for having so ill-piloted his fair charge, and bid him return home and be happy. And he had waited wearily, and, like many others, he had waited in vain. Never a word had come to him concerning what had happened at Mount St. Michael. Never had he seen the young count since that first day until now; and the strange discovery fell upon him with the same sad force. Both felt it was the workings of a mysterious Providence which neither of them could understand. It was with this as with so much that happens in this world: a very little knowledge would have prevented it all; but on that little hung the scourge of a great evil. But even the evil in this world tends to some good end; and this one was designed to teach a great lesson. Although the burden of it fell upon an innocent and helpless child, he was to be the unconscious instrument of a just and merited retribution.

The young count and the sailor talked and worked together for many days, and at last it was arranged that they should set out for Mount St. Michael, and that Count Philippe should there demand his sister's child of the Duke of Normandy. It was done so quietly that no one knew of their intention; and even while the two were journeying towards the old Norman castle, Sweet William and my Lady Constance were again in the Great Tower together, enjoying the peaceful evening hours as of old, while William heard of, and my lady re-lived many times over, the delightful days at the great tournament.

And my lord, little dreaming of the startling announcement about to be made to him, was also enjoying a few peaceful and quiet days, basking in the splendor of his own greatness. It would have been hard enough for him to be found out in all his sinfulness, to be thwarted in his revengeful purpose, to be baffled in his ambition. But something far worse than all this was in store for him. A chord in his cold nature never touched before was soon to be rudely awakened. He had never loved much, yet through his love he was to suffer more than from any of the defeats and disappointments of former years. The cloud that hung over Mount St. Michael for so many years was to be dispelled, and many hearts to be lightened of their anxious burden. No one suspected it—not my lord, surely, who felt quite safe in his strong castle; nor the dear little captive, though the day of his happiness was dawning; nor yet the good nurses, who knew the whole mystery of the Great Tower.

The story of Mount St. Michael was no longer a secret nor a mystery to one person at least; for while they journeyed together towards Normandy, the sailor had said to the count,—

"Your sister's child, my lord, was a little maid."

(To be Continued.)

A TEN MINUTES A DAY CLUB.

Several boys belonging to the "Ten Minutes a Day" Society, have occupied the "minutes" for a number of weeks, in going from house to house in the town where they live, and gathering such religious papers as their owners were willing to give away. At the end of a month they sent them to a missionary who had called for reading matter.—*The Pansy.*