



SWEET WILLIAM,
OR THE CASTLE OF MOUNT ST. MICHAEL.
By Marguerite Bouwet.
CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

"I am sure I should like him too. He was so good to let me in the tower this morning. Lasette came to the door to me and whispered something in his ear; and then he laughed and tossed me in his arms and cried, 'Ho, ho, little fairy! You are fond of him, are you not, cousin?'"

"Mathilde and Guilbert are the only persons I have ever known, and the only ones I love excepting you, dear Constance," added the artless William.

Constance was so delighted with his ingenuous declaration that she immediately embraced Sweet William again. And as if bent on making friends all round, she straightway ran and did likewise with Mathilde and Guilbert, who sat a little apart, watching their innocent pleasure.

Then the two children sat long together at the little table—Sweet William joyfully laying before his little cousin the best portions of his simple meal, and giving her the choicest flowers, which Mathilde had gathered fresh that morning; while Constance in turn delighted him with her merry prattle.

"No, no!" remonstrated my lady, as William placed his largest nosegay before her; "I will have no other than those sweet purple posies over there. They are your flowers, and I shall always wear them in my hair, as ladies do the chosen flowers of their knights." And she took a handful of purple and white sweet-williams that stood in an earthen vase upon the window-ledge.

"Nurse brings these to me every day, and I like them best of all myself. She says they are like me; do you think so, cousin?"

Constance looked at the tender blossoms and then at the pure, sweet face before her with its smile of innocence and its dark, lustrous eyes and earnest, trustful look; and she said quite gently,—

"I do not know, Sweet William; but I have never seen in all the fields of Normandy a flower so lovely as you. And there are many of them in the early summer, I do assure you—marigolds and daffodils and daisies and blue violets everywhere. Roncesvalles and I love to go and gather them. And I make wreaths of rosemary for his dear neck, and he likes it; for I tell him rosemary means true, and that I shall always be true to him. Oh, I wish that I might bring my Roncesvalles to see you! If you did not live in such a high tower, and he were not so very big, I would; for he is a beautiful and a brave horse."

"I thought so, as I saw him yesterday," returned Sweet William; "but you can ride under my window again, as you did then, and teach him to look up at me."

"Oh, I will, I will, and tell him all about my new cousin! Lasette need not fear but he can keep a secret, even better than I; and he will be so glad, for he understands all I tell him, and nearly talks to me with his great eyes. But you may see Ixo—that is my hawk. A fierce black

bird he is, with little silver bells at his talons, that tinkle and tell me where he is though he be ever so high. O Sweet William, if you could but leave this tower and come with me to my father's castle, I would show you a thousand pleasant things and we could have such sports together as you have never dreamed of."

Sweet William looked at her wistfully, and his deep eyes asked a question which his lips could not frame; and something in the tender face made Constance add hastily,—

"But I am again unmindful of Lasette's counsel. We must be patient and wait," she said; "and some day if we keep our secret well, you will surely come and live at the castle and be the Lord of Mount St. Michael and all Normandy. Think of it, cousin!"

Sweet William could scarcely think of it. His eyes grew wide with surprise as he asked,—

"How long must we wait, dear Constance?"

"I do not know, nor does Lasette; but surely not very many years, Sweet William, for you are almost tall enough now to be a king." And she looked admiringly at the slender, graceful young figure before her.

And so they went on, talking all the morning, and growing better friends every minute; telling each other the simple experiences of their little lives, which for being so different found greatest favor in their eyes. They made a grand survey of the tower chamber; and Constance was shown Sweet William's cradle, and the little shoes in which he had learned to walk, and the curious toys that Guilbert had fashioned for his amusement—in fact all the quaint little relics of his babyhood which Mathilde prized above all her earthly possessions, and which told of the simple comforts and great love that had been his. Sweet William took her to see his little birds, and told her the names of every one of them, as they hopped shyly in and out of their nests among the green vines; and he showed her how tame and friendly they were, and how they even ate little crumbs from his hand. And altogether Constance began to think the Great Tower the most delightful place she had ever seen, and declared she would spend all her days there till Sweet William was ready to leave it; and that then every dungeon at Mount St. Michael should be made just like it, that all little boys who were brought up in them might fare as peacefully and contentedly as did Sweet William. She tripped about the old gray chamber as familiarly as if she had lived in it, always, yet finding something new and pleasant at every turn, admiring all she saw, and chattering like a linnet, while the young William followed her and listened with his sweet, serious smile.

At length Lasette came to take my lady away, and finding her in such good and amiable spirits, was well pleased with her daring venture, and promised to let her come again every day. As Lasette led the little girl away, she stopped to whisper in Mathilde's ear,—

"Have no fear, good sister! It was

best to let my lady have her way in this. Her dread of bringing trouble on the dear little one will make her mindful of my words. She is full of reason, and, trust me, no harm will come of it."

Mathilde made no reply, but she looked up hopefully; for Guilbert had told her of Lasette's plan while the two children were engaged in their artless talk, and many of her old fears had vanished and new hopes risen in their stead.

Yet she watched her little boy anxiously more than once that day, for he was thoughtful and silent beyond his wont; and though no shadow rested on his peaceful face, the absent look in his dark eyes showed that his thoughts were far away.

"And of what does my sweetheart think?" she asked, as she watched the long curling lashes droop pensively over his fair cheek.

"I was thinking," said Sweet William, "of what my fair cousin said of the poor captives in that other prison; and I was wondering why it was cold and dreadful there, and why they were unhappy. Is it a sad thing to be a captive, nurse?"

"Ay, ay, sweet love; it is a dreary fate enough."

"And why are people shut up in gloomy towers like that, and made unhappy?"

"Ah, Sweet William," answered nurse, "that is what I cannot tell. I am too unwise to understand these things; but the good God knows best, and some time he will set it all right."

"And am I a captive, too, because I live in a dungeon?" asked William, with pathetic doubtfulness.

Mathilde clasped him in her arms. She could find no answer for these words.

"Why do you weep, good *maman*?" he said, caressing her tenderly. "Sure, this is no gloomy dungeon like the one my cousin spoke of, and I am very happy here."

"Oh, my little William, are you sure, very sure, that you are happy here?"

"So long as I have you with me, dear nurse."

"And is there nothing you long for and have not?"

"Nothing, now that I have seen my fair cousin. Truly, I should like to see the splendid castle she speaks of; but heard you not, dear Mathilde, what she said—that we must wait patiently, and some day I should be ruler of Mount St. Michael and Normandy?"

"That is my hope," returned Mathilde, half to herself; but she sighed as she thought of all that might happen before that great hope was fulfilled.

As for Sweet William, he had no knowledge of the strife and the bitterness born of such ambitious hopes; he knew only of peace and quietude, and love and gentleness, and his dreams of a blissful future were unclouded by any doubt.

"When I am a man, Mathilde, I will do good things," he said. "I should like to be a mighty lord, and make my people happy, and teach them to love me and to be good and wise. I would go through every castle in Normandy, and wherever I found an unhappy captive I would set him free. It is well to be powerful, is it not?"

"It is well to be powerful," answered nurse, "if that power is directed to mercy. But, dearest heart, it is better to be born good and lovable than to be born a king. And I would rather my little one possessed a kindly heart than all the wealth and power of this great realm; for love is stronger and makes mightier conquests than all the deadly weapons of men."

And Sweet William pondered over these wise words in his heart, and remembered them long after many strange things for him had come to pass.

CHAPTER VIII.—CAPTIVITY BRIGHTENED.

True to her promise, my Lady Constance appeared beneath Sweet William's Bower on the following morning. She rode the stately Roncesvalles, and waved her little hand toward the window where Sweet William stood smiling down upon them both. She halted, and bending forward until her rosy lips almost touched the listening ears of Roncesvalles, said in a coaxing little voice,—

"Come, good horse, look up at your cousin William. See! is he not a dear, dear cousin? No, no! this way, Roncesvalles; look where I look, and smile at him—do!"

But whether the face at the window was too high up for the proud Roncesvalles to look to, or whether he secretly felt that Cousin William bade fair to be a rival in his young mistress's affection, never a sign of recognition made he, save to beat the earth impatiently with his hoofs.

"Look up just once for me," pleaded Constance, "and then you will want to look twice for yourself."

But Roncesvalles remained obstinate.

Sweet William dropped a handful of his own little blossoms from his window, and they fell partly on my lady's broad-brimmed hat and partly on the good horse's mane. Constance gathered them carefully and put them to Roncesvalles's nose with childish audacity, using all her pretty witcheries to win him; but he only shook his head uneasily, and breathed such a whiff out of his nostrils that all the little petals were scattered to the winds.

"Oh, you are very, very naughty, and I do not love you," said she, with a contradictory smile.—"Dear cousin," she added, looking up at the little boy apologetically, "you must excuse his bad behavior to-day. Roncesvalles is very rude sometimes, even with his own relations. I must set about teaching him better courtesy; but he has so many loving qualities, for all his ill-temper, that I cannot be very severe with him.—Come!" cried she, drawing in her reins; "one more gallop to show my cousin what a brave, swift horse you are."

Roncesvalles awaited no second summons, but started off at full speed; and a moment later he and my lady had disappeared in the descent of the winding road.

After that they rarely missed their morning turn around the foot of the Great Tower; and although Roncesvalles never grew very intimate with cousin William nor yet learned to smile at him as he was bidden, he appeared to become reconciled to my lady's fondness for her little twin-cousin, and in time actually seemed to take pride in doing his best before Sweet William—galloping and cantering in his most graceful manner, and in fact displaying all the arts of an obedient and accomplished horse. And Sweet William from his high tower watched and admired it all, and "wondered" much in his quiet way at all the strange new things he saw.

It is astonishing how short a time it takes for young loves to grow. They are like the fair flowers of spring, which to-day are but tender buds, and to-morrow rich blossoms full of sweetness and promise. Sweet William and his little cousin, seeing more of each other as time went on, grew nearer and dearer each day. Nothing of interest ever took place at the castle but my lady brought glowing accounts of it to the little boy in his retirement. Before many weeks he had heard the histories of all the good peasants of the village. He knew by name all the good castle-folk at Mount St. Michael, and could have found, if he had leave, the spots where the brightest flowers grew, or the trees where the rarest birds built their nests, or the places on the shore where the loveliest sea-shells lay,—so vividly had Constance pictured to him all the things and places that she loved most. Indeed, he had in that short time learned more of his own surroundings from her than he had in all the years of his young life from the wise Mathilde. And it was well for my lady that she was the one chosen by fate to enjoy the free and beautiful world without. Such an eager, restless little bird as she could never have listened to all the delights of a world from which she was shut out with that sweet, submissive spirit which rendered the gentle William so lovable. Not that he was entirely free from a secret wish to share them sometimes, but that his unquestioning faith in those he loved told him it was best to be as he was, and kept him from vain longings.

(To be Continued.)

WHO THE PRISONERS ARE.

A governor of Canterbury gaol once remarked: "I have had 22,000 prisoners through my hands since I have been the governor of this gaol; but, though I have inquired, I have not discovered one teetotaler among them."—From "The Youth's Temperance Banner."