Two French Kings of Long Ago.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN a genealogical tree is so much a thing of the past that crumbled centuries lie at its feet, and still it goes on outlining itself against the day and the night, that great army of new humanity that lies within its mighty shadow, and whose small green heads have just emerged from the warm envelope which with such mysterious care has so long sheltered them, look up,—some with dislike, and some with a thrill of admiration, at the vast network of branch and shoot which fair dame and noble knight, priest and king, martyr or queen, have unconsciously sketched with their lives.

To those who are fond of carefully examining these trees, many sad blemishes appear;—long stretches of smooth shaft, where no cunning knot-holes are found; again, such a mighty rush of branches that the whole tree bends one way; again, some whose course is abruptly finished, or may have slowly pined away, until the delicate tracery of the feeble boughs no longer excite thoughts of hate or love.

Those who have lived in Normandy have many such examples before their eyes; the very strength of the air, and the force of the hills, which suddenly leap from the ground, and clothe themselves with verdure, should rightfully have nurtured a race powerful in mind and limb, and Love then as now played his part merry or sad. How many a broad branch incapable of control, has caught up to its heart some simple flower, whose exquisite face, bathed in the dew of youth and innocence, has looked half afraid of its bold lover. And so it chanced, many a long year ago, that Count Robert of Bearvais-Noir, looking from the window of his old chateau, fell in love with a flower that bloomed in a small house just outside the great wall. He must have needed a nearer view than any the window could have given him of this flower, but the road from the chateau wound around beside the small house, and in the open casement one saw such a lovely vision that who could wonder if Count Robert, forgetful of all the fair dames in the neighborhood, always rode beneath that casement. Perhaps at first it was a little the fault of his pet horse, Tonnerre, who found there a certain aromatic grass which grew nowhere else so abundantly; and when once the horse had tasted the grass, and when once Count Robert had raised his eyes, sure it is that both grew to look forward to that morning ride. At first there had been a raised cap, with a quick glance, and a blush from behind the big pot of resada; then sometimes a hand tossed down a flower, which was quickly pressed to Count Robert's lips, although the giver was far too shy to watch the flower's fate. And thus grew up the old, old story, which has always been a-telling ever since Adam began its recital in the garden of Eden, or Rebecca coquettishly adjusted her veil before meeting Isaac as he walked in the fields in the gloaming. But Count Robert found himself far away from those charming Biblical times, when, if one studiously avoided the Canaanitish women, one could always choose a fair wife when the wearied cattle came slowly up to the precious well, and the damsels went trooping down to give them drink. But to roll the stone from the well's mouth in Count Robert's time was such a different thing,—in fact roll it would not,—and yet each time he sat under fair Marguerite's casement he felt a more decided inclination to do so. "What was birth compared with beauty," he would ask a dozen times a day; and when finally the lovely flower ceased to hide herself behind the pot of resada, but, leaning over the broad window-seat, showed herself a most coquettish flower indeed, Count Robert longed to pull her down upon his saddle, and flying up to the grim chateau, where dwelt in solemn state his old mother and two maiden aunts, to throw the exquisite blossom into their arms, crying, "Look what Love can make!"