But the deed never followed the wish, and the stately old ladies smoothed their worn brocade dresses with their soft hands, quite unconscious of Count Robert's wild desire. They had kindly hearts, these gentlewomen of long ago, when the sun was brighter, when more roses bloomed on one stalk, and a sweet peacefulness breathed in the summer air. Their once powerful branch of the family tree had dwindled and pined until sturdy Count Robert, with his curling yellow hair, his light but proud blue eye, and splendid form, was its sole representative. Added to this was a retired life in the old chateau, shut well within its walls, and the solemn light that the double line of elms before and behind threw upon the faded tapestries, and still more faded satin of the white and gold furniture.

It was the shadows in life and the shadows of the trees that had dulled and saddened these poor ladies, forever clasping and smoothing their pretty old hands, and growing each year sadder and more quiet. There was a grand inclosure of gardens, lawns, and clumps of immense trees stretching back from the chateau, and a noble avenue of the "tilleul," through whose long, leafy vista one saw Mont St. Michael, her miracle of towers and turrets and lace staircase standing out clear against the sea, blue as now. And everywhere one found stone benches greened with moss, and half hidden by tangled grasses,—just such as Borgearau in our days has given to "The Sleeping Jesus and his Mother." But the long walks had sad need of gravel, the rose bushes were untrained, the stones tumbled down from the old walls, and small trees sprouted and grew beside them, rugged robin craned aloft his red cap on the broken eaves, and the useful plants of the kitchen garden, wholly forgetting in the lapse of years their ignoble birth, walked quietly into the ladies' rose garden, and each summer brought up their respective families with great dignity. Often on sunny days the three ladies, Madame de Bearvais-Noir and her sisters-in-law, Mademoiselle Reine and Mademoiselle Cecile, walked slowly along the grassy paths, their shadows, one very long and two equally short, following them at a respectful distance upon the high old walls. They kept up a gentle kind of chatter among themselves as they passed through the gardens, once so brilliant with flowers, so carefully tended, and their soft hands often detached some vine or too bold shoot which half barred their passage. Perhaps one of the sisters-in-law would gather a bouquet, a perfect gem when completed, Madame de Bearvais-Noir always regarding it with kindly, appropriating eye, and finding much to say in regard to the arrangement of the colors, and invariably manifesting much surprise upon refining it in a delicate vase beside her plate at dinner.

The good curé used often to join them in the garden on a fine morning, and being asked in a perplexed tone would he seat himself, the three ladies always standing all the while, and their favorite stone bench behind them stolidly admitting its inability to hold four; the curé, the gentlest of men, after regarding the sundial, and finding that too high, would cheerfully spread his big red handkerchief on the grass, saying with much grace, "At your feet, mesdames, as is my place." Then having offered them his delicate tortoise shell snuff-box, and they having at once pulled out their own of thin gold, the conversation commenced. The curé was always most deferential in manner, and though remarkably clever and well read, seldom advanced any opinion too strongly. He was, in fact, like most priests, a man of tact, and allowed the ladies to keep up their harmless chatter, which only ceased when Adèle, clattering around the bare floors in her wooden sabots, had tucked them all into bed. This was the usual life in the chateau, broken by much church-going in good weather, and occasional visits of ceremony, when the creaking old family coach, loudly protesting against hired horses and coachman, rumbled over the rough roads sadly jolting the three ladies, all in best attire. Count Robert seldom accompa-