

"Very nice, Catherine, thank you," said George.

"And I hope you will sleep comfortably," said she, returning to me.

This wise woman, full of excellent good sense, then said to me, while I was undressing: "Christian! what were you thinking of, to contradict your cousin? Such a rich man, and who can do us so much good by and by! What does the Plébiscite signify? What can that bring us in? Whatever your cousin says to you, say 'Amen' after it. Remember that his wife has relations, and she will want to get everything on her side. Mind you don't quarrel with George. A fine meadow below the mill, and an orchard on the hill-side, are not found every day in the way of a cow."

I saw at once that she was right, and I inwardly resolved never to contradict George again: he might himself alone be worth to us far more than the Emperor, the Ministers, the senators, and all the establishment together; for everyone of those people thought of his own interests alone, without ever casting a thought upon us. Of course we ought to do the same as they did, since they had succeeded so well in sewing gold lace upon all their seams, fattening and living in abundance in this world; not to mention the promises that the bishops made to them for the next.

Thinking upon these things, I lay calmly down, and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER II

THE next day early, Cousin George, my son Jacob, and myself, after having eaten a crust of bread and taken a glass of wine standing, harnessed our horses, and put them into our two carts to go and fetch my cousin's wife and furniture at the Lützelbourg station.

Before coming into our country, George had ordered his house to be whitewashed and painted from top to bottom; he had laid new floors, and replaced the old shingle roof with tiles. Now the paint was dry, the doors and windows stood open day and night; the house could not be robbed, for there was nothing in it. My cousin, seeing that all was right, had just written to his wife that she might bring their goods and chattels with her.

So we started about six in the morning; upon the road the people of Hangeviller, of Metting, and Véchem, and those who were going to market in the town, were singing and shouting "Vive l'Empereur!"

Everywhere they had voted "Yes," for peace. It was the greatest fraud that had ever been perpetrated: by the way in which the Ministers, the prefects, and the Government newspapers had ex-

plained the Plébiscite, everybody had imagined that he had really voted peace.

Cousin George hearing this, said, "Oh, you poor country folks, how I pity you for being such imbeciles! How I pity you for believing what these pickpockets tell you!"

That was how he styled the Emperor's government, and naturally I felt my indignation rise; but Catherine's sound advice came back into my mind, and I thought, "Hold your tongue, Christian; don't say a word—that's your best plan."

All along the road we saw the same spectacle; the soldiers of the 84th, garrisoned at Phalsbourg, looked as pleased as men who have won the first prize in a lottery; the colonel declared that the men who did not vote "Yes" would be unworthy of being called Frenchmen. Every man had voted "Yes;" for a good soldier knows nothing but his orders.

So having passed before the gate of France, we came down to the Baraques, and then reached Lützelbourg. The train from Paris had passed a few minutes before; the whistle could yet be heard under the Saverne tunnel.

My cousin's wife, with whom I was not yet acquainted, was standing by her luggage on the platform; and seeing George coming up, she joyfully cried, "Ah! is that you? and here is cousin."

She kissed us both heartily, gazing at us, however, with some surprise, perhaps on account of our

blouses and our great wide-brimmed black hats. But no! it could not be that; for Marie Anne Finck was a native of Wasselonne, in Alsace, and the Alsacians have always worn the blouse and wide-brimmed hat as long as I can remember. But this tall, thin woman, with her large brown eyes, as bustling, quick, and active as gunpowder, after having passed thirty years at Paris, having first been cook at Krantheimer's, at a place called the Barrière de Montmartre, and then in five or six other inns in that great city, might well be somewhat astonished at seeing such simple people as we were; and no doubt it also gave her pleasure.

That is my idea.

"The carts are there, wife," cried George, in high spirits. "We will load the biggest with as much furniture as we can, and put the rest upon the smaller one. You will sit in front. There—look up there—that's the Castle of Lützelbourg, and that pretty little wooden house close by, covered all over with vine, that is a châlet, Father Hoffman-Forty's châlet, the distiller of cordials, you know the cordial of Phalsbourg."

He showed her everything.

Then we began to load; that big Yéri, who takes the tickets at the gate and who carries the parcels to Monsieur André's omnibus, comes to lend us a hand. The two carts being loaded about twelve o'clock, and my cousin's wife seated in front of the foremost one upon a truss of straw, we started at a quiet pace for

the village, where we arrived about three o'clock. But I remember one thing, which I will not omit to mention. As we were coming out of Lützelbourg, a heavy wagon-load of coal was coming down the hill, a lad of sixteen or seventeen leading the horse by the bridle; at the door of the last house, a little child of five years old, sitting on the ground, was looking at our carts passing by; he was out of the road, he could not be in any one's way, and was sitting there perfectly quiet, when the boy, without any reason, gave him a lash with his whip, which made the child cry aloud.

My cousin's wife saw that.

"Why did that boy strike the child?" she inquired.

"That's a coal-heaver," George answered. "He comes from Sarrebrück. He is a Prussian. He struck the child because he is a French child."

Then my cousin's wife wanted to get down to fall upon the Prussian; she cried to him, "You great coward, you lazy dog, you wicked wretch, come and hit me." And the boy would have come to settle her, if we had not been there to receive him; but he would not trust himself to us, and lashed his horses to get out of our reach, making all haste to pass the bridge, and turning his head round toward us, for fear of being followed.

I thought at the time that Cousin George was wrong in saying this boy had a spite against the French because he was a Prussian; but I learned

afterward that he was right, and that the Germans have borne ill-will against us for years without letting us see it—like a set of sulky fellows waiting for a good opportunity to make us feel it.

"It is our *good man* that we have to thank for this," said George. "The Germans fancy that we have named him Emperor to begin his uncle's tricks again; and now they look upon our Plébiscite as a declaration of war. The joy of our sous-préfets, our mayors, and our curés, and of all those excellent people who only prosper upon the miseries of mankind, proves that they are not very far out."

"Yes, indeed," cried his wife; "but to beat a child, that is cowardly."

"Bah! don't let us think about it," said George. "We shall see much worse things than this; and we shall have deserved it, through our own folly. God grant that I may be mistaken!"

Talking so, we arrived home.

My wife had prepared dinner; there was kissing all round, the acquaintance was made; we all sat round the table, and dined with excellent appetites. Marie Anne was gay; she had already seen their house on her way, and the garden behind it with its rows of gooseberry bushes and the plum-trees full of blossom. The two carts, the horses having been taken out, were standing before their door; and from our windows might be seen the village people examining the furniture with great interest, hovering round and gazing with curiosity upon the great

heavy boxes, feeling the bedding, and talking together about this great quantity of goods, just as if it was their own business.

They were remarking no doubt that our cousin George Weber and his wife were rich people, who deserved the respectful consideration of the whole country round; and I myself, before seeing these great chests, should never have dreamed that they could have so much belonging entirely to themselves.

This proved to me that my wife was perfectly right in continuing to pay every respect to my cousin; she had also cautioned our daughter Grédel: as for Jacob, he is a most sensible lad, who thinks of everything and needs not to be told what to do.

But what astonished us a great deal more, was to see arriving about half-past three two other large wagons from the direction of Wéchem, and hearing my cousin cry "Here comes my wine from Barr!"

Before coming to Rothalp he had himself gone to Barr, in Alsace, to taste the wine and to make his own bargains.

"Come, Christian," said he, rising, "we have no time to lose if we mean to unload before night-fall. Take your pincers and your mallet; you will also fetch ropes and a ladder to let the casks down into the cellar."

Jacob ran to fetch what was wanted, and we all came out together—my wife, my daughter, cousin,

and everybody. My man Frantz remained alone at the mill, and immediately they began to undo the boxes, to carry the furniture into the house: chests of drawers, wardrobes, bedsteads, and quantities of plates, dishes, soup-tureens, etc., which were carried straight into the kitchen.

My cousin gave his orders: "Put this down in a corner; set that in another corner."

The neighbors helped us too, out of curiosity. Everything went on admirably.

And then arrived the wagons from Barr; but they were obliged to be kept waiting till seven o'clock. Our wives had already set up the beds and put away the linen in the wardrobes.

About seven o'clock everything was in order in the house. We now thought of resting till to-morrow, when George said to us, turning up his sleeves, "Now, my friend, here comes the biggest part of the work. I always strike the iron while it's hot. Let all the men who are willing help me to unload the casks, for the drivers want to get back to town, and I believe they are right."

Immediately the cellar was opened, the ladder set up against the first wagon, the lanterns lighted, the planks set leaning in their places, and until eleven o'clock we did nothing but unload wine, roll down casks, let them down with my ropes, and put them in their places.

Never had I worked as I did on that day!

Not before eleven o'clock did Cousin George, see-

ing everything settled to his satisfaction, seem pleased; he tapped the first cask, filled a jug with wine, and said, "Now, mates, come up; we will have a good draught, and then we will get to bed."

The cellar was shut up, so we drank in the large parlor, and then all, one after another, went home to bed, upon the stroke of midnight.

All the villagers were astonished to see how these Parisians worked: they were all the talk. At one time it was how cousin had bought up all the manure at the gendarmerie; then how he had made a contract to have all his land drained in the autumn; and then how he was going to build a stable and a laundry at the back of his house, and a distillery at the end of his yard: he was enlarging his cellars, already the finest in the country. What a quantity of money he must have!

If he had not paid his architect, the carpenters, and the masons cash down, it would have been declared that he was ruining himself. But he never wanted a penny; and his solicitor always addressed him with a smiling face, raising his hat from afar off, and calling him "my dear Monsieur Weber."

One single thing vexed George: he had requested at the préfecture, as soon as he arrived, a license to open his public-house at the sign of "The Pineapple." He had even written three letters to Sarrebourg, but had received no answer. Morning and evening, seeing me pass by with my carts of grain

and flour, he called to me through the window, "Hallo, Christian, this way just a minute!"

He never talked of anything else; he even came to tease me at the mayoralty-house, to indorse and seal his letters with attestations as to his good life and character; and yet no answer came.

One evening, as I was busy signing the registration of the reports drawn up in the week by the school-master, he came in and said, "Nothing yet?"

"Cousin, I don't know the meaning of it."

"Very well," said he, sitting before my desk. "Give me some paper. Let me write for once, and then we will see."

He was pale with excitement, and began to write, reading it as he went on:

"MONSIEUR LE SOUS-PRÉFET,—I have requested of you a license to open a public-house at Rothalp. I have even had the honor of writing you three letters upon the subject, and you have given me no answer. Answer me—yes or no! When people are paid, and well paid, they ought to fulfil their duty.

"Monsieur le Sous-préfet, I have the honor to salute you.

"GEORGE WEBER,
"Late Sergeant of Marines."

Hearing this letter, my hair positively stood on end.

"Cousin, don't send that," said I; "the sous-préfet would very likely put you under arrest."

"Pooh!" said he, "you country people, you seem to look upon these folks as if they were demi-gods; yet they live upon our money. It is we who pay them: they are for our service, and nothing more. Here, Christian, will you put your seal to that?"

Then, in spite of all that my wife might say, I replied, "George, for the love of Heaven, don't ask me that. I should most assuredly lose my place."

"What place? Your place as mayor," said he, "in which you receive the commands of the sous-préfet, who receives the commands of the préfet, who receives the orders of a Minister, who does everything that our *honest man* bids him. I had rather be a ragman than fill such a place."

The school-master, who happened to be there, seemed as if he had suddenly dropped from the clouds; his arms hung down the sides of his chair, and he gazed at my cousin with big eyes, just as a man stares at a dangerous lunatic.

I, too, was sitting upon thorns on hearing such words as these in the mayoralty-house; but at last I told him I had rather go myself to Sarrebourg and ask for the permission than seal that letter.

"Then we will go together," said he.

But I felt sure that if he spoke after this fashion to Monsieur le Sous-préfet, he would lay hands upon both of us; and I said that I should go alone, because his presence would put a constraint upon me.

"Very well," he said; "but you will tell me

everything that the sous-préfet has been saying to you."

He tore up his letter, and we went out together.

I don't remember that I ever passed a worse night than that. My wife kept repeating to me that our Cousin George had the precedence over the sous-préfet, who only laughed at us; that the Emperor, too, had cousins, who wanted to inherit everything from him, and that everybody ought to stick to their own belongings.

Next day, when I left for Sarrebourg, my head was in a whirl of confusion, and I thought that my cousin and his wife would have done well to have stayed in Paris rather than come and trouble us when we were at peace, when every man paid his own rates and taxes, when everybody voted as they liked at the préfecture. I could say that never was a loud word spoken at the public-house; that people attended with regularity both mass and vespers; that the gendarmes never visited our village more than once a week to preserve order; and that I myself was treated with consideration and respect: when I spoke but a word, honest men said, "That's the truth; that's the opinion of Monsieur le Maire!"

Yes, all these things and many more passed through my mind, and I should have liked to see Cousin George at Jericho.

This is just how we were in our village, and I don't know even yet by what means other people had made such fools of us. In the end, we have

had to pay dearly for it; and our children ought to learn wisdom by it.

At Sarrebourg, I had to wait two hours before I could see Monsieur le Sous-préfet, who was breakfasting with messieurs the councillors of the arrondissement, in honor of the Plébiscite. Five or six mayors of the neighborhood were waiting like myself; we saw filing down the passage great dishes of fish and game, notwithstanding that the fishing and shooting seasons were over; and then baskets of wine; and we could hear our councillors laughing, "Ha! ha! ha!" They were enjoying themselves mightily.

At last Monsieur le Sous-préfet came out; he had had an excellent breakfast.

"Ha! is that you, gentlemen?" said he; "come in, come into the office."

And for another quarter of an hour we were left standing in the office. Then came Monsieur le Sous-préfet to get rid of the mayors, who wanted different things for their villages. He looked delighted, and granted everything. At last, having despatched the rest, he said to me, "Oh! Monsieur le Maire, I know the object of your coming. You are come to ask, for the person called George Weber, authorization to open a public-house at Rothalp. Well, it's out of the question. That George Weber is a Republican; he has already offered opposition to the Plébiscite. You ought to have notified this to me: you have screened him because he is your

cousin. Authorizations to keep public-houses are granted to steady men, devoted to his Majesty the Emperor, and who keep a watch over their customers; but they are never granted to men who require watching themselves. You should be aware of that."

Then I perceived that my rascally deputy, that miserable Placiard, had denounced us. That old dry-bones did nothing but draw up perpetual petitions, begging for places, pensions, tobacco excise offices, decorations for himself and his honorable family; speaking incessantly of his services, his devotion to the dynasty, and his claims. His claims were the denunciations, the informations which he laid before the sous-préfecture; and, to tell the truth, in those days these were the most valid claims of all.

I was indignant, but I said nothing; I simply added a few words in favor of Cousin George, assuring Monsieur le Sous-préfet that lies had been told about him, that one should not believe everything, etc. He half concealed a weary yawn; and as the councillors of the arrondissement were laughing in the garden, he rose and said politely, "Monsieur le Maire, you have your answer. Besides, you already have two public-houses in your village; three would be too many."

It was useless to stay after that, so I made a bow, at which he seemed pleased, and returned quietly to Rothalp. The same evening I went to repeat to

George, word for word, the answer of the sous-préfet. Instead of getting angry, as I expected, my cousin listened calmly. His wife only cried out against that bad lot—she spoke of all the sous-préfets in the most disrespectful manner. But my cousin, smoking his pipe after supper, took it all very easily.

“Just listen to me, Christian,” said he. “In the first place, I am much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken. All that you tell me I knew beforehand; but I am not sorry to know it for certain. Yet I could wish that the sous-préfet had had my letter. As it is, since I am refused a license to sell a few glasses of wine retail, I will sell wine wholesale. I have already a stock of white wine, and no later than to-morrow I am off to Nancy. I buy a light cart and a good horse; thence I drive to Thiancourt, where I lay in a stock of red wine. After that I rove right and left all over the country, and I sell my wine by the cask or the quarter-cask, according to the solvency of my customers: instead of having one public-house, I will have twenty. I must keep moving. With an inn, Marie Anne would still have been obliged to cook; she has quite enough to do without that.”

“Oh! yes,” she said; “for thirty years I have been cooking dishes of sauerkraut and sausage at Krantheimer’s, at Montmartre, and at Auber’s, in the cloister St. Benoit.”

“Exactly so,” said George; “and now you shall

cook no longer; but you shall look after the crops, the stacking of the hay, the storage of fruit and potatoes. We shall get in our dividends, and I will trot round the country with my little pony from village to village. Monsieur le Sous-préfet shall know that George Weber can live without him.”

Hearing this, I learned that they had money in the funds, besides all the rest; and I reflected that my cousin was quite right to laugh at all the sous-préfets in the world.

He came with me to the door, shaking hands with me; and I said to myself that it was abominable to have refused a publican’s license to respectable persons, when they gave it to such men as Nicolas Reiter and Jean Kreps, whom their own wives called their best customers because they dropped under the table every evening and had to be carried to bed.

On the other hand, I saw that it was better for me; for if my cousin had been found infringing the law, I should have had to take depositions, and there would have been a quarrel with Cousin George. So that all was for the best; the wholesale business being only the exciseman’s affair.

What George had said, he did next day. At six o’clock he was already at the station, and in five or six days he had returned from Nancy upon his own char-à-banc, drawn by a strong horse, five or six years old, in its prime. The char-à-banc was a new one; a tilt could be put up in wet weather, which

could be raised or lowered when necessary to deliver the wine or receive back the empty casks.

The wine from Thiancourt followed. George stored it immediately, after having paid the bill and settled with the carter. I was standing by.

As for telling you how many casks he had then in the house, that would be difficult without examining his books; but not a wine-merchant in the neighborhood, not even in town, could boast of such a vault of wine as he had, for excellence of quality, for variety in price, both red and white, of Alsace and Lorraine.

About that time, my cousin sent for me and Jacob to make a list of safe customers. He wrote on, asking us, "How much may I give to So-and-So?"

"So much."

"How much to that man?"

"So much."

In the course of a single afternoon we had passed in review all the innkeepers and publicans from Droulingen to Quatre Vents, from Quatre Vents to the Dagsberg. Jacob and I knew what they were worth to the last penny; for the man who pays readily for his flour, pays well for his wine; and those who want pulling up by the miller are in no hurry to open their purses to the others.

That was the way Cousin George conducted his business.

He took a lad from our place, the son of the cooper Gros, to drive; and he himself was salesman.

From that day he was only seen passing through Rothalp at a quick trot, his lad loading and unloading.

My cousin, also, had a notion of distilling in the winter. He bought up a quantity of old second-hand barrels to hold the fruits which he hoped to secure at a cheap rate in autumn, and laid up a great store of firewood. Our country people had nothing to do but to look at him to learn something; but the people down our way all think themselves so amazingly clever, and that does not help to make folks richer.

Well, it is plain to you that our cousin's prospects were looking very bright. Every day, returning from his journey to Saverne or to Phalsbourg, he would stop his cart before my door, and come to see me in the mill, crying out: "Hallo! good afternoon, Christian. How are you to-day?"

Then we used to step into the back parlor, on account of the noise and the dust, and we talked about the price of corn, cattle, provender, and everything that is interesting to people in our condition.

What astonished him most of all was the number of Germans to be met with in the mountains and in the plains.

"I see nobody else," said he; "wood-cutters, brewers' men, coopers, tinkers, photographers, contractors. I will lay a wager, Christian, that your young man Frantz is a German, too."

"Yes; he comes from the Grand Duchy of Baden."

"How does this happen?" asked George.
"What is the meaning of it all?"

"They are good workmen," said I, "and they ask only half the wages."

"And ours—what becomes of them?"

"Ah, you see, Cousin George, that is their business."

"I understand," he said, "that we are making a great mistake. Even in Paris, this crowd of Germans—crossing-sweepers, shop and warehousemen, carters, book-keepers, professors of every kind—astonished me; and since Sadowa, there are twice as many. The more territory they annex, the farther they extend their view. Where is the advantage of our being Frenchmen—paying every year heavier taxes; sending our children to be drawn for the conscription, and paying for their exemption; bearing all the expenses of the State, all the insults of the préfets, the sous-préfets, and the police-inspectors, and the annoyances of common spies and informers, if those fellows, who have nothing at all to bear, enjoy the same advantages with ourselves, and even greater ones; since our own people are sent off to make room for these, who by their great numbers lower the price of hand-labor? This benefits the manufacturers, the contractors, the bourgeois class, but it is misery for the mass of the people. I cannot understand it at all. Our rulers, up there, must be

losing their senses. If that goes on, the workingmen will cease to care for their country, since it cares so little for them; and the Germans who are favored, and who hate us, will quietly put us out of our own doors."

Thus spoke my cousin, and I knew not what answer to make.

But about this time I had a great trouble, and although this affair is my private business alone, I must tell you about it.

Since the arrival of George, my daughter Grédel, instead of looking after our business as she used to do, washing clothes, milking cows, and so on, was all the blessed day at Marie Anne's. Jacob complained, and said: "What is she about down there? By and by I shall have to prepare the clothes for the wash and hang them upon the hedges to dry, and churn butter. Cannot Grédel do her own work? Does she think we are her servants?"

He was right. But Grédel never troubled herself. She never has thought of any one besides herself. She was down there along with George's wife, who talked to her from morning till night about Paris, the grand squares, the markets, the price of eggs and of meat, what was charged at the barrières; of this, that, and the other: cooking, and what not.

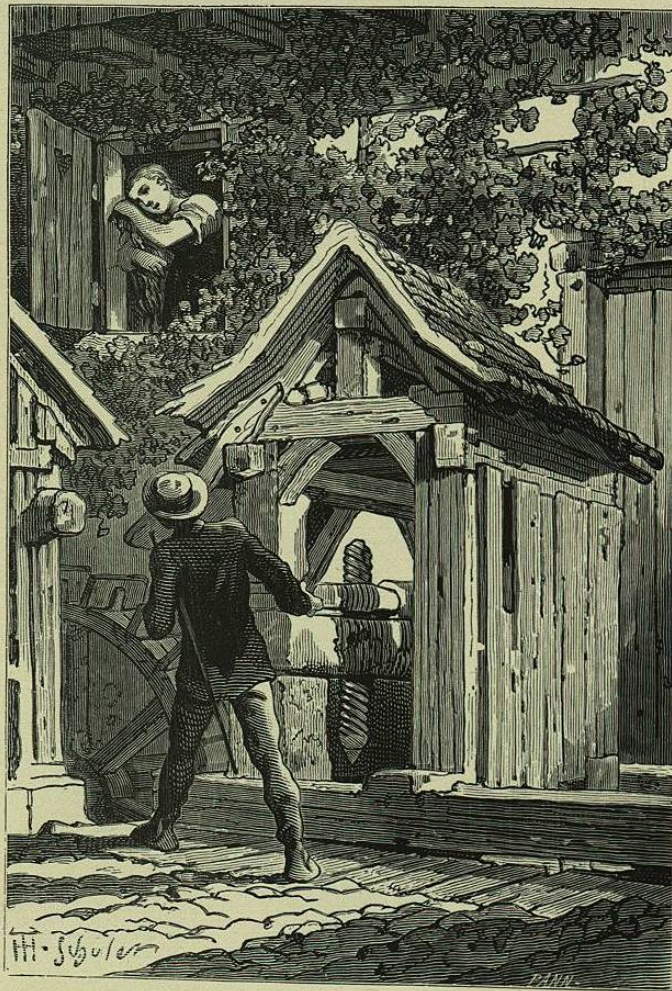
Marie Anne wanted company. But this did not suit me at all; and the less because Grédel had had a lover in the village for some time, and when

this is the case, the best thing to be done is always to keep your daughter at home and watch her closely.

It was only a common clerk at a stone-quarry in Wilsberg, a late artillery sergeant, Jean Baptiste Werner, who had taken the liberty to cast his eyes upon our daughter. We had nothing to say against this young man. He was a fine, tall man, thin, with a bold expression and brown mustaches, and who did his duty very well at the quarry by Father Heitz; but he could earn no more than his three francs a day: and any one may see that the daughter of Christian Weber was not to be thrown away upon a man who earns three francs a day. No, that would never do.

Nevertheless, I had often seen this Jean Baptiste Werner going in the morning to his work with his foot-rule under his arm, stopping at the mill-dam, as if to watch the geese and the ducks paddling about the sluice or the hens circling around the cock on the dunghill; and at the same moment Grédel would be slowly combing her hair at her window before the little looking-glass, leaning her head outside. I had also noticed that they said good-morning to each other a good way off, and that that clerk always looked excited and flurried at the sight of my daughter; and I had even been obliged to give Grédel notice to go and comb her hair somewhere else when that man passed, or to shut her window.

This is my case, simply told.



GRÉDEL WOULD BE SLOWLY COMBING HER HAIR AT HER WINDOW.

That young man worried me. My wife, too, was on her guard.

You may now understand why I should have preferred to have seen our daughter at home; but it was not so easy to forbid her to go to my cousin's. George and his wife might have been angry; and that troubled us.

Fortunately about that time the eldest son of Father Heitz,* the owner of the quarry, asked for Grédel in marriage.

For a long while, Monsieur Mathias Heitz, junior, had come every Sunday from Wilsberg to the "Cru-chon d'Or," to amuse himself with Jacob, as young men do when they have intentions with regard to a family. He was a fine young man, fat, with red cheeks and ears, and always well dressed, with a flowered velvet waistcoat, and seals to his watch-chain; in a word, just such a young man as a girl with any good sense would be glad to have for a husband.

He had property too; he was the eldest of five children. I reckoned that his own share might be fifteen to twenty thousand francs after the death of his parents.

Well, this young man demanded Grédel in marriage, and at once Jacob, my wife, and myself were agreed to accept him.

Only my wife thought that we ought to consult

* It is usual there for fathers of families to be distinguished as Father So-and-So.