

Cousin George and Marie Anne. Grédel was just there when I went in with Catherine; but behold! on the first mention of the thing she began to melt into tears, and to say she would rather die than marry Mathias Heitz. You may imagine how angry we were. My wife was going to slap her face or box her ears; but my cousin became angry now, and told us that we ought never to oblige a girl to marry against her will, because this was the way to make miserable households. Then he led us out into the passage, telling us that he took the responsibility of this affair: that he wished to obtain information, and that we were to tell the young man that we required a month for reflection.

We could not refuse him that. Grédel would no longer come home; my cousin's wife begged us not to plague her, and we had to give way to them; but it was one of the greatest troubles of my life. And I thought: "Now you cannot give your daughter to whoever you like; is not this really abominable?"

I felt angry with myself for having listened to my cousin: but, nevertheless, Grédel stayed with them a whole week, in consequence of which we were obliged to hire a charwoman; and Jacob exclaimed that Grédel could not have offered him a worse insult than to refuse his best comrade, a rich fellow, who boldly paid down his money for ten, fifteen, and twenty bottles at the club without winking.

However, he never mentioned it to Cousin

George, for whom he felt the greatest respect on account of his expectations from him, and whose strong language dismayed him.

At last my wife found that Grédel was staying too long away from home; the people of the village would talk about it; so one evening I went to see George, to ask him what he had learned about Heitz's son.

It was after supper. Grédel, seeing me come in, slipped out into the kitchen, and my cousin said to me frankly: "Listen, Christian: here is the matter in two words—Grédel loves another."

"Whom?"

"Jean Baptiste Werner."

"Father Heitz's clerk? the son of the woodward Werner, who has never had anything but potatoes to eat? Is she in love with him? Let the wretch come—let him come and ask her! I'll kick him down the stairs! And Grédel to grieve me so? Oh! I should never have believed it of her!"

I could have cried.

"Come, Christian," said my cousin, "you must be reasonable."

"Reasonable! she deserves to have her neck wrung!"

I was in a fury; I wanted to lay hold on her. Happily, she had gone into the garden, and George held me back. He obliged me to sit down again, and said: "What is Mathias Heitz? a fat fool who knows nothing but how to play at cards and drink.

He was put to college at Phalsbourg, at M. Verrot's, like all the other respectable young men in the district; but he now drives about in a char-à-banc in a flowered waistcoat, with jingling seals: he could not possibly earn a couple of pence—and the old man would like to be rid of him by marrying him. I have obtained information about him. He may come in for from fifteen to twenty thousand francs some day; but what are fifteen thousand francs for an ass? He will eat them, he will drink them—perhaps he has already swallowed half—and if there is a family, what are fifteen or even twenty thousand francs between five or six children? Formerly, when girls used to have an outfit for a marriage portion, and the eldest son succeeded his father, things went on pretty well. It did not want much talent to carry on a well-established business, or to follow up a trade from father to son. But at the present day, mother-wit and good sense stand in the foremost rank. Grandfather Heitz was an industrious man; he made money; but Father Mathias has never added a sou to his property, and the son has not a grain of good sense.”

“But the other fellow—why he has nothing at all.”

“The other, Jean Baptiste Werner, is a good man, who has done his duty by Father Heitz; he knows everything, manages everything, takes in orders, makes all the arrangements for the carriage of stone by carts or by railway. Heitz puts the money

into his pocket, and Werner has all the work, for want of a little capital to set himself up in business. He has seen foreign service. I have seen his certificates of character in Africa, in Mexico: they are excellent. If I were in your place, I would give Grédel to him.”

“Never!” cried I, thumping upon the table; “I had rather drown her.”

Half the wine-glasses were shattered on the floor; but my cousin was not angry.

“Well, Christian,” said he, “you are wrong. Think it over. Grédel will remain here. I will answer for her. You must not take her away at present. You would be very likely to ill-treat her, and then you would repent of it.”

“Let her stay as long as you like!” said I, taking up my hat; “let her never darken my doors again.” And I rushed out.

Never in my life had I been so angry and so grieved. At home I did not even dare to say what I had learned; but Jacob suspected it, and one day, as Werner was stopping in front of the mill, he shook his pitchfork at him, shouting: “Come on!” But Werner pretended not to hear him, and went on his way.

I was at last, however, obliged to tell my wife the whole matter. At first she was near fainting; but she soon recovered, and said to me: “Well, if Grédel won't have young Mathias, we shall keep our hundred louis, and we shall have no need to hire a

new servant. I should prefer that, for one cannot trust strange servants in a house."

"Yes; but how can we declare to Mathias Heitz that Grédel refuses his son?"

"Oh, don't trouble yourself, Christian," said she; "leave me alone, and don't let us quarrel with Cousin George: that's the principal thing. I will say that Grédel is too young to be married; that is the proper thing to say, and nobody can answer that."

Catherine quieted me in this way. But this business was still racking my brain, when extraordinary things came to pass, which we were far from expecting, and which were to turn our hair gray, and that of many others with us.

### CHAPTER III

ONE morning the secretary of the sous-préfet wrote to me to come to Sarrebourg. From time to time we used to receive orders, as magistrates, to go and give an account at the sous-préfecture of what was going on in our district.

I said to myself, immediately on receiving this letter from Secretary Gérard, that it was something about our Agricultural Society, which had not yet delivered the prizes gained by the ducks and the geese a few weeks before.

It was true that the Paris newspapers had for three days past been discussing a Prince of Hohenzollern, who had just been named King of Spain; but what could that signify to us at Rothalp, Illingen, Droulingen, and Henridorf, whether the King of Spain was called Hohenzollern or by any other name?

In my opinion, it could not be about that affair that Monsieur le Sous-préfet wanted to talk to us, but about the old or a new Agricultural Society, or something at least which concerned us in particular. The idea of the parish road and the bells came also into my mind; perhaps that was the object we were sent for.