

lantry, and made notes of it on the note-book of his heart.

In the mean time George Voss was thriving at Colmar—as the Vosses did thrive wherever they settled themselves. But he

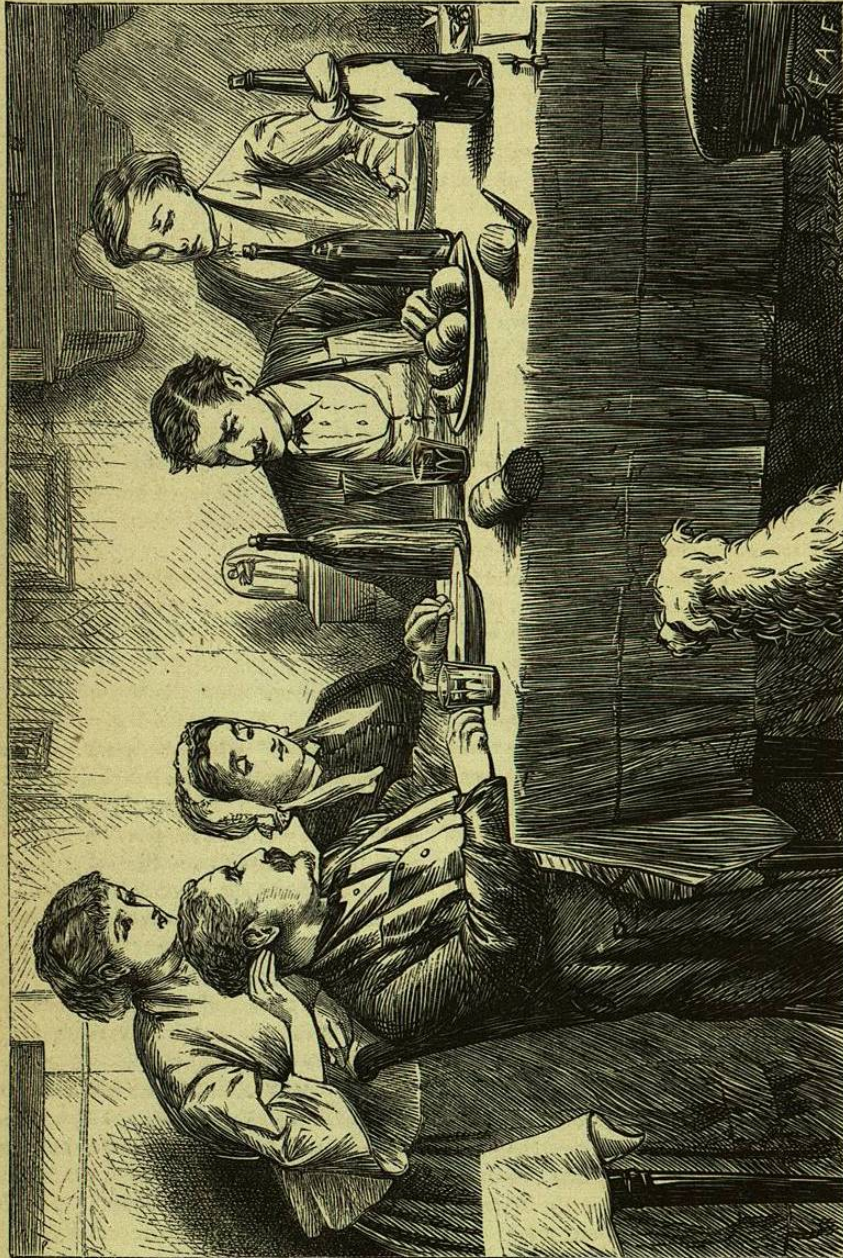
sent no word to his father; nor did his father send word to him, though they were not more than ten leagues apart. Once Madame Voss went over to see him, and brought back word of his well-doing.

CHAPTER II.

EXACTLY at eight o'clock every evening a loud bell was sounded in the hotel of the Lion d'Or at Granpere, and all within the house sat down together to supper. The supper was spread on a long table in the saloon up stairs, and the room was lighted with camphene lamps—for as yet gas had not found its way to Granpere. At this meal assembled not only the guests in the house and the members of the family of the landlord, but also many persons living in the village, whom it suited to take, at a certain price per month, the chief meal of the day at the house of the innkeeper, instead of eating in their own houses a more costly, a less dainty, and probably a lonely supper. Therefore, when the bell was heard, there came together some dozen residents of Granpere, mostly young men engaged in the linen trade, from their different lodgings, and each took his accustomed seat down the sides of the long board, at which, tied in a knot, was placed his own napkin. At the top of the table was the place of Madame Voss, which she never failed to fill exactly three minutes after the bell had been rung. At her right hand was the chair of the master of the house—never occupied by any one else; but it would often happen that some business would keep him away. Since George had left him he had taken the timber into his own hands, and was accustomed to think, and sometimes to say, that the necessity was cruel on him. Below his chair, and on the other side of Madame Voss, there would generally be two or three places kept for guests who might be specially looked upon as the intimate friends of the mistress of the house; and at the farther end of the table, close to the window, was the space allotted to travelers. Here the napkins were not tied in knots, but were always clean. And, though the little plates of radishes, cakes, and dried

fruits were continued from one of the tables to the other, the long-necked, thin bottles of common wine came to an end before they reached the strangers' portion of the board; for it had been found that strangers would take at that hour either tea or a better kind of wine than that which Michel Voss gave to his accustomed guests without any special charge. When, however, the stranger should please to take the common wine, he was by no means thereby prejudiced in the eyes of Madame Voss or her husband. Michel Voss liked a profit, but he liked the habits of his country almost as well.

One evening in September, about twelve months after the departure of George, Madame Voss took her seat at the table, and the young men of the placé, who had been waiting round the door of the hotel for a few minutes, followed her into the room. And there was M. Goudin, the curé, with another young clergyman, his friend. On Sundays the curé always dined at the hotel at half past twelve o'clock, as the friend of the family; but for his supper he paid, as did the other guests. I rather fancy that on week-days he had no particular dinner; and, indeed, there was no such formal meal given in the house of Michel Voss on week-days. There was something put on the table about noon in the little room between the kitchen and the public window, but, except on Sundays, it could hardly be called a dinner. On Sundays a real dinner was served in the room up stairs, with soup and removes, and *entrées* and the *rôti*, all in the right place—which showed that they knew what a dinner was at the Lion d'Or; but, throughout the week, supper was the meal of the day. After M. Goudin, on this occasion, there came two maiden ladies from Epinal who were lodging at Granpere for change of air. They seated themselves near to Madame Voss, but



"SHE WAS STANDING NOW CLOSE BEHIND HER UNCLE, WITH BOTH HER HANDS UPON HIS HEAD."

still leaving a place or two vacant. And presently at the bottom of the table there came an Englishman and his wife, who were traveling through the country; and so the table was made up. A lad of about fifteen, who was known in Granpere as the waiter at the Lion d'Or, looked after the two strangers and the young men, and Marie Bromar, who herself had arranged the board, stood at the top of the room, by a second table, and dispensed the soup. It was pleasant to watch her eyes, as she marked the moment when the dispensing should begin, and counted her guests, thoughtful as to the sufficiency of the dishes to come; and noticed that Edmond Greisse had sat down with such dirty hands that she must bid her uncle to warn the lad; and observed that the more elderly of the two ladies from Epinal had bread too hard to suit her—which should be changed as soon as the soup had been dispensed. She looked round, and even while dispensing saw every thing. It was suggested in the last chapter that another house might have been built in Granpere, and that George Voss might have gone there, taking Marie as his bride; but the Lion d'Or would sorely have missed those quick and careful eyes.

Then, when that dispensing of the soup was concluded, Michel entered the room, bringing with him a young man. The young man had evidently been expected; for, when he took the place close at the left hand of Madame Voss, she simply bowed to him, saying some word of courtesy as Michel took his place on the other side. Then Marie dispensed two more portions of soup, and leaving one on the farther table for the boy to serve, though she could well have brought the two, waited herself upon her uncle. "And is Urmand to have no soup?" said Michel Voss, as he took his niece lovingly by the hand. "Peter is bringing it," said Marie. And in a moment or two Peter, the waiter, did bring the young man his soup.

"And will not Mademoiselle Marie sit down with us?" said the young man.

"If you can make her, you have more influence than I," said Michel. "Marie never sits, and never eats, and never drinks." She was standing now close behind her uncle, with both her hands upon his head; and she

would often stand so after the supper was commenced, only moving to attend upon him, or to supplement the services of Peter and the maid-servant when she perceived that they were becoming for a time inadequate to their duties. She answered her uncle now by gently pulling his ears, but she said nothing.

"Sit down with us, Marie, to oblige me," said Madame Voss.

"I had rather not, aunt. It is foolish to sit at supper and not eat. I have taken my supper already." Then she moved away, and hovered round the two strangers at the end of the room.

After supper Michel Voss and the young man—Adrian Urmand by name—lit their cigars and seated themselves on a bench outside the front-door. "Have you never said a word to her?" said Michel.

"Well—a word; yes."

"But you have not asked her—you know what I mean—asked her whether she could love you?"

"Well—yes. I have said as much as that, but I have never got an answer. And when I did ask her, she merely left me. She is not much given to talking."

"She will not make the worse wife, my friend, because she is not much given to such talking as that. When she is out with me on a Sunday afternoon she has chat enough. By St. James, she'll talk for two hours without stopping when I'm so out of breath with the hill that I haven't a word."

"I don't doubt she can talk."

"That she can—and manage a house better than any girl I ever saw. You ask her aunt."

"I know what her aunt thinks of her. Madame Voss says that neither you nor she can afford to part with her."

Michel Voss was silent for a moment. It was dusk, and no one could see him as he brushed a tear from each eye with the back of his hand. "I'll tell you what, Urmand—it will break my heart to lose her. Do you see how she comes to me and comforts me? But if it broke my heart, and broke the house too, I would not keep her here. It isn't fit. If you like her, and she can like you, it will be a good match for her. You have my leave to ask her. She brought



AFTER SUPPER.

nothing here, but she has been a good girl, a very good girl, and she shall not leave the house empty-handed."

Adrian Urmand was a linen-buyer from Basle, and was known to have a good share in a good business. He was a handsome young man too, though rather small, and perhaps a little too apt to wear rings on his fingers, and to show jewelry on his shirt front and about his waistcoat. So, at least, said some of the young people of Granpere, where rings and gold studs are not so common as they are at Basle. But he was one who understood his business and did not neglect it; he had money too; and was, therefore, such a young man that Michel Voss felt that he might give his niece to him without danger, if he and she could manage to like each other sufficiently. As to Urmand's liking there was no doubt. Urmand was ready enough.

"I will see if she will speak to me just now," said Urmand, after a pause.

"Shall her aunt try it, or shall I do it?" said Michel.

But Adrian Urmand thought that part of the pleasure of love lay in the making of it himself. So he declined the innkeeper's offer, at any rate for the present occasion. "Perhaps," said he, "Madame Voss will say a word for me after I have spoken for myself."

"So let it be," said the landlord. And then they finished their cigars in silence.

It was in vain that Adrian Urmand tried that night to obtain audience from Marie. Marie, as though she well knew what was wanted of her, and was determined to thwart her lover, would not allow herself to be found alone for a moment. When Adrian presented himself at the window of her little bar he found that Peter was with her, and she managed to keep Peter with her till Adrian was gone. And again when he hoped to find her alone for a few moments, after the work of the day was over, in the

small parlor where she was accustomed to sit for some half hour before she would go up to her room, he was again disappointed. She was already up stairs with her aunt and the children, and all Michel Voss's good nature in keeping out of the way was of no avail.

But Urmand was determined not to be beaten. He intended to return to Basle on the next day but one, and desired to put this matter a little in forwardness before he took his departure. On the following morning he had various appointments to keep with countrymen and their wives who sold linen to him, but he was quick over his business, and managed to get back to the inn early in the afternoon. From six till eight he well knew that Marie would allow nothing to impede her in the grand work of preparing for supper; but at four o'clock she would certainly be sitting somewhere about the house with her needle in her hand. At four o'clock he found her, not with her needle in her hand, but, better still, perfectly idle. She was standing at an open window, looking out upon the garden, as he came behind her—standing motionless, with both hands on the sill of the window, thinking deeply of something that filled her mind. It might be that she was thinking of him.

"I have done with my customers now, and I shall be off to Basle to-morrow," said he, as soon as she had looked round at the sound of his footsteps and perceived that he was close to her.

"I hope you have bought your goods well, M. Urmand?"

"Ah! for the matter of that, the time for buying things well is clean gone. One used to be able to buy well; but there is not an old woman now in Alsace who doesn't know as well as I do, or better, what linen is worth in Berne and Paris. They expect to get nearly as much for it here at Granpere."

"They work hard, M. Urmand, and things are dearer than they were. It is well that they should get a price for their labor."

"A price, yes: but how is a man to buy without a profit? They think that I come here for their sakes—merely to bring the market to their doors." Then he began to remember that he had no special object in discussing the circumstances of his trade

with Marie Bromar, and that he had a special object in another direction. But how to turn the subject was now a difficulty.

"I am sure you do not buy without a profit," said Marie Bromar, when she found that he was silent. "And then the poor people, who have to pay so dear for every thing!" She was making a violent attempt to keep him on the ground of his customers and his purchases.

"There was another thing that I wanted to say to you, Marie," he began at last, abruptly.

"Another thing!" said Marie, knowing that the hour had come.

"Yes; another thing. I dare say you know what it is. I need not tell you now that I love you, need I, Marie? You know as well as I do what I think of you."

"No, I don't," said Marie, not intending to encourage him to tell her, but simply saying that which came easiest to her at the moment.

"I think this—that if you will consent to be my wife, I shall be a very happy man. That is all. Every body knows how pretty you are, and how good, and how clever; but I do not think that any body loves you better than I do. Can you say that you will love me, Marie? Your uncle approves of it, and your aunt." He had now come quite close to her, and having placed his hand behind her back, was winding his arm round her waist.

"I will not have you do that, M. Urmand," she said, escaping from his embrace.

"But that is no answer. Can you love me, Marie?"

"No," she said, hardly whispering the word between her teeth.

"And is that to be all?"

"What more can I say?"

"But your uncle wishes it, and your aunt. Dear Marie, can you not try to love me?"

"I know they wish it. It is easy enough for a girl to see when such things are wished, or when they are forbidden. Of course I know that uncle wishes it. And he is very good; and so are you, I dare say. And I'm sure I ought to be very proud, because you are so much above me."

"I am not a bit above you. If you knew what I think, you wouldn't say so."

"But—"

"Well, Marie? Think a moment, dearest, before you shall give me an answer that shall make me either happy or miserable."

"I have thought. I would almost burn myself in the fire if uncle wished it."

"And he does wish this."

"But I can not do this even because he wishes it."

"Why not, Marie?"

"I prefer being as I am. I do not wish to leave the hotel, or to be married at all."

"Nay, Marie, you will certainly be married some day."

"No; there is no such certainty. Some girls never get married. I am of use here, and I am happy here."

"Ah! it is because you can not love me."

"I don't suppose I shall ever love any one—not in that way. I must go away now, M. Urmand, because I am wanted below."

She did go, and Adrian Urmand spoke no further word of love to her on that occasion.

"I will speak to her about it myself," said Michel Voss, when he heard his young friend's story that evening, seated again upon the bench outside the door, and smoking another cigar.

"It will be of no use," said Adrian.

"One never knows," said Michel. "Young women are queer cattle to take to market. One can never be quite certain which way they want to go. After you are off to-morrow I will have a few words with her. She does not quite understand as yet that she must make her hay while the sun shines. Some of 'em are all in a hurry to get married, and some of 'em, again, are all for hanging back, when their friends wish it. It's natural, I believe, that they should be contrary. But Marie is as good as the best of them, and when I speak to her she'll hear reason."

Adrian Urmand had no alternative but to assent to the innkeeper's proposition. The idea of making love second-hand was not pleasant to him; but he could not hinder the uncle from speaking his mind to the niece. One little suggestion he did make before he took his departure. "It can't be, I suppose, that there is any one else that she likes better?" To this Michel Voss made no answer in words, but shook his head in a fashion that made Adrian feel assured that there was no danger on that head.

But Michel Voss, though he had shaken his head in a manner so satisfactory, had feared that there was such danger. He had considered himself justified in shaking his head, but would not be so false as to give in words the assurance which Adrian had asked. That night he discussed the matter with his wife, declaring it as his purpose that Marie Bromar should marry Adrian Urmand. "It is impossible that she should do better," said Michel.

"It would be very well," said Madame Voss.

"Very well! Why, he is worth thirty thousand francs, and is as steady at his business as his father was before him."

"He is a dandy."

"Pshaw! That is nothing," said Michel.

"And he is too fond of money."

"It is a fault on the right side," said Michel. "His wife and children will not come to want."

Madame Voss paused a moment before she made her last and grand objection to the match. "It is my belief," said she, "that Marie is always thinking of George."

"Then she had better cease to think of him," said Michel, "for George is not thinking of her." He said nothing further, but resolved to speak his own mind freely to Marie Bromar.



CHAPTER III.



The old-fashioned inn at Colmar, at which George Voss was acting as assistant and chief manager to his father's distant cousin, Madame Faragon, was a house very different in all its belongings from the Lion d'Or at Granpere. It was very much larger, and had much higher pretensions. It assumed to itself the character of a first-class hotel—and when Colmar was without a railway, and was a great posting station on the high-road from Strasburg to Lyons, there was some real business at the Hôtel de la Poste in that town. At present, though Colmar may probably have been benefited by the railway, the inn has faded, and is in its yellow leaf. Travelers who desire to see the statue which a grateful city has erected to the memory of its most illustrious citizen, General Rapp, are not sufficient in number to keep a first-class hotel in the glories of fresh paint and smart waiters; and when you have done with General Rapp, there is not much to interest you in Colmar. But there is the hotel; and poor,

fat, unwieldy Madame Faragon, though she grumbles much, and declares that there is not a sou to be made, still keeps it up, and bears with as much bravery as she can the buffets of a world which seems to her to be becoming less prosperous and less comfortable and more exacting every day. In her younger years a posting-house in such a town was a posting-house; and when M. Faragon married her, the heiress of the then owner of the business, he was supposed to have done uncommonly well for himself. Madame Faragon is now a childless widow, and sometimes declares that she will shut the house up, and have done with it. Why maintain a business without a profit, simply that there may be a Hôtel de la Poste at Colmar? But there are old servants whom she has not the heart to send away; and she has, at any rate, a roof of her own over her head; and, though she herself is unconscious that it is so, she has many ties to the old business; and now, since her young cousin George Voss has been with her, things go a little better. She is not robbed so much, and the people of the town, finding that they can get a fair bottle of wine and a good supper, come to the inn; and at length an omnibus has been established, and there is a little glimmer of returning prosperity.

It is a large old rambling house, built round an irregularly shaped court, with another court behind it; and in both courts the stables and coach-houses seem to be so mixed with the kitchens and entrances that one hardly knows what part of the building is equine and what part human. Judging from the smell which pervades the lower quarters, and, alas! also too frequently the upper rooms, one would be inclined to say that the horses had the best of it. The defect had been pointed out to Madame Fara-

