

"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-



gon more than once; but that lady, though in most of the affairs of life her temper is gentle and kindly, can not hear with equanimity an insinuation that any portion of her house is either dirty or unsweet. Complaints have reached her that the beds were—well, inhabited—but no servant now dares to hint at any thing wrong in this particular. If this traveler or that says a word to her personally in complaint, she looks as sour as death, and declines to open her mouth in reply; but when that traveler's back is turned, the things that Madame Faragon can say about the upstart coxcombry of the wretch, and as to the want of all real comforts which she is sure prevails in the home quarters of that ill-starred complaining traveler, are proof to those who hear them that the old landlady has not as yet lost all her energy. It need not be doubted that she herself religiously believes that no foul perfume has ever pervaded the sanctity of her chambers, and that no living thing has ever been seen inside the sheets of her beds except those guests whom she has allocated to the different rooms.

Matters had not gone very easily with George Voss in all the changes he had made during the last year. Some things he was obliged to do without consulting Madame Faragon at all. Then she would discover what was going on, and there would be a "few words." At other times he would consult her, and carry his purpose only after much perseverance. Twice or thrice he had told her that he must go away, and then, with many groans, she had acceded to his propositions. It had been necessary to expend two thousand francs in establishing the omnibus, and in that affair the appearance of things had been at one time quite hopeless. And then when George had declared that the altered habits of the people required that the hour of the morning *table d'hôte* should be changed from noon to one, she had sworn that she would not give way. She would never lend her assent to such vile idleness. It was already robbing the business portion of the day of an hour. She would wrap her colors round her and die upon the ground sooner than yield. "Then they won't come," said George, "and it's no use your having the table then. They will all go to the Hôtel de

l'Impératrice." This was a new house, the very mention of which was a dagger thrust into the bosom of Madame Faragon. "Then they will be poisoned," she said. "And let them! It is what they are fit for." But the change was made, and for the first three days she would not come out of her room. When the bell was rung at the obnoxious hour, she stopped her ears with her two hands.

But though there had been these contests, Madame Faragon had made more than one effort to induce George Voss to become her partner and successor in the house. If he would only bring in a small sum of money—a sum which must be easily within his father's reach—he should have half the business now, and all of it when Madame Faragon had gone to her rest. Or if he would prefer to give Madame Faragon a pension—a moderate pension—she would give up the house at once. At these tender moments she used to say that he probably would not begrudge her a room in which to die. But George Voss would always say that he had no money, that he could not ask his father for money, and that he had not made up his mind to settle at Colmar. Madame Faragon, who was naturally much interested in the matter, and was, moreover, not without curiosity, could never quite learn how matters stood at Granpere. A word or two she had heard in a circuitous way of Marie Bromar, but from George himself she could never learn any thing of his affairs at home. She had asked him once or twice whether it would not be well that he should marry; but he had always replied that he did not think of such a thing—at any rate as yet. He was a steady young man, given more to work than to play, and apparently not inclined to amuse himself with the girls of the neighborhood.

One day Edmond Greisse was over at Colmar—Edmond Greisse, the lad whose untidy appearance at the supper-table at the Lion d'Or had called down the rebuke of Marie Bromar. He had been sent over on some business by his employer, and had come to get his supper and bed at Madame Faragon's hotel. He was a modest, unassuming lad, and had been hardly more than a boy when George Voss had left Granpere. From time to time George had seen some

friend from the village, and had thus heard tidings from home. Once, as has been said, Madame Voss had made a pilgrimage to Madame Faragon's establishment to visit him; but letters between the houses had not been frequent. Though postage in France—or shall we say Germany?—is now almost as low as in England, these people of Alsace have not yet fallen into the way of writing to each other when it occurs to any of them that a word may be said. Young Greisse had seen the landlady, who now never went up stairs among her guests, and had had his chamber allotted to him, and was seated at the supper-table, before he met George Voss. It was from Madame Faragon that George heard of his arrival.

"There is a neighbor of yours from Granpere in the house," said she.

"From Granpere? And who is he?"

"I forget the lad's name; but he says that your father is well, and Madame Voss. He goes back early to-morrow with the roulage and some goods that his people have bought. I think he is at supper now."

The place of honor at the top of the table at the Colmar inn was not in these days assumed by Madame Faragon. She had, alas! become too stout to do so with either grace or comfort, and always took her meals, as she always lived, in the little room down stairs, from which she could see, through the apertures of two doors, all who came in and all who went out by the chief entrance of the hotel. Nor had George usurped the place. It had now happened at Colmar, as it has come to pass at most hotels, that the public table is no longer the *table d'hôte*. The end chair was occupied by a stout, dark man, with a bald head and black beard, who was proudly filling a place different from that of his neighbors, and who would probably have gone over to the Hôtel de l'Impératrice had any body disturbed him. On the present occasion George seated himself next to the lad, and they were soon discussing all the news from Granpere.

"And how is Marie Bromar?" George asked at last.

"You have heard about her, of course?" said Edmond Greisse.

"Heard what?"

"She is going to be married."

B

"Minnie Bromar to be married? And to whom?"

Edmond at once understood that his news was regarded as being important, and made the most of it.

"Oh dear, yes. It was settled last week when he was there."

"But who is he?"

"Adrian Urmand, the linen-buyer from Basle."

"Marie to be married to Adrian Urmand?"

Urmand's journeys to Granpere had been commenced before George Voss had left the place, and therefore the two young men had known each other.

"They say he's very rich," said Edmond.

"I thought he cared for nobody but himself. And are you sure? Who told you?"

"I am quite sure, but I do not know who told me. They are all talking about it."

"Did my father ever tell you?"

"No, he never told me."

"Or Marie herself?"

"No, she did not tell me. Girls never tell those sort of things of themselves."

"Nor Madame Voss?" asked George.

"She never talks much about any thing. But you may be sure it's true. I'll tell you who told me first, and he is sure to know, because he lives in the house. It was Peter Veque."

"Peter Veque, indeed! And who do you think would tell him?"

"But isn't it quite likely? She has grown to be such a beauty! Every body gives it to her that she is the prettiest girl round Granpere. And why shouldn't he marry her? If I had a lot of money, I'd only look to get the prettiest girl I could find any where."

After this George said nothing further to the young man as to the marriage. If it was talked about as Edmond said, it was probably true. And why should it not be true? Even though it were true, no one would have cared to tell him. She might have been married twice over, and no one in Granpere would have sent him word. So he declared to himself. And yet Marie Bromar had once sworn to him that she loved him, and would be his for ever and ever; and, though he had left her in dudgeon, with black looks, without a kind word of farewell, yet he had believed her. Through

all his sojourn at Colmar he had told himself that she would be true to him. He believed it, though he was hardly sure of himself—had hardly resolved that he would ever go back to Granpere to seek her. His father had turned him out of the house, and Marie had told him as he went that she would never marry him if her uncle disapproved it. Slight as her word had been on that morning of his departure, it had rankled in his bosom, and made him angry with her through a whole twelvemonth. And yet he had believed that she would be true to him.

He went out in the evening when it was dusk, and walked round and round the public garden of Colmar, thinking of the news which he had heard—the public garden in which stands the statue of General Rapp. It was a terrible blow to him. Though he had remained a whole year in Colmar without seeing Marie or hearing of her, without hardly ever having had her name upon his lips, without even having once assured himself during the whole time that the happiness of his life would depend on the girl's constancy to him—now that he heard that she was to be married to another man, he was torn to pieces by anger and regret. He had sworn to love her, and had never even spoken a word of tenderness to another girl. She had given him her plighted troth, and now she was prepared to break it with the first man who asked her! As he thought of this, his brow became black with anger. But his regrets were as violent. What a fool he had been to leave her there, open to persuasion from any man who came in the way, open to persuasion from his father, who would, of course, be his enemy! How, indeed, could he expect that she should be true to him? The year had been long enough to him, but it must have been doubly long to her. He had expected that his father would send for him, would write to him, would, at least, transmit to him some word that would make him know that his presence was again desired at Granpere. But his father had been as proud as he was, and had not sent any such message. Or rather, perhaps, the father, being older and less impatient, had thought that a temporary absence from Granpere might be good for his son.

It was late at night when George Voss went to bed, but he was up in the morning early to see Edmond Greisse before the roulage should start for Münster on its road to Granpere. Early times in that part of the world are very early, and the roulage was ready in the back court of the inn at half past four in the morning.

"What! you up at this hour?" said Edmond.

"Why not? It is not every day we have a friend here from Granpere, so I thought I would see you off."

"That is kind of you."

"Give my love to them at the old house, Edmond."

"Of course I will."

"To father, and Madame Voss, and the children, and to Marie."

"All right."

"Tell Marie that you have told me of her marriage."

"I don't know whether she'll like to talk about that to me."

"Never mind; you tell her. She won't bite you. Tell her also that I shall be over at Granpere soon to see her and the rest of them. I'll be over—as soon as ever I can get away."

"Shall I tell your father that?"

"No. Tell Marie, and let her tell my father."

"And when will you come? We shall all be so glad to see you."

"Never you mind that. You just give my message. Come in for a moment to the kitchen. There's a cup of coffee for you and a slice of ham. We are not going to let an old friend like you go away without breaking his fast."

As Greisse had already paid his modest bill, amounting altogether to little more than three francs, this was kind of the young landlord, and while he was eating his bread and ham he promised faithfully that he would give the message just as George had given it to him.

It was on the third day after the departure of Edmond Greisse that George told Madame Faragon that he was going home. "Going where, George?" said Madame Faragon, leaning forward on the table before her, and looking like a picture of despair.

"To Granpere, Madame Faragon."

"To Granpere! and why? and when? and how? Oh dear! Why did you not tell me before, child?"

"I told you as soon as I knew."

"But you are not going yet?"

"On Monday."

"Oh dear! So soon as that! Lord bless me! We can't do any thing before Monday. And when will you be back?"

"I can not say with certainty. I shall not be long, I dare say."

"And have they sent for you?"

"No, they have not sent for me, but I want to see them once again. And I must make up my mind what to do for the future."

"Don't leave me, George; pray do not leave me!" exclaimed Madame Faragon. "You shall have the business now if you choose to take it; only pray don't leave me!" George explained that at any rate he would not desert her now at once; and on the Monday named he started for Granpere. He had not been very quick in his action, for a week had passed since he had given Edmond Greisse his breakfast in the hotel kitchen.

CHAPTER IV.

ADRIAN URMAND had been three days gone from Granpere before Michel Voss found a fitting opportunity for talking to his niece. It was not a matter, as he thought, in which there was need for any great hurry, but there was need for much consideration. Once again he spoke on the subject to his wife. "If she's thinking about George, she has kept it very much to herself," he remarked.

"Girls do keep it to themselves," said Madame Voss.

"I'm not so sure of that. They generally show it somehow. Marie never looks love-lorn. I don't believe a bit of it; and as for him, all the time he has been away he has never so much as sent a word of a message to one of us."

"He sent his love to you, when I saw him, quite dutifully," said Madame Voss.

"Why don't he come and see us, if he cares for us? It isn't of him that Marie is thinking."

"It isn't of any body else, then," said Madame Voss. "I never see her speak a word to any of the young men, nor one of them ever speaking a word to her." Pondering over all this, Michel Voss resolved that he would have it all out with his niece on the following Sunday.

On the Sunday he engaged Marie to start with him after dinner to the place on the hill-side where they were cutting wood. It was a beautiful autumn afternoon, in that pleasantest of all months in the year, when

the sun is not too hot, and the air is fresh and balmy, and one is still able to linger abroad, loitering either in or out of the shade, when the midges cease to bite, and the sun no longer scorches and glares; but the sweet vestiges of summer remain, and every thing without-doors is pleasant and friendly, and there is the gentle, unrecognized regret for the departing year, the unconscious feeling that its glory is going from us, to add the inner charm of a soft melancholy to the outer luxury of the atmosphere. I doubt whether Michel Voss had ever realized the fact that September is the kindest of all the months, but he felt it, and enjoyed the leisure of his Sunday afternoon when he could get his niece to take a stretch with him on the mountain-side. On these occasions Madame Voss was left at home with M. le Curé, who liked to linger over his little cup of coffee. Madame Voss, indeed, seldom cared to walk very far from the door of her own house; and on Sundays to go to the church and back again was certainly sufficient exercise.

Michel Voss said no word about Adrian Urmand as they were ascending the hill. He was too wise for that. He could not have given effect to his experience with sufficient eloquence had he attempted the task while the burden of the rising ground was upon his lungs and chest. They turned into a saw-mill as they went up, and counted the scantlings of timber that had been cut, and Michel looked at the cradle to see that it

worked well, and to the wheels to see that they were in good order, and observed that the channel for the water required repairs, and said a word as to the injury that had come to him because George had left him. "Perhaps he may come back soon," said Marie. To this he made no answer, but continued his path up the mountain-side. "There will be plenty of feed for the cows this autumn," said Marie Bromar. "That is a great comfort."

"Plenty," said Michel; "plenty." But Marie knew from the tone of his voice that he was not thinking about the grass, and so she held her peace. But the want or plenty of the pasture was generally a subject of the greatest interest to the people of Granpere at that special time of the year, and one on which Michel Voss was ever ready to speak. Marie therefore knew that there was something on her uncle's mind. Nevertheless he inspected the timber that was cut, and made some remarks about the work of the men. They were not so careful in barking the logs as they used to be, and upon the whole he thought that the wood itself was of a worse quality. What is there that we do not find to be deteriorating around us when we consider the things in detail, though we are willing enough to admit a general improvement? "Yes," said he, in answer to some remarks from Marie, "we must take it, no doubt, as God gives it to us, but we need not spoil it in the handling. Sit down, my dear; I want to speak to you for a few minutes."

Then they sat down together on a large prostrate pine, which was being prepared to be sent down to the saw-mill. "My dear," said he, "I want to speak to you about Adrian Urmand." She blushed and trembled as she placed herself beside him, but he hardly noticed it. He was not quite at his ease himself, and was a little afraid of the task he had undertaken. "Adrian tells me that he asked you to take him as your lover, and that you refused."

"Yes, Uncle Michel."

"But why, my dear? How are you to do better? Perhaps I or your aunt should have spoken to you first, and told you that we thought well of the match."

"It wasn't that, uncle. I knew you

thought well of it; or, at least, I believed that you did."

"And what is your objection, Marie?"

"I don't object to M. Urmand, uncle—at least, not particularly."

"But he says you do object. You would not accept him when he offered himself."

"No; I did not accept him."

"But you will, my dear—if he comes again?"

"No, uncle."

"And why not? Is he not a good young man?"

"Oh yes—that is, I dare say."

"And he has a good business. I do not know what more you could expect."

"I expect nothing, uncle—except not to go away from you."

"Ah—but you must go away from me. I should be very wrong, and so would your aunt, to let you remain here till you lose your good looks, and become an old woman on our hands. You are a pretty girl, Marie, and fit to be any man's wife, and you ought to take a husband. I am quite in earnest now, my dear; and I speak altogether for your own welfare."

"I know you are in earnest, and I know that you speak for my welfare."

"Well; well; what then? Of course it is only reasonable that you should be married some day. Here is a young man in a better way of business than any man, old or young, that comes into Granpere. He has a house in Basle, and money to put in it whatever you want. And for the matter of that, Marie, my niece shall not go away from me empty-handed."

She drew herself closer to him, and took hold of his arm and pressed it, and looked up into his face. "I brought nothing with me," she said, "and I want to take nothing away."

"Is that it?" he said, speaking rapidly.

"Let me tell you, then, my girl, that you shall have nothing but your earnings—your fair earnings. Don't you take trouble about that. Urmand and I will settle that between us, and I will go bail there shall be no unpleasant words. As I said before, my girl sha'n't leave my house empty-handed; but, Lord bless you, he would only be too happy to take you in your petticoat—just

as you are. I never saw a fellow more in love with a girl. Come, Marie, you need not mind saying the word to me, though you could not bring yourself to say it to him."

"I can't say that word, uncle, either to you or to him."

"And why the devil not?" said Michel Voss, who was beginning to be tired of being eloquent.

"I would rather stay at home with you and my aunt."

"Oh, bother!"

"Some girls stay at home always. All girls do not get married. I don't want to be taken to Basle."

"This is all nonsense," said Michel, getting up. "If you're a good girl, you will do as you are told."

"It would not be good to be married to a man if I do not love him."

"But why shouldn't you love him? He's just the man that all the girls always love. Why don't you love him?" As Michel Voss asked this last question, there was a tone of anger in his voice. He had allowed his niece considerable liberty, and now she was unreasonable. Marie, who, in spite of her devotion to her uncle, was beginning to think that she was ill used by this tone, made no reply. "I hope you haven't been falling in love with any one else?" continued Michel.

"No," said Marie, in a low whisper.

"I do hope you're not still thinking of George, who has left us without casting a thought upon you. I do hope that you are not such a fool as that." Marie sat perfectly silent, not moving; but there was a frown on her brow, and a look of sorrow mixed with anger on her face. But Michel Voss did not see her face. He looked straight before him as he spoke, and was flinging chips of wood to a distance in his energy. "If it's that, Marie, I tell you you had better get quit of it at once. It can come to no good. Here is an excellent husband for you. Be a good girl, and say that you will accept him."

"I should not be a good girl to accept a man whom I do not love."

"Is it any thought about George that makes you say so, child?" Michel paused a

moment for an answer. "Tell me," he continued, with almost angry energy, "is it because of George that you refuse yourself this young man?"

Marie paused again for a moment, and then she replied, "No, it is not."

"It is not?"

"No, uncle."

"Then why will you not marry Adrian Urmand?"

"Because I do not care for him. Why won't you let me remain with you, uncle?"

She was very close to him now, and leaning against him; and her throat was half choked with sobs, and her eyes were full of tears. Michel Voss was a soft-hearted man, and inclined to be very soft of heart where Marie Bromar was concerned. On the other hand, he was thoroughly convinced that it would be for his niece's benefit that she should marry this young trader; and he thought also that it was his duty as her uncle and guardian to be round with her, and make her understand that, as her friends wished it, and as the young trader himself wished it, it was her duty to do as she was desired. Another uncle and guardian in his place would hardly have consulted the girl at all. Between his desire to have his own way and reduce her to obedience, and the temptation to put his arm round her waist and kiss away her tears, he was uneasy and vacillating. She gently put her hand within his arm, and pressed it very close.

"Won't you let me remain with you, uncle? I love you and Aunt Josey" (Madame Voss was named Josephine, and was generally called Aunt Josey) "and the children. I could not go away from the children. And I like the house. I am sure I am of use in the house."

"Of course you are of use in the house. It is not that."

"Why, then, should you want to send me away?"

"What nonsense you talk, Marie! Don't you know that a young woman like you ought to be married some day—that is, if she can get a fitting man to take her? What would the neighbors say of me if we kept you at home to drudge for us, instead of settling you out in the world properly? You forget, Marie, that I have a duty to



"DON'T YOU KNOW THAT A YOUNG WOMAN LIKE YOU OUGHT TO BE MARRIED SOME DAY?"

perform, and you should not make it so difficult."

"But if I don't want to be settled?" said Marie. "Who cares for the neighbors? If you and I understand each other, is not that enough?"

"I care for the neighbors," said Michel Voss, with energy.

"And must I marry a man I don't care a bit for because of the neighbors, Uncle Michel?" asked Marie, with something approaching to indignation in her voice.

Michel Voss perceived that it was of no use for him to carry on the argument. He entertained a half-formed idea that he did not quite understand the objections so strongly urged by his niece; that there was something on her mind that she would not tell him, and that there might be cruelty in urging the matter upon her; but, in opposition to this, there was his assured conviction that it was his duty to provide well and comfortably for his niece, and that it was her duty to obey him in acceding to

such provision as he might make. And then this marriage was undoubtedly a good marriage—a match that would make all the world declare how well Michel Voss had done for the girl whom he had taken under his protection. It was a marriage that he could not bear to see go out of the family. It was not probable that the young linen merchant, who was so well to do in the world, and who, no doubt, might have his choice in larger places than Granpere—it was not probable, Michel thought, that he would put up with many refusals. The girl would lose her chance, unless he, by his firmness, could drive this folly out of her. And yet how could he be firm, when he was tempted to throw his great arms about her, and swear that she should eat of his bread and drink of his cup and be unto him as a daughter till the last day of their joint existence? When she crept so close to him and pressed his arm, he was almost overcome by the sweetness of her love and by the tenderness of his own heart.

"It seems to me that you don't understand," he said at last. "I didn't think that such a girl as you would be so silly."

To this she made no reply, and then they began to walk down the hill together.

They had walked half-way home, he stepping a little in advance—because he was still angry with her, or angry rather with himself in that he could not bring himself to scold her properly—and she following close behind his shoulder, when he stopped suddenly and asked her a question which came from the direction his thoughts were taking at the moment. "You are sure," he said, "that you are not doing this because you expect George to come back to you?"

"Quite sure," she said, bearing forward a moment, and answering him in a whisper when she spoke.

"By my word, then, I can't understand it. I can't indeed. Has Urmand done any thing to offend you?"

"Nothing, uncle."

"Nor said any thing?"

"Not a word, uncle. I am not offended. Of course I am much obliged to him. Only I don't love him."

"By my faith I don't understand it. I don't indeed. It is sheer nonsense, and you must get over it. I shouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't tell you that you must get over it. He will be here again in another ten days, and you must have thought better of it by that time. You must indeed, Marie."

Then they walked down the hill in silence together, each thinking intently on the purpose of the other, but each altogether misunderstanding the other. Michel Voss was assured that she had twice declared that she was altogether indifferent to his son George. What he might have said or done had she declared her affection for her absent lover, he did not himself know. He had not questioned himself on that point. Though his wife had told him that Marie was ever thinking of George, he had not believed that it was so. He had no reason for disliking a marriage between his son and his wife's niece. When he had first thought that they were going to be lovers, under his nose, without his permission—going to commence a new kind of life between themselves with-

out so much as a word spoken to him or by him—he had found himself compelled to interfere, compelled as a father and an uncle. That kind of thing could never be allowed to take place in a well-ordered house without the expressed sanction of the head of the household. He had interfered—rather roughly; and his son had taken him at his word. He was sore now at his son's coldness to him, and was disposed to believe that his son cared not at all for any one at Granpere. His niece was almost as dear to him as his son, and much more dutiful. Therefore he would do the best he could for his niece. Marie's declaration that George was nothing to her—that she did not think of him—was in accordance with his own ideas. His wife had been wrong. His wife was usually wrong when any headwork was required. There could be no good reason why Marie Bromar should not marry Adrian Urmand.

But Marie, as she knew very well, had never declared that George Voss was nothing to her, he was forgotten, or that her heart was free. He had gone from her and had forgotten her. She was quite sure of that. And should she ever hear that he was married to some one else—as it was probable that she would hear some day—then she would be free again. Then she might take this man or that, if her friends wished it, and if she could bring herself to endure the proposed marriage. But at present her troth was plighted to George Voss; and where her troth was given, there was her heart also. She could understand that such a circumstance, affecting one of so little importance as herself, should be nothing to a man like her uncle; but it was every thing to her. George had forgotten her, and she had wept sorely over his want of constancy. But though telling herself that this certainly was so, she had declared to herself that she would never be untrue till his want of truth had been put beyond the reach of doubt. Who does not know how hope remains, when reason has declared that there is no longer ground for hoping?

Such had been the state of her mind hitherto; but what would be the good of entertaining hope, even if there were ground for hoping, when, as was so evident, her uncle would never permit George and her to be

man and wife? And did she not owe every thing to her uncle? And was it not the duty of a girl to obey her guardian? Would not all the world be against her if she refused this man? Her mind was tormented by a thousand doubts, when her uncle said another word to her, just as they were entering the village:

"You will try and think better of it, will

you not, my dear?" She was silent. "Come, Marie, you can say that you will try. Will you not try?"

"Yes, uncle, I will try."

Michel Voss went home in a good humor, for he felt that he had triumphed; and poor Marie returned broken-hearted, for she was aware that she had half yielded. She knew that her uncle was triumphant.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Edmond Greisse was back at Granpere he well remembered his message, but he had some doubt as to the expediency of delivering it. He had to reflect, in the first place, whether he was quite sure that matters were arranged between Marie and Adrian Urmand. The story had been told to him as being certainly true by Peter, the waiter. And he had discussed the matter with other young men, his associates in the place, among all of whom it was believed that Urmand was certainly about to carry away the young woman with whom they were all more or less in love. But when, on his return to Granpere, he had asked a few more questions, and had found that even Peter was now in doubt on a point as to which he had before been so sure, he began to think that there would be some difficulty in giving his message. He was not without some little fear of Marie, and hesitated to tell her that he had spread the report about her marriage. So he contented himself with simply announcing to her that George Voss intended to visit his old home.

"Does my uncle know?" Marie asked.

"No; you are to tell him," said Greisse.

"I am to tell him! Why should I tell him? You can tell him."

"But George said that I was to let you know, and that you would tell your uncle." This was quite unintelligible to Marie; but it was clear to her that she could make no such announcement after the conversation which she had had with her uncle. It was quite out of the question that she should be the first to announce George's return, when she had been twice warned on that Sunday afternoon not to think of him. "You had

better let my uncle know yourself," she said, as she walked away. But young Greisse, knowing that he was already in trouble, and feeling that he might very probably make it worse, held his peace. When, therefore, one morning George Voss showed himself at the door of the inn, neither his father nor Madame Voss expected him.

But his father was kind to him, and his step-mother hovered round him with demonstrations of love and gratitude, as though much were due to him for coming back at all. "But you expected me?" said George.

"No indeed," said his father. "We did not expect you now any more than on any other day since you left us."

"I sent word by Edmond Greisse," said George. Edmond was interrogated, and declared that he had forgotten to give the message. George was too clever to pursue the matter any further, and when he first met Marie Bromar there was not a word said between them beyond what might have been said between any young persons so related after an absence of twelve months. George Voss was very careful to make no demonstration of affection for a girl who had forgotten him, and who was now, as he believed, betrothed to another man; and Marie was determined that certainly no sign of the old love should first be shown by her. He had come back, perhaps just in time. He had returned just at the moment in which something must be decided. She had felt how much there was in the little word which she had spoken to her uncle. When a girl says that she will try to reconcile herself to a man's overtures, she has almost yielded. The word had escaped her without any such

meaning on her part—had been spoken because she had feared to continue to contradict her uncle in the full completeness of a positive refusal. She had regretted it as soon as it had been spoken, but she could not recall it. She had seen in her uncle's eye, and had heard in the tone of his voice, for how much that word had been taken; but it had gone forth from her mouth, and she could not now rob it of its meaning. Adrian Urmand was to be back at Granpere in a few days—in ten days Michel Voss had said; and there were those ten days for her in which to resolve what she would do. Now, as though sent from heaven, George had returned in this very interval of time. Might it not be that he would help her out of her difficulty? If he would only tell her to remain single for his sake, she would certainly turn her back upon her Swiss lover, let her uncle say what he might. She would make no engagement with George unless with her uncle's sanction; but a word, a look of love, would fortify her against that other marriage.

George, she thought, had come back a man more to be worshipped than ever, as far as appearance went. What woman could doubt for a moment between two such men? Adrian Urmand was no doubt a pretty man, with black hair, of which he was very careful, with white hands, with bright, small, dark eyes which were very close together, with a thin, regular nose, a small mouth, and a black mustache which he was always pointing with his fingers. It was impossible to deny that he was good-looking after a fashion; but Marie despised him in her heart. She was almost bigger than he was, certainly stronger, and had no aptitude for the city niceness and *point-devise* fastidiousness of such a lover. George Voss had come back, not taller than when he had left them, but broader in the shoulders, and more of a man. And then he had in his eye, and in his beaked nose, and his large mouth, and well-developed chin, that look of command which was the peculiar character of his father's face, and which women, who judge of men by their feelings rather than their thoughts, always love to see. Marie, if she would consent to marry Adrian Urmand, might probably have her own way in the house in every thing;

whereas it was certain enough that George Voss, wherever he might be, would desire to have his way. But yet there needed not a moment, in Marie's estimation, to choose between the two. George Voss was a real man; whereas Adrian Urmand, tried by such a comparison, was, in her estimation, simply a rich trader in want of a wife.

In a day or two the fatted calf was killed, and all went happily between George and his father. They walked together up into the mountains, and looked after the wood-cutting, and discussed the prospects of the inn at Colmar. Michel was disposed to think that George had better remain at Colmar, and accept Madame Faragon's offer. "If you think that the house is worth any thing, I will give you a few thousand francs to set it in order; and then you had better agree to allow her so much a year for her life." He probably felt himself to be nearly as young a man as his son; and then remember, too, that he had other sons coming up who would be able to carry on the house at Granpere when he should be past his work. Michel was a loving, generous-hearted man, and all feeling of anger with his son was over before they had been together two days. "You can't do better, George," he said. "You need not always stay away from us for twelve months; and I might take a turn over the mountain, and get a lesson as to how you do things at Colmar. If ten thousand francs will help you, you shall have them. Will that make things go straight with you?" George Voss thought the sum named would make things go very straight; but, as the reader knows, he had another matter near to his heart. He thanked his father; but not in the joyous, thoroughly contented tone that Michel had expected. "Is there any thing wrong about it?" Michel said, in that sharp tone which he used when something had suddenly displeased him.

"There is nothing wrong, nothing wrong at all," said George, slowly. "The money is much more than I could have expected. Indeed, I did not expect any."

"What is it, then?"

"I was thinking of something else. Tell me, father, is it true that Marie is going to be married to Adrian Urmand?"

"What makes you ask?"