



## CHAPTER VIII.

"How is it to be?" said Michel to his niece the next morning. The question was asked down stairs in the little room, while Urmand was sitting at table in the chamber above, waiting for the landlord. Michel Voss had begun to feel that his visitor would be very heavy on hand, having come there as a visitor, and not as a man of business, unless he could be handed over to the womankind. But no such handing over would be possible unless Marie would acquiesce. "How is it to be?" Michel asked. He had so prepared himself that he was ready, in accordance with a word or a look from his niece, either to be very angry, thoroughly imperious, and resolute to have his way with the dependent girl, or else to be all smiles and kindness and confidence and affection. There was nothing she should not have if she would only be amenable to reason.

"How is what to be, Uncle Michel?" said Marie.

The landlord thought that he discovered an indication of concession in his niece's voice, and began immediately to adapt himself to the softer courses. "Well, Marie, you know what it is we all wish. I hope you understand that we love you well, and think so much of you that we would not intrust you to any one living who did not bear a high character and seem to deserve you." He was looking into Marie's face as he spoke, and saw that she was soft and thoughtful in her mood, not proud and scornful as she had been on the preceding evening. "You have grown up here with us, Marie, till it has almost come upon us with surprise that you are a beautiful young woman, instead of a great straggling girl."

"I wish I was a great straggling girl still."

"Do not say that, my darling. We must all take the world as it is, you know. But

here you are, and of course it is my duty and your aunt's duty"—it was always a sign of high good humor on the part of Michel Voss when he spoke of his wife as being any body in the household—"my duty and your aunt's duty to see and do the best for you."

"You have always done the best for me in letting me be here."

"Well, my dear, I hope so. You had to be here, and you fell into this way of life naturally. But sometimes, when I have seen you waiting on the people about the house, I've thought it wasn't quite right."

"I think it was quite right. Peter couldn't do it all, and he'd be sure to make a mess of it."

"We must have two Peters; that's all. But, as I was saying, that kind of thing was natural enough before you were grown up, and had become—what shall I say?—such a handsome young woman." Marie laughed and turned up her nose and shook her head, but it may be presumed that she received some comfort from her uncle's compliments. "And then I began to see, and your aunt began to see, that it wasn't right that you should spend your life handing soup to the young men here."

"It is Peter who always hands the soup to the young men."

"Well, well; but you are waiting upon them and upon us."

"I trust the day is never to come, uncle, when I'm to be ashamed of waiting upon you." When he heard this he put his arm round her and kissed her. Had he known at that moment what her feelings were in regard to his son, he would have recommended Adrian Urmand to go back to Basle. Had he known what were George's feelings, he would at once have sent for his son from Colmar.

"I hope you may give me my pipe and my cup of coffee when I'm such an old fellow that I can't get up to help myself. That's the sort of reward we look forward to from those we love and cherish. But, Marie, when we see you as you are now—your aunt and I—we feel that this kind of thing shouldn't go on. We want the world to know that you are a daughter to us, not a servant."

"Oh, the world—the world, uncle! Why should we care for the world?"

"We must care, my dear. And you yourself, my dear—if this went on for a few years longer—you yourself would become very tired of it. It isn't what we should like for you if you were our own daughter. Can't you understand that?"

"No, I can't."

"Yes, my dear, yes. I'm sure you do. Very well. Then there comes this young man. I am not a bit surprised that he should fall in love with you—because I should do it myself if I were not your uncle." Then she caressed his arm. How was she to keep herself from caressing him when he spoke so sweetly to her? "We were not a bit surprised when he came and told us how it was. Nobody could have behaved better. Every body must admit that. He spoke of you to me and to your aunt as though you were the highest lady in the land."

"I don't want any one to speak of me as though I were a high lady."

"I mean in the way of respect, my dear. Every young woman must wish to be treated with respect by any young man who comes after her. Well, he told us that it was the great wish of his life that you should be his wife. He's a man who has a right to look for a wife, because he can keep a wife. He has a house, and a business, and ready money."

"What's all that, uncle?"

"Nothing; nothing at all. No more than that"—saying which, Michel Voss threw his right hand and arm loosely abroad—"no more than that, if he were not himself well-behaved along with it. We want to see you married to him—your aunt and I—because we are sure that he will be a good husband to you."

"But if I don't love him, Uncle Michel?"

"Ah, my dear; that's where I think it is that you are dreaming, and will go on dreaming till you've lost yourself, unless your aunt and I interfere to prevent it. Love is all very well. Of course you must love your husband. But it doesn't do for young women to let themselves be run away with by romantic ideas; it doesn't indeed, my dear. I've heard of young women who've fallen in love with statues and men in armor out of poetry, and grand fellows that they put into books, and there they've been waiting, waiting, waiting till some man in armor should come for them. The man in armor doesn't come. But sometimes there comes somebody who looks like a man in armor, and that's the worst of all."

"I don't want a man in armor, Uncle Michel."

"No, I dare say not. But the truth is, you don't know what you want. The proper thing for a young woman is to get herself well settled, if she has the opportunity. There are people who think so much of money that they'd give a child almost to any body as long as he was rich. I shouldn't like to see you marry a man as old as myself."

"I shouldn't care how old he was if I loved him."

"Nor to a curmudgeon," continued Michel, not caring to notice the interruption, "nor to an ill-tempered fellow, or one who gambled, or one who would use bad words to you. But here is a young man who has no faults at all."

"I hate people who have no faults," said Marie.

"Now you must give him an answer to-day or to-morrow. You remember what you promised me when we were coming home the other day." Marie remembered her promise very well, and thought that a great deal more had been made of it than justice would have permitted. "I don't want to hurry you at all, only it makes me so sad at heart when my own girl won't come and say a kind word to me, and give me a kiss before we part at night. I thought so much of that last night, Marie—I couldn't sleep for thinking of it." On hearing this she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him on each

cheek and on his lips. "I get to feel so, Marie, if there's any thing wrong between you and me, that I don't know what I'm doing. Will you do this for me, my dear? Come and sit at table with us this evening, and make one of us. At any rate, come and show that we don't want to make a servant of you. Then we'll put off the rest of it till to-morrow." When such a request was made to her in such words, how could she not accede to it? She had no alternative but to say that she would do in this respect as he would have her. She smiled, and nodded her head, and kissed him again. "And, Marie darling, put on a pretty frock—for my sake. I like to see you gay and pretty." Again she nodded her head, and again she kissed him. Such requests so made she felt that it would be impossible that she should refuse.

And yet when she came to think about it as she went about the house alone, the granting of such requests was, in fact, yielding in every thing. If she made herself smart for this young man, and sat next him, and smiled, and talked to him, conscious, as she would be—and he would be also—that she was so placed that she might become his wife, how afterward could she hold her ground? And if she were really resolute to hold her ground, would it not be much better that she should do so by giving up no point, even though her uncle's anger should rise hot against her? But now she had promised her uncle, and she knew that she could not go back from her word. It would be better for her, she told herself, to think no more about it. Things must arrange themselves. What did it matter whether she were wretched at Basle or wretched at Granpere? The only thing that could give a charm to her life was altogether out of her reach.

After this conversation Michel went up stairs to his young friend, and within a quarter of an hour had handed him over to his wife. It was, of course, understood now that Marie was not to be troubled till the time came for her to sit down at table with her smart frock. Michel explained to his wife the full amount of his success, and acknowledged that he felt that Marie was already pretty nearly overcome.

"She'll try to be pleasant for my sake this

evening," he said, "and so she'll fall into the way of being intimate with him; and when he asks her to-morrow, she'll be forced to take him."

It never occurred to him, as he said this, that he was forming a plan for sacrificing the girl he loved. He imagined that he was doing his duty by his niece thoroughly, and was rather proud of his own generosity. In the afternoon Adrian Urmand was taken out for a drive to the ravine by Madame Voss. They both, no doubt, felt that this was very tedious; but they were by nature patient—quite unlike Michel Voss or Marie—and each of them was aware that there was a duty to be done. Adrian, therefore, was satisfied to potter about the ravine, and Madame Voss assured him at least a dozen times that it was the dearest wish of her heart to call him her nephew-in-law.

At last the time for supper came. Throughout the day Marie had said very little to any one after leaving her uncle. Ideas flitted across her mind of various modes of escape. What if she were to run away—to her cousin's house at Epinal; and write from thence to say that this proposed marriage was impossible? But her cousin at Epinal was a stranger to her, and her uncle had always been to her the same as a father. Then she thought of going to Colmar, of telling the whole truth to George, and of dying when he refused her—for refuse her he would. But this was a dream rather than a plan. Or how would it be if she went to her uncle now at once, while the young man was away at the ravine, and swear to him that nothing on earth should induce her to marry Adrian Urmand? But brave as Marie was, she was afraid to do this. He had told her how he suffered when they two did not stand well together, and she feared to be accused by him of unkindness and ingratitude. And how would it be with her if she did accept the man? She was sufficiently alive to the necessities of the world to know that it would be well to have a home of her own, and a husband, and children if God would send them. She understood quite as well as Michel Voss did that to be head waiter at the Lion d'Or was not a career in life of which she could have reason to be proud. As the afternoon went on she was in great doubt.

She spread the cloth, and prepared the room for supper, somewhat earlier than usual, knowing that she should require some minutes for her toilet. It was necessary that she should explain to Peter that he must take upon himself some self-action upon this occasion, and it may be doubted whether she did this with perfect good humor. She was angry when she had to look for him before she commenced her operations, and scolded him because he could not understand without being told why she went away and left him twenty minutes before the bell was rung.

As soon as the bell was heard through the house Michel Voss, who was waiting below with his wife in a quite unusual manner, marshaled the way up stairs. He had partly expected that Marie would join them below, and was becoming fidgety lest she should break away from her engagement. He went first, and then followed Adrian and Madame Voss together. The accustomed guests were all ready, because it had come to be generally understood that this supper was to be, as it were, a supper of betrothal. Madame Voss had on her black silk gown. Michel had changed his coat and his cravat. Adrian Urmand was exceedingly smart. The dullest intellect could perceive that there was something special in the wind. The two old ladies who were lodgers in the house came out from their rooms five minutes earlier than usual, and met the *cortège* from down stairs in the passage.

When Michel entered the room he at once looked round for Marie. There she was standing at the soup tureen with her back to the company. But he could see that there hung down some ribbon from her waist, that her frock was not the one she had worn in the morning, and that in the article of her attire she had kept her word with him. He was very awkward. When one of the old ladies was about to seat herself in the chair next to Adrian—in preparation for which it must be admitted that Marie had made certain wicked arrangements—Michel, first by signs and afterward with audible words, intended to be whispered, indicated to the lady that she was required to place herself elsewhere. This was hard upon the lady, as her own table napkin and a cup out of which

she was wont to drink were placed at that spot. Marie, standing at the soup tureen, heard it all and became very spiteful. Then her uncle called to her:

"Marie, my dear, are you not coming?"

"Presently, uncle," replied Marie, in a clear voice, as she commenced to dispense the soup.

She ladled out all the soup without once turning her face toward the company, then stood for a few moments as if in doubt, and after that walked boldly up to her place. She had intended to sit next to her uncle, opposite to her lover, and there had been her chair. But Michel had insisted on bringing the old lady round to the seat that Marie had intended for herself, and so disarranging all her plans. The old lady had simpered and smiled and made a little speech to M. Urmand, which every body had heard. Marie, too, had heard it all. But the thing had to be done, and she plucked up her courage and did it. She placed herself next to her lover, and, as she did so, felt that it was necessary that she should say something at the moment:

"Here I am, Uncle Michel, but you'll find you'll miss me before supper is over."

"There is somebody would much rather have you than his supper," said the horrid old lady opposite.

Then there was a pause, a terrible pause.

"Perhaps it used to be so when young men came to sup with you, years ago; but nowadays men like their supper," said Marie, who was driven on by her anger to a ferocity which she could not restrain.

"I did not mean to give offense," said the poor old lady, meekly.

Marie, as she thought of what she had said, repented so bitterly that she could hardly refrain from tears.

"There is no offense at all," said Michel, angrily.

"Will you allow me to give you a little wine?" said Adrian, turning to his neighbor.

Marie bowed her head and held her glass, but the wine remained in it to the end of the supper, and there it was left.

When it was all over, Michel felt that it had not been a success. With the exception of her savage speech to the disagreeable old lady, Marie had behaved well. She was on



"HER AUNT STOOD FOR A MOMENT LOOKING AT HER."

her mettle, and very anxious to show that she could sit at table with Adrian Urmand and be at her ease. She was not at her ease, but she made a bold fight, which was more than was done by her uncle or her aunt. Michel was unable to speak in his ordinary voice or with his usual authority, and Madame Voss hardly uttered a word. Urmand, whose position was the hardest of all, struggled gallantly, but was quite unable to keep up any continued conversation. The old lady had been thoroughly silenced, and neither she nor her sister again opened their mouth. When Madame Voss rose from her chair, in order that they might all retire, the consciousness of relief was very great.

For that night Marie's duty to her uncle was done. So much had been understood. She was to dress herself and sit down to supper, and after that she was not to be disturbed again till the morrow. On the next morning she was to be subjected to the grand trial. She understood this so well that she went about the house fearless on that even-

ing—fearless as regarded the moment, fearful only as regarded the morrow.

"May I ask one question, dear?" said her aunt, coming to her after she had gone to her own room. "Have you made up your mind?"

"No," said Marie; "I have not made up my mind."

Her aunt stood for a moment looking at her, and then crept out of the room.

In the morning Michel Voss was half inclined to release his niece, and to tell Urmand that he had better go back to Basle. He could see that the girl was suffering, and, after all, what was it that he wanted? Only that she should be prosperous and happy. His heart almost relented; and at one moment, had Marie come across him, he would have released her. "Let it go on," he said to himself, as he took up his hat and stick and went off to the woods. "Let it go on. If she finds to-day that she can't take him, I'll never say another word to press her." He went up to the woods after

breakfast, and did not come back till the evening.

During breakfast Marie did not show herself at all, but remained with the children. It was not expected that she should show herself. At about noon, as soon as her uncle had started, her aunt came to her and asked her whether she was ready to see M. Urmand. "I am ready," said Marie, rising from her seat, and standing upright before her aunt.

"And where will you see him, dear?"

"Wherever he pleases," said Marie, with something that was again almost savage in her voice.

"Shall he come up stairs to you?"

"What, here?"

"No; he can not come here. You might go into the little sitting-room."

"Very well. I will go into the little sitting-room." Then without saying another word she got up, left the room, and went along the passage to the chamber in question. It was a small room, furnished, as they all thought at Granpere, with Parisian elegance, intended for such visitors to the hotel as might choose to pay for the charm and luxury of such an apartment. It was generally found that visitors to Granpere did not care to pay for the luxury of this Parisian elegance, and the room was almost always empty. Thither Marie went, and seated herself at once on the centre of the red, stuffy, velvet sofa. There she sat, perfectly motionless, till there came a knock at the door. Marie Bromar was a very handsome girl, but as she sat there, all alone, with her hands crossed on her lap, with a hard look about her mouth, with a frown on her brow, and scorn and disdain for all around her in her eyes, she was as little handsome as it was possible that she should make herself. She answered the knock, and Adrian Urmand entered the room. She did not rise, but waited till he had come close up to her. Then she was the first to speak. "Aunt Josey tells me that you want to see me," she said.

Urmand's task was certainly not a pleasant one. Though his temper was excellent, he was already beginning to think that he was being ill used. Marie, no doubt, was a very fine girl; but the match that he offered her was one at which no young woman of her

rank in all Lorraine or Alsace need have turned up her nose. He had been invited over to Granpere specially that he might spend his time in making love, and he had found the task before him very hard and disagreeable. He was afflicted with all the ponderous notoriety of an acknowledged suitor's position, but was consoled with none of the usual comforts. Had he not been pledged to make the attempt, he would probably have gone back to Basle; as it was, he was compelled to renew his offer. He was aware that he could not leave the house without doing so. But he was determined that one more refusal should be the last.

"Marie," said he, putting out his hand to her, "doubtless you know what it is that I would say."

"I suppose I do," she answered.

"I hope you do not doubt my true affection for you."

She paused a moment before she replied. "I have no reason to doubt it," she said.

"No indeed. I love you with all my heart. I do truly. Your uncle and aunt think it would be a good thing for both of us that we should be married. What answer will you make me, Marie?" Again she paused. She had allowed him to take her hand, and as he thus asked his question he was standing opposite to her, still holding it. "You have thought about it, Marie, since I was here last?"

"Yes; I have thought about it."

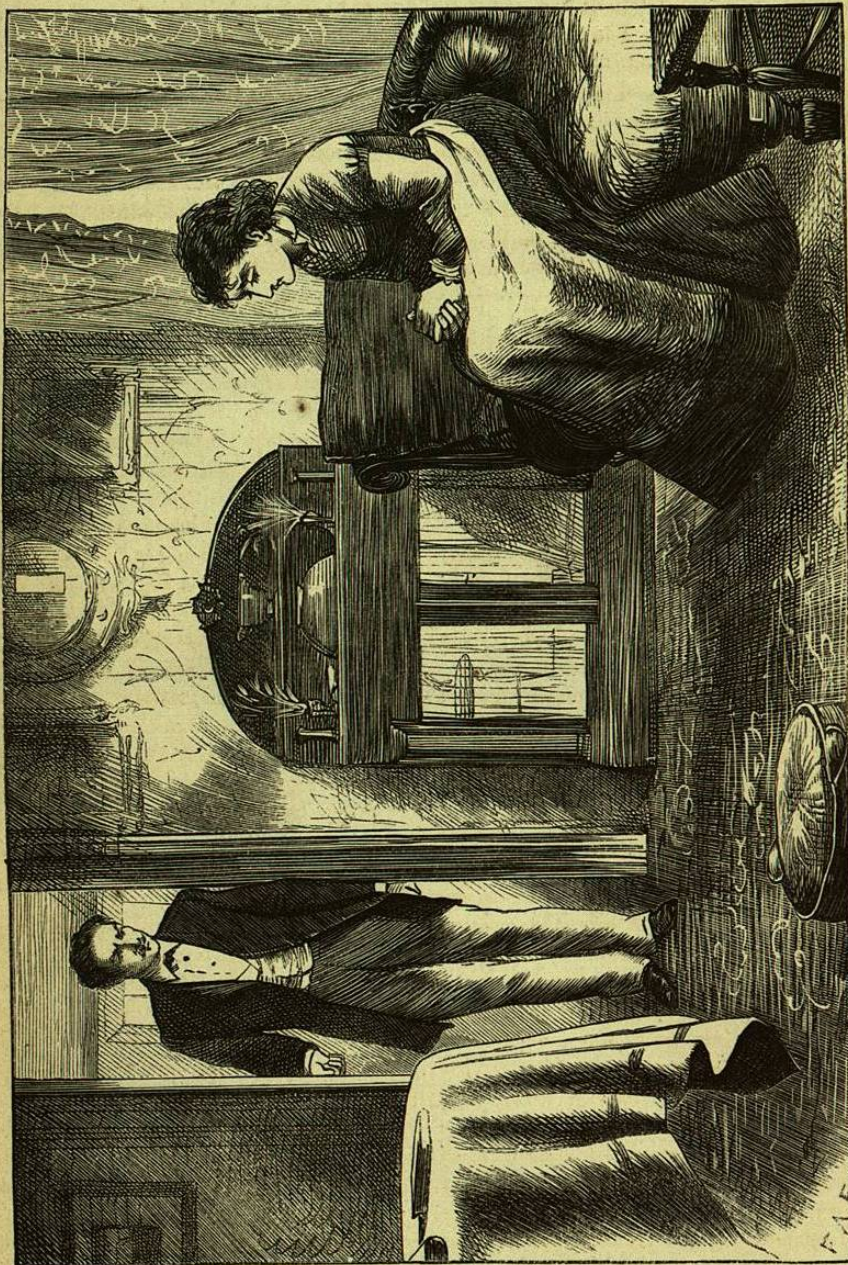
"Well, dearest?"

"I suppose it had better be so," said she, standing up and withdrawing her hand.

She had accepted him; and now it was no longer possible for him to go back to Basle except as a betrothed man. She had accepted him; but there came upon him a wretched feeling that none of the triumph of successful love had come to him. He was almost disappointed, or if not disappointed, was, at any rate, embarrassed. But it was necessary that he should immediately conduct himself as an engaged man. "And you will love me, Marie?" he said, as he again took her by the hand.

"I will do my best," she said.

Then he put his arm round her waist and kissed her, and she did not turn away her



"ADRIAN URMAND ENTERED THE ROOM."

face from him. "I will do my best also to make you happy," he said.

"I am sure you will. I believe you. I know that you are good." There was another pause, during which he stood, still embracing her. "I may go now, may I not?" she said.

"You have not kissed me yet, Marie." Then she kissed him; but the touch of her lips was cold, and he felt that there was no love in them. He knew, though he could hardly define the knowledge to himself, that she had accepted him in obedience to her

uncle. He was almost angry, but, being cautious and even-tempered by nature, he repressed the feeling. He knew that he must take her now, and that he had better make the best of it. She would, he was sure, be a good wife, and the love would probably come in time.

"We shall be together this evening, shall we not?" he asked.

"Oh yes," said Marie, "if you please." It was, as she knew, only reasonable now that they should be together. Then he let her go, and she walked off to her room.



## CHAPTER IX.

"I SUPPOSE it had better be so," Marie Bromar had said to her lover, when in set form he made his proposition. She had thought very much about it, and had come exactly to that state of mind. She did suppose that it had better be so. She knew that she did not love the man. She knew also that she loved another man. She did not even think that she should ever learn to love Adrian Urmand. She had neither ambition in the matter, nor even any feeling of prudence as regarded herself. She was enticed by no desire of position or love of money. In respect to all her own feelings about herself she would sooner have remained at the Lion d'Or, and have waited upon the guests day after day, and month after month. But yet she had supposed that "it had better be so." Her uncle wished it—wished it so strongly that she believed it would be impossible that she could remain an inmate in his house unless she acceded to his wishes. Her aunt manifestly thought that it was her duty to accept the man, and could not understand how so manifest a duty, going hand in hand as it did with so great an advantage, should be made a matter of doubt. She had not one about her to counsel her to hold by her own feelings. It was the practice of the world around her that girls in such matters should do as they were bidden. And then, stronger than all, there was the indifference to her of the man she loved.

Marie Bromar was a fine, high-spirited, animated girl; but it must not be thought that she was a highly educated lady, or that time had been given to her, amidst all her occupations, in which she could allow her mind to dwell much on feelings of romance. Her life had ever been practical, busy, and full of action. As is ever the case with those who have to do chiefly with things material,

she was thinking more frequently of the outer wants of those around her than of the inner workings of her own heart and personal intelligence. Would the bread rise well? Would that bargain she had made for poultry suffice for the house? Was that lot of wine which she had persuaded her uncle to buy of a creditable quality? Were her efforts for increasing her uncle's profits compatible with satisfaction on the part of her uncle's guests? Such were the questions which from day to day occupied her attention and filled her with interest. And therefore her own identity was not strong to her, as it is strong to those whose business permits them to look frequently into themselves, or whose occupations are of a nature to produce such introspection. If her head ached, or had she lamed her hand by any accident, she would think more of the injury to the household arising from her incapacity than of her own pain. It is so, reader, with your gardener, your groom, or your cook, if you will think of it. Till you tell them by your pity that they are the sufferers, they will think that it is you who are most affected by their ailments. And the man who loses his daily wage because he is ill complains of his loss and not of his ailment. His own identity is half hidden from him by the practical wants of his life.

Had Marie been disappointed in her love without the appearance of any rival suitor, no one would have ever heard of her love. Had George Voss married, she would have gone on with her work without a sign of outward sorrow; or had he died, she would have wept for him with no peculiar tears. She did not expect much from the world around her, beyond this, that the guests should not complain about their suppers as long as the suppers provided were reasonably