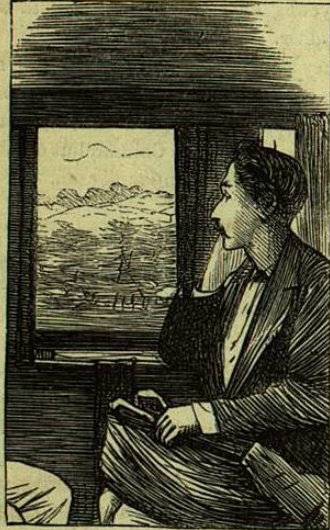




## CHAPTER XVII.



THERE had been very little said between Michel Voss and Urmand on their journey toward Granpere till they were at the top of the Vosges, on the mountain-road, at which place they had to leave their little carriage and bait their horse. Indeed, Michel had been asleep during almost the entire time. On the night but one before he had not been in bed at all, having reached Basle after midnight, and having passed the hours 'twixt that and his morning visit to Urmand's house in his futile endeavors to stop poor Marie's letter. And the departure of the travelers from Basle on this morning had been very early, so that the poor innkeeper had been robbed of his proper allowance of natural rest. He had slept soundly in the train to Colmar, and had afterward slept in the little *calèche* which had taken them to the top of the mountain. Urmand had sat silent by his side, by no means anxious to disturb his companion, because he had no determined plan ready to communi-

cate. Once or twice before he reached Colmar he had thought that he would go back again. He had been, he felt, badly treated, and though he was very fond of Marie, it would be better for him, perhaps, to wash his hands of the whole affair. He was so thinking the whole way to Colmar. But he was afraid of Michel Voss, and when they got out upon the platform there he had no resolution ready to be declared as fixed. Then they had hired the little carriage, and Michel Voss had slept again. He had slept all through Münster, and up the steep mountain, and was not thoroughly awake till they were summoned to get out at the wonderfully fine house for refreshment which the late emperor caused to be built at the top of the hill. Here they went into the restaurant, and as Michel Voss was known to the man who kept it, he ordered a bottle of wine. "What a terrible place to live in all the winter!" he said, as he looked down through the window right into the deep valley below. From the spot on which the house is built you can see all the broken wooded ground of the steep descent, and then the broad plain that stretches away to the valley of the Rhine. "There is nothing but snow here after Christmas," continued Michel, "and perhaps not a Christian over the road for days together. I shouldn't like it, I know. It may be all very well just now."

But Adrian Urmand was altogether inattentive either to the scenery now before him or to the prospect of the mountain innkeeper's winter life. He knew that two hours and a half would take them down the mountain into Granpere, and that when there it would be at once necessary that he should begin a task the idea of which was by no means pleasant to him. He was quite sure

now that he wished he had remained at Basle, and that he had accepted Marie's letter as final. He told himself again and again that he could not make her marry him if she chose to change her mind. What was he to say and what was he to do when he got to Granpere, a place which he almost wished that he had never seen, in spite of those profitable linen-buyings? And now when Michel Voss began to talk to him about the scenery and what this man up in the mountain did in the winter—at this moment when his terrible trouble was so very near him—he felt it to be an insult, or at least a cruelty. "What can he do from December till April except smoke and drink?" asked Michel Voss.

"I don't care what he does," said Urmand, turning away. "I only know I wish I'd never come here."

"Take a glass of wine, my friend," said Michel. "The mountain air has made you chill." Urmand took the glass of wine, but it did not cheer him much. "We shall have it all right before the day is over," continued Michel.

"I don't think it will ever be all right," said the other.

"And why not? The fact is, you don't understand young women; as how should you, seeing that you have not had to manage them? You do as I tell you, and just be round with her. You tell her that you don't desire any change yourself, and that after what has passed you can't allow her to think of such a thing. You speak as though you had a downright claim, as you have, and all will come right. It's not that she cares for him, you know. You must remember that. She has never even said a word of that kind. I haven't a doubt on my mind as to which she really likes best; but it's that stupid promise, and the way that George has had of making her believe that she is bound by the first word she ever spoke to a young man. It's only nonsense, and of course we must get over it." Then they were summoned out, the horse having finished his meal, and were rattled down the hill into Granpere without many more words between them.

One other word was spoken, and that word was hardly pleasant in its tone. Ur-

mand at least did not relish it. "I shall go away at once if she doesn't treat me as she ought," said he, just as they were entering the village.

Michel was silent for a moment before he answered. "You'll behave, I'm sure, as a man ought to behave to a young woman whom he intends to make his wife." The words themselves were civil enough; but there was a tone in the innkeeper's voice and a flame in his eye which made Urmand almost feel that he had been threatened. Then they drove into the space in front of the door of the Lion d'Or.

Michel had made for himself no plan whatsoever. He led the way at once into the house, and Urmand followed, hardly daring to look up into the faces of the persons around him. They were both of them soon in the presence of Madame Voss, but Marie Bromar was not there. Marie had been sharp enough to perceive who was coming before they were out of the carriage, and was already ensconced in some safer retreat up stairs, in which she could meditate on her plan of the campaign. "Look lively and get us something to eat," said Michel, meaning to be cheerful and self-possessed. "We left Basle at five, and have not eaten a mouthful since." It was now nearly four o'clock, and the bread and cheese which had been served with the wine on the top of the mountain had, of course, gone for nothing. Madame Voss immediately began to bustle about, calling the cook and Peter Veque to her assistance. But nothing for a while was said about Marie. Urmand, trying to look as though he were self-possessed, stood with his back to the stove and whistled. For a few minutes, during which the bustling about the table went on, Michel was wrapped in thought and said nothing. At last he had made up his mind, and spoke. "We might as well make a dash at it at once," said he. "Where is Marie?" No one answered him. "Where is Marie Bromar?" he asked again, angrily. He knew that it behooved him now to take upon himself at once the real authority of a master of a house.

"She is up stairs," said Peter, who was straightening a table-cloth.

"Tell her to come down to me," said her



uncle. Peter departed immediately, and for a while there was silence in the little room. Adrian Urmand felt his heart to palpitate disagreeably. Indeed, the manner in which it would appear that the innkeeper proposed to manage the business was distressing enough to him. It seemed as though it were intended that he should discuss his little difficulties with Marie in the presence of the whole household. But he stood his ground and sounded one more ineffectual little whistle. In a few minutes Peter returned, but said nothing. "Where is Marie Bromar?" again demanded Michel, in an angry voice.

"I told her to come down," said Peter.

"Well?"

"I don't think she's coming," said Peter.

"What did she say?"

"Not a word; she only bade me go down."

Then Michel walked into the kitchen as though he were about to fetch the recusant himself. But he stopped himself, and asked his wife to go up to Marie. Madame Voss did go up, and after her return there was some whispering between her and her husband. "She is upset by the excitement of your return," Michel said at last, "and we must give her a little grace. Come; we will eat our dinner."

In the mean time Marie was sitting on her bed up stairs in a most unhappy plight. She really loved her uncle, and almost feared him. She did fear him with that sort of fear which is produced by reverence and habits of obedience, but which, when softened by affection, hardly makes itself known as fear except on troublous occasions. And she was oppressed by the remembrance of all that was due from her to him and to her aunt, feeling, as it was natural that she should do, in compliance with the manners and habits of her people, that she owed a duty of obedience in this matter of marriage. Though she had been able to hold her own against the priest, and had been quite firm in opposition to her aunt—who was in truth a woman much less strong by nature than herself—she dreaded a further dispute with her uncle. She could not bear to think that he should be enabled to accuse her with justice of ingratitude. It had been her great pleasure to be true to him, and he had

answered her truth by a perfect confidence which had given a charm to her life. Now this would all be over, and she would be driven again to beg him to send her away, that she might become a household drudge elsewhere. And now that this very moment of her agony had come, and that this man to whom she had given a promise was there to claim her, how was she to go down and say what she had to say before all the world? It was perfectly clear to her that in accordance with her reception of Urmand at the first moment of their meeting, so must be her continued conduct toward him till he should leave her, or else take her away with him. She could not smile on him and shake hands with him, and cut his bread for him and pour out his wine, after such a letter as she had written to him, without signifying thereby that the letter was to go for nothing. Now, let what might happen, the letter was not to go for nothing. The letter was to remain a true fact and a true letter. "I can't go down, Aunt Josey; indeed I can't," she said. "I am not well, and I should drop. Pray tell Uncle Michel, with my best love and with my duty, that I can't go to him now." And she sat still upon her bed, not weeping, but clasping her hands, and trying to see her way out of her misfortune.

The dinner was eaten in grim silence, and after the dinner Michel, still grimly silent, sat with his friend on the bench before the door and smoked a cigar. While he was smoking Michel said never a word. But he was thinking of the difficulty he had to overcome; and he was thinking also, at odd moments, whether his own son George was not, after all, a better sort of lover for a young woman than this young man who was seated by his side. But it never occurred to him that he might find a solution of the difficulty by encouraging this second idea. Urmand during this time was telling himself that it behooved him to be a man, and that his sitting there in silence was hardly proof of his manliness. He knew that he was being ill treated, and that he must do something to redress his own wrongs, if he only knew how to do. He was quite determined that he would not be a coward; that he would stand up for his own rights. But

if a young woman won't marry a man, a man can't make her do so either by scolding her or by fighting any of her friends. In this case the young lady's friends were all on his side. But the weight of that half hour of silence and of Michel's gloom was intolerable to him. At last he got up and declared he would go and see an old woman who would have linen to sell. "As I am here, I might as well do a stroke of work," he said, striving to be jocose.

"Do," said Michel; "and in the mean time I will see Marie Bromar."

Whenever Michel Voss was heard to call his niece Marie Bromar, using the two names, it was understood by all who heard him about the hotel that he was not in a good humor. As soon as Urmand was gone he rose slowly from his seat, and with heavy steps he went up stairs in search of the refractory girl. He went straight to her own bedroom, and there he found her still sitting on her bedside. She jumped up as soon as he was in the room, and running up to him, took him by the arm. "Uncle Michel," she said, "pray, pray be good to me. Pray spare me!"

"I am good to you," he said. "I try to be good to you."

"You know that I love you. Do you not know that I love you?" Then she paused, but he made no answer to her. He was surer of nothing in the world than he was of her affection, but it did not suit him to acknowledge it at that moment. "I would do any thing for you that I could do, Uncle Michel; but pray do not ask me to do this." Then she clasped him tightly, and hung upon him, and put up her face to be kissed. But he would not kiss her. "Ah," said she; "you mean to be hard to me. Then I must go; then I must go; then I must go."

"That is nonsense, Marie. You can not go, till you go to your husband. Where would you go to?"

"It matters not where I go to now."

"Marie, you are betrothed to this man, and you must consent to become his wife. Say that you will consent, and all this nonsense shall be forgotten." She did not say that she would consent; but she did not say that she would not, and he thought that he might persuade her, if he could speak to her

as he ought. But he doubted which might be most efficacious, affection or severity. He had assured himself that it would be his duty to be very severe before he gave up the point; but it might be possible, as she was so sweet with him, so loving, and so gracious, that affection might prevail. If so, how much easier would the task be to himself! So he put his arm round her, stooped down, and kissed her.

"Oh, Uncle Michel," she said; "dear, dear Uncle Michel, say that you will spare me, and be on my side, and be good to me."

"My darling girl, it is for your own good, for the good of us all, that you should marry this man. Do you not know that I would not tell you so if it were not true? I can not be more good to you than that."

"I can—not, Uncle Michel."

"Tell me why, now. What is it? Has any body been bringing tales to you?"

"Nobody has brought any tales."

"Is there any thing amiss with him?"

"It is not that. It is not that at all. I am sure he is an excellent young man, and I wish with all my heart he had a better wife than I can ever be."

"He thinks you will be quite good enough for him."

"I am not good for any body. I am very bad."

"Leave him to judge of that."

"But I can not do it, Uncle Michel. I can never be Adrian Urmand's wife."

"But why, why, why?" repeated Michel, who was beginning to be again angered by his own want of success. "You have said that a dozen times, but have never attempted to give a reason."

"I will tell you the reason. It is because I love George with all my heart, and with all my soul. He is so dear to me that I should always be thinking of him. I could not help myself. I should always have him in my heart. Would that be right, Uncle Michel, if I were married to another man?"

"Then why did you accept the other man? There is nothing changed since then."

"I was wicked then."

"I don't think you were wicked at all; but at any rate you did it. You didn't think



any thing about having George in your heart then."

It was very hard for her to answer this, and for a moment or two she was silenced. At last she found a reply. "I thought every thing was dead within me then, and that it didn't signify. Since that he has been here, and he has told me all."

"I wish he had staid where he was, with all my heart. We did not want him here," said the innkeeper in his anger.

"But he did come, Uncle Michel. I did not send for him, but he did come."

"Yes, he came; and he has disturbed every thing that I had arranged so happily. Look here, Marie. I lay my commands upon you as your uncle and guardian, and I may say also as your best and stanchest friend, to be true to the solemn engagement which you have made with this young man. I will not hear any answer from you now, but I leave you with that command. Urmand has come here at my request, because I told him that you would be obedient. If you make a fool of me, and of yourself, and of us all, it will be impossible that I should forgive you. He will see you this evening, and I will trust to your good sense to receive him with propriety." Then Michel Voss left the room and descended with ponderous steps, indicative of a heavy heart.

Marie, when she was alone, again seated herself on the bedside. Of course she must see Adrian Urmand. She was quite aware that she could not encounter him now with that half-sancy, independent air which had come to her quite naturally before she had accepted him. She would willingly humble herself in the dust before him, if by so doing she could induce him to relinquish his suit. But if she could not do so, if she could not talk over either her uncle or him to be on what she called her side, then what should she do? Her uncle's entreaties to her, joined to his too evident sorrow, had upon her an effect so powerful that she could hardly overcome it. She had, as she thought, resolved most positively that nothing should induce her to marry Adrian Urmand. She had, of course, been very firm in this resolution when she wrote her letter. But now—now she was almost shaken! When she thought only of herself, she would almost task herself to

believe that after all it did not much matter what of happiness or of unhappiness might befall her. If she allowed herself to be taken to a new home at Basle she could still work and eat and drink—and working, eating, and drinking, she could wait till her unhappiness should be removed. She was sufficiently wise to understand that as she became a middle-aged woman, with perhaps children around her, her sorrow would melt into a soft regret which would be at least endurable. And what did it signify, after all, how much one such a being as herself might suffer? The world would go on in the same way, and her small troubles would be of but little significance. Work would save her from utter despondence. But when she thought of George, and the words in which he had expressed the constancy of his own love, and the shipwreck which would fall upon him if she were untrue to him—then again she would become strong in her determination. Her uncle had threatened her with his lasting displeasure. He had said that it would be impossible that he should forgive her. That would be unbearable! Yet, when she thought of George, she told herself that it must be borne.

Before the hour of supper came her aunt had been with her, and she had promised to see her suitor alone. There had been some doubt on this point between Michel and his wife, Madame Voss thinking that either she or her husband ought to be present. But Michel had prevailed. "I don't care what any people may say," he replied. "I know my own girl; and I know also what he has a right to expect." So it was settled, and Marie understood that Adrian was to come to her in the little brightly furnished sitting-room up stairs. On this occasion she took no notice of the hotel supper at all. It is to be hoped that Peter Veque proved himself equal to the occasion.

At about nine she was seated in the appointed place, and Madame Voss brought her lover up into the room.

"Here is M. Urmand come to speak to you," she said. "Your uncle thinks that you had better see him alone. I am sure you will bear in mind what it is that he and I wish." Then she closed the door, and Adrian and Marie were left together.



"TO SAVE YOURSELF FROM LIVING WITH A WOMAN WHO CAN NOT LOVE YOU."

"I need hardly tell you," said he, "what were my feelings when your uncle came to me yesterday morning. And when I opened your letter and read it, I could hardly believe that it had come from you."

"Yes, M. Urmand; it did come from me."

"And why—what have I done? The last word you had spoken to me was to declare that you would be my loving wife."

"Not that, M. Urmand; never that. When I thought it was to be so, I told you that I would do my best to do my duty by you."

"Say that once more, and all shall be right."

"But I never promised that I would love you. I could not promise that; and I was very wicked to allow them to give you my troth. You can't think worse of me than I think of myself."

"But, Marie, why should you not love me? I am sure you would love me."

"Listen to me, M. Urmand; listen to me, and be generous to me. I think you can be

generous to a poor girl who is very unhappy. I do not love you. I do not say that I should not have loved you if you had been the first. Why should not any girl love you? You are above me in every way, and rich, and well spoken of; and your life has been less rough and poor than mine. It is not that I have been proud. What is there that I can be proud of—except my uncle's trust in me? But George Voss had come to me before, and had made me promise that I would love him; and I do love him. How can I help it, if I wished to help it? Oh, M. Urmand, can you not be generous? Think how little it is that you will lose." But Adrian Urmand did not like to be told of the girl's love for another man. His generosity would almost have been more easily reached had she told him of George's love for her. People had assured him since he was engaged that Marie Bromar was the handsomest girl in Lorraine or Alsace; and he felt it to be an injury that this handsome girl should pre-



fer such a one as George Voss to himself. Marie, with a woman's sharpness, perceived all this accurately. "Remember," said she, "that I had hardly seen you when George and I were—when he and I became such friends."

"Your uncle doesn't want you to marry his son."

"I shall never become George's wife without his consent—never."

"Then what would be the use of my giving way?" asked Urmand. "He would never consent."

She paused for a moment before she replied.

"To save yourself," said she, "from living with a woman who can not love you, and to save me from living with a man I can not love."

"And is this to be all the answer you will give me?"

"It is the request that I have to make to you," said Marie.

"Then I had better go down to your uncle." And he went down to Michel Voss, leaving Marie Bromar again alone.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

THE people of Colmar think Colmar to be a considerable place, and far be it from us to hint that it is not so. It is—or was in the days when Alsace was French—the chief town of the department of the Haut Rhine. It bristles with barracks, and is busy with cotton factories. It has been accustomed to the presence of a préfet, and is, no doubt, important. But it is not so large that people going in and out of it can pass without attention, and this we take to be the really true line of demarkation between a big town and a little one. Had Michel Voss and Adrian Urmand passed through Lyons or Strasburg on their journey to Granpere, no one would have noticed them, and their acquaintances in either of those cities would not have been a bit the wiser. But it was not probable that they should leave the train at the Colmar station, and hire Daniel Bredin's *calèche* for the mountain journey thence to Granpere, without all the facts of the case coming to the ears of Madame Faragon. And when she had heard the news, of course she told it to George Voss. She had interested herself very keenly in the affair of George's love, partly because she had a soft heart of her own, and loved a ray of romance to fall in upon her as she sat fat and helpless in her easy-chair, and partly because she thought that the future landlord of the Hôtel de la Poste at Colmar ought to be regarded as a bigger man and a better match than any Swiss linen merchant in the world. "I can't think what it is that your father

means," she had said. "When he and I were young he used not to be so fond of the people of Basle, and he didn't think so much then of a peddling buyer of sheetings and shirtings." Madame Faragon was rather fond of alluding to past times, and of hinting to George that in early days, had she been willing, she might have been mistress of the Lion d'Or at Granpere, instead of the Poste at Colmar. George never quite believed the boast, as he knew that Madame Faragon was at least ten years older than his father. "He used to think," continued Madame Faragon, "that there was nothing better than a good house in the public line, with a well-spirited woman inside it to stand her ground and hold her own. But every thing is changed now since the railroads came up. The peddlers become merchants, and the respectable old shop-keepers must go to the wall." George would hear all this in silence, though he knew that his old friend was endeavoring to comfort him by making little of the Basle linen merchant. Now when Madame Faragon learned that Michel Voss and Adrian Urmand had gone through Colmar back from Basle on their way to Granpere, she immediately foresaw what was to happen. Marie's marriage was to be hurried on, George was to be thrown overboard, and the peddler's pack was to be triumphant over the sign of the inn-keeper.

"If I were you, George, I would dash in among them at once," said Madame Faragon.

George was silent for a minute or two, leaving the room and returning to it before he made any answer. Then he declared that he would dash in among them at Granpere.

"It will be better to go over and see it all settled," he said.

"But, George, you won't quarrel?"

"What do you mean by quarreling? I don't suppose that this man and I can be very dear friends when we meet each other."

"You won't have any fighting. Oh, George, if I thought there was going to be fighting, I would go myself to prevent it." Madame Faragon, no doubt, was sincere in her desire that there should be no fighting; but, nevertheless, there was a life and reality about this little affair which had a gratifying effect upon her. "If I thought I could do any good, I really would go," she said again, afterward. But George did not encourage her to make the attempt.

No more was said about it; but early on the following morning, or, in truth, long before the morning had dawned, George had started upon his journey, following his father and M. Urmand in their route over the mountain. This was the third time he had gone to Granpere in the course of the present autumn, and on each time he had gone without invitation and without warning. And yet, previous to this, he had remained above a year at Colmar without taking any notice of his family. He knew that his father would not make him welcome, and he almost doubted whether it would be proper for him to drive himself direct to the door of the hotel. His father had told him, when they were last parting from each other, that he was nothing but a trouble. "You are all trouble," his father had said to him. And then his father had threatened to have him turned from the door by the servants if he should come to the house again before Marie and Adrian were married. He was not afraid of his father, but he felt that he had no right to treat the Lion d'Or as his own home unless he was prepared to obey his father. And he knew nothing as to Marie and her purpose. He had learned from her that were she left to herself she would give herself with all her heart to him. But she would not be left to herself, and he only knew now that Adrian Urmand was being taken back to Granpere

—of course with the intention that the marriage should be at once perfected. Madame Faragon had, no doubt, been right in her advice as to dashing in among them at once. Whatever was to be done must be done now. But it was by no means clear to him how he was to carry on the war when he found himself among them all at Granpere.

It was now October, and the morning on the mountain was very dark and cold. He had started from Colmar between three and four, so that he had passed through Münster and was ascending the hill before six. He too stopped and fed his horse at the emperor's house at the top, and fortified himself with a tumbler of wine and a hunch of bread. He meant to go into Granpere and claim Marie as his own. He would go to the priest and to the pastor if necessary, and forbid all authorities to lend their countenance to the proposed marriage. He would speak his mind plainly, and would accuse his father of extreme cruelty. He would call upon Madame Voss to save her niece. He would be very savage with Marie, hoping that he might thereby save her from herself—defying her to say either before man or God that she loved the man whom she was about to make her husband. And as to Adrian Urmand himself—he still thought that, should the worst come to the worst, he would try some process of choking upon Adrian Urmand. Any use of personal violence would be distasteful to him and contrary to his nature. He was not a man who in the ordinary way of his life would probably lift his hand against another. Such liftings of hands on the part of other men he regarded as a falling back to the truculence of savage life. Men should manage and coerce each other either with the tongue, or with money, or with the law—according to his theory of life. But on such an occasion as this he found himself obliged to acknowledge that, if the worst should come to the worst, some attempt at choking his enemy must be made. It must be made for Marie's sake, if not for his own. In this mood of mind he drove down to Granpere, and, not knowing where else to stop, drew up his horse in the middle of the road before the hotel. The stable servant, who was hanging about, immediately came to him—and there was his father standing, all