

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

alone, at the door of the house. It was now ten o'clock, and he had expected that his father would have been away from home, as was his custom at that hour. But the innkeeper's mind was at present too full of trouble to allow of his going off either to the wood-cutting or to the farm.

Adrian Urmand, after his failure with Marie on the preceding evening, had not again gone down stairs. He had taken himself at once to his bedroom, and had remained there gloomy and unhappy, very angry with Marie Bromar, but, if possible, more angry with Michel Voss. Knowing, as he must have known, how the land lay, why had the innkeeper brought him from Basle to Granpere? He found himself to have been taken in, from first to last, by the whole household, and he would at this moment have been glad to obliterate Granpere altogether from among the valleys of the Vosges. And so he went to bed in his wrath. Michel and Madame Voss sat below waiting for him above an hour. Madame Voss more than once proposed that she should go up and see what was happening. It was impossible, she declared, that they should be talking together all that time. But her husband had stayed her. "Whatever they have to say, let them say it out." It seemed to him that Marie must be giving way if she submitted herself to so long an interview. When at last Madame Voss did go up stairs, she learned from the maid that M. Urmand had been in bed ever so long; and on going to Marie's chamber, she found her sitting where she had sat before. "Yes, Aunt Josey, I will go to bed at once," she said. "Give uncle my love." Then Aunt Josey had returned to her husband, and neither of them had been able to extract any comfort from the affairs of the evening.

Early on the following morning M. le Curé was called to a consultation. This was very distasteful to Michel Voss, because he was himself a Protestant, and, having lived all his life with a Protestant son and two Roman Catholic women in the house, he had come to feel that Father Gondin's religion was a religion for the weaker sex. He troubled himself very little with the doctrinal differences, having no slightest touch of an idea that he was to be saved because

he was a Protestant, and that they were in peril because they were Roman Catholics. Nor, indeed, was there any such idea on either side prevalent in the valley. What M. le Curé himself may have believed, who can say? But he never taught his parishioners that their Protestant uncles and wives and children were to be damned. Michel Voss was averse to priestly assistance; but now he submitted to it. He hardly knew himself how far that betrothal was a binding ceremony. But he felt strongly that he had committed himself to the marriage; that it did not become him to allow that his son had been right; and also that if Marie would only marry the man, she would find herself quite happy in her new home. So M. le Curé was called in, and there was a consultation. M. le Curé was quite as hot in favor of the marriage as were the other persons concerned. It was, in the first place, infinitely preferable in his eyes that his young parishioner should marry a Roman Catholic. But he was not able to undertake to use any special thunders of the Church. He could tell the young woman what was her duty, and he had done so. If her guardians wished it, he would do so again, very strongly. But he did not know how he was to do more. Then the priest told the story of Annette Lolme, pointing out how well Marie was acquainted with all the bearings of the case.

"But both consented to break it off in that case," said Michel. It was singular to observe how cruel he had become against the girl whom he so dearly loved. The curé explained to him again that neither the Church nor the law could interfere to make her marry M. Urmand. It might be explained to her that she would commit a sin requiring penitence and absolution if she did not marry him. The Church could go no further than that. But—such was the curé's opinion—there was no power at the command of Michel Voss by which he could force his niece to marry the man, unless his own internal power as a friend and a protector might enable him to do so. "She doesn't care a straw for that now," said he. "Not a straw. Since that fellow was over here she thinks nothing of me, and nothing of her word." Then he went out to the hotel door, leaving the priest with his wife, and

he had not stood there more than a minute or two before he saw his son's arrival. Marie, in the mean time, had not left her room. She had sent word down to her uncle that she was ill, and that she would beg him to go up to her. As yet he had not seen her; but a message had been taken to her, saying that he would come soon. Adrian Urmand had breakfasted alone, and had since been wandering about the house alone. He also, from the windows of the billiard-room, had seen the arrival of George Voss.

Michel Voss, when he saw George, did not move from his place. He was still very angry with his son, vehemently angry, because his son stood in the way of the completion of his desires. But he had forgotten all his threats, spoken now nearly a week ago. He was altogether oblivious of his declaration that he would have George turned away from the door by the servants of the inn. That his own son should treat his house as a home was so natural to him that it did not even occur to him now that he could bid him not to enter. There he was again, creating more trouble; and, as far as our friend the innkeeper could see, likely enough to be successful in his object. Michel stood his ground, with his hands in his pockets, because he would not even shake hands with his son. But when George came up, he bowed a recognition with his head; as though he should have said, "I see you; but I can not say that you are welcome to Granpere." George stood for a moment or two, and then addressed his father.

"Adrian Urmand is here with you, is he not, father?"

"He is in the house somewhere," said Michel, sullenly.

"May I speak to him?"

"I am not his keeper—not his;" and Michel put a special accent on the last word, by which he implied that though he was not the keeper of Adrian Urmand, he was the keeper of somebody else. George stood a while, hesitating, by his father's side, and as he stood he saw through the window of the billiard-room the figure of Urmand, who was watching them. "Your mother is in her own room; you had better go to her," said Michel. Then George entered the ho-

tel, and his father went across the court to seek Urmand in his retreat. In this way the difficulty of the first meeting was overcome, and George did not find himself turned out of the Lion d'Or.

He knew, of course, nothing of the state of affairs at the inn. It might be that Marie had already given way, and was still the promised bride of this man. Indeed, to him it seemed most probable that such should be the case. He had been sent to look for Madame Voss, and Madame Voss he found in the kitchen.

"Oh, George, who expected to see you here to-day?" she exclaimed.

"Nobody, I dare say," he replied. The cook was there and two or three other servants and hangers on. It was impossible that he should speak out before so many persons, and he had not a friend about the place, unless Marie was his friend. After a few moments he went into the inner room, and Madame Voss followed him. "Well," said he, "has any thing been settled?"

"I am sorry to say that every thing is as unsettled as it can be," said Madame Voss.

Then Marie must be true to him! And if so, she must be the grandest woman, the finest girl, that had ever been created! If so, would he not be true to her? If so, with what a true worship would he offer her all that he had to give in the world! He had come there before determined to crush her with his thunder-bolt. Now he would swear to cherish her and keep her warm with his love for ever and ever. "Is she here?" he asked.

"She is up stairs, in bed. You can not see her."

"She is not ill?"

"She is making every body else ill about the place, I know that," said Madame Voss. "And as for you, George, you owe a different kind of treatment to your father; you do indeed. It will make an old man of him. He has set his heart upon this, and you ought to have yielded."

It was at any rate evident that Marie was holding out, was true to her first love, in spite of that betrothal which had appeared to George to be so wicked, but which had, in truth, been caused by his own fault. If Marie would hold out, there would be no need

that he should lay violent hands upon Adrian Urmand, or have resort to any process of choking. If she would only be firm, they could not succeed in making her marry the linen merchant. He was not in the least afraid of M. le Curé Gondin; nor was he afraid of Adrian Urmand. He was not much afraid of Madame Voss. He was afraid only of his father. "A man can not yield on such a matter," he said. "No man yields in such an affair, though he may be beaten." Madame Voss listened to him, but said nothing further. She was busy with her work, and went on intently with her needle.

He had asked to see Urmand, and he now went out in quest of him. He passed across the court, and in at the door of the café, and up into the billiard-room. Here he found both his father and the young man. Urmand got up to salute him, and George took off his hat. Nothing could be more ceremonious than the manner in which the two rivals greeted each other. They had not seen each other for nearly two years, and had never been intimate. When George had been living at Granpere, Urmand had only been an occasional sojourner at the inn, and had not as yet fallen into habits of friendship with the Voss family.

"Have you seen your mother?" Michel asked.

"Yes; I have seen her." Then there was silence for a while. Urmand knew not how to speak, and George was doubtful how to proceed in presence of his father.

Then Michel asked another question. "Are you going to stay long with us, George?"

"Certainly not long, father. I have brought nothing with me but what you see."

"You have brought too much if you have come to give us trouble."

Then there was another pause, during which George sat down in a corner, apart from them. Urmand took out a cigar and lit it, offering one to the innkeeper. But Michel Voss shook his head. He was very unhappy, feeling that every thing around him was wrong. Here was a son of his, of whom he was proud, the only living child of his first wife, a young man of whom all people said good things; a son whom he

had always loved and trusted, and who even now, at this very moment, was showing himself to be a real man; and yet he was forced to quarrel with this son, and say harsh things to him, and sit away from him with a man who was, after all, no more than a stranger to him, with whom he had no sympathy; when it would have made him so happy to be leaning on his son's shoulder, and discussing their joint affairs with unreserved confidence, asking questions about wages, and suggesting possible profits. He was beginning to hate Adrian Urmand. He was beginning to hate the young man, although he knew that it was his duty to go on with the marriage. Urmand, as soon as his cigar was lighted, got up and began to knock the balls about on the table. That gloom of silence was to him most painful.

"If you would not mind it, M. Urmand," said George, "I would like to take a walk with you."

"To take a walk?"

"If it would not be disagreeable. Perhaps it would be well that you and I should have a few minutes of conversation."

"I will leave you together here," said the father, "if you, George, will promise me that there shall be no violence." Urmand looked at the innkeeper as though he did not like the proposition, but Michel took no notice of his look.

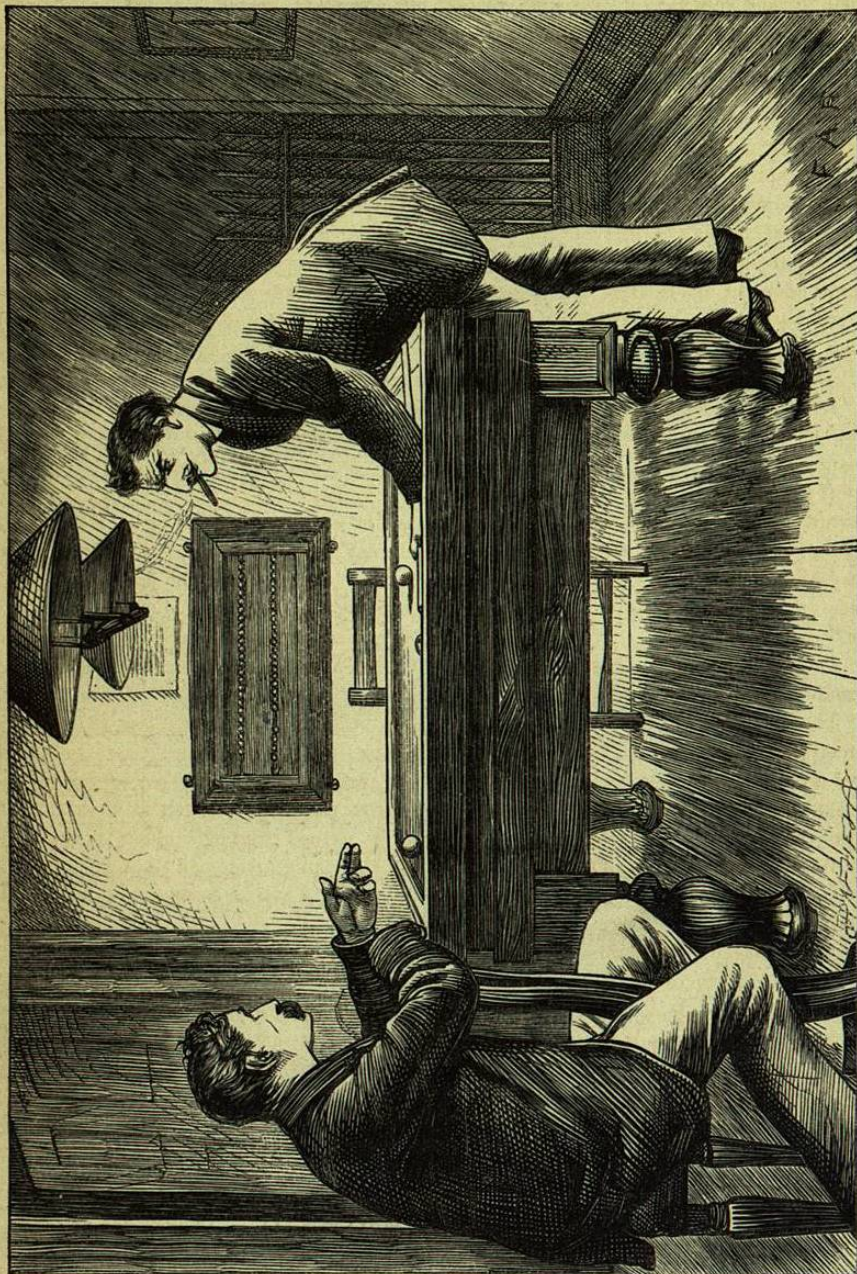
"There certainly shall be none on my part," said George. "I don't know what M. Urmand's feelings may be."

"Oh dear, no; nothing of the kind," said Urmand. "But I don't exactly see what we are to talk about." Michel, however, paid no attention to this, but walked slowly out of the room. "I really don't know what there is to say," continued Urmand, as he knocked the balls about with his cue.

"There is this to say. That girl up there was induced to promise that she would be your wife, when she believed that—I had forgotten her."

"Oh dear, no; nothing of the kind."

"That is her story. Go and ask her. If it is so, or even if it suits her now to say so, you will hardly, as a man, endeavor to drive her into a marriage which she does not wish. You will never do it, even if you do try.



"WILL YOU GO AWAY AND LEAVE US AT PEACE?"

Though you go on trying till you drive her mad, she will never be your wife. But if you are a man, you will not continue to torment her, simply because you have got her uncle to back you."

"Who says she will never marry me?"

"I say so. She says so."

"We are betrothed to each other. Why should she not marry me?"

"Simply because she does not wish it. She does not love you. Is not that enough? She does love another man; me—me—me. Is not that enough? Heaven and earth! I would sooner go to the galleys, or break stones upon the roads, than take a woman to my bosom who was thinking of some other man."

"That is all very fine."

"Let me tell you that the other thing, that which you propose to do, is by no means fine. But I will not quarrel with you if I can help it. Will you go away and leave us at peace? They say you are rich, and have got a grand house. Surely you can do better than marry a poor innkeeper's niece—a girl that has worked hard all her life?"

"I could do better if I chose," said Adrian Urmand.

"Then go and do better. Do you not perceive that even my father is becoming tired of all the trouble you are making? Surely you will not wait till you are turned out of the house?"

"Who will turn me out of the house?"

"Marie will, and my father. Do you think he'll see her wither and droop and die, or perhaps go mad, in order that a promise may be kept to you? Take the matter into your own hands at once, and say you will have no more to do with it. That will be the manly way."

"Is that all you have to say, my friend?"

asked Urmand, assuming a voice that was intended to be indifferent.

"Yes—that is all. But I mean to do something more if I am driven to it."

"Very well. When I want advice from you, I will come to you for it. And as for your doing, I believe you are not master here as yet. Good-morning." So saying, Adrian Urmand left the room, and George Voss in a few minutes followed him down the stairs.

The rest of the day was passed in gloom and wretchedness. George hardly spoke to his father; but the two sat at table together, and there was no open quarrel between them. Urmand also sat with them, and tried to converse with Michel and Madame Voss. But Michel would say very little to him, and the mistress of the house was so cowed by the circumstances of the day that she was hardly able to talk. Marie still kept her room; and it was stated to them that she was not well, and was in bed. Her uncle had gone to see her twice, but had made no report to any one of what had passed between them.

It had come to be understood that George would sleep there, at any rate for that night, and a bed had been prepared for him. The party broke up very early, for there was nothing in common among them to keep them together. Madame Voss sat murmuring with the priest for half an hour or so; but it seemed that the gloom attendant upon the young lovers had settled also upon M. le Curé. Even he escaped as early as he could.

When George was about to undress himself there came a knock at his door, and one of the servant-girls put into his hand a scrap of paper. On it was written, "I will never marry him, never—never—never; upon my honor."

