



CHAPTER XIX.



MICHEL VOSS at this time was a very unhappy man. He had taught himself to believe that it would be a good thing that his niece should marry Adrian Urmand, and that it was his duty to achieve this good thing in her behalf. He had had it on his mind for the last year, and had nearly brought it to pass. There was, moreover, now, at this present moment, a clear duty on him to be true to the young man who with his consent, and indeed very much at his instance, had become betrothed to Marie Bromar. The reader will understand how ideas of duty, not very clearly looked into or analyzed, acted upon his mind. And then there was always present to him a recurrence of that early caution which had made him lay a parental embargo upon any thing like love between his son and his wife's niece. Without much thinking about it—for he probably never thought very much about any thing—he had deemed it prudent to separate two young people brought up together, when

they began, as he fancied, to be foolish. An elderly man is so apt to look upon his own son as a boy, and on a girl who has grown up under his nose as little more than a child! And then George in those days had had no business of his own, and should not have thought of such a thing! In this way the mind of Michel Voss had been forced into strong hostility against the idea of a marriage between Marie and his son, and had filled itself with the spirit of a partisan on the side of Adrian Urmand. But now, as things had gone, he had been made very unhappy by the state of his own mind, and consequently was beginning to feel a great dislike for the merchant from Basle. The stupid, mean little fellow, with his white pocket-handkerchief, and his scent, and his black greasy hair, had made his way into the house and had destroyed all comfort and pleasure! That was the light in which Michel was now disposed to regard his previously honored guest. When he made a comparison between Adrian and George, he could not but acknowledge that any girl of spirit and sense would prefer his son. He was very proud of his son—proud even of the lad's disobedience to himself on such a subject; and this feeling added to his discomfort.

He had twice seen Marie in her bed during that day spoken of in the last chapter. On both occasions he had meant to be very firm; but it was not easy for such a one as Michel Voss to be firm to a young woman in her night-cap, rather pale, whose eyes were red with weeping. A woman in bed was to him always an object of tenderness, and a woman in tears, as his wife well knew, could on most occasions get the better of him. When he first saw Marie he merely told her to lie still and take a little broth. He kissed her, however, and patted her cheek, and then

got out of the room as quickly as he could. He knew his own weakness, and was afraid to trust himself to her prayers while she lay before him in that guise. When he went again he had been unable not to listen to a word or two which she had prepared, and had ready for instant speech. "Uncle Michel," she said, "I will never marry any one without your leave, if you will let M. Urmand go away." He had almost come to wish by this time that M. Urmand would go away and never come back again. "How am I to send him away?" he had said, crossly. "If you tell him, I know he will go—at once," said Marie. Michel had muttered something about Marie's illness, and the impossibility of doing any thing at present, and again had left the room. Then Marie began to take heart of grace, and to think that victory might yet be on her side. But how was George to know that she was firmly determined to throw those odious betrothals to the wind? Feeling it to be absolutely incumbent on her to convey to him this knowledge, she wrote the few words which the servant conveyed to her lover—making no promise in regard to him, but simply assuring him that she would never, never, never become the wife of that other man.

Early on the following morning Michel Voss went off by himself. He could not stay in bed, and he could not hang about the house. He did not know how to demean himself to either of the young men when he met them. He could not be cordial as he ought to be with Urmand; nor could he be austere to George with that austerity which he felt would have been proper on his part. He was becoming very tired of his dignity and authority. Hitherto the exercise of power in his household had generally been easy enough; his wife and Marie had always been loving and pleasant in their obedience. Till within these last weeks there had even been the most perfect accordance between him and his niece. "Send him away; that's very easily said," he muttered to himself, as he went up toward the mountains; "but he has got my engagement, and of course he'll hold me to it." He trudged on he hardly knew whither. He was so unhappy that the mills and the timber-cutting were nothing

to him. When he had walked himself into a heat he sat down and took out his pipe, but he smoked more by habit than for enjoyment. Supposing that he did bring himself to change his mind—which he did not think he ever would—how could he break the matter to Urmand? He told himself that he was sure he would not change his mind, because of his solemn engagement to the young man; but he did acknowledge that the young man was not what he had taken him to be. He was effeminate, and wanted spirit, and smelled of hair grease. Michel had discovered none of these defects—had perhaps regarded the characteristics as meritorious rather than otherwise—while he had been hotly in favor of the marriage. Then the hair grease and the rest of it had, in his eyes, simply been signs of the civilization of the town as contrasted with the rusticity of the country. It was then a great thing in his eyes that Marie should marry a man so polished, though much of the polish may have come from pomade. Now his ideas were altered, and, as he sat alone upon the log, he continued to turn up his nose at poor M. Urmand. But how was he to be rid of him—and, if not of him, what was he to do then? Was he to let all authority go by the board, and allow the two young people to marry, although the whole village heard how he had pledged himself in this matter?

As he was sitting there, suddenly his son came upon him. He frowned and went on smoking, though at heart he felt grateful to George for having found him out and followed him. He was altogether tired of being alone, or, worse than that, of being left together with Adrian Urmand. But the overtures for a general reconciliation could not come first from him, nor could any be entertained without at least some show of obedience. "I thought I should find you up here," said George.

"And now you have found me, what of that?"

"I fancy we can talk better, father, up among the woods, than we can down there when that young man is hanging about. We always used to have a chat up here, you know."

"It was different then," said Michel. "That was before you had learned to think

it a fine thing to be your own master and to oppose me in every thing."

"I have never opposed you but in one thing, father."

"Ah, yes; in one thing. But that one thing is every thing. Here I've been doing the best I could for both of you, striving to put you upon your legs, and make you a man and her a woman, and this is the return I get!"

"But what would you have had me do?"

"What would I have had you do? Not come here and oppose me in every thing."

"But when this Adrian Urmand—"

"I am sick of Adrian Urmand," said Michel Voss. George raised his eyebrows and stared. "I don't mean that," said he; "but I am beginning to hate the very sight of the man. If he'd had the pluck of a wren, he would have carried her off long ago."

"I don't know how that may be, but he hasn't done it yet. Come, father; you don't like the man any more than she does. If you get tired of him in three days, what would she do in her whole life?"

"Why did she accept him, then?"

"Perhaps, father, we were all to blame a little in that."

"I was not to blame—not in the least. I won't admit it. I did the best I could for her. She accepted him, and they are betrothed. The curé down there says it's nearly as good as being married."

"Who cares what Father Gondin says?" asked George.

"I'm sure I don't," said Michel Voss.

"The betrothal means nothing, father, if either of them choose to change their minds. There was that girl over at Saint Die."

"Don't tell me of the girl at Saint Die. I'm sick of hearing of the girl at Saint Die. What the mischief is the girl at Saint Die to us? We've got to do our duty if we can, like honest men and women, and not follow vagaries learned from Saint Die."

The two men walked down the hill together, reaching the hotel about noon. Long before that time the innkeeper had fallen into a way of acknowledging that Adrian Urmand was an incubus; but he had not as yet quite admitted that there was any way of getting rid of the incubus. The idea of having the marriage on the 1st of the pres-

ent month was altogether abandoned, and Michel had already asked how they might manage among them to send Adrian Urmand back to Basle. "He must come again, if he chooses," he had said; "but I suppose he had better go now. Marie is ill, and she mustn't be worried." George proposed that his father should tell this to Urmand himself; but it seemed that Michel, who had never yet been known to be afraid of any man, was in some degree afraid of the little Swiss merchant.

"Suppose my mother says a word to him," suggested George.

"She wouldn't dare for her life," answered the father.

"I would do it."

"No indeed, George; you shall do no such thing."

Then George suggested the priest; but nothing had been settled when they reached the inn door. There he was, swinging a cane at the foot of the billiard-room stairs—the little bug-a-boo, who was now so much in the way of all of them! The innkeeper muttered some salutation, and George just touched his hat. Then they both passed on, and went into the house.

Unfortunately the plea of Marie's illness was in part cut from under their feet by the appearance of Marie herself. George, who had not as yet seen her, went up quickly to her, and, without saying a word, took her by the hand and held it. Marie murmured some pretense at a salutation, but what she said was heard by no one. When her uncle came to her and kissed her, her hand was still grasped in that of George. All this had taken place in the passage; and before Michel's embrace was over, Adrian Urmand was standing in the doorway looking on. George, when he saw him, held tighter by the hand, and Marie made no attempt to draw it away.

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Urmand, coming up.

"Meaning of what?" asked Michel.

"I don't understand it—I don't understand it at all," said Urmand.

"Don't understand what?" said Michel. The two lovers were still holding each other's hands; but Michel had not seen it; or, seeing it, had not observed it.

"Am I to understand that Marie Bromar is betrothed to me or not?" demanded Adrian. "When I get an answer either way, I shall know what to do." There was in this an assumption of more spirit than had been expected on his part by his enemies at the Lion d'Or.

"Why shouldn't you be betrothed to her?" said Michel. "Of course you are betrothed to her; but I don't see what is the use of your talking so much about it."

"It is the first time I have said a word on the subject since I've been here," said Urmand. Which was true; but as Michel was continually thinking of the betrothal, he imagined that every body was always talking to him of the matter.

Marie had now managed to get her hand free, and had retired into the kitchen. Michel followed her, and stood meditative, with his back to the large stove. As it happened, there was no one else present there at the moment.

"Tell him to go back to Basle," whispered Marie to her uncle. Michel only shook his head and groaned.

"I don't think I am at all well treated here among you," said Adrian Urmand to George, as soon as they were alone.

"Any special friendship from me you can hardly expect," said George. "As to my father and the rest of them, if they ill treat you, I suppose you had better leave them."

"I won't put up with ill treatment from any body. It's not what I'm used to."

"Look here, M. Urmand," said George. "I quite admit you have been badly used; and, on the part of the family, I am ready to apologize."

"I don't want any apology."

"What do you want, M. Urmand?"

"I want—I want— Never mind what I want. It is from your father that I shall demand it, not from you. I shall take care to see myself righted. I know the French law as well as the Swiss."

"If you're talking of law, you had better go back to Basle and get a lawyer," said George.

There had been no word spoken of George returning to Colmar on that morning. He had told his father that he had brought

nothing with him but what he had on; and in truth when he left Colmar he had not looked forward to any welcome which would induce him to remain at Granpere. But the course of things had been different from that which he had expected. He was much too good a general to think of returning now, and he had friends in the house who knew how to supply him with what was most necessary to him. Nobody had asked him to stay. His father had not uttered a word of welcome. But he did stay, and Michel would have been very much surprised, indeed, if he had heard that he had gone. The man in the stable had ventured to suggest that the old mare would not be wanted to go over the mountain that day. To this George assented, and made special request that the old mare might receive gentle treatment.

And so the day passed away. Marie, who had recovered her health, was busy as usual about the house. George and Urmand, though they did not associate, were rarely long out of each other's sight; and neither the one nor the other found much opportunity for pressing his suit. George probably felt that there was not much need to do so, and Urmand must have known that any pressing of his suit in the ordinary way would be of no avail. The innkeeper tried to make work for himself about the place, had the carriages out and washed, inspected the horses, and gave orders as to the future slaughter of certain pigs. Every body about the house, nevertheless, down to the smallest boy attached to the inn, knew that the landlord's mind was preoccupied with the love affairs of those two men. There was hardly an inhabitant of Granpere who did not understand what was going on; and, had it been the custom of the place to make bets on such matters, very long odds would have been wanted before any one would have backed Adrian Urmand. And yet two days ago he was considered to be sure of the prize. M. le Curé Gondin was a good deal at the hotel during the day, and perhaps he was the staunchest supporter of the Swiss aspirant. He endeavored to support Madame Voss, having that strong dislike to yield an inch in practice or in doctrine, which is indicative of his order. He strove

hard to make Madame Voss understand that if only she would be firm, and cause her husband to be firm also, Marie would of course yield at last. "I have ever so many young women just in the same way," said the curé, "and you would have thought they were going to break their hearts; but as soon as ever they have been married, they have forgotten all that." Madame Voss would have been quite contented to comply with the priest's counsel, could she have seen the way with her husband. But it had become almost manifest even to her, with the curé to support her, that the star of Adrian Urmand was on the wane. She felt from every word that Marie spoke to her, that Marie herself was confident of success. And it

may be said of Madame Voss, that although she had been forced by Michel into a kind of enthusiasm on behalf of the Swiss marriage, she had no very eager wishes of her own on the subject. Marie was her own niece, and was dear to her; but the girl was sure of a well-to-do husband whichever way the war went; and what aunt need desire more for her most favorite niece than a well-to-do husband?

The day went by, and the supper was eaten, and the cigars were smoked, and then they all went to bed. But nothing more had been settled. That obstinate young man, M. Adrian Urmand, though he had talked of his lawyer, had said not a word of going back to Basle.



CHAPTER XX.

It is probable that all those concerned in the matter who slept at the Lion d'Or that night made up their minds that on the following day the powers of the establishment must come to some decision. It was not right that a young woman should have to live in the house with two favored lovers; nor, as regarded the young men, was it right that they should be allowed to go on glaring at each other. Both Michel and Madame Voss feared that they would do more than glare, seeing that they were so like two dogs with one bone between them, who in such an emergency will generally fight. Urmand himself was quite alive to the necessity of putting an end to his present exceptionally disagreeable position. He was very angry; very angry naturally with Marie, who had, he thought, treated him villainously. Why had she made that little soft, languid promise to him when he was last at Granpere if she had not then loved him? And of course he was angry with George Voss. What unsuccessful lover fails of being angry with his happy rival? And then George had behaved with outrageous impropriety. Urmand was beginning now to have a clear insight of the circumstances. George and Marie had been lovers, and then George, having been sent away, had forgotten his love for a year or more. But when the girl had been accommodated with another lover, then he thrust himself forward and disturbed every body's arrangements! No conduct could have been worse than this. But, nevertheless, Urmand's anger was the hottest against Michel Voss himself. Had he been left alone at Basle, had he been allowed to receive Marie's letter and act upon it in accordance with his own judgment, he would never have made himself ridiculous by appearing at Granpere as a discomfited lover.

But the innkeeper had come and dragged him away from home, had misrepresented every thing, had carried him away, as it were, by force to the scene of his disgrace, and now—threw him over! He, at any rate, he, Michel Voss, should, as Adrian Urmand felt very bitterly, have been true and constant; but Michel, whose face could not lie, whatever his words might do, was clearly as anxious to be rid of his young friend as were any of the others in the hotel. Urmand himself would have been very glad to be back at Basle. He had come to regard any further connection with the inn at Granpere as extremely undesirable. The Voss family was low. He had found that out during his present visit. But how was he to get away, and not look, as he was going, like a dog with his tail between his legs? He had so clear a right to demand Marie's hand that he could not bring himself to bear to be robbed of his claim. And yet he had come to perceive how very foolish such a marriage would be. He had been told that he could do better. Of course he could do better. But how could he be rid of his bargain without submitting to ill treatment? If Michel had not come and fetched him away from his home, the ill treatment would have been by comparison slight, and of that normal kind to which young men are accustomed. But to be brought over to the house, and then to be deserted by every body in the house! How, oh, how, was he to get out of the house? Such were his reflections as he sat solitary in the long public room drinking his coffee, and eating an omelet with which Peter Veque had supplied him, but which had in truth been cooked for him very carefully by Marie Bromar herself. In her present frame of mind Marie would have cooked ortolans for him had he wished for them.

And while Urmand was eating his omelet and thinking of his wrongs, Michel Voss and his son were standing together at the stable door. Michel had been there some time before his son had joined him, and when George came up to him he put out his hand almost furtively. George grasped it instantly, and then there came a tear into the innkeeper's eye. "I have brought you a little of that tobacco we were talking of," said George, taking a small packet out of his pocket.

"Thank ye, George, thank ye; but it does not much matter now what I smoke. Things are going wrong, and I don't get satisfaction out of any thing."

"Don't say that, father."

"How can I help saying it? Look at that fellow up there. What am I to do with him? What am I to say to him? He means to stay there till he gets his wife."

"He'll never get a wife here, if he stays till the house falls on him."

"I can see that now. But what am I to say to him? How am I to get rid of him? There is no denying, you know, that he has been treated badly among us."

"Would he take a little money, father?"

"No. He's not so bad as that."

"I should not have thought so only he talked to me about his lawyer."

"Ah—he did that in his anger. By George, if I was in his position I should try and raise the very devil. But don't talk of giving him money, George. He's not bad in that way."

"He shouldn't have said any thing about his lawyer."

"You wait till you're placed as he is, and you'll find that you'll say any thing that comes uppermost. But what are we to do with him, George?"

Then the matter was discussed in the utmost confidence, and in all its bearings. George offered to have a carriage and pair of horses got ready for Remiremont, and then to tell the young man that he was expected to get into it and go away; but Michel felt that there must be some more ceremonious treatment than that. George then suggested that the curé should give the message, but Michel again objected. The message, he felt, must be given by himself. The doing this would be very bitter to him, because it

would be necessary that he should humble himself before the scented shiny head of the little man; but Michel knew that it must be so. Urmand had been undoubtedly ill treated among them, and the apology for that ill treatment must be made by the chief of the family himself. "I suppose I might as well go to him alone," said Michel, groaning.

"Well, yes; I should say so," replied his son. "Soonest begun, soonest over; and I suppose I might as well order the horses."

To this latter suggestion the father made no reply, but went slowly into the house. He turned for a moment into Marie's little office, and stood there hesitating whether he would tell her his mission. As she was to be made happy, why should she not know it?

"You two have got the better of me among you," he said.

"Which two, Uncle Michel?"

"Which two? Why, you and George. And what I'm to do with the gentleman up stairs it passes me to think. Thank Heaven, it will be a great many years before Flos wants a husband."

Flos was the little daughter up stairs, who was as yet no more than five years old.

"I hope, Uncle Michel, you'll never have any body else as naughty and troublesome as I have been," said Marie, pressing close to him. She was indescribably happy. She was to be saved from the lover whom she did not want. She was to have the lover whom she did want. And, over and above all this, a spirit of kind feeling and full sympathy existed once more between her and her dear friend. As she offered no advice in regard to the disposal of the gentleman up stairs, Michel was obliged to go upon his painful duty, trusting to his own wit.

In the long room up stairs he found Adrian Urmand sitting at the closed window, looking out at the ducks who were paddling in a temporary pool made by the late rains. He had been painfully in want of something to do—so much so that he had more than once almost resolved to put his things into his bag and leave the house without saying a word of farewell to any one. Had there been any means for him to escape from Granpere without saying a word, he would have done so. But at Granpere there was no railway, and the only public conveyance

in and out of the place started from the door of the Lion d'Or—started every morning, with much ceremony—so that it was impossible for him to fly unobserved. There he was, watching the ducks, when Michel entered the room, and very much disposed to quarrel with any one who approached him.

"I'm afraid you find it rather dull here," said Michel, beginning the conversation.

"It is dull; very dull indeed."

"That is the worst of it. We are dull people here in the country. We have not the distractions which you town folk can always find. There's not much to do, and nothing to look at."

"Very little to look at that's worth the trouble of looking," said Urmand.

There was a malignity of satire intended in this; for the young man in his wrath, and with a full conviction of what was coming upon him, had intended to include his betrothed in the catalogue of things of Granpere not worthy of inspection. But Michel Voss did not at all follow him so far as that.

"I never saw such a place," continued Urmand. "There isn't a soul even to play a game of billiards with."

Now Michel Voss, although for a purpose he had been willing to make little of his own village, did in truth consider that Granpere was, at any rate, as good a place to live in as Basle. And he felt that though he might abuse Granpere, it was very uncourteous in Adrian Urmand to do so. "I don't think much of playing billiards in the morning, I must own," said he.

"I dare say not," said Urmand, still looking at the ducks.

Michel had made no progress as yet, so he sat down and scratched his head. The more he thought of it, the larger the difficulty seemed to be. He was quite aware now that it was his own unfortunate journey to Basle which had brought so heavy a burden on him. It was as yet no more than three or four days since he had taken upon himself to assure the young man that he, by his own authority, would make every thing right; and now he was forced to acknowledge that every thing was wrong. "M. Urmand," he said at last, "it has been a very great grief to me, a very great grief indeed, that you should have found things so uncomfortable."

"What things do you mean?" said Urmand.

"Well—every thing—about Marie, you know. When I went over to Basle the other day, I didn't think how it was going to turn out. I didn't indeed."

"And how is it going to turn out?"

"I can't make the young woman consent, you know," said the innkeeper.

"Let me tell you, M. Voss, that I wouldn't have the young woman, as you call her, if she consented ever so much. She has disgraced me."

To this Michel listened with perfect equanimity.

"She has disgraced you."

At hearing this Michel bit his lips, telling himself, however, that there had been mistakes made, and that he was bound to bear a good deal.

"And she has disgraced herself," said Adrian Urmand, with all the emphasis that he had at command.

"I deny it," said Marie's uncle, coming close up to his opponent and standing before him. "I deny it. It is not true. That shall not be said in my hearing, even by you."

"But I do say it. She has disgraced herself. Did she not give me her troth, when all the time she intended to marry another man?"

"No! She did nothing of the kind. And look here, my friend, if you wish to be treated like a man in this house, you had better not say any thing against any of the women who live in it. You may abuse me as much as you please—and George too, if it will do you any good. There have been mistakes made, and we owe you something."

"By Heavens! yes; you do."

"But you sha'n't take it out in saying any thing against Marie Bromar—not in my hearing."

"Why—what will you do?"

"Don't drive me to do any thing, M. Urmand. If there is any compensation possible—"

"Of course there must be compensation."

"What is it you will take? Is it money?"

"Money—no. As for money, I'm better off than any of you."



"IF THERE IS ANY THING I CAN DO, I WILL DO IT," SAID MICHEL, PITEOUSLY.

"What is it, then? You don't want the girl herself?"

"No—certainly not. I would not take her if she came and knelt to me."

"What can we do, then? If you will only say."

"I want—I want—I don't know what I want. I have been cruelly ill used, and made a fool of before every body. I never heard of such a case before—never. And I have been so generous and honest to you! I did not ask for a franc of *dot*; and now you come and offer me money. I don't think any man was ever so badly used anywhere." And on saying this Adrian Urmand in very truth burst into tears.

The innkeeper's heart was melted at once. It was all so true! Between them they had treated him very badly. But then there had been so many unfortunate and unavoidable mistakes! When the young man talked of compensation, what was Michel Voss to think? His son had been led into exactly

the same error. Nevertheless, he repented himself bitterly in that he had said any thing about money, and was prepared to make the most abject apologies. Adrian Urmand had fallen into a chair, and Michel Voss came and seated himself close beside him.

"I beg your pardon, Urmand; I do indeed. I ought not to have mentioned money. But when you spoke of compensation—"

"It wasn't that; it wasn't that. It's my feelings!"

Then the white cambric handkerchief was taken out and used with considerable vehemence.

From that moment the innkeeper's goodwill toward Urmand returned, though, of course, he was quite aware that there was no place for him in that family.

"If there is any thing I can do, I will do it," said Michel, piteously. "It has been unfortunate. I know it has been very unfortunate. But we didn't mean to be untrue."

"If you had only left me alone when I was at home!" said the unfortunate young man, who was still sobbing bitterly.

They two remained in the long room together for a considerable time, during all of which Michel Voss was as gentle as though Urmand had been a child. Nor did the poor rejected lover again have recourse to any violence of abuse, though he would over and over again repeat his opinion that surely, since lovers were first known in the world, and betrothals of marriage first made, no one had ever been so ill used as was he. It soon became clear to Michel that his great grief did not come from the loss of his wife, but from the feeling that every body would know that he had been ill used. There wasn't a shop-keeper in his own town, he said, who hadn't heard of his approaching marriage. And what was he to say when he went back?

"Just say that you found us so rough and rustic," said Michel Voss.

But Urmand knew well that no such saying on his part would be believed.

"I think I shall go to Lyons," said he, "and stay there for six months. What's the business to me? I don't care for the business."

There they sat all the morning. Two or three times Peter Veque opened the door, peeped in at them, and then brought down word that the conference was still going on.

"The master is sitting just over him like," said Peter, "and they're as close and loving as birds."

Marie listened, and said not a word to any one. George had made two or three little attempts during the morning to entice her into some lover-like privacy. But Marie would not be enticed. The man to whom she was betrothed was still in the house; and, though she was quite secure that the betrothals would now be absolutely annulled, still she would not actually entertain another lover till this was done.

At length the door of the long room was opened, and the two men came out. Adrian Urmand, who was the first to be seen in the passage, went at once to his bedroom, and then Michel descended to the little parlor. Marie was at the moment sitting on her stool of authority in the office, from whence

she could hear what was said in the parlor. Satisfied with this, she did not come down from her seat. In the parlor was Madame Voss and the curé, and George, who had seen his father from the front-door, at once joined them.

"Well," said Madame Voss, "how is it to be?"

"I've arranged that we're to have a little picnic up to the ravine to-morrow," said Michel.

"A picnic!" said the curé.

"I'm all for a picnic," said George.

"A picnic!" said Madame Voss, "and the ground as wet as a sop, and the wind from the mountains enough to cut one in two."

"Never mind about the wind. We'll take coats and umbrellas. It's better to have some kind of an outing, and then he'll recover himself."

Marie, as she heard all this, made up her mind that if any possible store of provisions packed in hampers could bring her late lover round to equanimity, no efforts on her part should be wanting. She would pack up cold chickens and Champagne bottles with the greatest pleasure, and would eat her dinner sitting on a rock, even though the wind from the mountains should cut her in two.

"And so it's all to end in a picnic," said M. le Curé, with evident disgust.

It appeared from Michel's description of what had taken place during that very long interview that Adrian Urmand had at last become quite gentle and confidential. In what way could he be let down the most easily? That was the question for the answering which these two heads were kept together in conference so long. How could it be made to appear that the betrothal had been annulled by mutual consent? At last the happy idea of a picnic occurred to Michel himself. "I never thought about the time of the year," he said; "but when friends are here, and we want to do our best for them, we always take them to the ravine, and have dinners on the rocks." It had seemed to him, and, as he declared, to Urmand also, that if something like a jubilee could be got up before the young man's departure, it would appear as though there could not have been much disappointment.

"We shall all catch our death of cold," said Madame Voss.

"We needn't stay long, you know," said Michel. "And, Marie," said he, going into

the little office in which his niece was still seated, "Marie, mind you behave yourself."

"Oh, I will, Uncle Michel," she said. "You shall see."

CHAPTER XXI.

THEY all sat down together at supper that evening, Marie dispensing her soup as usual before she went to the table. She sat next to her uncle on one side, and below her there were vacant seats. Urmand took a chair on the left hand of Madame Voss, next to him was the curé, and below the curé the happy rival. It had all been arranged by Marie herself with the greatest care. Urmand seemed to have got over the worst of his trouble, and when Marie came to the table bowed to her graciously. She bowed in return, and then ate her soup in silence. Michel Voss overdid his part a little by too much talking, but his wife restored the balance by her prudence. George told them how strong the French party was at Colmar, and explained that the Germans had not a leg to stand upon as far as general opinion went. Before the supper was over Adrian Urmand was talking glibly enough; and it really seemed as though the terrible misfortunes of the Lion d'Or would arrange themselves comfortably after all. When supper was done the father, son, and the discarded lover smoked their pipes together amicably in the billiard-room. There was not a word said then by either of them in connection with Marie Bromar.

On the next morning the sun was bright and the air was as warm as it ever is in October. The day perhaps might not have been selected for an out-of-doors party had there been no special reason for such an arrangement; but seeing how strong a reason existed, even Madame Voss acknowledged that the morning was favorable. While those pipes of peace were being smoked overnight Marie had been preparing the hampers. On the next morning nobody except Marie herself was very early. It was intended that the day should be got through at any rate with a pretense of pleasure, and they were all to be as idle and genteel and agreeable as possible. It had been settled

that they should start at twelve. The drive unfortunately would not consume much more than half an hour. Then what with unpacking, climbing about the rocks, and throwing stones down into the river, they would get through the time till two. At two they would eat their dinner—with all their shawls and great-coats around them—then smoke their cigars, and come back when they found it impossible to drag out the day any longer. Marie was not to talk to George, and was to be specially courteous to M. Urmand. The two old ladies accompanied them, as did also M. le Curé Gondin. The programme for the day did not seem to be very delightful; but it appeared to Michel Voss that in this way better than in any other could some little halo be thrown over the parting hours of poor Adrian Urmand.

Every thing went as well as could have been anticipated. They managed to delay their departure till nearly half past twelve, and were so lost in wonder at the quantity of water running down the fall in the ravine that there had hardly been any heaviness of time when they seated themselves on the rocks at half past two.

"Now for the business of the day," said Michel, as, standing up, he plunged a knife and fork into a large pie which he had placed on a boulder before him. "Marie has got no soup for us here, so we must begin with the solids at once." Soon after that one cork might have been heard to fly, and then another, and no stranger looking on would have believed how dreadful had been the enmity existing on the previous day—or, indeed, how great a cause for enmity there had been. Michel himself was very hilarious. If he could only obliterate in any way the evil which he had certainly inflicted on that unfortunate young man! "Urmand, my friend, another glass of wine. George, fill our friend Urmand's glass; not so quick-