nied them,—it was truly too dull,—and his relations readily pardoned him on account of his youth. But notwithstanding the quiet life, the shabby turnout, the dilapidated manor house, Robert of Bearvais-Noir was too good a “parti” to remain unknown in families where one or two daughters were to be well settled in life; and so it happened that the inmates of a neighboring chateau grew very cordial, that the ladies often chanced to meet coming from mass, and that finally—well, that after some gentle discussion a marriage was all arranged between the bewitching Marie de Montfort and Count Robert. That is to say, the mothers fully agreed upon the fitness of the match, the fine “rentes” of Madamoiselle de Montfort fully compensating for her less noble pedigree, and from the black eyes of the young girl herself flashed a joyful consentment. She longed to cut herself adrift from her quiet life, and have whole winters in charming Paris, instead of the brief visits which only made the country more insupportable by contrast.

But Count Robert, when all was duly announced to him by his stately mother, with many an expressive gesture and quick lifting of the brow—Robert swore by the bones of all his ancestors that this could never be.

“What! dispose of me as one sells a horse! Never!”

“Will you disobey the wishes of your mother?” cried Madame de Bearvais-Noir, almost rising from her chair in her amazement and wrath, and looking sternly at Count Robert, who, standing in the middle of the room, his shoulders squared and his hands behind him carelessly holding his cap, returned the gaze with one equally steady, although respectful. Was this the obedience, even to her smallest wishes, that she had always received from her son, she asked, slowly re-seating herself, one hand still grasping either arm of the chair. And she saw for the first time, revealed as by a flash, that here was something she could never rule; she had never ruled the father; the very attitude of the son told the same tale.

With an air of mingled surprise and anger, Madame de Bearvais-Noir slowly turned her gaze toward the window, and happily for all concerned it met the smiling face of the curé, who, hat in hand, stood waiting to be recognized before entering the drawing-room. Count Robert, after saluting him, withdrew. The ladies pulled their chairs more closely together, the snuff-boxes were tapped by delicate fingers, and the curé soon found himself the recipient of the scene which had just passed. His smiling face grew thoughtful as he listened, and his gray eyes also, as they rested upon Madame de Bearvais-Noir’s flushed cheeks and irritated expression. This was not the charming afternoon to which he had looked forward after all his tiresome and often depressing labors among the poor and erring of his flock. He tapped his snuff-box gently, and pulled his soutane quite straight over his knee, but still nothing in the way of solution came to his mind.

“And to refuse such a match as that!” cried the irritated mother for the tenth time, raising her eyes heavenward as though to implore pardon for such imbecility. Poor soul! She saw the old chateau restored, the shabby rooms again brilliant with gay hangings, the gardens once more bright with flowers, the great avenue of tilleuls, “that time only made more majestic;” the charming girl who had worked all this change would be walking there, and Robert beside her. But no; Robert would not; he had refused all this.

“Ah, Monsieur le curé,” she sighed, “Heaven took my husband and my three oldest sons; my fortune slipped away, too; but I have been most patient, feeling sure my Robert would marry well, and our old name and place be itself once more. Ah, had his father lived this would never have happened! His father had a will, too but I am only a woman!”

“The young lady is charming,” answered the curé, half speaking to himself, “and monsieur your son, has he no other attachment by chance?”