He looked at Madame de Bearvais-Noir as he spoke. Had he looked at little Mademoiselle Reine he would have remarked a flush on her round cheeks.

"Not any, I assure you," replied Madame de Bearvais-Noir at once.

And finally, as the hours passed, came dinner, so modest, so charmingly served, and then a quiet game of cards, in which the good curé took his part, as he was expected, and wherein, by some strange caprice of fortune, all the luck remained with the lady of the house,—as it always did, indeed, by tacit agreement.

CHAPTER II.

When Count Robert quitted the salon, quite hot, and irritated, too, he walked around the old gardens a few moments with the air of one who sees nothing; and then quickly calling the shabby groom to saddle Tonnerre, he cantered slowly out the gates just as his mother had fully commenced her sad recital of the downfall of her plans. Count Robert gave the reins to his horse, half knowing the route sure to be taken; and filled with emotions which rendered him alternately angry with his mother, and then with himself, soon found that Tonnerre had brought him beneath Marguerite's window. But no roguish face peeped from behind the big pot of resada; and descending and tying the horse to a rough post serving for a gate that was never shut, he entered the domain of Monsieur Geoffey. Not inviting to eve or sense, this surely—a long stretch of house and barn, all covered by the same thatched roof, green with moss and fern; a great pile of manure quite near the entrance door, ricks of hay and straw, old carts, old wheels, little pools of water here and there. All this met his eye, but in no manner disconcerted him; he was accustomed to it; and quickly threading his way through them all, tapped with his whip at the open door.

As he did so his eye glanced quickly around the low, square room, at the end of which, bending over a table, stood Marguerite. The earthen floor was uneven enough. Two beds, with fresh, white curtains, occupied one side, and opposite was an immense fireplace, leaning against one corner of which was a bundle of fagots ready to replenish the fire, above which, in a copper "marmite," slowly simmered the pot-au-feu, destined to last a week. A tall dark-wood "armoire," bright with brass hinges and devices, held the wealth of family linen, and nailed against the wall, quite beside the door, the stand for the "cuvette," or wash-bowl, and the "cuvette" itself, magnificent in the consciousness of being pure hammered brass.

"Entrez," cried the fresh voice of the young girl; "father will be here directly;" and then, turning her head, she blushed upon recognizing Count Robert. Not all with pleasure, either, did she blush; she was startled upon seeing him enter her house. Ah! how foolish she had been, smiling and chatting from her window; and yet how utterly charming he was, too! And so, half pleased, half annoyed, she advanced a few steps, and, dropping a courtesy which Mademoiselle de Montfort might well have envied, begged to know how she might serve Monsieur le Comte.

"I called to see your father about my dogs," answered Count Robert, easily, having arranged this excuse on the way.

"Ah! he will be in so soon, in a little moment. Will Monsieur wait an instant, or shall I send my father upon his arrival?" All this with the prettiest possible business air, and one hand already stretched back to the piles of dried leaves and flowers upon the table behind her.

"I will wait, Mademoiselle Marguerite," replied the Count, half amused and wholly puzzled by this new behavior. "I will wait to see what witches' cauldron you are brewing there," pointing to a strange glass machine, from whose long neck some drops of water slowly fell into a delicate porcelain bowl.

"Ah!" cried Marguerite, crossing herself, and quickly refinding her gayety, as she sorted