

In the meantime four men from the village were bringing a sort of rude litter, made of planks and moss, and Father Maret accompanied them. The boy had arrived at the church just as he was finishing Mass.

"She has revived a little," whispered d'Auban, "but is scarcely conscious. Feel her pulse. Will you try and speak to her now, or can we venture to carry her at once to Therese's hut?"

"I think you may," said the priest, counting the beats of her feeble pulse; "I fear she will not recover, but there is still some strength in the poor child. She will be much more conscious, I expect, in a little while than she is now." He drew his hand across his eyes, and sighed deeply. "If you please, I will ride your horse by the side of the litter, and watch her closely. Wait, however, for one instant." Before Simonette was lifted from Madame de Moldau's knees he bent down and whispered: "My child, are you truly sorry for all your sins against the good God who loves you so much?"

She opened her eyes, and answered distinctly, "Yes, Father, very sorry."

"Then I will give you absolution, my child," he said, and pronounced the words which have spoken peace to so many contrite hearts since the day that our Lord said, "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven. Lo, I am with you always to the end of the world."

After she was laid on the couch of moss covered with skins, which was Therese's bed, Simonette fell fast asleep for two or three hours. When she awoke she eagerly asked for d'Auban and Madame de Moldau.

"Will you not first see the chief of prayer?" said Therese, who feared she would exhaust all her strength in speaking to them.

"No! I must see them first; but I wish the Father to come in also."

In a few moments Madame de Moldau was sitting on one side of her, and Father Maret on the other side of the couch. D'Auban was standing at its foot, more deeply affected than anyone would have thought from the stern composure of his countenance. It was by a strong effort he repressed the expression of feelings which were wringing his heart, for it was one of the tenderest that ever beat in a man's breast.

Simonette looked fixedly at him for a moment, then tried to undo the fastenings of her dress. She was too weak, and made a sign to Madame de Moldau to do it for her. Then she drew from her bosom a newspaper and a letter. The former was a number of the "Gazette de France," and an article in it was marked with black ink. She put her finger upon it, and beckoned for d'Auban to come nearer. "It was for this I went," she murmured. "This is why I wanted her to stay."

D'Auban took the paper, and moved away a little. She watched him with an eagerness which brought a faint color into her cheek. He, on the contrary, turned as white as a sheet, as his eyes glanced over the passage in the Gazette and then at the letter she had brought. He came round to the side of the bed, and whispered to Madame de Moldau, "Will you give up your seat to me for a moment?" She looked surprised, but immediately rose, and went out of the hut with Therese.

D'Auban handed the newspaper and the letter to Father Maret, and then bending down his head and taking Simonette's cold hand in his—"My poor child," he said, with a faltering voice, "you have killed yourself, I fear!"

"But you will be happy," she answered, and a large tear rolled down her cheek.

"No! No! I shall always reproach myself—always feel as if I had caused your death."

"But you must not do so, because I am very glad to die, and always wished to die for you;" and turning to the priest, she said, "Father! did not our Lord say that no greater love could a man have than to lay down his life for a friend?"

"God may hear our prayers; you may yet live," d'Auban cried.

"Do not agitate her," Father Maret said; "let her tell you quietly what she wishes, and then leave her to turn her thoughts to the next world."

The dying girl raised herself up a little, and uttered at different intervals the following sentences:—"I had resolved to denounce her, because I thought she was wicked, and I was afraid you would marry her. . . . But I heard her tell you her story. . . . and I saw how much you loved her. . . . and that she loved you. Hans had told me the night before that he thought