

at my ease, with unjaundiced feelings took a survey of my abiding place. As this is a remarkable tale, I must be particular. The room was large, but looked small—firstly, because the ceiling was very low; secondly, because its area was much encroached upon by a row of benches and tables, that ran round three of its sides. From the fourth the stove projected into the centre of the apartment, on the flat pipe of which hissed and fished a number of corpulent tea-kettles, squab iron pots, “casserolles,” and “marmettes,” of various capacities, a monstrous coffee-pot closing the file. The rods of brass and steel that surrounded and defended the whole, had a most undeniable polish, and so had the litres and demi-litres ranged thickly upon the shelves on either side. There were three large latticed windows to give light on one side; two very substantial iron-knobbed doors, for ingress and egress, placed directly opposite each other; the floor was of red tiles, six inches square—red, aye, superlatively red—strewn with deep yellow sand.

The persons present were a stout, burley, round-faced man, about fifty, with a cotton night-cap on his half bald pate, a handsome “blouse,” that left nothing but the knees of a pair of coarse corded breeches, with their brass buttons on either side, to be seen, excepting a blue pair of woollen stockings, with large red clocks and slippers on his feet. Of course he had a pipe in his mouth, and of course a “litrom” of “Licver’s beer” by his side, to which he frequently applied himself, with many tokens of satisfaction. As he was pretty well powdered with flour, I made no doubt he was the master of that very mill, whose large wheel was going lazily round and round on the other side of the road, driven by the superfluous waters of the “Etay,” spreading its broad sheet directly before the windows. The mistress of the “auberge” was spinning flax—a plump partridge-like body, with very blue eyes, a very round face, and an immensity of very short petticoats; having, also, a red and orange cotton handkerchief folded over her head, and tied beneath the chin. An old crone sat knitting in the corner, ugly enough for a witch; and a very merry little soul of a girl was reeling thread, seated on a stool.

I tried a conversation with my male neighbor, but as he could only afford “*nein*” and “*ya*” to the common stock, it speedily dropped. Confound the rain, how it did come down! Plash, plash, steadily, evenly—you might have sworn it was Flemish, from its regularity. What was I to do? Six miles’ was no joke in such weather, through a dense forest, although on a *chaussée*. The devil, I knew the road well enough, but I tried a question to the woman, to have some one speak. “*Recht und bleib mein Herr,*” she said, with a meaning nod to the window.

“But I must go, *nein.*”