

whispered: "How well we have got on after all without our noble cousins!"

It was probable the fear of this very consinship being claimed by the new married couple, that prompted the unkind and otherwise unaccountable indifference the Lubois had displayed during the course of the wooing and wedding. "They were not going," they angrily reasoned, "to expose themselves to the incursions of unpolished, country clod-hoppers. Mr. de Courval might make as much of the farmer Durand as he liked, because he lived in the country where society was not only limited but less select; they, however, could not think of admitting hob-nailed boots and rustic manners into their aristocratic drawing-room."

## CHAPTER II.

No small amount of jealousy had been excited in Alonville by the unexpected and speedy manner in which the best match of the parish had thus been appropriated by a stranger; and the tongues of mothers and daughters were alike busy and merciless in their denunciations of such a step.

"What could he see in her, indeed, a little doll-faced creature with no life or gaiety in her, to bewitch him in such a manner? What made him marry a stranger when there were plenty of smart handsome girls in his own village that he had known ever since they wore pinafores? She had pretty little feet to be sure and small dainty hands, but were they good for anything? Could they bake, spin, milk, or do anything useful? Ah, well, retribution would come to Paul Durand, and he would yet mourn in sackcloth and ashes the fine girls he had passed by to marry that little puppet."

But all these lamentations and prophecies were unavailing, and in no manner disturbed the serenity of the two individuals who were the objects of them. Were they all unfounded? Alas! that we should have to record it—not quite. The bride knew little, if anything, of house-keeping. This was the more unfortunate, as the elderly woman who had superintended Durand's household skilfully enough since his mother's death, had abruptly taken leave when informed of his intended nuptials.

It was not so much that she felt incensed at the idea of his introducing a wife into the establishment; his chief fault lay in his having ignored the charms of a certain niece of her own, who could boast of a really handsome face as well as comfortable dower, and whom *la mère Niquette* had decided many months previous was a suitable wife for him. With this end in view she had sounded Sophie's praises night and morning, lauded Sophie's qualities, mental and moral, dilated on her admirable house-keep-

ing skill, and the patience with which Durand had listened to talk, which he judged the result of the garrulousness of age, unfortunately confirming her in her illusions, which were shared by the fair Sophie herself, she felt too much aggrieved to remain beneath his roof after seeing her dreams so rudely dispelled. The two inexperienced girls hired at the last moment to replace her, though stout and willing, were otherwise incompetent, and the bride was thus thrown entirely on her own resources. With a vague presentiment of coming trouble, Paul had done his utmost to induce the injured Mrs. Niquette to retain her post. He had expostulated, solicited, and offered what was considered then almost fabulous wages for her continued services, but revenge to some natures is very sweet, and she could not forego it.

Forgetful of the kindness, the consideration with which her employer had always regarded her, the presents, the privileges he had bestowed with a liberal hand, she worked herself up to a belief that she had been treated with the most signal ingratitude, and that she was really an injured personage.

"Ah!" she thought, as she left him with a "good bye, Mr. Durand," to which he coldly responded. "I'll soon see you arrive, my gay bridegroom, begging me to come back, but I won't do that till you and your dainty wife have prayed long and hard; and then when I do return, I'll teach you both how to respect *la mère Niquette*."

But the good old dame was mistaken: neither her master nor his bride troubled her with solicitations to return. Long as she had lived with Paul Durand, she had not fathomed his character yet.

As we have before said, the women of the Durand family were always notable housewives, and during the long reign of the last worthy lady who had borne that name, Paul's house had been the best managed, the most neatly kept in the village, whilst his dairy products were equally famed for quantity and quality. This satisfactory state of things had deteriorated very little, if any, during Mrs. Niquette's rule, who, to do her justice, had looked as narrowly to the comforts of Paul and the interests of the establishment, as her late mistress had done. Alas! under the new dynasty, things were very different, and it was to be hoped, for the sake of the departed Mrs. Durand's peace of mind, that she was not cognizant of sublunary matters, especially of details concerning her son's household.

The latter liked a good table and had always been accustomed to one—now, the soup was often burned or watery, the bread sour and heavy, worthy of the