

CHAPTER II.

EXACTLY at eight o'clock every evening a loud bell was sounded in the hotel of the Lion d'Or at Granpere, and all within the house sat down together to supper. The supper was spread on a long table in the saloon up stairs, and the room was lighted with camphine lamps—for as yet gas had not found its way to Granpere. At this meal assembled not only the guests in the house and the members of the family of the landlord—but also many persons living in the village whom it suited to take, at a certain price per month, the chief meal of the day, at the house of the innkeeper, instead of eating in their own houses a more costly, a less dainty, and probably a lonely supper. Therefore when the bell was heard there came together some dozen residents of Granpere, mostly young men engaged in the linen trade, from their different lodgings, and each took his accustomed seat down the sides of the long board, at which, tied in a knot, was placed his own napkin. At the top of the table was the place of Madame Voss, which she never failed to fill exactly three minutes after the bell had been rung. At her right hand was the chair of the master of the house—never occupied by any one else ;—but it would often happen that some business would keep him away. Since George had left him he had taken the timber into his own hands, and was accustomed to think and sometimes to say that the necessity was cruel on him. Below his chair and on the other side of Madame Voss there would generally be two or three places kept for guests who might be specially looked upon as the intimate friends of the mistress of the house ; and at the farther end of the table, close to the window, was the space allotted to travellers. Here the napkins were not tied in knots, but were always clean. And, though the little plates of radishes, cakes, and dried fruits were continued from one of the tables to the other, the long-necked thin bottles of common wine came to an end before they reached the strangers' portion of the board ; for it had been found that strangers would take

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