

FRITZ KOBUS' DINNER.

"Come here. Listen. Two groschens for you."

Ludwig took the groschens, thrust them deep into his pocket, and passed his hand under his nose, as much as to say—good!

"Go to Frederick Schultz, in the Rue Plat d'Etain, and to Professor Haan, at the Cigogne hotel; do you understand?"

Ludwig bent down his head suddenly.

"Tell them Mr. Fritz Kobus invites them to dinner at 5 precisely."

"Yes, Mr. Kobus."

"Stop; go to the Rabbi David also, and say that I expect him at 6 o'clock for coffee. Now, off!"

Ludwig descended the stairs like a shot.

Kobus saw him, an instant after, flying over the road; he was gone. The butler, Katel, was still standing there.

"Listen, Katel. I want you to go to the market at once. Select the best fish and game. Anything especially choice you will buy, without regard to price; it is essential only that it must be the best. I will set the table and select the wine; you take the kitchen entirely. But hurry, for I am certain Professor Speck and all the other town gourmets are already there, snapping up the choice bits."

After the departure of Katel, Fritz entered the kitchen and lighted the candle; he wanted to inspect his vault and choose some old bottles of wine for the fete. He descended with the candle in his hand, the bunch of keys in his pocket and the basket on his arm. Low under a stairway he opened the door of a cave. It was a very dry old cave, and the walls, covered with saltpeter, shone like crystal—the cave of the Kobuses 150 years before where the grandfather, Nicholas, had come for the first time with the Markobrunner 1715.

At the first turn, and as he was about to enter the second cave—the cave of the bottles—he stopped to snuff the candle, which he did with his fingers, having forgotten the snuff s—and after having put his foot on the snuffing he advanced with a bent back under a little vaulted cave cut in the rock. At the end of the entrance he opened a second door, shut by an enormous padlock all covered with dust, straightened his back again and joyously cried: "Ahi! ahi! Here we are!" and his voice resounded through all the high gray vault. At the same time a black cat clutched the wall sprang to the window, its green eyes gleaming, and saved itself by springing across the Rue Coin Brule. This cave, the best of Hunebourg, was partly cut in the rock and for the rest was constructed of enormous pieces of stone. It was not very large, having only twenty feet of depth to fifteen in

width, but it was high, separated in two by a lattice and shut by a door, also of lattice; the whole length was shelved, and on the shelves were the bottles, arranged in admirable order.

They had been there all these years from 1730 to 1840. The light of three windows in the lattice sparkled against the bottles in an agreeable and picturesque fashion. Kobus entered; he carried a basket made of water willow with compartments intended to hold a bottle each. He set the basket on the ground and held the candle high. The sight of all these good wines, some in blue seals, the others in cases of lead, softened him and he said to himself:

"If the poor old people who, fifty years ago, with all their wisdom and perception put aside these good wines—if they could come back, I am sure they would be contented to see me following their example, and would find me worthy to succeed them in the world. Yes! they would be satisfied! Those three rows there I have filled, and, I say it myself, with discernment. I have always taken the pains to go to the vineyard myself and treat with the vinedressers in the face of the tubs themselves. And for the care of the vault I am not any more saving of myself than I should be; and these wines here, although they are younger than the others, are not of any inferior quality; they will age and replace their predecessors. It is thus that the good old traditions are maintained and develop not only as good but better things in families. Yes, if the old Nicholas Kobus, the grandfather of Franz Sepel, and my own father, could come back and taste these wines they would be satisfied with their son. They would say he has the same wisdom and the same virtues as ourselves. Unhappily they cannot return; it is done! done! I must replace them all in all. It is said all the same; they were so prudent and such good livers! To think they can't even taste a glass of their own wine and yet rejoice in seeing the Lord and His angels! Well! well! we are all the same; we all come to the same end, sooner or later, and while we are here we are wise if we profit by the good things set before us."

After these melancholy reflections Kobus busied himself in choosing the wines which they would drink. On the old labels he read "Markobrunner of 1708, Affenthal of 1804;" "Johannisberg of the Capuchins," said he, then straightening up, and, clacking his tongue, he lifted a bottle covered with dust and put it in the basket.

"I know that wine," said he, and he took one moment to reflect on the Capuchins of Hunebourg, who, in 1792, arrived at Custine, abandoning their caves to escape the French pillage. His grandfather, Franz, had received 200 or 300 bottles from them. Then to complete his basket, he said: "There is enough, but yet another bottle of Capuchin."