

point; I would not for the world have her controlled."

"She is too young to marry, and so is he."

"Ah, but what the baron proposes is that they should be affianced at once and then that the chevalier should travel for three years—at the end of that time, wherever we are, he will come and claim his bride."

"I see, my sweetest wife, that the thought of this marriage pleases you."

"I do not deny it. If I could have pictured to myself a fate I should have chosen for Mina, it would have been to enter a family of noble but yet not of princely birth, one in which I have witnessed the most admirable virtues and the purest domestic happiness. Young Raoul is handsome, good, and I need not apologize to you, Henri, for adding, though others might laugh at me—he is in love with her."

"And does the little *Dame de ses pensées* return his passion?" asked d'Auban, smiling.

"Ah! I don't know. That child of ours is often a great enigma to me. Open and guileless as she is, I am sometimes at a loss when I try to fathom the depths of her young heart."

"Do not be too romantic, sweet wife. Far be it from me to force her inclinations, but at her age assent is sufficient."

"You know no French young lady ever utters a stronger form of approval of the suitor presented to her acceptance than the admission, that he is not disagreeable to her. In this case we might rest satisfied with it. But there is one consideration I cannot quite get over. Is not the Baron de la Croix, are not all his family, making an effort of generosity in asking for the hand of our little portionless daughter? It is so contrary to French usages for a young man to marry a girl without a fortune, that I cannot rest quite satisfied that it is not an overstrained point of honor which alone induces them to make this proposal."

Madame d'Auban looked a little pained, her cheek flushed. "Henri, do you give me credit for such a total absence of pride, as to think I should have spoken as I have done if I had not seen beyond a doubt that the hearts of your friends are set upon this marriage;—had I not heard from Raoul's mother, expressions which seldom fall in these days from the lips of French mothers, as to her hopes and fears for the darling of her heart; as to her knowledge of what Mina is, and her intense desire that his destiny should be united to hers? She never mentions her child since the night of Osseo's death without tears in her eyes. But far be it from me, however, to urge you . . ."

"Enough, dearest, enough. I am more than satisfied," exclaimed d'Auban, who felt he had unintentionally slightly wounded his wife's feelings.

A conversation d'Auban held that evening with the Baron proved to him the justice of his wife's appreciation of the old man's real feelings; he was so thoroughly happy at the thoughts of an alliance with the family to which his own had owed so much, so full of delight at acquitting a debt of gratitude as regarded the past, and he kindly added, pressing his friend's hand in both his, "in incurring a fresh one in the shape of the holy and beautiful child he asked of them for his Raoul, that it would have

been playing an unkind and ungracious part to reject, from a false delicacy, the proposal so cordially made. He seemed a little surprised, indeed, when d'Auban stipulated that the betrothal was not to take place unless his little girl gave her full and free assent to it,—that her mother had made him promise this.

"But surely," said the Baron, "a young lady as well educated as Mademoiselle Mina, and of as amiable a disposition, would never dream of opposing her parents' wishes on such a subject."

"My best of friends," d'Auban answered. "Mina's education was not a bad one, thank God, but yet it has been in many respects peculiar. Events, more than teaching, have formed her character. She would doubtless obey our orders, but her mother's ideas on that point are strong, and she would never compel her daughter to marry, or to promise her hand to any one she did not freely choose."

The idea of young ladies choosing their husbands was quite a new one to the baron, and utterly distasteful to him. He would like to see Bertha and Isare think of choosing for themselves, indeed! And as to Raoul, when he had informed him that he was about to ask for Mademoiselle d'Auban's hand for him, he had behaved as well as possible, and expressed his perfect submission to his grandfather's wishes.

"But I suppose your daughter is not likely to object to the chevalier," he said. "He has, I hope, made himself agreeable to her since she arrived here?"

"I should think your grandson as likely as any youth I have ever seen to win a young lady's heart," answered d'Auban; "and I trust I may have the happiness of calling him my son."

On the morning of the next day, which was to be the last but one they were to spend at the Chateau de la Croix, Madame d'Auban sent for her daughter into her room from the library, where she had gone with Isare, to copy some passages out of an old book of poetry they had been reading together, and when Mina came bounding into the room she found her father and mother sitting together. They made room for her between them, and he said to her:

"Have you been very happy here, my daughter?"

"Yes; very happy," she answered. "Everybody has been so kind to me, and I love them all very much."

"They are all very fond of you, Mina. The Baron has been speaking to me about you."

"I was afraid he was a little angry with me, because I told Osseo to go away, instead of calling to the sentinels."

"Well, he seems to have forgiven you. He told me you were a brave little girl. I suppose you will be sorry to part with Isare and Bertha?"

"Yes; and with Raoul also."

"Ah! you like him. I am glad of that. I have taken a great fancy to Raoul. He is very pleasing, and so good and noble-hearted."

"He ought to be good, for his mother, oh, dearest papa! she is quite a saint. I like so much to watch her when she is speaking to a poor person, or dressing their wounds. There