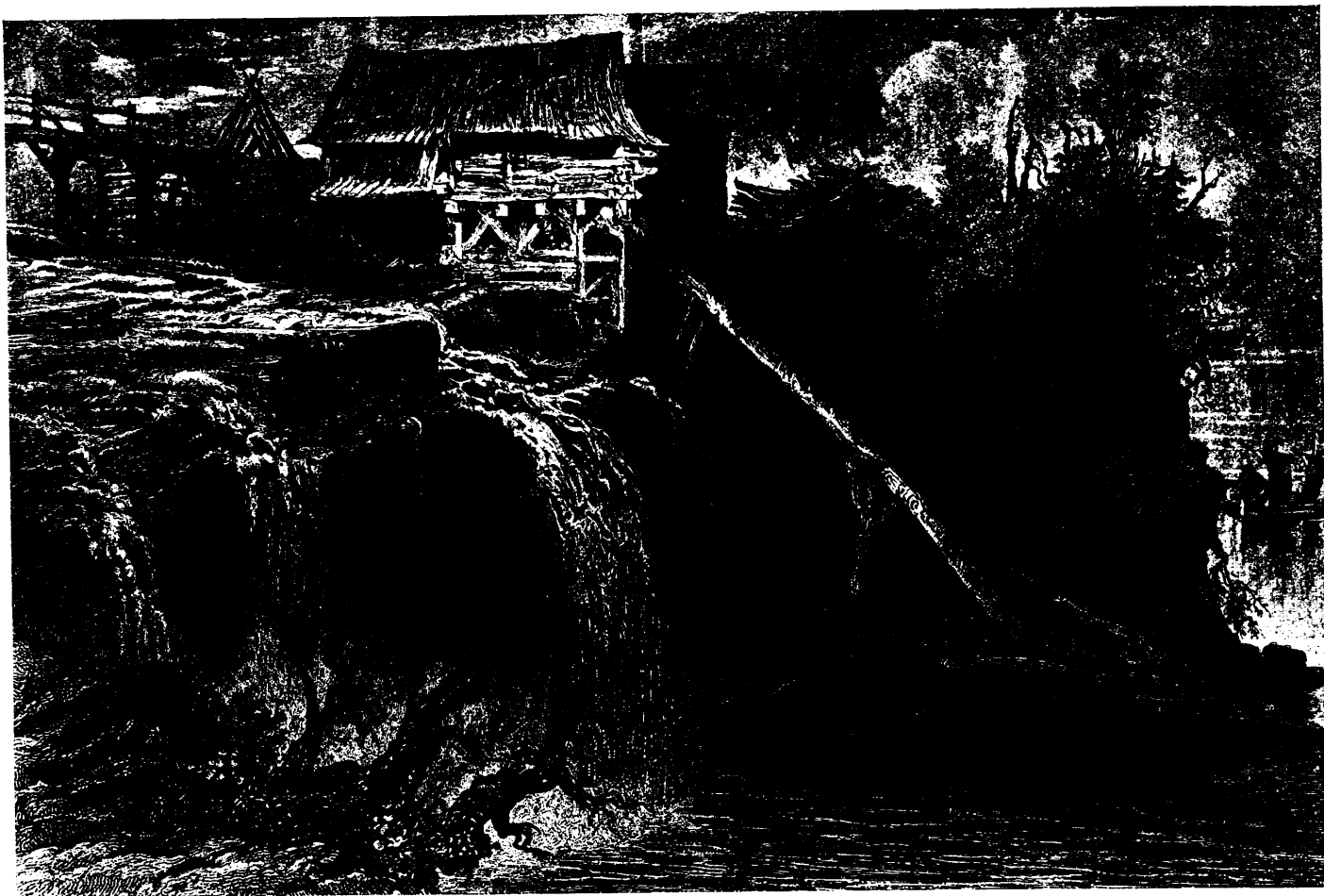




AN OLD MILL ON THE OTTAWA.

in general, to which the handsome lazy fellow listened serenely, casting meanwhile ardent, pleading, reproachful glances at his neighbour's pretty daughter, who always made a transparent pretense of utter unconsciousness. Amidst this group of absorbed, self-interested people fluttered little capricious Rosalie like some airy butterfly created only for joy and pleasure; a creature beset by tender, youthful fancies, entering a charmed inner circle of passion and emotion.

"It appears to me that the occasion is favourable. Thou must marry, my daughter. The world was not made for thee to dance in."

Rosalie tossed her head till her earrings jingled again.

"Oh! fy, fy, what a shame. Though art capricious, my little cabbage; that must be allowed between ourselves. It is ever thus with the young; a droll farce in truth, caprice, caprice and still caprice. Misericorde! but we are fools in youth, we others. It is I who ought to know that, for, *seigneur dieu!* these things have made me greatly to suffer. One false step and all is spoilt forever, and where is the gain, my heart?"

"But when one loves," Rosalie ventured sentimentally. The drooping of the long lashes concealed the sparkle of the red brown eyes. The girl bent her head with a modest discretion, which prevented her mother from noticing the carmine flush which crimsoned her cheek.

"There are two words to a bargain. Love—that is one thing, but marriage is another pair of sleeves. Love," with a disdainful grimace,—"A few days, or weeks, or months, how long I know not—what does it make, that?—to care for some poor, unworthy spindle of a creature; then, for all the life long, he teaches one to fear, to hate, to work like a beaver, to bear his burden. Misere! when husband and wife spit at each other like cats, and the husband is of necessity the strongest." A genuine tragic pathos appeared in every line of the quaint, puckered face, and was betrayed in every accent of the quivering voice. "Figure to thyself that to me marriage meant cold and hunger, toil, and shame, and misery. There is no laughing under the nose when it relates to that—the thought is enough to break a rock in two, true as I tell you. *Ouais!* when I think on it, I know not whether to weep like a watering pot or to scratch somebody's eyes out. But why make such a time, little fool? There are marriages and marriages, and thine shall not be of that species, faith of Sophie Goufiel." The widow nodded her head, every crinkled curl bobbing gaily with the

motion. "We will do our little possible; it is thine old mother who is capable of arranging that. See to it then, *ma chérie*. Behold the amiable M. Cadieux who arrives."

Rosalie rushed to her little mirror. As she gazed at the charming image reflected therein, her careless, gleeful laugh rang out confidently. How droll it seemed that these old ones should once have loved; but of course they could never have known anything like her own love-lit dreams; the marvellous glamour of youth and hope, of love and faith was reflected for her alone.

"My mother, you would not have me return to the city, but marry and settle near you; many times you have assured me of that. We have sometimes mistaken each other, but at present it is peace between us." The reality of a genuine affection touched Rosalie's brunette beauty to an expression of sweet earnestness.

With a tremor of nerves and soul, Ma'me Goufiel sank into a chair, still watching her daughter's face with constantly increasing solicitude and a dreadful suppressed eagerness. The Holy Virgin be praised that all uncertainty was over. A sense of relief that almost reached ecstasy thrilled through her. Her expectations had arisen to a white heat, silent, consuming; a very frenzy of suspense. Now, at this culminating crisis of all her hopes, she began to realize how severe a strain the last few weeks had been upon her energies and faculties; how irritating had been the progress of these slow preliminaries. How sweet would be the bliss of successful repose.

"He has always pleased you well. He will be as a son to you, my mother. He is so handsome, so kind, so generous."

Ma'me Goufiel's eyes opened wide. She could make allowance for youthful extravagance of feeling, the eminently natural exultations of a girl who had secured the owner of three good farms for a husband, but she was of a literal turn of mind, and, even in her triumphant confusion, did not allow this statement to pass unchallenged.

"But, see you," she muttered, "a son, truly—thy future nearly approaches my own age. If thou canst persuade thyself of his beauty, it is well; then, three fine farms and a house of the best—"

"A house and farms. You dream, mother. All the world knows that we shall, indeed, be poor in all save love."

"Poor! The richest man in the parish. Auguste Cadieux—"

"Cadieux!" with a cry of contemptuous derision. "That proud turkey with the eye of a dead fish and a hand whose touch is cold and clammy like a snake."

Ma'me Goufiel rose stiffly, the movement appeared to require great exertion. Her voice sounded thin and dry; her heart beating in her throat suffocated her.

"Who is it then?"

"But Jean, Jean Minot; truly that explains itself; it is quite simple."

"But Jean," the widow repeated blankly, feeling that, breathless and stupified, she was being carried away on the wild whirl of a dream.

"Jean—but what other? You ever showed yourself his friend."

The commotion that assailed the schemer at this speech was like an internal earthquake. She raised her eyes in mute, agonized appeal. Novel forces of energy and resolution had moulded her daughter's girlish beauty into a strong and tender womanliness. A spasm of despair rent the mother's heart; misery, rage and the bitterness of baffled hope burned within her. The sorest sting lay in the fact that she had been deceived and betrayed. She had been beaten with her own weapons—terribly, miserably, mercilessly beaten. As she acknowledged the subtle change which had taken place in the girl, the mother was smitten by a scathing conviction that she herself had grown very old, feeble and stricken; utterly unable to cope with the passionate insistence of a desperate youthful determination.

"And what, after all, was the actual amount of the little Goufiel's dower?" inquired Cadieux a few months after Rosalie's marriage to Gros Jean.

Pierre Chauvin laughed, a dry, mirthless chuckle, which shook his whole frame and ended in a cough.

"Dower, truly. Her only dower was her pretty face, and, as things go at present, that won't be of long duration. She will pay through the nose for her fancy, the little one. Sainte dame! When I think of it. She had saved twenty dollars in service, but Gros Jean spent that on a spree the first week of his married life. Now the women work to keep him in comfort. I wish them good chance, me."

Cadieux drew a long breath. Then he smiled, showing his teeth in a somewhat forced and ghastly manner, with a smile of relishing cruelty. "Ah! a good-for-nothing of that species!—it was to be expected—and, without doubt, the old one has received her deserts."