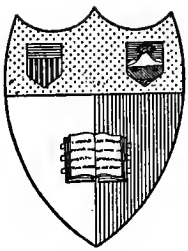

THE LIFE OF A SIMPLE MAN

BY

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FOREWORD

"WHAT an absorbing book! It kept me up half the night. Do you know of any book like 'The Life of a Simple Man'?" said an officer friend, who had returned from abroad, *blasé* and cynical after his surfeit of war. His question set me mentally rehearsing the list of our authors who have dealt with English peasant and labouring life. I could only think of two books at all comparable to Guillaumin's work, viz., George Bourne's "Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer" and W. H. Hudson's "A Shepherd's Life." Each of these, in its individual way, is beyond criticism; but for the completeness and finality of the whole picture of a peasant farmer's life Guillaumin's book is their superior. Moreover, one has to note the fact that all but two or three of our writers on the subject were not born in the class they depict. Cobbett, Clare and Richard Jefferies are the conspicuous exceptions. But Cobbett, though he was, and always remained, a fierce, sincere champion of the peasant and farmer, wore many coats in his day, attorney, clerk's, soldier's, farmer's, pamphleteer's, journalist's, politician's; and his crusade against "bankers, brewers, monopolists, loan-jobbers, stock-jobbers, Jews and tax-eaters of every kind" took him far afield. Clare, the victim of weak heredity and privation in youth, had too brief and ill-starred a career to unfold all he knew of agricultural life, and, moreover, as Edward Thomas has put it, "Clare was a peasant poet, because he had behind him no tradition of peasant literature, but had to do what he could with the current forms of polite literature." Richard Jefferies, himself of yeoman descent, is, indeed, an unerring guide to the life of the agricultural labourer,* but in thought and feeling he is spiritually remote from the

* Notably in "Hodge and His Masters."

peasant's outlook; and "Amaryllis at the Fair," his personal "memoir" of country people's life, well characterizes his complex attitude. Of the middle-class authors, Crabbe, after his early struggle with poverty as a young surgeon, developed the tastes and outlook of a prosperous, lettered, leisured divine. To "The Village" succeeded "Tales of the Hall." Kingsley and George Eliot speak with authority, but Parson Lot remains a parson, and George Eliot only spoke for selected types and not for the rural labouring class as a whole. Thomas Hardy's spiritual insight and sympathy with the West Country peasant's old-world raciness has enriched our literature with many peasant portraits of veracious quality; but one is always conscious that the creator of Gabriel Oak and Giles Winterborne is not himself one with them. Barnes is the faithful recorder of the genial flavours and humours of Wessex yeoman life. And of latter-day authors, Alfred Williams, Maurice Hewlett and James Bryce need only to be named to show that the angle from which each surveys peasant life is peculiar to himself. If we have here run cursorily through the above list of authors, it is to emphasize the fact that the least articulate class in the community has been that of the peasant and small farmer. Even when the Parliamentary enclosures of the period—1764–1832—were steadily degrading the peasant farmer to the rank of hind, by stripping him of his economic birthright, he was unable to make his voice audible.* Crabbe, indeed,

* "He [the French peasant] belongs to a community that can withstand the seigneur, dispute his claims at law, resume its rights, recover its possessions, and establish, one day, its independence.

"In England the aristocracy destroyed the promise of such a development when it broke the back of the peasant community. The enclosures created a new organization of classes. The peasant with rights and a status, with a share in the fortunes and government of his village, standing in rags, but standing on his feet, makes way for the labourer with no corporate right to defend, no corporate power to invoke, no property to cherish, no ambition to pursue, bent beneath the fear of his masters and the weight of a future without hope."—"The Village Labourer, 1760–1832," by J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, page 105. London, 1911.

"Lord Carnarvon said in our House of Parliament that the English

in the middle of the period most disastrous of all to the peasant, called attention to the hard lot of the village poor ; but had a dozen Crabbes come forward from their ranks and given imperishable form to the Petitions against Enclosure that are buried in the Journals of the House of Commons, they could not have arrested the process by which the governing class enriched itself at the peasant's expense in the name of Agricultural Reform and State benefit. Without entering into the field of politics, we need only add that the reader who wishes to examine for himself the process and causes of the English peasant's economic ruin, should consult Mr. Hammond's historical study, " The English Labourer, 1760–1832." We are not aware of any work that disputes the evidence he adduces or that seriously controverts his conclusions. Though the hero of " The Life of a Simple Man " was a *métayer*, and did not own the land he farmed, his outlook and worldly state were as typically a product of the French rural system of 1823–90, as the Surrey labourer, George Bettesworth's,† was typical of English rural life of identically the same period.

" The Life of a Simple Man " excels by the unity and depth of the social picture, by its intimate warmth and justness

labourer had been reduced to a plight more abject than that of any race in Europe. . . ."

" . . . At the end of all this time the conquerors of Napoleon found themselves in a position which they would have done well to exchange with the position of his victims. The German peasant had been rescued from serfdom ; Spain and Italy had at least known a brief spell of less unequal government. The English labourer alone was the poorer ; poorer in money, poorer in happiness, poorer in sympathy, and infinitely poorer in horizon and in hope. The riches that he had been promised by the champions of enclosure had faded into something less than a maintenance."— " The Village Labourer," page 241.

† " Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer," by George Bourne. London, 1907.

of vision. It is, in fact, what "A Life" should be and rarely is—a work of art. The hero, Tiennon, we judge, is a pseudonym for the author's own father. First, let us note the charming spontaneity of Tiennon's childish recollections of the break up of the family, and the removal to Le Garibier; and then the Maris-like atmosphere of the little boy's adventures while herding the sheep and swine on the waste of La Breure. What an unforgettable picture is that of the boy's journey to Bourbon fair, his amazement at the big town, and his childish misery in that long winter day while he guards the three pigs on the frozen road. None of the passers-by trouble to help the shivering lad, and he waits dumbly till nine o'clock at night, when his maudlin father turns up, having forgotten him, drinking in the taverns. All childhood's intensity of feeling is in this memory. Then follows the old-world picture of the peasant double wedding, the gargantuan meals prepared for the guests, the mummers, the dancing in the lighted barn and the neighbours' broad jests—a veritable Brouwer in its rich chiaroscuro. We may note here that the author by his fine candour gains our confidence from the start. He has nothing to conceal. His parents' and his relatives' quarrels, their faults, meannesses and their little intrigues, are depicted without bias or self-consciousness, even as is the behaviour of their employers, the gentry, such as their wealthy landlord, M. Fauconnet, who has built up his estate by his shrewdness and his talent for cheating others. What a depth of social history of the poor man's experience of the rich rises in the old grandmother's cry, after the scene of recriminations with M. Fauconnet: "The lawyers will take our all. They will sell the furniture and all the tools by auction. Ah! my God!" It is true the rich have a thousand tools in their hands always ready for use; the social machine has been built up by such instruments. But if the poor appear to be better, it is only that their circumstances give them little opportunity for social injustice. At heart they are the same, as we see from the actions of Uncle Toinot and from the behaviour of Tiennon's family at the old grandmother's

death, and at the "wake" with the retailing of "lies, scandal, foolishness."

The disputes of the son with his parents when they refuse to pay him for his work are faithfully recorded, along with his sister Catherine's ready adoption of "the polished and submissive manner which is necessary in serving the rich." Every thread is clearly disclosed in the web of the poor man's necessity. And his critical insight into motives, how admirably it serves the author in his series of character sketches, such as that of the fussy landlord, M. Boutry, and Madame, his hard, close-lipped wife; of M. Gorlier, the proprietor of La Creuserie, whose principle it is "not to do any repairs," and of M. Parent, his obsequious steward. The author knows how to convey the whole background of rural manners in a few nervous lines, as in the story of young Tiennon's discomfiture by virtuous little Suzanne and by big Hélène. The scene of the wooing of Victoire, his black-eyed, delicate wife, with "her cold and reserved character," is masterly in its precision. But quickly the picture of the first flush of married happiness changes into the grey skies of the young couple's struggle with poverty, their exhaustion from toil and their "lonely evenings." With what a burden of back-breaking, grinding labour this French peasant farmer secures a roof-tree and food and clothing for his little family! Small wonder he had no time to trouble his head with "politics," or the rival party cries of Republicans and Conservatives. And how significant is his avowal that whereas he voted for the Republicans because they remitted the salt tax, six months later he voted for Louis Napoleon because the influential people spread abroad that the Republican townsfolk would lower the price of corn and meat! Thus in preparing the *débâcle* of 1871, and *la revanche* for France and suffering Europe, old Tiennon, too, played his infinitesimal part.

If we draw attention to these particular scenes and episodes, it is to point out how varied and full of movement is this human chronicle. And the author knows well how to paint in just perspective the life of the fields,

and set the anxieties and harassments of the farmer against his joys and the compensations of his lot. His happiness as a good husbandman is in his well-tilled fields and his fine beasts; and he details his tricks and devices in hay and harvest time to get his hired helpers to hasten with the garnering of his crops. But at the height of his prosperity comes the blow of his illness and the disaster of the miserable year when the hailstorm in June ruined all the countryside, followed by the death of M. Gorlier, his landlord. What an edged commentary on the life of the rich *bourgeoisie* is the picture of Tiennon's first view of the great house, with its "beautiful room," in which he "did not see one object which responded to a real need;" and no less incisive is the sketch of the malice of the spoiled little *bourgeoise*, Mathilde Lavallée, against the children of "the ugly peasants." The touching family picture of the departure of Jean, the young conscript, is worthy of Tolstoy, as is the companion story of Victoire, the mother's jealous guarding of the golden grapes for her son's return, and then her surrender of them to placate the proprietress, Madame Lavallée. The heaviest blow to Tiennon, after his ceaseless toil in cultivating and enriching the soil of La Creuserie, is his landlord's ultimatum—Pay more rent or go! The Fauconnets, the Lavallées, the Norises, the Gouins, are all people of the same kidney, and it is about this class of landlord that Tiennon quotes the country saying: "The proprietors collect in their granary the skins of the numerous *métayers* whom they have fleeced." But Tiennon, we repeat, is under no illusion about the obligatory virtues of the poor. In spite of the peasant farmer's disabilities and the mill of labour, "work, work, always work," he is happier than the rich with all their leisure and amusements. In the fine chapters XLIV.–V. Tiennon sums up his philosophy of life, and has notable things to say on religion and morals. His words on Socialism, later on, have all the prudence of the national temperament as well as the experience of his years. And we may leave him here, in quoting his simple creed, which is the basis of all morality

everywhere : " It seemed to me—and my opinion has not changed—that the true duty of each person lies in a very simple line of conduct : to work honestly, to cause sorrow to none, to help when we have a chance, to come to the aid of those more unfortunate than ourselves." So we may leave old Tiennon with thanks to his creator, not forgetting the translator by whose fine perseverance an English audience can at last judge the work.

EDWARD GARNETT.

August, 1919.

EMILE GUILLAUMIN

EMILE GUILLAUMIN was born at Ygrande (Allier) on November 10th, 1873. His parents were *métayers*, who by dint of hard work succeeded in becoming independent. He attended the village school, no other. From his twelfth year he worked with his parents, and all his life (except for the interruption caused by his term of military service) has been spent in the quiet little town of eighteen hundred inhabitants.

He is, in every sense of the word, a peasant author, and one desires to know something of the man who has such marvellous gifts of assimilation and such a capacity for work that he has been able to rise unaided to the level of intellectual culture so much above the average.

Like Goethe, he has inherited from his mother a natural predisposition and from his grandfather a taste for story-telling. When he was about thirteen he found in a Moulins newspaper a serial story unlike the usual banal productions which appeared there: it was "Pêcheur d'Islande."

He experienced a joy then which he has never forgotten. Then was born his love for books. He devoured all he could find in Ygrande. He searched well, he found many.

He does not revolt against homely labour. He works steadily in the fields, but he never quits his dreams, his longings. That is precisely what constitutes the originality of Guillaumin: he has remained faithful to the

soil. He has known how to continue to be a peasant and to realize the ideal of manual work, as well as the life of the spirit.

He has been able to become one of the very rare French novelists who has succeeded, where the greatest (to cite only Balzac, Georges Sand, and Zola) have failed. We may only compare him to Erckmann, Chatrian, Eugène Leroy. They have known, as he has known, how to show, as it really exists, the life of peasants in their own provinces.

When he was fifteen Emile Guillaumin began his literary career by writing verse, as do all adolescents driven by the demon Literature.

His first prose work was " Les Dialogues Bourbonnais."

In 1901 his book " Tableaux Champêtres " was noticed by l'Académie Française, which awarded him a prize.

But the work which brought the most renown to this peasant author was his " La Vie d'un Simple," published in 1904, and which also received an award from l'Académie Française.

Léon Blum said in *l'Humanité :* " This is a beautiful book, simple in the way natural things are simple, coming spontaneously from the earth and retaining the taste and freshness of it."

Charles Louis Philippe wrote to him on March 19th, 1904 :

" My dear friend, I cannot resist writing to you at once. I have just read your book. How fine it is and how I like it. You yourself cannot know just what you have done, there is too much of your flesh and blood in it, too much of that unconsciousness which characterizes the great human books for you to be able to know all the substance and all the emotion which it contains. It is a masterpiece."

The critic E. Ledrain declared :

" This book is a little masterpiece, it will live as a work of art and as a document."

Eulogistic testimony could also be given from Emile

Pouvillon, Octave Mirbeau, Gaston Deschamps, Ernest Charles and others.

The publication of " La Vie d'un Simple " was followed by " Près du Sol," " Albert Monceau, Adjutant," " Rose et sa ' Parisienne ' " and " Baptiste et sa Femme."

To the above particulars, which are derived from "Notes on the Nivernais," by Henri Buriot (May 10, 1910), may be added some particulars of more recent date.

Guillaumin was called up early in August, 1914, and served in various capacities in the army: in the trenches, as an observer, and as paymaster; and latterly he began to write some sketches and articles, while in the trenches. On being demobilized at the beginning of this year, he wrote:

" I have resumed very heartily my former occupations. It is not unpleasant after living so long in such close intimacy with men, to take up life again among the beasts, and to feel once more the joys of solitude."

M. H.

June, 1919.

TO THE READER

OLD TIENNON is my neighbour: he is a dear old fellow. He is very bent by age, and cannot walk without the help of his hazel stick. He wears a fringe of very white thin beard, has rather red eyes, and a wart at the side of his nose; like his beard, the skin of his face is white, but is spotted and scurfy. Except in the summer months he wears a big cotton smock with a leather belt round the waist, and ample trousers of blue stuff, a woollen cap, the edges of which he turns over his ears, a cotton handkerchief badly tied round his neck, and *sabots* of beechwood bound with iron hoops.

I often meet Old Tiennon in the road which connects the farm where he lives and the one I occupy to the main road, and each time we have a chat. Old people like to have attentions paid to them, and generally nobody seems disposed to do it. But during the little leisure that I have I provide old Tiennon with a complaisant listener.

Having had a long life, he remembers many things, and he tells them in a picturesque fashion, giving his personal opinion about each, which is at times very just, seldom commonplace.

He has unconsciously told me the story of his life in fragments; it contains nothing very remarkable; it has been the poor, monotonous life of a peasant, like many others.

Old Tiennon has had his hours of pleasure; he has had days of trouble; he has worked hard; he has suffered from the elements, man, and also from uncontrollable fatality; he has been at times a rascal and at times a good fellow—like you, reader, and like me.

I said to myself: "People know so little of the peasants," so I put together old Tiennon's stories to make a book of

them. And one fine day I told him about my idea. He looked at me with astonishment :

" What good will that do you, my poor boy ? "

" Not very much, Father Tiennon, it is simply to show the gentlemen of Moulins and Paris and elsewhere what the life of a *métayer* really is,—they don't know ; and also to prove that all peasants are not as stupid as they imagine ; for, in your manner of relating things there is a dose of what they call ' philosophy,' a thing they make much of."

" If it amuses you, do it, but you can't write the things as I say them : I speak too badly, the gentlemen in Paris would not understand."

" That's true : I shall write in French so that they may be able to understand without trouble : but I shall only, as it were, translate your phrases ; they shall be yours all the same."

" All right, that's settled : begin when you like."

That has kept him busy, poor old man ; he has come to see me several times, to tell me things he had forgotten, or even things he had vowed never to divulge.

" Since I am relating my life through you, I ought to tell all, you see, the good and the bad. It is a general confession." He has done his best to satisfy me. Perhaps I have not been quite faithful to my promise ; perhaps in certain pages I have put more of myself than I ought. However, I have read each chapter as soon as it was written to old Tiennon, retouched where he has pointed out that it was necessary, repaired the little deviations from the truth, changed the sense of thoughts that I had not quite grasped at first.

When it was complete I read it again to him ; he has considered that this story of his life is in accordance with the truth ; he has declared himself satisfied. Readers, may you also be satisfied.

EMILE GUILLAUMIN.

The Life of a Simple Man

I

My name is Etienne Bertin, but they always call me "Tiennon." I was born in October, 1823, at a farm in the Commune of Agonges, near Bourbon l'Archambault. My father was a *métayer* on the farm in partnership with his eldest brother, my uncle Antoine, called "Toinot." My father's name was Gilbert, shortened to "Bérot": it was the custom at that time to deform everybody's name.

My father and his brother did not agree very well. Uncle Toinot had been a soldier under Napoleon: he had been in the Russian campaign, and had returned with his feet frost-bitten, and with pains in every part of his body. After his return his health had improved; but any sharp change of temperature revived his pains badly enough to hinder him from working. Even when he was not ill he preferred to go to the fairs, to carry the ploughshares to the farrier, or to walk in the fields, his *gouyard* on his shoulder, under the pretext of repairing the breaches in the hedges, rather than to attend to his own work.

His life in the army had spoiled his appetite for work, and given him instead a taste for lounging and spending money. He constantly smoked a very short black clay pipe; he could not do without his drop of brandy every

morning, and could never go to Bourbon without loitering at the tavern. In short, he was equal to using all the advantages of the position for his own benefit. In recounting all these things, it is not that I had any knowledge, or that I was able to understand them myself, but that I had heard them talked over at our house.

At last my father decided to leave the farm. At Meillers, on the border of the forest of Gros-Bois, he took, in *métayage*, an estate called Le Garibier, which was under the management of a Bourbon farmer, M. Fauconnet.

At the time of the removal there were painful discussions as to the sharing of the tools, furniture, linen and household utensils. My grandmother was to accompany us, and that complicated things still more. My aunt, who disagreed with her the most, wrangled with her about what she ought to take, and snatched sheets and towels out of her hands. My father had a calmer temperament, and sought to avoid these disputes, but my mother, quick and impetuous, was constantly in a rage with my uncle or my aunt and sometimes with both. It used to terrify me to hear them shouting and shaking their fists with menacing gestures as though they would strike each other.

On St. Martin's day they hoisted me for the journey on the top of a cart drawn by red oxen. I sat between the frame used for drying cheeses (in which they had placed some fowls) and a basket piled up with dishes. Everywhere the roads were badly broken and dirty. Lumps of sticky earth caked on the wheels, then fell to the ground with a dull thud.

In passing through Bourbon I opened my eyes enough to see the fine houses of the town and the tall grey towers of the old castle. I was interested also in the proceedings of a gang of workmen who were metalling the great road to Moulins which was in course of construction.

Perhaps it was a mistake to gaze about so much and tire myself. After an interval, as soon as our procession had

again reached the open country, I went to sleep, resting carelessly against the cage of fowls, and rocked by the continual rolling of the vehicle. But an extra sharp jolt turned the cage over, and made it tumble to the ground, and of course I followed pretty quickly, and was wakened rather unpleasantly. The fowls began to screech and I to cry. They rushed forward to rescue us. It appears they had some trouble to console me, although I was not hurt, the mud into which I had rolled having broken my fall.

I did the rest of the journey on foot, except one little ride that I had astride the back of my brother Baptiste, who was also my godfather.

On our arrival, my mother put me to bed on a heap of clothes in a corner of the bakehouse, and I found in another sleep, very peaceful this time, the true remedy for my emotions on the way.

I was awakened by my sister Catherine, who called me into the big room. The furniture was all in its place along the walls, and the clock sounded the twelve strokes of midnight.

Some drovers, our neighbours, who had helped us to remove, having finished their dinner, were singing. My father had pressed them to drink, the glasses clinked noisily, the wine they had spilled reddened the white tablecloth. Everybody seemed extraordinarily gay: great bursts of laughter shook their animated faces. They gave me some bits of meat and cake and buns to eat; then an old man gave me a gallop on his knee: so I had my share in the general merriment.

But the next day I heard my mother say in a vexed tone to my father that they had made it a pretty expensive Saint Martin; my father replied:

"That's true. Fortunately one does not make a fresh start often."

My mother concluded with:

" One would soon be drained, if one had to make a fresh start often."

I was then four years old. I can give as my earliest memories these episodes of the removal.

II

OUR farm was bordered by the woods and possessed a zone of virgin soil, which had always been fallow land. It was covered with fine grass, heather, broom, brambles and ferns, and in some places great grey stones protruded from the ground.

That part of the domain was known as La Breure, and during half of the year served as pasture for the sheep. My sister Catherine, who was ten years old, took care of the sheep, and I often went with her. Thus La Breure soon became familiar to me. There we came across all kinds of animals, and there were swarms of birds as well as reptiles, and sometimes the beasts of the forest appeared. One day I saw a whole family of great black pigs running across the lower part of the pasture. Hurriedly I called my sister's attention to them : she was busy knitting and had not seen them. She told me they were wild boars. Another time it was she who first saw a couple of roe-deer busily browsing on the little green branches of the hedges as the goats do. I ran to them, but they quickly scampered away.

It was said that there were wolves hidden in the forest. Towards the end of the winter, one of our lambs disappeared and it was quite impossible to discover any indication which would enable us to trace it. Catherine, whom I had not accompanied that day, declared that she had seen nothing of it, and that the sheep had not seemed afraid. Wrongly or rightly, a wolf was accused of this mysterious

abduction. My sister did not want to go alone again to La Breure, she was terrified at the idea of the wild beast reappearing; so they made me go with her constantly, and I must say that one was not less frightened than the other. We talked only of the wolf, and we made of it a frightful monster capable of every crime. However, we had not occasion to compare the real wolf with that of our imagination. No more appeared and no other lamb was carried off.

Much less rare were the rabbits; we saw many of them running about every day. The greater part of the time our dog Médor hunted them, and sometimes managed to catch one, but he thought it better not to show it to us: he hid behind the hedge of a neighbouring field, or went into the wood to eat his meal without the risk of being disturbed: he returned later, looking very sheepish, with hair and blood in his grey beard: he hung his head and wagged his tail with an air of asking pardon. To tell the truth, the poor dog had such meagre cheer at home, that it was quite excusable that he should satisfy his appetite when chance furnished him with any supplementary fare.

Nowadays dogs are treated like people; they are given good soup and bread. But at that time they were only allowed to poke about in the trough which contained the pigs' swill, which same swill was very clear and thin. To supplement this we used to dry in the oven a quantity of little sour apples called crabs, which grew wild on the hedges. Dogs were considered capable of providing for themselves by hunting. When Médor returned from the fields apparently famishing, and at meal times prowled round the table seeking crusts, my father would ask Catherine:

"Hasn't he caught any rats then?"

My sister would say "No"; then my father would say:

"He is a lazybones; if he was hungry he should have ratted: anyhow, give him a crab."

Catherine would then go into the bakehouse adjoining the house, and which served as a lumber room, and she would take from an old, dusty, bottle-shaped basket one or two little hard apples and offer them to Médor, who would go into the yard and munch them on some rushes upon which he used to sleep. On such diet you may guess he was lean and his hair rough : it would have been easy to count his ribs.

And really our own fare was hardly more appetizing. We ate bread as black as the chimney and as gritty as if it contained a good dose of thick sand from the river ; it was made of coarsely-ground rye, all the husk left and mixed with the flour ; they said that it was nourishing. A few measures of wheat also were ground, but that was for fritters and pastry, tarts and cakes which were cooked along with the bread. However, they usually kneaded out of this flour a little round white loaf which smelt good, and which had golden crust and white crumb. But this small loaf was saved for soup for my little sister Marinette, who was the youngest, and for my grandmother, for the days when she suffered from her stomach complaint.

Sometimes, however, when my mother was in a good humour, she would cut me a tiny piece, which I devoured with as much pleasure as if it had been the finest of cake. But that happened seldom, for the poor woman was greedy over her little wheat loaf.

Soup was our chief fare ; onion soup morning and evening, and at midday potato soup with haricots or pumpkin, with hardly any butter. Bacon was reserved for the summer, and for festivities ; with that we had rissoles, indigestible and doughy, which stuck to our teeth, and baked potatoes and haricots cooked in water slightly whitened with milk.

We regaled ourselves on cooking days, because then we had tarts and cakes, but those " side dishes " were quickly exhausted. Ah ! good things were not plentiful !

III

It was as shepherd in La Breure that I began to be useful.

The third summer after our installation at Le Garibier, Catherine having passed her twelfth year, had to replace the servant that my mother had employed until then. Catherine left the sheep in order to occupy herself with domestic concerns and to share the work in the fields. To me, now almost seven years old, they handed over the care of the flock.

Before five o'clock in the mornings my mother pulled me out of bed, and I set out, my eyes heavy with sleep. A liltte lane, winding, and sunk between high banks, led to the pasture. On each side on the banks were enormous hedges, and great oaks whose dark roots thrust themselves out of the earth, and whose mighty branches thick with leaves hid the sky. All this made the lane, which was known as La Rue Creuse, sombre and mysterious: an ill-defined fear always gripped me when I passed along it: it even occurred to me to call Médor, who yelped conscientiously at the freshly sheared sheep, to keep near me and I put my hand on his back as though asking him for protection.

When I arrived at La Breure I breathed more freely. The horizon widened. Towards the east and south the view extended beyond a fertile valley (hardly visible because of the hedges) to a bare hillock covered with rusty coloured grass which rose in front of Messarges. Cultivated fields could be seen on the north side; and in the west reigned the forest, populated by tall firs, their trunks full of resin, the pungent odour of which I could smell.

But La Breure itself was vast enough, and in fine weather when I arrived there in the early morning it was magnificent: the dew sparkled in the vanquishing rays of the sun; it sprinkled with diamonds the great bushes of broom whose vigorous blooms made a golden nimbus on the sombre verdure; it hung from the notched ferns and the bunches of white daisies disdained by the sheep; it masked with a uniform mist the fine grass and the grey heather studded with rosy flowerets. In the surrounding hedges there were trills, voice exercises, chirpings and warblings, all the enchanting concerts of Summer dawns.

Barefooted, in half-broken *sabots*, my legs bare to the knees, I wandered about my domain, whistling in unison with the birds. The dew from the heather got inside my *sabots*, that from the broom soaked my striped linen blouse and little cotton trousers and my frozen legs, making them very white. But this daily bath did not hurt, the sun quickly effaced any trace of it.

Most of all I feared the brambles; they crept treacherously level with the ground and were hidden by the heather, and when I walked quickly and heedlessly, it often happened that I did not go far without being tripped up by one of those reprobates, which scratched cruelly. The lower parts of my legs were always girdled with fresh or half-healed punctures. I carried in my pocket, to eat when I was hungry, a piece of hard bread and a little bit of cheese, and I used to eat this seated upon one of the grey stones which showed their noses between the flowering plants. At that moment a very familiar little black-headed lamb never failed to come to me, and I would give him morsels of my bread; but the others noticed this, and a second one would get into the habit of coming, then a third, then still more, so many that they would easily have eaten all my provisions if I had allowed them; to say nothing of Médor, who, when he was not hunting, would come too and ask for his share: he even hustled

the poor lambs (without hurting them, however) so that he alone might gaze at me with his big, gentle, pleading eyes. I would throw some little bits far off to send him away, and the others quickly took the opportunity to snap up what I wished to distribute among them.

That amused me, and a crowd of other incidents of less importance amused me also. I tried to steal the turtle doves, to catch the rabbits. I made a tour of the domain along by the hedges to find nests. In the grass I caught black crickets or green grasshoppers and tortured them pitilessly: or, I made one of those little animals with red backs spotted with black, walk on my hand; gentlemen call these "the beasts of the good God"; here we call them *marivoles*.

"Marivole, vole, vole;
Ton mari est à l'école,
Qui t'achète une belle robe."

Pushing him with my finger I sang this refrain, which Catherine had taught me, and the poor little creature did well to fly as quickly as possible, for if he delayed to obey me I made his condition most pitiable.

But in spite of all this I found the time very long. I was instructed to return between eight and nine o'clock, when, because of the heat, the sheep refuse to eat and gather together in a compact group in a shady corner.

When I returned too early I was scolded and even beaten by my mother, who never laughed, and who gave a cuff more readily than a caress. I forced myself, therefore, to stay till the appointed time. To avoid making a mistake I had one sure sign; when the oak at the right-hand side of the entrance fence made a black shadow on the fence I knew I might go away without fear; it was eight o'clock at least.

But God, how hard it was to wait till then. And in the

evenings how hard to wait for the falling night. Sometimes, overcome by fear and misery, I wept, wept without motive and for a long time. A sudden rustling in the wood, the running of a mouse through the grass, the cry of a bird unfamiliar to me, those were enough in my hours of weariness to make my tears flow.

I had been alone to La Breure for three weeks, when I had my first great fright. It was a warm evening. I was walking along sleepily, with my eyes half closed, when I saw, at the edge of the ditch which ran alongside the wood, a great black reptile, as thick as the handle of a hay fork and nearly as long. It must have been an adder. Never having seen lizards or slow-worms, and having heard of vipers as particularly bad, dangerous beasts, I believed that I saw before me an enormous black viper. I commenced to make off, then returned rather cautiously, desiring to see it again, but it had disappeared.

A quarter of an hour later, having already forgotten this incident, I was preparing to cut a branch of broom with my little knife, when suddenly I saw the black viper gliding among the heather, and approaching me very quickly. Instinctively I started running, like a fool in the direction of the sheep. Alas ! I had not reckoned with the trailing branches. Before I had run twenty yards I found myself tripped up, and I fell. I was sobbing and trembling so much that at first I had no power to move, and when I felt a strange touch on my bare legs, and then at the back of my head something cool skimming over me, I believed that it was the black viper which, having pursued me, was worming itself over my body. Stung by terrible anguish I sprang up at one bound. No aggressive reptile was near, only two friends who had come to show their sympathy and lavish their caresses upon me. It was good old Médor who had licked my legs, and the little black-headed lamb who had poked his nose into my neck. Thanks to the company of the two poor beasts, I recovered

a little from my great emotion. Nevertheless, when I returned home as usual in the falling night, the tears still ran down my cheeks, and I was convulsed with sobs.

To console me, my mother cut me a piece of the wheaten loaf and gave me some St. John pears which they had found under a pear tree in the hemp field.

In spite of my trouble, I ate those good things greedily. But that did not cure me. In the night I had a frightful nightmare, the result of a painful indigestion which made me vomit.

The next morning they allowed me to sleep later, and as the haymaking was finished, my grandmother took my place with the sheep for a few days.

When the rye was ripe, and that was not much later, I had to go back to my work again. I had not entirely recovered from my fright, and the following day I had a new, and perhaps a more lively one.

I was busy making a great bouquet, blending with the sweet perfumes of the honeysuckle and the glowing colours of the golden broom, some white daisies and pink heather, when Médor's warning yelps made me lift my head. Coming out from the wood and advancing towards me I saw a great black-bearded fellow, who carried on his shoulder a keg at the end of a stick.

I was unusually shy and timid, for our farm was isolated, and I rarely had any occasion to see strangers, except from the neighbouring farms: the Simons of Suippière, the Parnières of La Bourdrie, and sometimes the Lafonts of L'Errain. When I saw the big dark person, who was neither from Suippière, nor La Bourdrie, nor L'Errain, I was so terror-stricken that I could not move.

He called out: "Hullo! little man, come here." But into my mind came the tales of malefactors and brigands, which I had heard during the winter evenings. Without answering or waiting to hear more, I started running, resolved to abandon my post. That time I was able to

avoid the brambles, and to reach the first fence without accident, then La Rue Creuse. I fled towards the house. But the man with the black beard called after me.

"Why do you run, little man? I won't hurt you." He laughed, following me all the time, and though only at his normal pace, gained on me.

When I managed to cast behind me a terrified glance, I saw him approaching, approaching: and when at last I turned into the farm, he was only a few paces away. No matter! I felt I was safe now that I could rush into the house. But to my surprise the door was shut. I shook it violently, without moving it; it was locked. Too wearied to run any more, I crouched down in the doorway, screaming as though I was being murdered. The man from the wood arrived. He was very gentle.

"Why do you cry, my little friend? I am not wicked; on the contrary I am fond of little children."

He patted my cheeks, and in spite of my tears, I noticed that he had horny hands, a thin face and kind, gentle eyes under thick black eyebrows. He repeated his first words:

"I won't hurt you," and then he said, "where are your parents then?"

His accent was not that of our country; he pronounced his words separately. This puzzled me a great deal.

As you can imagine I did not answer, but only wept and screamed more. All the same I was astonished that he did not try to seize and carry me off, and that he spoke gently, and caressed me.

We remained thus a little while, he very embarrassed and not venturing to say anything, and I suffocated with fear.

Finally my grandmother, who had gone with the cows to a distant pasture, returned. She hurried, my cries of fright having reached her; she was followed by my little sister Marinette, whose hand she held, and who moved her short legs more quickly than she ought.

The man met them, apologizing for having unintentionally frightened me, and explained why he was there.

He was a long-sawyer from Auvergne, who was working in the forest with his gang of workmen. Their timber-yard had been installed the previous evening in a cutting near to our La Breure, and he had been sent to seek water.

My grandmother showed him the spring which was common to the two domains of Le Garibier and Suippière, and which was to be found in the meadow belonging to the Simons, beyond our Chaumat. The man went at once to fill his keg, and on his return he came into the house to thank us. I crouched down between the cupboard and my parent's bed, and obstinately refused to look at him, still more to go back with him to the pasture, as he suggested.

My grandmother had some trouble afterwards to make me return to the flock. She only succeeded by going with me half-way along La Rue Creuse, and assuring me that the Auvergnat was not hidden anywhere, but that he had really disappeared.

However, that man ended by gaining my confidence. I saw him again as early as the next day, and although his presence caused me to make an instinctive movement of fear, I did not run away. I even lifted my old hat in salute on seeing him approach. Then he began to talk to me gently, and gave me some pretty branches of strawberry plant covered with little strawberries that he had gathered in the wood expressly for me. The following day when I saw him appear with his keg, I ran to meet him, and went with him across La Breure, then into La Rue Creuse and nearly half-way to our house. I did this for a whole week.

One morning he proposed that I should go with him to his timber pit. My mother had strictly forbidden me to go into the forest, for fear of the wild beasts, and I had obeyed her, more or less, especially since the incident of the viper. Nevertheless, I readily consented to follow

my friend the Auvergnat, the more readily as he had promised to find me some more strawberries, and to give me some chips of wood, out of which I might easily cut little men and oxen and ploughs, that being how I occupied most of my time.

We were obliged to cross first the belt of firs; the ground was strewn with their fine dry needles, and some of the preceding year's fir-cones in their gaping shells. After these we came to birches and oaks, many of whose sturdy trunks were marked with a red circle which announced their near execution.

Then we came to some very thick underwood where walking was difficult; however, little as I was, I insinuated myself easily in the wake of my companion, who, besides, did not move quickly.

But once he allowed a flexible branch, which he had held back to clear the way, to slip back too soon, and it lashed my face and hurt it badly. In any other circumstances I would most certainly have wept, but in the company of this stranger I restrained my tears. Aware of what had happened he turned and asked if I was hurt. I said "No" in a voice that was almost natural. I was a stoic.

It took about twenty minutes to get to the timber pit. Three men were working there in the midst of giant oaks which had been felled. The men had long beards and long hair, and wielded long axes with their long arms. Some planks were already cut, and some beams and rafters. An enormous log was on a sawing horse, held by two great chains. Four black camp kettles sat side by side on a heap of grey ashes. A saucepan which had lost its lid lay near the cabin of refuge. This hut was made of branches and turf, and its roof sloped down to the ground. The sky shed its great light, the sun darted his living rays upon that open space, that space momentarily withdrawn from the great surrounding mystery. Wagtails

and swallows were chasing the midges which sported in numerous swarms.

The workmen ceased their cutting; after having questioned their comrade about me, they declared, laughing, that they would make a long-sawyer of me; then each took his can and sat on a log to eat.

"Sawyers' soup, you see, little man," said my friend. "The spoon sticks in it."

In fact, right in the middle he stuck the spoon, which did not move for it was a thick paste without a trace of gravy. He used another phrase which made me laugh, and which I have not forgotten.

"This is good stuff anyhow, this soup is better than I get from your house."

When each of the four men had emptied his can of soup, the oldest, who had a grey beard, lifted some chips and uncovered a saucepan; a large piece of rancid bacon was in it, which he divided. Each took his portion on a slice of black bread, which did not seem much better than ours, although it came from a baker in Bourbon. When they had finished eating they, in turn, refreshed themselves from the keg, which they held suspended at arms' length above their mouths.

After he had finished, the youngest wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve and said:

"King Louis Philippe has perhaps not dined as well as I have."

The evening before, he had gone to get some tools that were being repaired at Bourbon, and he had heard that Paris was in revolt, and they had driven out the old king, that the white flag with the *fleur de lis* had been replaced by the tricolour flag, and finally that the new king was called Louis Philippe.

The foreman, the sawyer with the grey beard, appeared much interested in what his neighbour said, he then gave his opinion:

" Since they have made such a change, it is little Napoleon whom they should have brought back."

" Yes, that he might kill people and devastate countries as his father did," said another ironically.

" I should have liked a good Republic," said the young man; " a good Republic that would plague the priests and the gentry."

" Let us go and look for strawberries," said my friend to me. We rambled in the glade between the fallen giants. He found a strawberry plant, that had not been explored, and I regaled myself at my ease. I liked that better than listening to the others talking of the King's flag.

They resumed their work, and I waited a moment to watch them, interested above all in the continual movement of the great saw, worked at the head of the log by the old Napoleonite, and at the foot by the young Republican.

I rolled in the sawdust, and amused myself by filling my pockets with it, then I selected a stock of chips; and finally timidly said that I wished to go.

My friend kindly reconducted me nearly to the border of firs, and before leaving me, he touched both my cheeks with his bearded face.

I arrived without hindrance at the edge of the wood, and was glad to see my pasture again, with its rosy heather and golden broom, the brightness of which was deadened by the great sun.

Instinctively my eyes sought the flock, but I could not see them, and that was why I was reckless when I reached the ditch which bordered our land, and rolled to the bottom on to a bed of brushwood, from which I rose all bruised and bleeding and with my blouse torn. For the second time that morning, by not weeping, I showed myself a stoic.

Besides, I was too concerned about the sheep to pity myself. I ran across La Breure hoping to discover them grouped in some corner, but nowhere could they be seen.

Then I made a tour of the quickset hedges. That was a wise plan. Down below on the valley side, between a pollarded oak and a vigorous cluster of nut trees, there was a breach in the hedge which led into a field of clover, of which the first cutting had been made, and which had been left to shoot again for seed. I dashed through the opening and soon saw sheep and lambs cramming themselves with the green clover, in spite of the heat.

My first act was to call Médor, who had left me in the forest, to follow I know not what trail. But Médor did not come. I was obliged to try and get the flock together by myself, and to push them towards the hedge.

I succeeded after a thousand attempts, but instead of going through the gaps, they went to each side, and scattered again among the clover ; a second and a third attempt failed in the same way.

Desperate and weeping, I made for the house to seek help. There I found only my grandmother nursing my little sister Marinette, who was suffering from colic, and who moaned continuously.

The first words the old woman greeted me with were to tell me that I had brought the sheep back too late. When I confessed, sobbing, that they were in the clover, she threw up her arms, with a pitiable lamentation : " Ah ! La, la, la ! Is it possible ? My God ! Holy Mother of God ! Oh, they will all be swelled. Oh ! they will all be lost ! What shall I do ? My God ! What will become of us ? "

With Marinette in her arms, she crossed the yard, mounted the ridge which overlooked the great pool surrounded by willows, and commenced calling in a piercing voice :

" Ah ! Bérot ! Aaah ! Bérot ! "

At the fourth call my father answered with a prolonged " Aaah ! "

My grandmother implored him to come quickly ; then,

having ordered me to remain there to tell my father, she ran by La Rue Creuse, in the direction of La Breure, still carrying Marinette in her arms.

My father was not long in arriving; he stopped an instant quite out of breath, interrogating me with a look, and when I told him, uttered an oath, and went out again, running.

I followed him, afar off, very worried and whimpering all the time. When I reached the pasture, the sheep had been got out of the clover, but their bellies swelled out beside their loins, and they walked with a weary air, their heads lowered and their ears hanging. Behind them came my grandmother and my father, lamenting together, saying that they were all swelled, and that not one would escape.

My grandmother proposed that she should go to Saint Aubin to seek Fanchi Dumoussier, who knew the prayers. My father was troubled chiefly at the prospect of having to go to Bourbon to tell M. Fauconnet, the master, and he spoke of going to ask Parnière of La Bourdrie, who was rather skilful in such matters, to come and lance those which were most ill.

While I was walking beside them silently, they bethought themselves of me for a moment. The blood from my scratches diluted with tears, made my face very dirty, and my blouse and trousers were torn. My grandmother and my father misapprehended the cause of this mishap; at first they believed that I had broken through the hedge out of pure mischief, and that *I* was entirely the cause of the freak of the flock.

To clear myself from that reproach, I told them without lying, how I had spent my morning.

Then they swore a great deal at " that pig of an Auvergnat," who had taken me away. But my grandmother none the less considered me very culpable, and urged my father to punish me as I deserved. My father, always

easy-going, replied that that would not undo the mischief, and left me alone. However, I did not get off so easily. When we had returned to the house, my mother, having got back from the fields, gave me several slaps and a good whipping, which made me run off to the bottom of the hemp field, and hide in a big ditch bordered by young elms.

There I sulked and wept my fill. When dinner-time came my godfather came to look for me. He only got me to follow him by promising that I should not be beaten nor scolded. I asked him for news of the flock. He told me that Parnière of La Bourdrie had lanced the ten beasts that were most ill, and that only two sheep and a lamb had died. They reckoned that the lives of the others would be saved, and in fact no more died. For that business my friend the Auvergnat " paid for breakages."

That evening, when he came with his keg, my grandmother accosted him and made a violent scene, accusing him of being the cause of this great disaster which would ruin us, and she forbade him to take any more water from our well. He was so disconcerted at first that he had nothing to say. At length, when he understood what had happened and what they reproached him with, he sputtered a great deal, throwing out his arms with great gestures, as though calling the heavens to witness his complete innocence ; then, seeing how exasperated the two women were, and that no reasonable explanation was possible, he took the wise course of going to get water at the spring of Crozière, on the other side of La Bourdrie, a good three-quarters of an hour from his sawpit ; and he continued to go there. As for me, I never saw my poor sawyer again.

Besides these extraordinary events, the storms caused me serious trouble in the course of that summer. I was ordered to return if it thundered much, because it was bad for the sheep to get wet. But one morning I saw the sky darken, the storm coming from the direction of

Souvigny. Then the lightning zigzagged through the blackness, and rather loud rumblings followed, so Médor and I got the flock together and took them home ; I had only been away an hour. In the Rue Creuse, hearing less thunder, I had a presentiment that I was doing a stupid thing; however, I had not the courage to go back on my determination.

As soon as my mother saw me she demanded in a hard voice what possessed me to return so soon ; when I spoke of the storm, she laughed and shrugged her shoulders, saying that I was a donkey not to know yet that storms were never for us when they came from the east. To get this better into my head, she gave me a couple of slaps and sent me off again without more delay.

" Once bitten, twice shy." When another storm came on, I judged it prudent not to pack up, seeing that it gathered over Bourbon. Without flinching I remained through all the premonitory rumblings. But they increased, and great flashes of lightning lit up the sky with their luminous twistings and writhings : the storm gained upon St. Aubin. I was very frightened, and decided to go just at the moment that the big drops began to fall, wide apart. I had hardly reached the lane, when the rain suddenly became heavier, and fell in a terrific downpour, mixed with large hailstones.

The sheep refused to move ; I was dripping, wet through, and began to fret a good deal, when I saw my father with a sack over his shoulders, coming to my aid.

He asked me if I wasn't a thorough idiot, not to come back sooner in such weather.

At the house my mother punished me again, after she had made me put on dry clothing.

So, having been beaten for going back when it was not necessary, and for not going back when it was, you can understand how afterwards the stormy skies perplexed me, and how they seemed big with menace.

IV

WHEN I think that I was not quite seven when I had all these adventures, when I compare my childhood with that of the little ones of to-day, who are petted and cared for tenderly, and who are not obliged to do any manual labour before they are twelve or thirteen years old, I feel that they have a very good time indeed. I used to pass my days in the open air, they spend theirs in school. For two years I was a shepherd, and so escaped, until I was eight and a half, being exposed to the worst weather, for the sheep are not sent out in rain or snow. Afterwards they gave me the pigs to take care of, and that was the end of my days of rest. Let the wind blow or the rain fall, let the sun burn or the north wind lash, in snow or frost, I was obliged to go to the fields. Oh ! those terrible sentry duties of winter ; how one's legs were plastered with mud, how soaked one's feet became, and how the cold gripped ; do what one might, they followed their cruel course. I could not sit down, the leafless hedges gave no shelter, my fingers, benumbed and chapped, hurt badly ; my whole body would be shaken by a convulsive trembling. Oh ! how wretched I was.

We always had two sows that we called " old poringers," and two litters of little ones, numbering from fifteen to twenty. They all wandered about, grunting and rummaging in the soil. When the little ones were very young and remained in the stable, the sows were particularly difficult to manage, the maternal instinct driving them nearer to their young. They got through the hedges with astonishing ease, and some strategy was needed to prevent them getting away ; besides, it was

impossible to make them stay anywhere for very long, but when they escaped I had the certainty that they would go straight towards the house. Unfortunately that was no longer the case when the little ones were strong enough to follow them. In summer, as soon as the barley ripened, they became unbearable, for they were downright thieves. When they managed to get into a field of corn, they made a lot of havoc there and it was not easy to find them, and almost impossible to keep them from returning to it. I got a good many cuffs on the few occasions that I had been unable to keep them out of the corn. After the corn came the fruit. My " old porringers " knew, within a radius of several kilometres, where to find all the wild pear trees which were good producers. I had to run pretty fast and struggle with them, and then it was hardly possible to prevent them making a great circular promenade each day, to eat the fallen fruit. The same thing happened when the chestnuts were ripe, and the beech nuts, and the acorns; and they had to be watched very closely on account of the new seeds and the potatoes that had not been dug. But the worst of all was that they would not keep together: the families would divide, each litter of little ones following the mothers in different directions. At other times the little ones, too inexperienced, would lie about, some here and some there, not being able to follow the " old porringers " in all their wanderings, and while I pursued one lot, the others would make off in another direction, the result being that, on certain unlucky days, I could not get them back to the stable all together. Often at nightfall I had to go out again a devil of a way to look for the missing ones.

To add to all the annoyances that the pigs caused in the fields, there was the trouble of keeping the houses of these gentlemen clean. They were lodged in three small sties, which leaned against the gable end of the house:

the sties were much too narrow and the joints in the floor too wide, which made the cleaning difficult. I did my best, but my mother, who inspected them frequently, was never satisfied, she always had some complaint to make. I remember one time that she beat me because I had put some new-born pigs on straw which was too stiff, and which had made all their tails droop. These little miseries have made the memory of that time bad enough, but it was at a winter fair at Bourbon, to which I went with my father, that the most wretched event happened in my career as a swineherd.

V

I WAS then nine years old. They chose me to go to the fair because my godfather had a sprain, my brother Louis was obliged to stay at home to attend to the grooming, and my sister Catherine had a bad cold. I must confess that I was not at all sorry, very much otherwise. Since we had been at Le Garibier, I had never left the farm more than four or five times, to go to Mass at Meillers on great fête days. From the day of the removal, when we had crossed Bourbon, I had retained a confused and vague memory of the grandeur of that town. I thought of it as an immense place with great houses, fine shops, and so many streets that it must be difficult to find them.

Well, I was very pleased to be going to see those wonderful things again. However, in the morning I found it very disagreeable to have to rise at three o'clock. My father had some trouble to wake me, and even when I was up, I was so sleepy that I was scarcely conscious: my mother made me put on my best clothes, not very grand ones, for they had served my two brothers before

coming down to me. Then she tried to make me swallow some soup, but I was too sleepy to be hungry. My head, which was leaning on my arms, rolled again on the table. I felt as though I had burning sand in my eyes. My mother foresaw that before long I would regret my sleepiness of the morning; she put a piece of bread and some apples in my pocket:

"For when you are hungry, dear," she said.

She put round my neck a thick woollen muffler, and covered my shoulders with an old grey fringed shawl.

"How cold you will be, my poor Tiennon; it grieves me to see you going out in such weather."

That morning my mother showed me an unusual tenderness, dear woman; her voice was caressing, and her eyes full of sad gentleness. I realized at that moment the mother love which through her usual hardness rarely showed itself.

At four o'clock the astonished pigs were taken out of the stable, and after some trouble we got them out of the yard. In the keen frost of that end of night, the journey began. Contact with the hostile temperature wakened me sharply. Then I remembered that I was going to Bourbon, and my childish enthusiasm and innocent gaiety returned. I struck the pigs with my willow branch, being in a hurry to get to Bourbon. I made myself so busy that I was not very cold, and the early morning journey was accomplished with very little weariness or discomfort.

By half-past seven we were installed in the field in which the fair was to be held. We had a good place sheltered by a wall; my father had brought a little dark linen bag, from which he took handfuls of rye, and threw it to the pigs to help to keep them patient. However, the cold soon made them grunt, their leathery bodies trembled, their bristles stood on end, and it was hard work to keep them in one place. I was very cold too:

after the exertion of walking and the consequent warmth, the inactivity was torture. And I was hungry, but my poor hands were so stiff that I could not get the food which my mother had given me out of my pocket; I only succeeded after I had warmed my hands, by putting first one and then the other on my chest inside my clothes: but the icy air stung so much that I was obliged to stop eating to warm them again and again. My father, too, had some trouble to pull through. He tramped about constantly, rubbing his hands, and beating the air with great movements of his arms.

However, the fair had its course, but it was of little importance. It was a "dead fair," the frequenters said. Around us were other young pigs, some very small, that, like ours, were grunting with cold. Further off were some fat hogs lying on the hard ground, rising with an angry complaint when a buyer struck them with his whip to examine them. At the other extremity of the enclosure were sheep, looking ill and miserable because of the rime which wet their fleece. The cattle were in another part of the field, separated from us by a wall; we could not see them, but from time to time we could hear their wearied and plaintive bellowing. The men in charge of the animals, countrymen in *sabots*, and wearing trousers of blue stuff, big smocks and caps, and with very high shirt collars which made their thin faces look ungainly, shivered in company, and like my father, tried various devices to overcome the cold. There were few other people at the fair, only some big farmers wearing goat skins, and dealers in long blue or grey cloaks. They were all constantly on the move, hurrying to get their business done, that they might go and dine in some well-warmed inn parlour. Idlers, who only frequent fairs to kill time, had prudently stayed at home.

From time to time our master, M. Fauconnet, came beside us. He was a man of forty, broad-shouldered and

with a clean-shaven, puckered face. When in a good humour he wore a perpetual benign smile, but when anything happened that did not suit him, he frowned, and his face became hard. That day he was in a very bad humour, for the fair was not good for much, and we had to sell at a low price or not at all. He was annoyed, too, because three of the pigs were very inferior. He said that we ought to have left them at home, that the whole lot was spoilt by them, and that it was almost impossible to sell them with the others.

Meantime it grew late. I was cold all the time, and began to find the day very long. My father proposed that I should go and take a turn in the town, to warm myself, but I refused, being afraid of losing my way, besides being terrified by all the unknown people I saw moving about.

Several attempts at a sale having failed, we were thinking of going back, when towards ten o'clock, a very loquacious dealer, after a long debate, bought all the pigs except the three poor ones, which he would not take. To tell the truth, M. Fauconnet hardly tried to sell those three, he preferred to sell the others at a higher price, and to let us take the little ones back to fatten them more. The trouble we should have as a result of that mattered little to him.

We had to wait two hours on the Moulins road, where we were to deliver the pigs to the man who had bought them. I was very tired, and it was still bitterly cold, the sun had not been able to break through the density of the wintry atmosphere.

When the purchaser appeared, some kind folk helped us to sort the newly-sold animals, not an easy task. After they had been delivered and paid for (in gold pieces, which my father sounded one by one on the damp pavement), we set out across the town with the three rejected pigs. I was disillusioned in the course of that journey, the

houses did not seem so fine, though some of the shop windows delighted me. I ought to say that we did not go by the main thoroughfare, but along a steep, roughly-paved street, which ran alongside the river Burge. This street leads to the Place de l'Eglise, in the upper part of the town : it is there that the road to Meillers begins.

In this Place de l'Eglise my father left me alone. He wanted, as was usual, to hand the money over at once from the sale to M. Fauconnet. I was rather uneasy when I saw him go away : but he had promised not to be long, and to bring me some white bread and chocolate for my dinner ; besides, he wanted to ask M. Vernier, a farmer from Meillers (whom he knew, and whom he expected to meet along with M. Fauconnet) to take me home on his horse. His promise helped me to forget my fear of being left alone. I threw the rye that was left in the bottom of the bag to the pigs, but in spite of that, they soon began to give me a lot of trouble : one made off down the road leading to Meillers, no doubt he recognized it : another ran towards the town again. Fortunately, a man returning from the fair helped me to get them together, then they were quiet for a little while, but not for long ; they soon began to run from one side to another, grunting, and I had hard work to keep them from escaping. During the few moments that they were quiet, I watched anxiously the entrance of the street down which my father had gone, with the hope, always disappointed, of seeing him reappear. More and more was I gripped by hunger, cold and weariness. I had been there a long time when I heard three o'clock sound from the tower of St. Chapelle. This tower and three others more distant, the last vestiges of the ancient castle, I divined rather than saw : darkened by the centuries, they appeared more sombre still under the grey sky, nearly invisible, drowned in the thick mist of the frosty evening. Below, the town formed an equally shapeless and vague mass, where nothing could be seen,

and from which no sound came; it seemed as though annihilated by some unseen catastrophe. The Place de l'Eglise, where I was standing, framed well with the general effect of mournfulness. Mournful were the great trees, their nakedness veiled by white spangles; and the evergreen shrubs all whitened too, and the square of worn grass which crackled under my feet; and the rectangular pond, where the sliding of the boys had bruised the dull ice. At the bottom of the Place, the church, its massive doors closed, seemed hostile to prayer and hope. To the right, in a garden behind high walls, a very new mansion with two square towers looked like a prison. On the edge of the Meillers road, facing the church, stood a fine one-storied house, but dismal too, for up its walls climbed ugly black reptiles, which in summer no doubt were beautiful green plants. Then there was a row of low cottages with a uniform line of narrow gardens in front of them; they were day labourers' houses most likely, except the one in the middle, which was evidently occupied by a cobbler, to judge by the big boot hung over the door.

At the bottom of the Place the house at the angle of the street served as an inn and a grocer's shop; a few cakes of soap were visible behind the upper panes of the window, and a branch of juniper hung on the wall.

Like the church, all the habitations were closed. No doubt, in them were flaming fires and warm stoves, near which the people could laugh at the hostility of the outer world. The hostility of the outer world; I was all alone in it, suffering, with my three pigs.

The gate which shut in the garden of the mansion opened and two priests came out. They bowed low to a hooded lady, who accompanied them to the gate. They passed close beside me, even giving me an indifferent glance, and went into the house with the black reptiles, in which I supposed they lived.

A moment later it was one of the cottage doors which creaked on its hinges. A big, untidy woman appeared in the opening and threw some water out of a saucepan into the garden. In spite of her observation, an urchin about my own age managed to escape: he came to the pond and began to slide on the ice. After five or six turns he went and knocked at the cobbler's door and called "André" three times. Another boy, rather smaller, at length appeared. They slid for a long time together, sometimes upright and following each other, and sometimes crouching down and holding each other's hands. But the big, untidy woman, having opened her door again, ordered them to go in, in such a severe tone that they decided to obey her without delay. Once more I was alone on the Place.

At long intervals a few farm labourers passed; they walked quickly, being in a hurry to get home; also some farmers on horseback went by, they were wrapped up in cloaks and mufflers. One of these, who rode a big white horse, stopped on seeing me.

"Where do you come from, my little lad?"

"From Meillers, sir," I stammered; my teeth chattering.

"You are not little Bertin from Le Garibier?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hasn't your father come back yet?"

"No, sir."

"What a shame. He must have gone on the spree! Eh well, my boy, I ought to take you back with me, but as it is it's impossible, you can't leave your pigs. Keep moving about whatever you do, don't let yourself get numb with the cold."

With this sententious advice the gentleman spurred on his horse and soon disappeared in the fog. I easily guessed that he was M. Vernier, and my misery was increased by what he said about my father—"What a shame! he must have gone on the spree." I had not thought of

that, but now it seemed to me very likely. My father went out very rarely, but when he attended Mass at Meillers he usually returned at once. But on market days he was sometimes not so wise. I had been in bed on those occasions before he returned, but the following days he used to look tired and ill, and my mother had, above all for him, her harshest look. She pitied him, however, for having such a weak head and not enough strength to resist chance temptations. I remembered all these old facts and had no doubt that his delay was due to the cause suspected by M. Vernier.

At four o'clock it was night : it came down from the great sky low and black ; it rose from the ground with the floating mist which suddenly thickened ; I trembled with cold, hunger and fear. Having eaten nothing all day except my hard crust and apples, I felt faint, my entrails rumbled, and dark veils passed before my eyes. I was also weak with fatigue, the slight weight of my body was too much for my feeble legs. I regretted that I had not risked setting out alone earlier, even though I hardly knew the way. But now that the country was wrapped in darkness, I preferred to freeze where I stood rather than start on the road. The pigs, worn out like myself, slept at the bottom of the ditch : I took advantage of that to sit down near them, and tried to suppress my misery.

A servant with a shaven face came out of the mansion, carrying an empty basket. He strode past the line of trees in the square, along the paved street and disappeared towards the town. He returned shortly after, the basket heavy with provisions, and carrying under his arm a long loaf with a golden crust, at which I looked with envy.

Five o'clock. It was quite dark. I could scarcely see a gipsies' cart which came from the town and passed our way. Two men walked beside the horse, which they struck violently with sticks. Behind, were three lads of different

sizes, whose clothes hung in tatters, and who wrangled loudly in a strange language. From the inside of the cart came wailings, the cries of beaten children, and the voices of scolding shrews. Those people had no better reputation then than now; I had heard that they lived by plunder and that they stole children to make little beggars of them to excite pity. My blood froze still more and my heart beat very fast. But the gipsies passed without seeing me.

And two couples of lovers who came by later did not see me either. They had probably been at a dance in an inn. The girls had flung their cloaks on anyhow in great haste to set out when they had seen how late it was. The young men held them closely round the waist in an amorous embrace which the cold made very excusable.

The sexton had rung the evening Angelus. The vicarage and the cottages had closed their shutters, through which thin threads of light filtered. It was freezing hard: the mist was partly dispelled and it was like a vague twilight making all the surrounding objects appear fantastic. I suffered less, my stomach was worn-out, but I became weaker and weaker, the dark veils befogged my eyes more frequently, and in my ears was the sound of bells as though the Angelus rang ceaselessly. The pigs woke up and were troublesome. But in spite of the energy I had to expend on keeping them together, the cold reached my bones.

From the town side a great clamour rose. Again I was terribly frightened when I saw the noisy group of men who were shouting. At that moment I was outside the Place a little way along the road which led homewards. At the crossways the men stopped and separated, after having said their noisy good-byes. Some took the road to Autry, the others came my way. For a moment it occurred to me that perhaps my father might be amongst them, but when they were nearer I saw that they were all young people. There were six of them. One very tall man walked in front, twirling his stick; arm in arm three

others followed, staggering a great deal. A few yards behind came the other two, who had stopped to light their pipes. The one in front sang in a loud, raucous voice the refrain of a drinking song :

"A boire, à boire, à boire,
Nous quitt'rons-nous sans boire ?"

At this interrogation the three in the middle replied with a formidable "Non," then all joined in, each in a different key and with comic gestures :

"Les gas d'Bourbon sont pas si fous
De se quitter sans boire un coup !"

The last word prolonged itself into a "ououou" and was at its fullest when they were passing me. I was in the ditch, leaning against the trunk of a little oak beside my pigs, which were again asleep ; the men had no suspicion of my presence.

At that moment an odour of cooking reached me from the mansion, a delicious odour of meat crackling in butter. That reawakened the faculties of my empty stomach. I wanted to climb the wall, to cry, to shout my misery and my hunger, to crave one little morsel of the food which smelt so good. To escape from this temptation I drew nearer to the vicarage, but there, too, I could hear the rattling of spoons and smell the soup, which smell, if it was less penetrating than that of the mansion, was not less pleasant. I realized that, everywhere in warm houses, people were eating the evening meal. In the mansion the rich ate meat and good bread with golden crust ; the vicar and his curates had soup with an appetizing smell, and other good things. And in the cottages, they too had soup which, if it did not smell much, tasted good and filled the stomach. Alone, left on the road, in the rime and frost, a little peasant, wrapped in an old grey shawl, guarded three rejected pigs : and that little peasant had

been there five hours : and that little peasant had, during the whole day, eaten only a scrap of bread and three apples : and I was that little peasant. They had all seen me, the people of the mansion, and those of the vicarage, and the women of the cottages, and their children who were of my own age ; they had all seen me, but not one had deigned to give the dole of a sympathetic word : not one had thought that I might be suffering : not one had thought of coming to see if I was still there in the darkness.

The clock of St. Chapelle rang seven. Sadly I counted the blows of the hammer striking the brass, which in the silence of that deserted place, in that nocturnal frame of winter seemed to me as mournful as a knell. From that moment I fell into a kind of half sleep, the terrible lethargic state of those who perish from cold. Once more I leaned against the trunk of the tree in the ditch and my eyes half closed. However, I saw the pigs get up and I forced myself to follow them mechanically. But I had scarcely any sensations left, nor any thoughts. Some memories still haunted my half-dead brain—Le Garibier, La Breure, the forest, my grandmother, my mother, my brothers and sisters, even the dog Médor, the fields, the house, the things which had held a place in my childhood's life—and which it seemed to me had left it a long time ago—passed in a procession of indistinct images. That caused me neither regrets nor emotions, it was merely like a dream, I was not quite certain of having lived that past life, at any rate I felt that I should not live it again. I felt that I was dying and had not the will to resist the final torpor.

* * * * * *

It was almost nine o'clock when the sound of a step that seemed familiar roused me. I rubbed my eyes and saw my father. He coughed and spat and walked rather crookedly, but anyhow it was he. In a moment I forgot all the misery, the terrors, the suffering, all the long martyr-

dom of the day, in the great happiness of finding him again, and exulting with joy, I was about to throw myself into his arms. At first he stopped, taken aback; he was in the usual besotted state which follows an orgy, and he seemed astonished to see me there. Then memory returned and he embraced me in an overwhelming enthusiasm of paternal love, calling me his " poor little friend." Drunken people always make the most of their feelings. My father wept to think that he should have left me alone all day. He found in his pocket a crust of bread left over from his dinner, and a lump of sugar, the remains of the coffee which had followed that meal. I devoured those crumbs and they seemed to give me some strength. He was anxious to go back to the grocery-inn to buy me some food, but I refused. Now that I had found him again, my protector and my guide, I had no fears: I felt strong enough to walk all the way home without anything more to eat, and I clung to his hand with a dull determination to prevent him escaping.

The pigs staggered about the road as though they too were half-conscious, they had certainly no wish to run away then: I had not had to do my duty to the end as guardian, even unconsciously.

The return journey was long, silent and painful, my eyes kept closing in spite of myself, and my father, whose hand I held, almost dragged me along. Moreover, he had to continually lash the pigs, who would loiter; once he was very sick and was obliged to stop and lean against a wall of dry stones, his forehead in his hands: he exhaled a sickening smell of wine, his hiccup increased and shook him more and more. He suffered so much that his face was distorted; finally he vomited; that relieved him, and he took my hand and we went on again.

It was past eleven when we reached home: I went at once into the house, leaving my father to feed the pigs and shut them up. In the corner of the fireside, where the

last embers were dying, my mother sat knitting, waiting for us. During the whole evening she had been straining her ears listening to the sounds outside, always expecting us to arrive, getting more and more anxious as the night advanced. She asked me why we were so late and loaded me with caresses, and overwhelmed my father with angry looks when he came in. Then she ignored him altogether. He did not say a word, but went to bed immediately. I ate some soup and an egg cooked in the ashes. That feast did me some good, but all the same I could scarcely sleep. It took me more than a week to recover from the fatigue and cold which resulted from my long sentry. But it took my father and mother a still longer time to recover their normal relationship.

VI

THE time came for me to go to the catechism, which was my first contact with society. Society in this case was represented by an old rosy-faced priest with white hair, and by five urchins, of whom four at least were as uncivilized as myself. One only, Jules Vassenat, son of the clerk-innkeeper, was less awkward, because he had learned to read at Noyant, where there was a school. The schools at that time were very far apart, and only the fairly well-off could afford to send their children, for the fees were high.

The boys' catechism took place at eight o'clock in the morning. It was a good league from Le Garibier to the village, so in winter I had to leave our house before daylight. In frosty weather I got along very well, although I often stumbled and sometimes fell down, for the roads were very rough. But in wet weather I used to be

smothered with slimy mud. It got inside my *sabots* and bespattered my woollen stockings, making me very uncomfortable in church during the class. The curé used to be annoyed when I arrived with very dirty *sabots;* to be sure he was no better pleased with my companions, for whom the roads were no better than for me. He had a very hasty temper. When we answered his questions badly, and when we whispered and laughed, he used to get into a rage.

" You great blockhead, you stupid ass," he would shout.

Then he would give us bangs on the head with the side of his book. But his wrath was short-lived, very soon he would tell us funny little stories and laugh with us. He also did us little kindnesses which compensated largely for his passing severities. Once on the occasion of a wedding, he shared with us the blessed bread which the young couple had offered him : he also divided some sweets among us after a baptism : and on New Year's Eve he gave us each an orange, begging us not to begin the new year badly by any naughtiness the next day. Indeed he was a good man, familiar with everybody, jovial and free from malice : he was free of speech even with the rich ; he was indifferent to the power of money ; he was not a toady like some I have since met.

I could hardly get back from the catechism before ten o'clock, but I often returned later. I was very friendly with one of my class-mates, Jean Boulois of Parizet, who would come to the end of the road with me, and we managed to have some good games.

We used to pass the shore of a large lake close to the mill and we always stopped to watch the big wheel turn, and to listen to the grinding of the millstones and the clicking of the machinery. We also found it interesting to watch the lads with the big horses which carried on their backs the customers' flour, and in the same way brought back the grain to be ground. The covered

wagons of the present day were unknown then, because there were no roads.

Jean Boulois, who was ingenious, had always new diversions to propose. He took me along the riverside, where we found plants with red berries out of which we made necklaces. He taught me how to make snares with elder twigs and treacle, to catch birds in snowy weather. We looked for bullaces, which are eatable when frozen. Thus our return journeys took a long time. At last, when I arrived home at eleven instead of ten o'clock, my mother was annoyed and I used to tell her that the curé had kept us late. She would conclude with :

" Go along then, get your soup eaten, the pigs are getting impatient in the stable, they ought to have been in the fields two hours ago." I would then go out again to La Breure or some other fallow land for a long day with my pigs, but solitude weighed more heavily upon me than formerly.

One day I was imprudent enough not to return until midday; that roused my mother's suspicions. The following Sunday she went to see the curé, who told her we were always free by nine o'clock. Of course she scolded me well and it became impossible to loiter : if I was not back by a quarter to ten at the latest I was sure of having my ears pulled.

In May, 1835, after my second year of catechism, the good old curé allowed me to receive the Sacrament. As my friend Boulois was my class-mate, I went after Mass with my father, mother, and godfather to dinner at Parizet. It was considered a good house, and indeed the meal was a liberal one : there was soup made with ham, rabbit, chicken, a very fresh wheaten loaf, cakes and buns : there was wine (I drank a whole glassful) and coffee, which beverage I had never tasted before. Perhaps I abused all those good things somewhat, anyhow I was not very well at the evening ceremony.

I have become convinced since, that it is a rule in life that vexation follows pleasure. That vexation is the penalty that we pay for pleasure.

VII

VERY soon after my confirmation, I was present at another festivity. My two brothers were married in the month of November of that same year.

My elder brother Baptiste, who was my godfather, was almost twenty-five. Louis was twenty-two. To save them from military service, my father had insured them before the balloting, with a merchant of substitutes.

Military service, which at that time was for eight years, seemed an unspeakable calamity. My mother often said, when speaking about my brothers, that she would rather see them dead than in the army. There were several reasons for this excessive fear. First, the number called was limited, and among the victims of chance, all those who had any resources found substitutes. Then those who went away had no prospect of coming home every year on leave. They went on foot to their distant garrisons, and were usually not seen again until the expiration of their term of service.

The railways were not then in existence, travelling was very costly and possible only to the rich. In fact, nearly everybody remained in one place: no one had the least idea of the outside world. Beyond the commune and the canton, and some known places more remote, were mysterious countries that one imagined to be dangerous and inhabited by barbarians. Then, too, people remembered the great wars of the empire in which so many men died. That is why, ten years in advance, conscription was a continual source of dread to parents. To insure oneself

before the balloting cost about five hundred francs, but if it happened that the substitute was not drawn, then the cost was at least a thousand or eleven hundred francs. My mother had patiently accumulated in the inside drawer of the cupboard, big and little coins. By dint of paring, of saving on the salt, on the butter and on everything, she had managed to lay by for the occasion of the drawing by lot, the five hundred francs necessary for the preliminary insurance of each of the elder sons.

She was very proud of this result, which gave her the certainty of keeping them at home.

My brothers were marrying two sisters, the daughters of Cognet of Le Rondet. Up to the last moment Louis had not decided to propose to Claudine Cognet, for he had a good little friend nearer home whom he wanted to marry. But my mother had made him understand that, as he would always have to live with his brother, it would be more to his interest that they should have sisters for wives, that this would be some guarantee of harmony in the household. As she had considerable ascendancy over him she succeeded in persuading him.

As I was too young to act as best man, they made me stay at home with my grandmother and Marinette on the wedding day. I even went out as usual with the pigs, but I brought them back early, knowing very well that it would not be noticed in the general confusion.

My mother returned as soon as the ceremony was over. The dinner was prepared under the direction of a cook from Bourbon who, with Mother Simon of Suippière and the servant from La Bourdrie, helped my mother.

Everything was topsy-turvy. The beds had been carried into the granary. A large table, made up with planks placed on trestles, cut the room in two diagonally. A great slaughter of fowls had taken place the previous evening, I had counted as many as twenty geese, ducks and chickens, exposing upon a bench their bleeding naked-

ness. In another place was a quantity of meat which the butcher from Bourbon had brought in his cart. When I returned from the fields all this was being cooked in the bakehouse. I regaled myself with some giblets and rolls with fresh butter, which had a very appetizing smell.

The wedding guests arrived at nightfall. The day had been spent at Vassenat's inn in the market town, where they had had a grand ball. The wedding being an important one, they had two musicians, one, a thin old man who turned the handle of a hurdy-gurdy, and a chubby-faced one with a broken nose, who played the musette. Lunch was eaten early and hastily at Rondet before the departure for Meillers. Everybody was very hungry in the evening, and dinner began almost at once. The big table not being big enough, a little one was placed in a corner of the fireplace, and the children, including myself, sat there. There were Uncle Toinot's two young children, three or four little ones belonging to relations of my sisters-in-law and those of the neighbours, two lads from Suippière, and Claude and Thérèse of La Bourdrie. I was placed beside Thérèse and I admired her fresh cheeks and the little locks of fair hair which escaped from her cotton bonnet. I hardly spoke to her all the time, for I was not usually very bold, and this invasion of strangers intimidated me still more. My table companions were not much more loquacious, but if we were nearly silent we did full justice to the good things. My mother sat beside us to keep an eye on us and serve us, which was very wise, but for her we should certainly have overeaten.

By contrast, the conversation at the large table was very animated; everyone spoke loudly, but most loudly of all Uncle Toinot, who gave his usual account of the war in Russia. He told a dramatic story which he only recited on great occasions: it was about a Russian whom he had killed.

"It was two days before Beresina, a bitterly cold day,

confound it. I was reconnoitring with my company on the flanks of a column, beyond a little hill which rose clearly in the middle of the immense stretch of country. Just at the moment when we expected nothing to happen, the Cossacks began to fire on us at short range. Before we had time to defend ourselves, they had killed and wounded a good half of our little troop; then seeing us demoralized, they threw themselves on us with wild yells: being numerous, they wanted to hem us in. Then we showed that we were Frenchmen, we defended ourselves with the bayonet with such vigour that they could not manage to surround us. The Russian commander had an ugly face. I should have liked to have given his guts to the wind. But as I approached him I saw out of the corner of my eye, to the left, a great devil making for me to knock me on the head with his musket. I had only time to avoid the shock by jumping aside, and before the Cossack could collect himself, I gave him a thrust in the belly with my head, then tripped him up by the legs and made him sprawl in the snow, then quickly, I brought the point of my bayonet in sight of his chest. Then the poor wretch fixed on me two great eyes full of terror and supplication:

"'*Francis bono! Francis bono!*' he said.

"I understood that he meant 'Good Frenchman,' and that he was imploring me not to kill him. But I was hardly in the humour to show any indulgence. For eight days all we had eaten was a few morsels of horseflesh.

"'Go along, you old pig, you can just look out! You wouldn't have spared me if I hadn't seen you in time. You wanted to kill me; well, I am going to kill you——'

"Of course I didn't say all that to him, but that was what passed through my mind as, quick as lightning, I thrust my bayonet into his belly with such force that it went through and through."

A little shiver of horror passed through those at the table, silenced for a moment. Everybody gazed at this man who had killed a man. He enjoyed his triumph. He drank two glasses of wine, and in order to continue to attract attention, he began to sing ribald songs of the army, and that raised everybody's spirits. My grandmother said it was not nice to sing those before the children. Indeed, at the small table we were all ears, and more than one couplet puzzled us greatly.

The outside door opened with a sharp push. A dozen fantastically-dressed individuals filed in and began to jump about, shouting and making contortions and grimaces. They were nearly all dressed up as women or in odd costumes, half men's and half women's. They had big false noses on their faces, powdered with flour. Some of them had moustaches made with soot, and had streaked their faces. From fifty mouths came the same cry :

" The mummers ! The mummers ! "

At that time it was the custom for the young people of the neighbourhood to present themselves thus disguised at all wedding dinners, under the pretext of amusing the guests.

They continued to play the fool, kissing the girls, whom they whitened with flour and blackened with soot. They were offered wine and cake. They ate and drank, and then began to dance in the small amount of space left free : they danced with great capers which lifted their petticoats, and they howled like animals.

But the guests began to get tired of being at the table : the mummers' antics and gestures made them want to get up and stretch their legs. Everybody got up ; my father lighted the lantern and crossed the muddy yard, they followed him to the barn and there began to dance on the threshing floor. In one corner they had built up a kind of platform with some trusses of straw, upon which they set the thin old man with his hurdy-gurdy and the

chubby-faced one with his musette. The lantern was hung in the middle, very high up, and was fastened to a stick stuck at one side in the hay in the loft, and at the other in a heap of unthreshed wheat. It gave a dim, lurid light, and in the half-darkness the dancers looked like spectres. All that mattered little to them, mummers and guests spun round in eager rivalry or swayed together in time through the many figures of the bourrée. Leaning against a heap of sheaves, the old folks looked on, chatting, sometimes even joining in. We urchins ran among the dancers, following them and bickering with them. At one time, when we were behaving pretty well, my godfather and his wife teased us.

" The little ones ought to dance, it is a good chance to learn."

We looked down and turned very red, but my godfather went on :

" Go on, Tiennon, catch Thérèse and make her take a turn with you."

They insisted, and in spite of our confusion we had to make a start. Our heads were turned a little ; we bumped against the grown-ups, who drove us off to right and left ; but we went on to the end, and when the dance was finished, seeing the others kissing their partners, I gave Thérèse two big kisses on her rosy cheeks, and got well teased by my godfather, who had seen me. This first attempt had given me courage, and I took part in nearly all the dances which followed. The oil in the lantern was used up and the light suddenly went out, and in the dark barn there were cries of fright and of gaiety, and jostling and laughing. Ironical exclamations were heard :

" Baptiste, take care of your wife."

" Louis, I've stolen your Claudine."

" Poor young couples, where are they ? "

There were embracings in the corners, and whispering

and kissing could be heard ; anonymous kisses were taken, which offended the girls.

My godfather sent me to the house to get a light. I found there some of the old people, who a moment before had left the ball. They were sitting round the table again, ready to drink, and sing, and cram themselves with great pieces of roasted fowl. Uncle Toinot, quite drunk, was asleep, lying across the table.

When the barn was once more lighted, the ball began again, and it only ended at two o'clock in the morning. Only the newly-married couples had gone earlier to Suippière, where they were to spend the night. Some of thé guests were accommodated by the neighbours. Others slept at our house, the women and children in the granary (each bed had been enlarged by my mother), the men slept in the hay loft, where they found old bed-clothes and sacks for covering.

The young men did not go to bed. When they had eaten and drank their fill, they wandered about the yard and played a thousand stupid tricks. They took the plough completely to pieces ; turned the ox cart upside down in the horse-pond ; took the leather straps from the yokes and used them to hang spades, pickaxes, and all the tools they could find, at the top of the pear tree. They also hung up a wheelbarrow, in which they had tied Médor. The poor dog uttered such heartrending howls that everybody was wakened, and my father was obliged to go to his rescue ; he had a great deal of trouble to reach him. All this time the youths continued their tricks ; they placed in the path of the young couples great forked sticks, the meaning of which I did not at that time understand. In this way they occupied themselves till morning.

Towards nine o'clock a procession was formed to go and meet the young married folk, and there was a fine laugh at their expense when they passed the emblems. I saw nothing of all this, for I had to go out with my pigs as

though nothing unusual was going on. When I returned, the breakfast was in full swing, but the gaiety was a little forced. The big sleepy eyes and the drawn faces looked very weary. There was another little ball in the barn; then after endless embraces the guests departed.

It took a good many days' work to put everything in order again.

VIII

AFTER this double marriage our household was very strong, in women especially. My grandmother, my mother, Catherine, my two sisters-in-law made five, all capable of working. There was also my little sister Marinette, who was nearly ten years old, but the poor child was half-witted. She had grown up sickly and puny. She had been a very long time developing physically, and was two years old before she walked, three before she talked: she still had a lisp which deformed most of her words, and made it difficult for strangers to understand her. This was attributed to a bad fever she had in infancy, or rather, to the convulsions which had followed the fever. But these physical defects were nothing in comparison with those of the brain, where was no gleam of intelligence. The poor little girl could scarcely grasp the simplest ideas. Her face was blank. Her eyes, strangely fixed, revealed no light of reason. She answered by monosyllables, and she scarcely talked to anyone except Médor and the cats, with whom she liked to play. Reproaches left her indifferent; the gravest events never stirred her; at times she would have long spells of laughing without any motive. At ten years old her understanding was that of a very young child, and it always remained so.

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From that time, although still a swineherd in name, I began to be familiar with all kinds of work. I was employed as cattle drover, especially during the winter months and the first months of spring. It was then we ploughed the fallow land for sowing the following autumn, and after, and for this we used four oxen in one team.

After the grooming in the morning, my godfather and I started out at nine o'clock and we stayed until three or four in the afternoon. I took the pigs with us, and they followed the open furrow to eat the worms which were unearthed. They were fairly quiet on such occasions.

I used a goad to direct the oxen, whose names were Noiraud, Rougeaud, Blanchon and Mouton.

The first two were of that breed from Auvergne that I have already mentioned ; there was a couple on each farm, for it was said that the white oxen of the country were not strong enough to do all the work. They went well, having the experience of age. But the two white ones, still young, needed constant watching. Walking on the loose soil tired me very much, chiefly because of the pebbles which got into my *sabots* and made my feet ache. When I was very tired of driving I used to ask my godfather to let me hold the handle of the plough, and sometimes he consented. It shook me a good deal, but it was interesting. But in spite of all my good intentions, the lack of practice and strength, or perhaps a wrong movement of the oxen, would cause me to let the tool swerve. Then my godfather was angry, for he was hasty-tempered, and punctilious where work was concerned. However, sometimes the same thing happened when he held the handle, then he pretended it was my fault for guiding the oxen badly, and he often boxed my ears. It was then I learned that, with the best intentions in the world, the weak are always considered to be in the wrong, and I also realized the misery of working under other people. I used often to count the furrows worked in the course of the plough-

ing, and compare them with what we had done the previous days, and I used to make an approximate calculation, in order to know when it would be time to go. When that time approached, I would linger quite frankly at the hedge where the entrance was, and steal glances at my companion's face, hoping that he would give the desired signal. But he would say nothing, he would be quite stolid, and I had to turn the oxen and do another length, at the end of which would be another disappointment, all the deeper because of my hope. My godfather did not go, as a rule, until they called him from the house: he had no watch, and when the sun was not shining he had no guide except the amount of work done, or the degree of hunger which attacked his stomach. The villages were so far away that we rarely heard the midday Angelus, which would have been some indication, as it would have sounded just in the middle of our daily task.

When the weather was good, the time passed with the least amount of weariness, but on bad days it seemed endless. I remember one March, when we were digging in the chestnut field, the most distant of our fields. A strong wind was blowing all the time from Souvigny, that is right from the north, with cold rain, hail, and sometimes snow. This soaked through my clothes, enveloping me in an icy shroud; my hands were purple-red, speckled with violet. One day, when the showers poured on us more than usual, I shivered with more than cold. My forehead burned, my teeth chattered, and my stomach was heavy; I yawned, and although it was late I was not hungry. I told my godfather that I felt ill and wanted to go home; but he was angry, and accused me of malingering, and made me go on with my work. At the last extremity, however, a too heavy shower having forced us to shelter in a hollow oak tree, my godfather took the trouble to look at me; he said that I was red and white by turns, and he believed that I had an attack

of fever, so he allowed me to go home. My legs shook, they were so weak and tired. I could scarcely walk to the house. I was sent to bed at once and covered warmly ; the next day, after a good sweating, my body was covered with red spots.

That kept me indoors for a fortnight. When I recovered from this attack of measles and was able to go out again in the fields, April was radiant with the sunshine, and the greenness and the birds. The hedges were covered with young leaves and the cherry trees with white flowers. Happy nature seemed to be celebrating my convalescence. I found pleasure in merely moving about, in being alive.

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The following winter, after my fifteenth year, being no longer a swineherd, I was considered to be a man. They made me thresh with the flail, and help to clean the stables.

In previous years, when I went out to the fields in the snow, I used to envy those who remained in the barn to do the threshing. But when I had to take my turn at that, I had to admit that it was not a bed of roses ; if we had dry feet we had pretty tired arms, and swallowed too much dust. You see, at that time threshing was no light matter, when it was all done with the flail. It lasted from All Saints' Day to the Carnival, and even to Mid-Lent, almost without interruption, except for some days each month when the moon was good, and then the hedges were cut and the trees pruned. In the daytime they threshed only between the two groomings, but worked at it again in the evenings. That particular year of my debut was one of abundant harvests ; we threshed every evening by the light of the lantern, until ten o'clock. I know of no work which so unnerves one, even to the point

of revolt. To wield the flail continuously with the same regularity; to keep the necessary rhythm; not to be able to stop one moment; not to be able to use one hand to wipe one's nose even, or to flick off the grain of dust which irritates one's neck: when one is still awkward and unused to sustained effort, how maddening it all is. I was happy only on the days when we winnowed, when I saw the great heaps of grey mixture diminish little by little, to pass entirely into the machine: with what delight I plunged my hands into the clean grain.

The cleaning of the stables on Saturday mornings was also very hard work. It was Louis whom I used to help with that. We had a big oak barrow, which was heavy enough when empty. We each had a bent fork, with which we prodded vigorously the thick beds of manure, and heaped it on the barrow in great forkfuls. Louis excited my vanity:

"Let's put on a bit more, eh? You're doing fine, now we'll see if you are a man."

Of course I had to show what a man I was, so I agreed to allow the load to be increased so much that when I had to lift this too heavy burden it nearly broke my back. At first, however, I attempted to pull it, but after a moment I felt suffocated. Whatever the outside temperature may have been, my shirt was wet with sweat; my strained nerves relaxed, and I could no longer hold the handles of the barrow, which ran the whole length of the stable into the big heap of manure in the yard. After that they had to moderate the load. At every turn a new misfortune seemed to befall me. My father or my godfather had to come and replace me, and they enraged me with their jeering.

I have noticed since, that all beginners have these vexations. When one begins to work, one has immediately the desire to do as much as the grown-ups; but that is impossible, for the strength is lacking, and the

skill, and the experience. The others make much of their superiority because they are older : and one suffers when one is not able to be on an equality with them.

IX

M. FAUCONNET came to our house nearly every fortnight, riding or driving, according to the state of the roads. As soon as he appeared, the women rushed forward to take his nag, and they called my father immediately, who, however far off he might be, always came quickly to show him the crops and the beasts, and to give him any information he wanted.

M. Fauconnet was familiar with everybody, young and old, men and women. In a mood of great joviality, he nearly went so far as to take off my grandmother's cap. This cap had three parts, a cone and two scrolls reversed —the head-dress of the Bourbon women, which the young ones had already begun to disdain.

" Eh ! You keep well, little mother ? Yes, you are still good-looking ; you will live till you are ninety. With those caps all the women live to a great age. It's a mistake to change ; the new ones are too flat to be healthy, they don't keep the sun off."

To my mother he would say :

" Your poultry doing well this year, Jeanette ? I declare they want for nothing. I see the yard is full of them. Don't let them eat the pigs' meal nor allow them to waste the grain in the fields—or look out ! "

He would tap my sisters-in-law familiarly and ask, " If that wasn't coming," and when they were enceinte, he would say complacently, " That won't be long now."

He chucked Catherine under the chin, telling her she was a good girl, and that he wanted to engage her as a servant.

" And you, you brigand of Auvergne," he would say to me, " you are getting as long as a walking rushlight."

He called me " brigand of Auvergne " in memory of the day when I let the sheep in among the clover, while I went walking in the forest with the long-sawyer.

In bad years my father made loud complaints, begging for a reduction of charges, to which the master would reply :

" You are always worrying, Bérot : you make yourself old, my man. A reduction ! But you don't think : when you gain nothing, I gain nothing either, you old humbug. And when things do go well, how can I give you more ? "

At Martinmas, when they had to go into the accounts for the year, they had to try and remember at which fairs they had sold certain beasts and at what price. Nobody knowing how to make a figure, it was very difficult to carry all the calculations in their heads, and more difficult still to make the totals and to decide the exact sum which remained for our benefit.

Attentive, solemn, with shining eyes, my father, my mother and my brothers would count together :

" At the Bourbon winter fair—seven pigs at twenty-three francs—that makes a hundred and sixty-one francs——" said Louis very cleverly.

At first my mother would not agree :

" You say a hundred and sixty-one—is it that ? Look here ! Seven times twenty-three—take first seven twenty-franc pieces, which make—which make—the five make a hundred, the two forty, a hundred and forty francs : then there are seven three-franc pieces, which make twenty-one ; a hundred and forty and twenty-one make a hundred and sixty-one. Yes, that is right. Well, what else ? "

My father had had time to think, he took up with :

" We sold some more on Ash Wednesday at Montet. There were five. They were big ones : we sold them for thirty-eight francs ten sous, I'm quite sure of that."

Then would begin again their troubled calculations.

"Five thirty-franc pieces, five eight-franc pieces, five ten-sous pieces."

That was how it was, evening after evening. When they got to the end, they had forgotten the previous totals they had made, and had to begin all over again. They despaired of being able to finish. In the end they would agree on a sum without being very certain that it was the right one.

When M. Fauconnet came to count, he very soon settled the whole matter.

With his paper in his hand, he would say:

"The purchases come to so much—sales to so much; returns to you so much, Bérot."

In bad seasons our share was nothing; we were even behind. Sometimes it came to two or three hundred francs, never more. Sometimes, when my father had hoped for more, he would venture to say:

"But, sir, I did think I should have had more than that."

Then the master's face would wear its worst frown:

"How more than that? Do you take me for a thief, Bérot? If that is so, I beg you will find another master, who won't rob you."

My father would hasten to stammer very humbly:

"I'm sure I don't mean that, sir."

"That's just as well, for you know labourers are not scarce; after you another."

However, when the difference was too marked, M. Fauconnet would deign to explain that he had carried the October sales to the next account. This allowed him to pay an insignificant amount as usual, and gave him for the whole year the use of the money, which he would have to share with us afterwards. But of course we had to accept this illegal combination with a good grace or be put to the door.

X

MONEY, you can imagine, was not plentiful in our house, and until I was seventeen I had never had as much as a poor twenty-sous piece in my pocket. However, on holidays I began to want to go to the inn to see something fresh. We used to go to Mass by turns, there being only two sets of tidy clothes among the four of us. My brothers had, of course, their wedding clothes, but these were saved for holidays and possible ceremonies. A man's wedding under-linen used to last him all his life, and serve for his last toilet. My father and my brother Louis used to go together to the town; and the following Sunday it was my godfather's turn and mine.

On the second Sunday before the Carnival, it was the custom for the young people to have some fun.

Being in my eighteenth year, I ventured to ask for a little money. My father seemed startled, then he sighed:

"What do you want it for? At your age, good heavens!"

My mother added that they could not go on keeping us all, if I was going to begin already to eat up their money. Still, I contrived to get forty sous.

Away I went, as happy as a king, holding my head higher than usual, and puffing out my smock with pride. After Mass, instead of slipping away, I boldly accosted Boulois, of Parizet, and offered to stand him a drink. He had been going to Vassenat's for a long time and knew all the frequenters. He got hold of some acquaintances, and soon five or six of us were seated round the table. Not being accustomed to the place, I was bashful at first and dared not say anything, even to those of my own party. I was astonished to hear them recounting old

debauches, and passing in review the girls of the district, about whom they made rude or ironical remarks.

Behind the inn parlour was a room for dancing, in which the thin old man, with his hurdy-gurdy, and the chubby-faced man with the broken nose, who played the musette, were already beginning to play. I went in with my companions. A side door opened into the street, and through this the girls entered. Over their thick stuff dresses they wore small grey or brown shawls, crossed on the breast, coming to a point at the back. Their white caps were covered by round straw hats without brims, trimmed with black velvet, and they had strings which floated on their shoulders. Thérèse Parnière was there. She was a fine girl of sixteen, very fair and well-developed. As I knew her better than any other, I asked her to dance, and she consented. She was my partner for nearly the whole of the ball. Between the dances I rejoined Boulois and the others in the inn parlour; we returned to the table, where our glasses stood in a row, and drank a bumper, chatting gaily, but went out at the first sound of the music.

The ball went on till nearly five o'clock in the evening, when the last of the young girls slipped away. Then, as we were very hungry, we ordered bread and cheese. The food was devoured in a twinkling, as quickly as we emptied two more pots. After that we had coffee, then the dram. It was the first time I had drank so much, and I was intoxicated. I saw, as in a dream, the movements in the room, the groups round the tables laughing and singing, and my companions, also very gay, added to the general hubbub. When we rose to go, I felt that I was not very steady. Outside, Boulois took my arm, otherwise I should certainly have been sprawling in some ditch. However, the air revived me a little, and when we were at Parizet I had recovered my balance. My comrade was able to leave me and go home. I managed to go the rest of the

way without any mishap. At home I found everybody had gone to bed.

" Asleep already ! " I said, entering the dark kitchen.

I stumbled against a seat, which made a great noise, and then I began to rave and soliloquize. My godfather's two babies and Louis' three were wakened and began to cry. My mother and Claudine got up ; I wanted to kiss them.

" He is drunk ! " they said together. My mother gave me some food, sighing because I had spent so foolishly the poor money they had so much trouble to earn. Claudine nursed her little one, who was crying, then she put him back in the cradle, and while rocking him, she sang :

Dodo, le petit, dodo.
Le petit mignon voudrait bien dormir :
Son petit sommeil ne peut pas venir ;
Dodo, le petit, dodo.

But neither the reproaches of my mother, nor her regrets, nor the chanting of my sister-in-law, nor the weeping of the child had any power to move me. I played the fool more than there was any need for, and kept everybody awake by my antics and noise, until after nine o'clock. After that I went to bed and slept heavily till morning. At work next day my brothers jeered at me for my miserable appearance, and because I had to go and drink from the ditches, my mouth was so dry.

I had no chance to repeat that experience for some time. At Easter they only gave me twenty sous. I had to wait till the feast of the Patron Saint, in June, to get another forty-sous piece.

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Fortunately at that time there were ways of finding amusements without money ; there were many pleasure parties which cost nothing : in fine weather we had balls

in the open, which we called *vijons*, and in the winter we had soirées.

For the outdoor balls, we found, if possible, an open space, shady and grassy, and on the appointed day, the young girls and lads of the neighbourhood assembled there. Married people and old folk and children would also come : all, in fact, who had a little leisure. When it was possible to have any kind of music, we danced with great enjoyment as much as we could wish ; even the old folk danced the bourrée. If there were no musicians, the most zealous sang or whistled the tunes, which served just as well.

We would form a circle, in the middle of which a victim was placed with his eyes bandaged, and who was only freed after having guessed who faced him, or touched his hand or something of that kind. Then there were forfeits, which allowed the young men to kiss the girls. Finally, for serious men to whom such pleasures seemed too childish, there were games of skittles.

Lovers had few opportunities of isolating themselves ; there were too many people about ; it would soon have been noticed and ill-natured comments made. So that these daylight parties were quite decorous : nothing irregular happened.

The evening parties in the winter often gave more liberty. They took place somewhat after the same manner as the outdoor balls. We would meet, one Sunday at one house and the following Sunday at another. We danced, we played, we laughed. When a host wanted to do things very well, he would provide a panful of chestnuts, and this made an agreeable finish to the evening. And when it got towards midnight, sometimes there was a chance of acting as escort in the darkness, to the chosen of one's heart, and that was altogether delightful.

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It was in such circumstances that I began to court Thérèse Parnière, my neighbour at La Bourdrie. Since my first visit to Vassenat's, in fact since my brother's wedding, I had been much attracted to her. At the *vijons* and the soirées I was her recognized partner, and by the pressing of hands and tender looks, I had shown her something of the sentiments she had inspired in me. But when I met her outside under other conditions, I had nothing to say except foolish words about the weather and the bad state of the roads, although God knows how my heart was beating.

On that Sunday the soirée had taken place at Suippière, and I was the only guest from our house: Catherine was ill and did not wish to go, and my brothers rarely went out. From La Bourdrie there was only Thérèse and her brother Bastien. I knew quite well that Bastien would want to go with the youngest Lafont of L'Errain, who had been his sweetheart for a long time. As I was not reserved with him I said to him in confidence that it would be embarrassing for him to have his sister's company.

"Well, go with her yourself then," said he.

I told him that was what I most wanted; he laughed and said:

"You have only to ask her, Booby, she will be glad enough."

When we were dancing the polka, I screwed up my courage and said to Thérèse:

"Will you let me take you home this evening?"

"Yes, if you like," she said, without any hesitation. "As well you as anyone else."

As usual, the soirée ended about midnight. All the guests went out together, and in the yard sorted themselves into families or sympathetic groups. I rejoined Thérèse, who had intentionally left her brother behind, and we went into a large field which we had to cross to get to La Bourdrie. It was very dark. The west wind was blowing violently

in intermittent squalls. The fine drizzling rain which had fallen during the day had made the ground slippery. We went cautiously, arm in arm, trying to keep ourselves from falling when our *sabots* tripped us up.

I kept silence, much moved by the novelty of the experience. Thérèse said :

" It's no use going on, it is as black as the bottom of the oven."

" Oh, but when there are two of us——" I said timidly ; and then suddenly I kissed her fresh cheeks.

I could not see her face in the darkness, but it seemed to me that my boldness had not greatly surprised her. But as I showed some wish to loiter, she said :

" Go on and be quiet, you great stupid," but her tone was more condescending than annoyed.

I let go her arm, took her hand in mine and put my left arm round her waist.

" Thérèse, for a long time I have wanted to be your sweetheart."

" You are very forward. You don't want to marry yet, I expect."

" Perhaps before very long——"

I tightened my arm round her waist, and pressed her still more ; then with an energetic movement I stopped her :

" Tell me, do you wish it ? "

" What ? "

" To marry me ? "

And intoxicated, without giving her time to reply, I gave her another long embrace. My lips sought hers.

She had turned her head with an instinctive gesture : I felt her tremble.

" Oh ! stop it," she said again, in a weak, half-pleading voice.

But she was not able to escape my caress ; our lips met in a delicious kiss. Quite close, and with an air of defy-

i ng us, an owl uttered a series of harsh screeches. We resumed our walk with quickened steps, both very agitated by this manifestation of love and by the cries of ill omen uttered by the bird of the night.

The drizzle had started again, thick and cold. It wet my companion's baize cape, and my thick cotton smock, but did not penetrate them ; it laid its icy touch on our joined hands.

After crossing the fields, we had to climb a stile in the quickset hedge which separated it from the Bourdrie paddock. It was so dark that we had some difficulty in finding the stile. I went first, and as the paddock was at a lower level, I received Thérèse in my arms at the foot of the crooked stake which served as a step to mount and descend the stile. I wished to make the most of that opportunity to have another embrace, but she disengaged herself so quickly that I had no time. We walked the whole length of the damp meadow soberly and nearly silently. We had to cross a very bad bit of road and had to go one behind the other upon a footpath of big stepping-stones, placed far apart. In order to appear very brave, although the way was unfamiliar to me, I wanted to go first. I was punished for my boldness : although I went carefully, I missed one of the stones and plunged into a puddle above my knees. I stood there very sheepishly, my clothes dripping and covered with mud, while she laughed at my mishap. In the yard, however, before leaving her, I took her in my arms, pressed her to me in a passionate embrace, and without vexing her this time, gave her a lover's long kiss.

In a fever I found my way to Le Garibier. An exuberance of life uplifted me. In that winter night of wind and rain my heart saw only blue sky.

From that evening Thérèse was recognized as my sweet heart. After that I had no fear of proclaiming my preference for her at the other soirées that winter, nor at the

vijons the following summer, nor even at the ball at Vassenat's on holidays. I often went to meet her in the fields on Sundays when there were no parties, and we used to spend long hours together, under the discreet and scented hedges, those accomplices of lovers. But she did not become my mistress. Our relations never went beyond innocent hugs and numerous kisses—repetitions of the embraces of that first evening. Young and shy, timidity, modesty, fear of consequences hindered us from the consummation of our love. Besides, I intended to make her my wife.

XI

I WAS nineteen when I had to leave that farm of Le Garibier, where my youth had been passed.

That came about as the result of a violent scene between my father and M. Fauconnet, who gave my parents notice to go.

My father wanted to sell one of the sows and some little ones because food was scarce that year. But the master declared that he wished to keep the mother and let the little ones grow bigger.

" We can buy bran," he said.

That word was like fire to powder, for they were convinced that, when settling up at the previous Martinmas, more had been reckoned for bran than had been bought. They had also considered as absolutely ridiculous the price of the fat oxen which had been sold when my father was not present. At different times my mother had sworn that Fauconnet should repent this before he died. So, when he mentioned bran she took the opportunity of telling him that what he proposed to buy should not be charged

to their expenses, seeing that it had been paid since the previous year. Thereupon Fauconnet having demanded an explanation, she answered right out that he had counted at least a thousand pounds too much.

" Say at once that you think I am a thief," he cried as usual.

My father, roused from his habitual passivity, said :

" Well, yes, you are a thief then."

Then he spoke of the fat oxen and several old matters which had struck him at the time, but which he had never dared to mention for fear of making the master angry.

Standing beside my mother, he repeated :

" Yes, yes, you are a thief ! If you had acted honestly I should have had three or four thousand francs laid by instead of not having a sou. Yes, yes, you are a thief ! "

Fauconnet, in spite of his effrontery, turned white. His bare face, with its very accentuated creasings, wore a horrible grimace. Furious, with a menacing gesture, he said :

" You shall repeat this before the judges, my lambs ! I shall prosecute you for insult, and slanders against my honour. You don't know who holds you by the nose indeed. In the meantime, Bérot, seek another place, you knave."

He went alone to the stable to get his horse, crying out as he went :

" You shall know what I am called, no fear."

In daring thus, my parents knew that an immediate dismissal would follow. That foreseen consequence therefore left them indifferent. But the threat of prosecution dismayed them, and their fear was shared by all of us. Before the judges, with the best case, the poor were always found to be in the wrong. That was a well-known fact. What would happen ? They could only affirm what they knew to be true ; then the master would show his papers, and his account, which would have the appearance of being

right, and he would gain the case. My grandmother lamented:

"The lawyers will take our all. They will sell the furniture and all the tools by auction. Ah, my God!"

These terrors were vain, however. Fauconnet did not bring his action. At the bottom, in spite of his superiority, he also perhaps had some fear of the judges. Until Martinmas he contented himself by inflicting upon us all possible vexations, exacting the conditions of the lease to the letter, hindering us from using the clover for pasture, in fact forcing us to buy hay or leave the cattle in a bad state.

He found so many ways of worrying us, that when we left, my father owed a sum so large that he was unable to pay it. The master then hastened to seize the crops in the ground and kept them all. He was the only person who profited by our work of the whole year.

Later, when I saw him send his sons to the great schools with the intention of making the oldest a doctor, the second a lawyer, and the third an officer; when, later still, I saw him buy a mansion at Agonges and four farms, grow old and die a great landed proprietor, possessor of at least half a million, and respected in consequence, I understood how justly the epithet thief had been applied to him.

It was only by taking advantage of the lower orders that he built himself up thus. From his ancestors he had received nothing. His father was a steward of an estate, and his grandfather a *métayer* like ourselves.

XII

AFTER many attempts my father succeeded in finding another farm. It was called La Billette, and was situated near to the market town of St. Menoux, at the foot of a great hill, close to the Bourbon road. It had been bought by a chemist of Moulins, a certain M. Boutry, who, having

invested his money, settled himself there at the same time as we did. There was a house for the master, a big square house in a spacious garden, separated from our yard by a wall.

In several ways we were better off than at Le Garibier. The buildings were only two hundred yards from the main road, which bounded several of our fields. We could see the people passing on foot, and in carriages; that was a change from our wild valley, where we never saw any strangers. The house was passable, and there was nothing to complain of in the land. But soon, what at first seemed to us trying, then unbearable, was the nearness of the master, his constant presence.

M. Boutry was not a bad sort of man, and I would swear that he would not have taken advantage of our ignorance, nor have eaten up our share of the profits. But he was fastidious and meddling. He was in the wrong there, for he knew nothing of farming. He took his rôle of managing proprietor too seriously. He had bought some books on agriculture, and he wanted to make us accept all the theories which he found in them. There was, perhaps, some good in them, but they contained many absurd things, and they were so contrary to our usual ways, that very often, as soon as he unfolded them to us, we laughed in his face. And then his figure and his gestures made us laugh. Little, lively, excited, bald-headed and short-bearded, he would come hopping towards us in the stables and fields, and timidly and politely make his observations.

"Look here," he would say, "it would be better to work at such a time and in such a manner:" or even, "You don't use enough seed," or, "You ought to give such and such food to the oxen."

I remember one day he came to look for my godfather and me when we were working some fallow land; it was about nine o'clock in the morning, at the end of April and very hot; M. Boutry said very fussily:

" Baptiste, Baptiste, when it is as warm as this, you ought not to keep the oxen at it too long—three hours at the outside. If you work them longer than that at a time, it may result in very serious trouble indeed. I read that yesterday in a very good treatise on agriculture."

He stroked the backs of the oxen with his small, fine white hand.

" See, they are already in a sweat, their sides are heaving, they are frothing at the mouth. You must unharness them, Baptiste."

My godfather shrugged his shoulders :

" We shall be a fine time getting through the work, sir, if we are only to yoke them for three hours. Of course their sides heave and they put out their tongues in the hot weather, but that doesn't hurt them, you'll see."

He said all this roughly and in the rude language of the country people, and it was a great contrast to the affability of the master, with his pure French.

" It is a mistake : it may result in very serious trouble, I tell you. Don't keep them in too long."

" All right, not later than midday; don't worry," said my godfather slyly.

" The same as the others," I added maliciously.

M. Boutry saw quite well that we were making game of him. He went away displeased.

" Go on, you old muff, you are never done with your plaguing," my godfather muttered, as the master disappeared. " What a nuisance it is to have that old booby on our backs all the time."

As you see, politeness and respect were defects in our eyes. At Garibier before the rupture, we knew how to behave to Fauconnet. But Fauconnet only came twice a month ; he knew rural life ; he had an undoubted capacity for management : in fact, he knew how to talk as a master. Whilst Boutry, pleadingly expressing his ideas taken from

books, seemed ridiculous to us ; and then—well, he was always there.

By the conditions of the lease, we were obliged to do a lot of little jobs of personal service for the master, for he had no male domestic servant. We had to look after his horse, clean his carriage, harness and unharness it whenever he used it ; also we had to work in his garden and cut his wood. I think he would have liked us to anticipate his wishes, or at least do our various duties with a good grace, and indeed, considering his character, we might have profited by acting in that way, by asking each morning, for instance, if he was going out that day and at what time, if there was anything to do in the garden, and so on. But instead, my father, who usually undertook the grooming and such duties, never failed to say to the master that it was very annoying to have to stay at home when there was so much to be done elsewhere. He was absolutely ignorant of the art of dissimulation so necessary in life.

In the spring especially, when the garden needed digging, my father was always furious, because at that time we were very busy, and in harvest time it was still worse ; he would make fussy replies to M. Boutry when he came to ask for anything.

" Oh, sir, that will hinder us ; I want to do this, or that—to finish bringing the hay from the meadow—or to bind the wheat in a field—or to set up a millstone—I shall hardly get through what I have to do."

Generally my mother or my brother outdid him. Then the master would say :

" But it won't take long, my friends. It is only the matter of one little moment—you will soon do it, my good Bérot."

" Longer than you think, sir. This is only going to muddle us, I tell you that," my father would say.

These complaints annoyed M. Boutry. He was afraid to come and disturb us unless it was absolutely necess·

and then he was very humble, cowering like a dog beaten or some mischief, or as if he was asking a favour from quite ndifferent persons.

Among the women matters were still worse. Madame Boutry, a thin, impertinent woman past middle age, was not nearly so complaisant as her husband. She would say to my mother in a dry, disdainful tone :

" Jeanette, send someone to me to-morrow for the washing ; " or, " I shall expect Catherine on Sunday to help the maid, I shall have a lot of people."

That admitted of no reply. She was also excessively suspicious. The fowls and fruit being divided, like the other things, she frequently counted the young chickens, and often came at meal times to see if she could find any fruit which had not been shared, on the table.

On market days, when my mother was starting out, Madame Boutry was always there, as if by chance, to inspect the baskets, no doubt fearing that they contained some commodity subtracted from what belonged to the community. In fact, she spent a great part of her time ferreting and spying, always anxious to know the why and wherefore of the smallest things. My mother and sisters-in-law did not hesitate to grumble enough about that.

One day Madame Boutry remarked to Claudine that some plums had been taken from the tree near the road. Claudine, who was not always good-tempered, gave a rather sharp answer :

" My word ! what do you expect ?—I have something else to do than stay there to watch them."

Another day, when two chickens had disappeared, probably taken by a buzzard, the lady remarked :

" I find this often happens : you ought to look after them better."

" We keep a servant to do that," my sister-in-law answered ironically.

The lady was much offended.

Above all, M. Boutry and his wife had one mania in common which none of us could bear: they were always giving us advice about our health. If they saw us sweating after a spell of hard work they would say:

"Now, don't stay like that. Go at once and change. Rub each other down to get the blood to circulate evenly, that it may not cool too quickly. Above everything, avoid draughts."

All that was no doubt excellent, but in summer we had something else to do than to change our clothes and rub each other down every time we sweated. We should have had to do both too often.

When, as was constantly happening, the children ran out of doors bare-headed, our employers would again interfere:

"Do take care: those children will be ill. Don't allow them to go out in the sunshine with nothing on their heads."

Neither did they wish them to go out in the twilight, nor in damp weather, because of the weakness of their lungs. In fact, they gave us a lot of advice suitable to the children of the rich (who, anyhow, are none the better for it), but to which the children of working people are not used to submitting.

And when any of us, big or little, suffered from any illness, the lady and gentleman insisted together on his taking medicine and that the doctor should be sent for.

"They reckon that their medicines keep us from dying," said my father. "What humbug it is: the more they pour into the body the worse it is. As to the doctors, if we are to run to them every time we are ill we must not be ill, for if they know nothing half the time of what ails us, they know how to take the money. It's easy to see that the master has been a druggist: they agree well, the doctors and the druggists, to do for poor folk."

My mother, too, when she had been subjected to a lecture on hygiene, said:

" There, how they do worry ! If we believed them we should have to wrap up in cotton wool. But one must have means to do that : they seem to think we have."

My sisters-in-law grumbled still more when they received advice about their babies.

All these various causes soon made friction in our relations with our employers. A veritable broil existed between the mistress and Louis' wife. However, as far as general interests were concerned, everything went well. M. Boutry seldom went to the fairs : in any case he allowed my father a great deal of liberty with regard to sales and purchases. From the first account we had a good sum, which enabled us to live, in spite of the seizure of our part of the harvest at Le Garibier.

XIII

DURING the first three months that we lived at La Billette I was faithful to Thérèse Parnière, and in spite of the distance (six miles at least, by the bridle paths) I went to see her nearly every Sunday. Those journeys were up hill and down dale, across fields and meadows, sometimes I had to go along a bit of deep and almost impassable road, and even to pass through a corner of the forest.

Twenty minutes' walk from La Bourdrie, I had to cross a piece of waste ground, very vast and boggy, into which ran several roads. Towards the middle there was a narrow path, the expanse being divided by a big pool of greenish water, in which some reeds were growing, and which was surrounded by elms fantastically twisted. Near by towered two rows of old oaks which had never been cut. The forest was five minutes' walk away. This place, deserted and mysterious, was called The Witches' Trysting Place, and truly it was not pleasant to walk there alone in the dead of night : the screeching of the owls seemed more

mournful there, and the sound of the wind in the leaves had a peculiar entreaty and an alarming loudness. Without being exactly afraid I was not free from a certain apprehension when I entered that place. I had passed through it several times without seeing anything abnormal; but one moonless night, when I was within ten yards of the edge of the pool, suddenly, between the elms a white form arose, which began to caper. Then another appeared, and a third. A shiver ran right through me; but I did not lose my presence of mind. I was carrying a thick thorn cudgel; I grasped it firmly in my hand and continued to advance, quite resolved to use it against the phantoms if they attempted to bar my way. After skipping about silently for some seconds, they all three stood abreast in the path and uttered, first simultaneously, then alternately, horrible guttural cries. They were appalling; the white winding sheets with which they were draped hid their forms; neither heads nor legs were visible; they waved about, abnormally long arms, which also were white. When I was five steps from them:

"Hold on, lads!" I shouted, with an energy I had not believed myself capable of.

Instead of turning back they surrounded me, continuing their howls and stretching towards me their great threatening arms. With a desperate movement my cudgel cleaved the air and fell upon the back of one of the three beings, which sank down with a long, piteous cry—very human this time. Without waiting for more the others made off across a field.

At my feet, the phantom, now in the throes of death, moaned most lamentably, and between two wails he uttered:

"You have killed me, you pig, you have killed me!"

I stripped off the towels and sheet which disguised the poor wretch, and I recognized little Barret of Pontivier, a

lad two years younger than myself, with whom I was very friendly: I asked where I had struck him.

"It is my back," he moaned; "you have broken my back. I can't move."

His companions were the two Simons of Suippière, friends of my childhood, but with whom I had quarrelled some time before. I called first one and then the other, but they did not answer. Barret had a spasm; he vomited blood, I thought he was about to die. I had a great desire to go away and leave him all alone in the night to die, not that I might revenge myself unmercifully, but from selfishness, for I foresaw that I was going to have a great deal of trouble in helping him. I ransacked my pockets and found some matches. By the light of one of them I saw his distorted features, his supplicating eyes, the red blood which still flowed from his mouth. A great pity and an immense grief filled me. I went to the extreme edge of the pond and soaked one of the towels which he had wrapped round his arms; I bathed his forehead, his temples, the palms of his hands; I wiped his mouth. He appeared to recover a little.

"Take me home, I implore you," he said, "don't leave me all alone here."

"You have got what you deserve, though," I said, in the tone of a judge.

"But Tiennon, you are well enough revenged—I swear that I had not the least intention of doing you any harm. I only wanted to frighten you so that you would not come again to see Thérèse. I have loved her for a long time and have not been able to sleep for it. But you may be easy now, it is you who will have her; I am done for."

I strove to reassure him about his condition; then with great care I set him on his feet. He staggered a great deal; however, by leaning on me he was able to hold himself up and take a few steps; but a false step caused by kicking a stone made him cry with pain.

"Let us sit down; I can't go any further," he said, sobbing.

We had not gone ten yards.

I bent down, made him lean on my back, his head on my neck, his arms round me, his hands joined on my breast. Then getting up gently, I placed my hands on his thighs to keep him from slipping, and bent double, I began to walk carefully. I did my best, but in spite of that, the unavoidable joltings during the walk made him suffer so frightfully that his moans were heart-breaking. I went on carrying him without appearing to pay any attention to his lamentations, which at one time were feeble and at another piercing. There was one moment when the pressure of his arms became so weak and his body such a dull weight that I thought he was dead. As I was exhausted, I laid him slowly on the ground; he did not move. I ran to a hole in the ditch to soak the towel again and once more bathed his face and hands and wrists: he opened his eyes and began to moan again without saying anything. As soon as I was a little rested, I put him in the same position as before and the mournful walk was resumed.

Barret hiccoughed in a way that seemed to betoken his death agony. The white sheet that I had put round my neck was mottled with blood, where his mouth had been; the blood was flowing again. I congratulated myself that the winding sheet saved my clothes, preventing my smock from being blood-stained. I did not want that to happen, and to be asked embarrassing questions at home the next day.

I tried to walk more quickly, I was so anxious and unnerved that I no longer felt the weight of my burden. My strength seemed to have increased tenfold, and my heart, which at one time had softened, had become like marble; without heeding or being touched by them, I heard the many modulations indicating the degree of torture which my victim was suffering.

After a long hour of walking I reached the yard of Fontivier. The dogs barked furiously and came growling and sniffing at me; fearing they would give the alarm to the people in the house, I tried to cajole them with soft words. I kept alongside the wall of the one block of farm buildings, and reached the door of the house, and put the poor boy down; he was still moaning most lamentably; I laid him in the recess on his phantom's shroud. Then, having given the door two great kicks, I ran along a path behind some buildings, and made a sharp descent through some crops. The dogs followed me a little distance with angry yelpings, but I was soon out of their reach. And when, in the silence of the night, I heard the grating of the bolt as it was drawn, and of the door as it was opened, then the exclamations which followed the mournful discovery, I was no longer afraid of being overtaken.

Unhappily poor Barret had not been mistaken, he was done for. My thorn stick had broken something in his spine. He lingered for several months, suffering frightfully, then died. Never, in all his agony, would he speak of the drama in which he had been the victim. When he was asked who had struck him, he invariably replied:

"It was someone who had reason; it served me right." And he absolutely forbade his parents to lodge any complaint.

The victim's two accomplices made no confidences which might have brought about a confession of their sorry share in the affair. I myself had every reason to say nothing. Barret's parents, if they had any suspicions, abstained from divulging them. Therefore no proceedings were taken, and after suppositions in the beginning, no more was said about that event, which remained mysterious and inexplicable to everybody.

Having acted in self-defence, or nearly so, I could not blame myself. But all the same it is a grief to know that one has caused a man's death—in such circumstances, at

least : for it seems that there are times when it is a meritorious act. My uncle Toinot was very proud of having killed a Russian ! Often the image of that unhappy boy and the details of that sad night have returned to assail my thoughts. I do not say that this memory has poisoned my life : no, indeed ! but it has caused me many secret torments.

After that event I hastened to break with Thérèse. Her parents insisted that I should marry her at once, or not go to see her any more. They had heard that my father was not able to insure me and that I would have to be a soldier if the drawing was unfavourable. That frightened them. And their ultimatum was a dismissal, for they knew quite well that I did not want to marry without being settled. So I went there no more.

Six months later Thérèse married the eldest Simon, one of the cowards who accompanied little Barret to The Witches' Trysting Place. The wedding took place the same week that Barret was buried. Life has some cruel ironies.

XIV

DURING the first year at La Billette, two serious events happened at our house : the death of my grandmother and the departure of my sister Catherine.

My grandmother was over eighty. One day in May, when she was taking care of the goslings, she had a seizure. My father was alarmed when she did not appear at dinner-time and went to look for her : he found that she had slipped down into a ditch, her left side was helpless and her tongue clammy. They carried her to bed, from which she never rose again. She remained there for six months, suffering a great deal, and giving no little trouble. She

would obstinately utter incomprehensible sounds, which were meant to be phrases, and she was very angry because we were unable to understand her. To satisfy her, someone had to be with her all the time, in order to give her something to eat and drink whenever she wanted it, and so on.

I have often heard people say to my mother or to one of my sisters-in-law :

" Do you think she is likely to last long ? "

To which they would reply :

" It is to be hoped not."

I neither liked nor disliked the old woman ; I was rather indifferent about her. But in spite of that I was pained by the remarks in which the desire for her death showed itself. When we were at table, I used to lift my eyes mechanically to her bed, and it hurt me to see her so helpless and to see the waxen face under the old cap, or the movements of the lips making sounds which were not words. I often cut my meals short and took a piece of bread to eat outside, because in her presence eating was impossible.

I consider that one of the advantages of being well-off is, to be able to have a house containing several rooms, the one in which one eats being separate from the one in which one sleeps, and that each family might have its own room and consequently its own distinct intimacy. At least one could be ill in peace. But in the single apartments of poor families, all the spectacles mingle, and the misery of each is exposed to the eyes of all without the possibility of avoiding it.

Thus, while on the one hand my grandmother lay dying, my little nephews clamoured their joy in being alive, overwhelming her with their noisy games and shouts. Life went its usual round. What mattered a poor paralysed old woman.

At the beginning of the winter she had a second attack,

and died after one day of most acute suffering. As soon as she was dead they stopped the clock, and threw away the water that was in the pail, because they believed that the dead woman's soul had bathed in it before ascending to the celestial regions. As I had not seen mourning at our house before, all this impressed me very deeply. Seeing the terror of death close at hand gave me a complex feeling in which curiosity, disgust and pity mingled. Several times I contemplated for a long time, in its last rigidity, that creature who was associated with my earliest memories, and whom I had always seen moving in the familiar radius of my life. This death made no difference in our daily routine; the usual work was done; meals took place at the ordinary hours in front of that bed whose closed curtains concealed a corpse; one sole note of mystery was created by the lighted candle standing on a little table near the bed and on which also stood a bowl containing holy water with a branch of box steeping in it. We abstained only from doing the daily labour in the fields. My brother Louis went to Agonges to tell Uncle Toinot and his family. My godfather was sent to the clerk at the Town Hall to declare the death, and to arrange with the priest about the hour of burial. I was sent to the neighbours to ask for bearers. When my godfather returned from the town he busied himself fixing up a new plough, and I had to help him. That task finished, he said to me with a satisfied air:

"How many times I have wanted to see the end of that job! I just needed a day like this."

Such an expression of calm selfishness hurt me. One is easily touched when one is young; later, when I was as old as my godfather was at that time, I became quite as practical as he.

The funeral took place the next day. In the thick cold fog, thirty of us followed the ox cart which carried the bier. At the entrance of the town, the coffin was lifted down

and placed on two chairs borrowed from a neighbouring house. We had to wait a good quarter of an hour, for the priest was not there. He appeared finally, recited some prayers in Latin, and then we proceeded to the church. Four men carried the coffin on poles which they passed through towels hung round their necks. They walked in the same manner from the church to the cemetery after the ceremony. At the grave, at the moment of the final sprinkling with holy water, I was astonished to see my mother and sisters-in-law weeping copiously. This open parade of grief surprised me greatly, for I knew they had so often feared that she would take too long to die. I realized that those sobs were only a matter of form, that it was the custom to do that at such a time. For myself, when the coffin was lowered into the grave, I had a moment of intense emotion and silently shed a few very real tears.

When all was over, the relatives from Agonges went home with us. Some preparations had been made, wine bought, and a piece of meat for soup, and my mother added an omelette. The meal lasted two hours, and towards the end the conversation became animated; I believe that Uncle Toinot once more told the circumstances in which he had killed his Russian. I reflected that all such gatherings ended in pretty much the same way, whether the occasion was a wedding, a baptism, or a funeral, or any event of less importance. Provided that they had a meal with something extra, a meal giving occasion for sitting a long time at table, they inevitably arrived at retailing their reminiscences to show how each had played a fine part himself and turned others to ridicule; at telling daring or comic stories; in short, lies, scandal, foolishness.

Only, from the funeral repast songs were excluded.

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A little while after the death of my grandmother, my sister Catherine left home to go into service in the house of a relative of Mme. Boutry, at Moulins.

Catherine was twenty-four years old. Her pleasant face had at once pleased the lady, who had often employed her in the house to help the servant. My sister liked her work and the ways of the house; she soon adopted the polished and submissive manner which is necessary in serving the rich; she even came to use a certain amount of respectful familiarity with the Boutrys, who were kind to her. She was in love with a young man at Meillers named Grassin, who was also in service, and to whom she had sworn to be faithful. For five years she had kept her promise, had gone out very little, and had allowed no other wooer. Grassin wrote to her three times a year: on the first of January, during the spring, and at the end of the summer. Catherine awaited these letters with impatience, but they caused her some chagrin, for she did not know who she could ask to read them to her and to write the answers. She saved on her clothes in order to obtain money from my mother to pay for the writing and sending off of the letters. But after some months she told her master and mistress about her romance, and they took charge of the correspondence. Then, seeing that she did her best to please them and that she had an inclination for service, M. and Mme. Boutry thought of finding a place for her in the town. Grassin was an officer's servant; if they were married they might find a place together and earn a good deal. Catherine gradually got used to this idea, which had at first frightened her owing to the unknown element it held. She was the more reconciled to it as my sisters-in-law reproached her for having given up the farm work for that of the master's house. Moreover, when Grassin was consulted by M. Boutry he was enthusiastic about the plan. So she agreed, and in spite of the opposition of our parents, she set out for Moulins in December.

XV

At that time I too felt a good deal of restlessness. The market town of St. Menoux was a place of some importance; it contained at least five inns, one of which had a billiard table, and another had a bowling green; and on special days there was dancing at both places. Since I had ceased to visit Thérèse I had fallen into dissipated habits. I went out regularly, almost every other Sunday, and each time I demanded forty sous from my parents. When they did accede to my request, they never omitted a lecture, to which I listened with bent head without replying; sometimes, though, I would say right out that I ought to be paid for my work. At times they gave me only twenty sous, occasionally nothing at all; then I was furious, and spoke of going elsewhere.

We were five or six lads, belonging to the next conscript class, and we all had a taste for play; we played long games of skittles and nine-pins. On the days when we managed to get money, we drank a good many glasses, got tipsy, and returned home late. At such times it was not wise of anyone to provoke us; we were not very approachable, nor in a humour to joke. It happened on a certain Sunday that we picked a quarrel with some lads of the town, young workmen of the borough belonging to different trades: smiths, tailors, carpenters, masons, etc. Between them and us there was an old chronic feud. They disdainfully called us clodhoppers. We called them upstarts, because they had an air of looking down on everybody, and talked better French, and went about in round jackets instead of smocks. They had their recognized inn, as we had ours, and we hardly ever ventured into each others' houses without a row resulting. That day,

three of the town lads, having drank some white wine in the morning, were very excited after Mass. They came to play at nine-pins with us. One of our group said :

" We don't want to play with swells."

" Ah, well, we want to play with clodhoppers ; we have money to stake as well as they."

I had an empty stomach, and was always a little timid with those lads, who, sober, had at any time much more effrontery than we had. Nevertheless, I said :

" You needn't trouble yourselves ; the *clodhoppers*, the *ploughmen* have as much money as you have."

I had exactly thirty sous !

One of my chums, a tall, rather daring fellow called Aubert, flung at them I know not what stinging abuse. They retorted. Finally it got to noisy brawling on both sides, and as we were by far the most numerous, we chased them from the playing court. After their departure the game began again and our party was in luck : Aubert won, so did I, and one other. Of course, we immediately went on the spree. Towards eight o'clock in the evening when we had had supper, the devil tempted us to go to the inn where the townsmen were gathered round the billiard table. Our entry caused a sensation. There was a moment of silence, during which we looked at each other. Then one of those whom we had driven off in the morning, a little dark shoemaker, said in a very loud voice :

" No swineherds allowed here."

" Say that again, you upstart ! Say it again ! Look you, *I* am one of the swineherds ! " said Aubert, rolling his furious eyes.

" Yes, yes," replied the other, " you are swineherds, jumping jacks, a lot of cursed clodhoppers ! "

One of his companions, holding his nose, shouted :

" Faugh ! they smell of cow-dung ! "

And a third said :

" No wonder ; they only wash their legs once a year ; they keep a coating of dung to keep themselves warm in winter."

The billiard party was interrupted ; ten of them were glaring at us and jeering. We tried to put a good face on it and to return their gross insults as much as possible. Aubert, proud of his strength, raged :

" Come outside and say that, damned braggarts that you are, would-be swells, scum ! "

The landlord intervened, and implored us not to fight, then urged us countrymen to go outside as we were the last-comers. But that did not suit us.

" We have as much right here as they, I suppose," said one of our party, which speech we all approved.

However, with some management, the landlord pushed us outside little by little. The others came forward :

" Put them out ! " they cried, " put them out ! "

He did not strike us, but hustled us.

" Ah, that's it ! " said Aubert. " Oh well, you shall see ! "

Then he dealt a violent blow with his fist on the head of the little dark shoemaker, who was the noisiest of the opposing party.

That was the signal for a general scrimmage. Blows and kicks rained, while the abuse continued. With gentle persistence, the landlord pushed us all, friends and enemies, outside. When the last were on the step, he shut the door so quickly that two or three fell over. An icy wind, herald of snow, swept along the street. The struggle continued with fury ; one could hear :

" Here, take that, ploughman ! "

" That's one for you, cobbler ! "

" Pig ! he has broken one of my teeth ! "

" Leave me alone, my nose is bleeding," cried a mason, to whom I had given a formidable whack.

Aubert nearly choked a farrier, who, helpless, bit at his arm and face ; a wheelwright rescued the farrier, they

combined their efforts and threw down my big comrade. In a paroxysm of rage he took out his knife, struck at the hand of the one, and dug it into the cheek of the other. This caused cries of fury :

" One of the ploughmen is using a knife ! "

" Yes," said Aubert, getting up again, bare-headed, his smock thrown back, his eyes starting out of their sockets, his teeth grinding, his uplifted hand brandishing the bloody knife :

" Whoever wants the same, let him come and get it."

The *garde-champêtre* arrived and some onlookers with lanterns.

" Look at that one bleeding like an ox."

" What a pack of savages ! Is it possible to sink to such depths ? "

Some men separated those of us who still fought, and held us off at some distance : for we were so furious that we continued our abuse and tried to rush at each other again. The *garde-champêtre* took our names and attended to the wounded. Our antagonists were taken away by their parents or employers. The father of the farrier who had got the knife wound in his jaw shouted as he went :

" The *quiet ploughmen* shall be left alone ; they can fight among themselves if they like."

" The ploughmen are as good as you," cried Aubert.

He wanted to attack their group again. Our landlord and some people who had come with him preached moderation. I was neither so drunk nor so angry as to be incapable of understanding. I said :

" There has been enough of it, Aubert ; it's much better to go away."

And we went, not very far, to tell the truth, for we decided to go to our own inn to drink cold coffee and to get over our excitement. Some people, who were drinking there were talking about the brawl.

" There was a lot of fighting ; they were using knives."

" That will mean prison, perhaps."

" Quite likely."

Aubert, still excited, gave the table great thumps, saying he didn't care for the law courts :

" If we have to go to prison we can go, that is all ; and that won't stop me fighting again if they insult me. What I won't stand is to be taken for a braggart. No, never ! The town lads wanted to give us a licking. Ah well ! it was they who got it. They won't be able to say the ploughmen are cowards ! "

We were all agreed that we regretted nothing, in fact, that all the right was on our side. At heart we were none the less very uneasy.

* * * * * *

The next day the gendarmes from Souvigny came to La Billette to question me. My little nephews, who were playing in the yard, were the first to see them :

" The gendarmes ! The gendarmes ! " they cried, in frightened tones. They ran for refuge to the barn, where my brothers and I were threshing with the flail. The children crouched down behind a heap of straw and were motionless.

My parents were not altogether surprised, for in the morning they had seen my soiled clothes, and my face blackened with blows ; and I had to admit that I had been mixed up in a scuffle.

The gendarmes interrogated me briefly and ordered me to go to St. Menoux at midday the next day.

At the appointed hour we found ourselves, artisans and countrymen, all together again on the site of the battle. The farrier whom Aubert had struck had a bandage on his cheek ; another had his arm in a sling ; several limped ; black and blue bruises showed still as witnesses, if not as glorious scars, on every face. Two gendarmes arrived

soon, one of them had white stripes on his sleeve : he was the sergeant-major, chief of the brigade of Souvigny. It was he who conducted the inquiry. His sharp features, his frigid air, his long black moustache and billy-goat beard, gave him a stern and ill-natured appearance. He made the landlord explain how the dispute arose ; then he questioned the *garde-champêtre*, finally he interrogated us separately, beginning with the wounded. He wrote our replies in a great notebook. Ah ! our arrogance of Sunday had vanished. Friends and foes, we looked at each other without hatred ; our lowered eyes, our dejected faces showed only how much we regretted that foolishness and its ugly consequences. I noticed that Aubert was the most abject of all. As he was the only one who had used a knife, the sergeant-major questioned him at greater length ; but the miserable wretch was limp and livid, and trembled so much that he could only answer in monosyllables. Those who are the most bombastic when they have had a glass too much, are nearly always the most cowardly, the most craven when put to the test.

I must say that the town lads made a better impression than we did during the inquiry : they expressed themselves better and with more ease, and were less nervous. It was the same on the day of the trial. Countrymen, who are used to working alone in the open, always make a poor show in the presence of people not of their own class.

You can imagine I had some miserable days at home. There were reproaches without end about the expense, the annoyance, and the dishonour that I was going to cause.

" It is no small thing, Good God ! " said my mother. " You may have to go to prison. You will be marked on the red paper ! How wretched to have children who give so much trouble."

My father lamented nearly as much ; the others too were anxious, and indeed I was not easy in my own mind.

When M. Boutry got to know about the affair, he came

every day to give me a lecture, saying that it was unworthy of a civilized century to see young people of the same commune fighting for no reason. "You have behaved like savages, like barbarians," he concluded.

Nevertheless, he intervened with the sergeant-major and with the mayor; then, seeing that it was impossible to evade the trial, he busied himself to find a counsel to act for all the belligerents.

"This trial," he said to me one day, "ought to serve not only as a lesson, but more; it ought to be the means of a general and lasting reconciliation."

He was hardly a prophet, that good M. Boutry; all this happened sixty years ago, and the feud is still going on at St. Menoux and elsewhere, between the lads of the town and those of the farms.

On the day of the trial, we proceeded on foot, in two groups, to Moulins, the town lads starting half an hour before us.

I remember how astonished I was when I passed over the bridge of Allier. I had only seen the narrow Burge at Bourbon, and the very small streams in our meadows: it did not seem possible that there could be such wide rivers. Those of my companions who went to the chief town for the first time, also shared my astonishment.

In the town we soon became confused. We went slowly, looking at the shop windows like boobies who had never seen anything. It had rained the previous day, and the weather was still threatening: our *sabots* slipped on the damp pavements. I was conscious that to the people of the town we must have appeared a ridiculous group. In fact, the clerks and shop girls, who were returning to work, looked at us with curiosity and a shade of mockery.

A man was loading a cart with a heap of mud; I ventured to ask him if he knew the way to the law court.

"The law court?" said he, a little astonished, "it is

in the Rue de Paris, a big red-brick building with a court in the middle. You are still a long way off; first you will have to go right to the Place d'Allier and then ask again." He showed us the way to the Place d'Allier, and we were not long in finding it. As we were looking for someone to direct us, we saw another group standing in front of a great bazaar: they were our compatriot foes, the lads of the town. My word! Away from their usual environment, they were no more at home than we were; they were no longer themselves: the persistent rancour had diminished a great deal. They turned towards us, and we smiled at each other.

"Eh, well, are you going there?"

The little dark shoemaker answered:

"We were waiting for you—only we had begun to think that you had eaten the summons."

We went together towards the big red-brick building. We were ushered into a square hall with whitewashed walls, and furnished with seats: there we had to wait a whole hour and a half in the company of six tramps and three poachers. Our turn came at last, after all the others, and we filed into the Hall of Justice. At the end, on a kind of high platform, were seated three men in black robes. On the wall behind them, a great plaster figure of Christ enthroned, towered above them. The man in the middle examined us: he was a big man, red-faced and clean-shaven, and his eyes twinkled behind his glasses. We all had the look of beasts caught in a trap; we answered in such a plaintively humble tone, that they might well have asked if we were the same furious fools who had made such a to-do a fortnight before. After the examination was finished, another man in a robe got up. He was a young man with black whiskers: he sat on a small platform to the left of the judges and a little in front: he spoke witheringly of our abominable conduct, made out that we were blackguards and ruffians—he even spoke of

Aubert as an assassin—and advised the Court not to hesitate to punish us with all the rigour of the law, which would be an excellent example. But after this, it was the turn of our advocate, a bearded man, who had the air of laughing at everybody. He spoke of our epic battle as youthful foolishness of no importance, said we were all excellent fellows, inoffensive little young people, whose only fault had been that they had drunk a glass too much on a certain day, and he begged the three men at the end of the hall not to put us in prison. He won the case: but, because of the wounding with the knife, Aubert was fined twenty-five francs; all the others sixteen francs.

When we left, we had a meal all together in a tavern in the Place du Marché, and afterwards started on our return journey, which we managed very well, excepting that several of us had galled feet, and everyone was much fatigued. The little shoemaker tried at different times to provoke us, but he got no encouragement from his friends, so the relations between the two reunited groups remained cordial.

At home they were very glad that I had not been sent to prison; nevertheless, the cost of the fine and expenses seemed enormous.

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The time for the "drawing by lot" approached. One fine day, my parents took me aside to tell me that I could not count on a substitute. They detailed their reasons; the removal, my grandmother's death, these had caused considerable outlay; my brothers had several children, which increased the household expenses; the blackguardism of Fauconnet had made a great deal of trouble; for a long time I had been spending a lot of money at the inn; and finally that wretched trial had been costly. As

a result of all this, they had found it impossible to save up the five hundred francs necessary to insure me with a merchant of substitutes or at the *cagnotte mutuelle*,* which was at St. Menoux. This revelation overwhelmed me, for I had always, in spite of everything, counted on being treated like my brothers. I exploded with fury, and said right out that if chance did favour me at the drawing, I should not stay long at home. My parents were much troubled, but made no attempt to curb my discontent.

I drew number sixty-eight; I was saved, for they only took up to fifty-nine. I remained at La Billette for the rest of the winter, and nearly all the spring. But about St. John's Day, I announced that I was going to offer myself for hire.

"You don't really want to go, Tiennon?" said my mother very uneasily.

"Why are you going elsewhere, when there is enough work here for you?" added my father.

"It is evident that you expected to be able to do without me, since you intended to let me go," I replied maliciously. "I have spent all my youth working for nothing: it is time that I earned some money by my work."

My mother answered:

"When you have to feed yourself out of your wages, I can tell you there will not be much left. You won't have as much for your amusements as we give you here."

They all begged me to stay: my godfather, Louis, my sisters-in-law, and even poor little innocent Marinette, who was fond of me. The little ones clung to me.

"Tonton, don't go! Say you won't go. Do!"

I could not help weeping as I freed myself from the clasp of their little hands, but I remained obdurate.

* In the large towns conscripts' parents made a preliminary deposit of a sum agreed upon, to buy substitutes for those whom the ballot had decided upon.

To tell the truth, in addition to my resentment at my parents' injustice, I had another motive for going. I realized that when the little ones grew up, there would be too many of us for one household. It was very necessary therefore that I should earn my living somewhere else. I preferred to begin before I was any older.

Consequently, I went to the fair at Souvigny, with an ear of wheat in my hat. I was hired for the year to work on a farm in Autry, at Fontbonnet, at a wage of ninety francs, the usual wage for good servants in those days.

On the morning of St. John's Day, I made a bundle of my clothes, took my sickle and my scythe, and left the family roof for good. I felt some emotion when I heard my mother's sobs and saw my father weeping silently.

XVI

We have to change our way of living to appreciate at their true value the good things in the old way: for, in the monotony of daily existence we enjoy the better things unconsciously: they seem so much a matter of course that it never occurs to us that they may not continue. Only the annoyances make an impression because we do not realize that they exist everywhere. Change of environment, in depriving us of the good things that we have not appreciated, enhances their importance, and shows us that the unpleasant ones are always there: they indeed hardly change their form.

I proved that during the first weeks I lived at Fontbonnet, and there were times when I regretted having left home.

I ended, however, by getting used to it, and even found myself better off, because of my absolute independence in my free hours.

But I was not able to ask for money, so I quite gave up going to Saint-Menoux, and that seemed natural enough to my old friends, seeing I no longer lived in the commune.

Neither did I go to Autry, though that was my nearest town. I even avoided the Vijons, fearing that I might find people there who would tempt me to gamble. Having an empty pocket, I was obliged to be wise.

I spent my Sundays rambling about the country and in the forest, for the estate skirted the end of Gros-Bois. In that direction there was a forester's cottage, in which lived an old keeper, old Giraud, with whom I soon made acquaintance. I assisted him in various ways, helping him to cut the grass in the clearing of the forest for his cows, and to reap the patch of wheat that he had at the bottom of his garden. At his house I always found something to occupy several hours every Sunday. He generally gave me a glass of wine when the work was done, and I stayed with him a good part of the day. Old Giraud had a son in Africa, a soldier, of whom he often spoke to me, a daughter married to a glass-blower in Souvigny, and a second unmarried daughter who lived with him. Mlle. Victoire was a brunette with black eyes and a swarthy complexion, and a cold manner like her mother. I was not at all familiar with the two women: the daughter of the keeper seemed to me to belong to a station so superior to mine that I dared not lift my eyes to her.

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However, I had lifted my eyes to the servant who was at Fontbonnet. She was a little slim girl with a frank look, and she had most beautiful teeth and a perfectly enchanting smile. Her name was Suzanne, she worked well and had a good character. I might have wooed her with a good motive if she had belonged to a respectable family, but she was illegitimate. Her mother, they said, was a maid of all work to an infirm old gentleman, and

had never been married, but that had not hindered her from having two other children. Poor Suzanne became purple when they talked about that. As for me, as I was only a servant by chance and of my own free-will, it would have been a condescension to marry a servant: only the daughters of *métayers* were of my rank. A stronger reason was that I could not marry a bastard: my mother would have made a pretty fuss about that. If, however, I stopped short of the idea of marrying Suzanne, I none the less intended to make her my mistress. My excuse is that I was in that particular state of mind, common, I believe, to all lads of my age.

At St. Menoux, Aubert and most of those with whom I had associated the year before, used to assert that they had tasted of the forbidden fruit. They even named the girls: to many of whom, from their appearance, one would have given the Host without confession. Every time that subject came on the carpet, I used to take part in the conversation with a playful air, as though I had known all that a long time; to speak about a matter that one knows nothing about, it is only necessary to be able to season and serve up other people's phrases with a blasé air: that always works. The fact is, I was entirely innocent and had a great desire to be otherwise.

I attempted therefore to wheedle Suzanne by doing friendly little services for her, such as saving her the hardest tasks in the fields and house, going in her place to fetch water and wood when it was possible. It was not long before she looked at me with affection, because of these little attentions. Besides, I was not bad-looking. I was of middle height, rather thick-set; my frame spoke of vigour; my face was rather long with a strong nose; a forehead hidden by a mass of hair, and stamped with virility and energy. It was quite natural that I should please the little girl. Be that as it may, having happened one evening at nightfall to meet in the cowshed, I told

Suzanne that she was pretty, and that I loved her, and I kissed her with as much ardour as I had kissed Thérèse two and a half years before. She appeared so happy that I really thought she was going to faint in my arms. I held her there, afraid lest the master who was roaming about should appear.

But one Sunday when we were alone in the house, I began again to make gallant little speeches to her, and after perhaps a too short prelude, I showed too clearly my real design. She was upright at a bound; a strange flame appeared in her eyes, and with all the strength of her nervous little arm, she struck me twice. Then, having placed herself defensively behind a chair, she said in a hissing voice:

"Go, you dirty beast! That is what your flattery meant; you wanted to amuse yourself with me. I have as much honour as anybody, no matter who they are, and you shall know it, and if ever you attempt to touch me, I shall tell the master at once. You understand?"

"You bad girl, you bad girl," I said stupidly, rubbing my red, smarting cheek.

"It is your own fault, if I have hurt you," she said, a little more gently. "It will teach you to respect me."

I went out very sheepishly, and never again tried to assail that too savage virtue.

Besides, as a result of her energetic defence, I had an awakening of conscience, and I realized how badly I had behaved, how by stupid vanity and for the sake of some moments of satisfaction, I had risked causing the unhappiness of her life. I felt culpable and contemptible, and tried to earn Suzanne's pardon by continuing to be kind to her without ever again speaking to her of love.

* * * * * *

Some time after that, I had another gallant adventure, which also caused me some discomfiture.

On a neighbouring estate, at Toveny, there was another servant, not young, indolent-looking, with hair like tow, who was known as "Big Hélène." Even at La Billette, I had heard of this woman, who had the reputation of being easy-going as to her morals. So this was quite another affair. At work, the men used to talk all day of her. When they were tired, they told coarse stories of which she was the heroine, in order to revive their gaiety. "She has only refused two," said the master; "the one who wouldn't and the one who couldn't." I greatly longed to know her better.

Well, one day while we were having dinner, she came to Fontbonnet to take back three bulls which had escaped from the pasturage and had strayed. She sat down unceremoniously, talked of everything with assurance, and answered in kind the chaffing of the master and the lads. She went out at the same time as I did. Outside, I was able to speak to her alone; I made the most of the opportunity to serve up some choice sillinesses, the toughest that I knew, which did not seem to make the least impression on her; I believe, on the contrary, that it was I who blushed at her replies.

The acquaintance seemed to me to be sufficiently advanced, so, the devil driving me, the following Sunday I loitered round Toveny. I hid in a patch of maize near the yard, and before long I saw Hélène, who was going to the milking. She carried her pitcher of milk to the house and came out a few minutes later, having put on a clean jacket, a white cap, and newly-blackened *sabots*. She returned to the stables to unfasten the cows, which she drove out of the yard. Five minutes later, out of sight of the buildings, I met her as if by chance in the road.

"Hullo! is that you?" she said, astonished.

"Yes, I am taking a walk for my health."

"Well, if you like you can come and help me to look after the cows."

" I was just going to propose that."

Side by side, we went down a shady and lonely lane, till we reached a meadow with deep water, bounded by a little copse. I was rather excited to find myself alone with this dispenser of favours, and I painfully pondered over some suitable phrases, but was not successful in giving them utterance. She played with her stick, and made all the conversation. I was annoyed to see, at the other end of the meadow, a labourer's cottage, near which some children were playing. But my companion, as though she had read my thought, proposed :

" Come along, if you like, in the wood and gather nuts."

I accepted eagerly, and when we were there, how my heart beat. I became bold, and, putting my arm round Hélène's waist, I said how pleasant it would be to lie down on the soft grass under the green arches. She answered ironically :

" Are you tired ? I assure you I didn't come here to lie down."

Then, having by a quick half-turn escaped from my embrace, she began to bend the branches and gather the clusters of nuts, which she slipped into the pocket of her apron.

I began to be perplexed. It astonished me that she should appear to make a ceremony of what must have been a commonplace to her. I wanted to act, but I delayed the beginning of the action from one moment to another. I noticed that the nut trees were not so numerous.

" Let us go to the end, we'll find more there," she said.

She glided among the branches with a surprising agility, considering her weight ; I had some trouble to follow her. We had walked for a few minutes in the open track which cut the copse in two, when we found ourselves face to face with a black-bearded man, very big and still young. She showed no surprise ; I had an idea that I was being made a fool of. The man said, half laughing :

" Hullo ! Have you brought an assistant to help you gather nuts, Hélène ! "

I blushed like a girl of fifteen, as Suzanne at our house had blushed. Nevertheless, I tried to extricate myself with bravado.

" Two always do better than one," I said.

" Yes, but three don't do as well, Greenhorn."

He thereupon set on me, punching me and jeering :

" There, take that, and that, and that too ! That will teach you to come prowling round where you have no business, my lad."

In any other circumstances, I should certainly not have allowed myself to be thrashed without saying anything. But I was so taken by surprise that I had no idea of defending myself. Without waiting for more, I ran off like a hare, followed to the end of the wood by the jeers of both.

And I swore, too late though, that nothing would take me again near the skirts of " Big Hélène."

* * * * * *

My youthful amorous escapades reduced themselves to nothing, as you see, and I have no occasion to be proud of them. But that did not keep me later, like others, from appearing to be knowing, and speaking with an experienced air of my great feats when I was a youth, or saying even :

" Women were not lacking, Good Heavens ! I had only the embarrassment of choosing."

To tell the truth, my legitimate wife was my first mistress.

XVII

THE following spring I went to the Fête at Meillers to see my communion class-mate, Boulois of Parizet. His young brother having died, he was the only son, and he

was proud of his fine position, for his parents were well off. In our conversation I happened to speak of old Giraud the keeper, and Boulois asked with a sly smile if he had not a daughter. I replied that he had two, one married and the other still to be secured. Then Boulois said that a relative had pointed out Victoire to him at a fair at Souvigny, telling him that she would do well for him. He then subjected me to a veritable catechism, with the object of learning about the character and habits of the young girl: and when I departed he charged me to approach her in order to find out if she would consent to marry a young countryman.

"If she seems likely to say 'yes,' you might speak to her about me," he concluded.

I thought about this a great deal during the whole week. For several reasons this delicate mission annoyed me; however, with the intention of fulfilling it, I went the following Sunday to the forester's house. Chance favoured me: Victoire and her mother had gone to Mass in the morning, and when they returned, old Giraud went to the ten o'clock Mass. I went with him, making a pretence of returning to Fontbonnet, and trying to appear quite natural. But I went back an hour later; it was a propitious moment, for Victoire was alone in the house, her mother having taken the cows to the pasture in the clearing. After an embarrassing preface, I said that I wanted to see her alone, to ask her if she would be satisfied to marry a peasant. For a moment she fixed her great black eyes on me; her deep and questioning gaze seemed to search my mind, but she made no answer.

"It is one of my friends who has charged me to ask you this question," I added.

"Oh! It is one of your friends?"

After these words she became thoughtful for a moment, and I believed that I saw a shade of disappointment in them, which impressed me.

" Ah, well ! I must see that friend ; unless I know him, I can say nothing to you."

" He will make himself known—but the position is not one that you dislike too much ? "

" Why should I dislike it ? Am I not a peasant myself ? "

There was a moment of painful silence. Victoire, seated in the chimney corner, poked the fire and did not turn her eyes away from the rosy flame. I was standing with my back to an old oak chest of drawers near the outside door, and the sounds which struck my ears had the power to make me tremble : these sounds were the crackling of the flaming branches, the tic-tac of the clock, the singing of a cricket in the wall, the clucking of a hen in the yard, all quite familiar. But my brain was confused, and intensely agitated by an idea which had come to me during the week. And I had the unheard of audacity to say in a breath :

" Well, no ! I cannot deceive you any longer. It is not for another, it is for myself that I have spoken, Victoire. Will you have me for your husband ? "

She rose at a bound, and half turned towards me, her eyes were lowered towards the large black stones which paved the room, and I saw a slight colour rise in her swarthy cheeks.

" I don't dislike you ; but I cannot give you a definite answer without speaking to my parents. Go on Sunday to the ball at Autry ; I shall arrange to be there, and I will tell you if you may make an offer or not."

I stammered a " Thank you," and retired without even seeking to approach her, so much was I troubled, and so much did her cold and serious air continue to impress me.

The following days I went about dreaming. It did not seem to me possible that I had betrayed Boulois' confidence, that I had sought for myself this Victoire, who had no other attraction for me than that which resulted

from her position as a girl in easy circumstances! However, it was done! How true it is that great events hang on a mere trifle: a thought born by chance, a fleeting inclination, a moment of boldness, a moment of want of conscience or of reflection.

Victoire, who had some love for me, managed well, for she told me at the ball on Sunday that I had a chance, although her parents had made many objections. They had promised to give her a bed, a cupboard, a little linen, and three hundred francs, which was a good deal for that time. Naturally they were annoyed that I had nothing at all: they explained everything to me clearly when I went to their house to make my request.

"Get your father to give you a sum at least equal to Victoire's, he owes you that, as he didn't ransom you. On that condition we will consent to the marriage, for we know you are a hard worker and a good lad."

The parents' good reception astonished me nearly as much as the daughter's. I found out the reason later. Their son, the soldier in Africa, had been wild in his youth; he had cost them much money, and given them a great deal of trouble when he was a clerk in a cotton warehouse at Moulins. Also their son-in-law, the glass-blower, gave them no satisfaction; he got drunk often, and had even beaten his wife: that household was not a happy one. I profited by those examples, for in Giraud's eyes they had lowered the prestige of the industrial and commercial trades.

My father was once more afloat; he had received from M. Boutry eight hundred francs on account of the second year, and I had not much trouble in obtaining the necessary three hundred francs. I was then accepted definitely, and the wedding took place at Martinmas, 1845; I was exactly twenty-one.

My wife stayed with her parents, and I continued my work at Fontbonnet, where I was hired for a second year.

Each evening, after the day's work was done, I returned to the forester's house, and each morning, in the twilight, I got back to my post. On Sundays I continued to do the harder tasks for my father-in-law, and this made me welcome at the house. Victoire was amiable; I had neither responsibility nor anxiety; that time was one of the happiest in my life.

XVIII

HOWEVER, we could not go on like that for long. In the course of the year, I learned that a holding was vacant in Bourbon, quite near the town, on the borders of Les Craux (a name given to a granitic and stony district, where grew some very short blackish grass). Les Craux formed the descending part of a fertile upland, which joined a valley where a stream bordered with alders ran through some damp meadows. I went to look at this holding. I liked it and hired it for three years. We settled there the following Martinmas, exactly a year after our marriage.

Ah! our poor six hundred francs, how soon they were exhausted. The purchase of two cows, which were necessary, used the greater part of it. We had to borrow from old Giraud in order to buy a cart, a barrow, some indispensable household utensils, a quantity of fuel, and some measures of rye. Victoire, who at home had been used to a certain amount of comfort, suffered more than I did from our early hardships. It is true that with her cold and reserved character, she was not in the habit of showing much satisfaction, though she knew how to give weight to her complaints. I often had to tell her that she gave way to that propensity to a vexatious extent. She would say in a complaining tone:

"I must have another stewpan," or, "I need some

more dishes," or, "I can't do my washing without a tub."

These would be bought, but there was always something needed. Then she got busy with baby clothes and a cradle, for she was *enceinte*. I was not very easy in my own mind, but I made an effort to cheer her up.

But above all, it was our lonely evenings in the winter that were full of restlessness, and were miserably monotonous. I found it hard to get accustomed to that, I had been so used to the liveliness of large families. However, thanks to continuous activity, I did not weary. I made a lot of useful things, my plough at first, then a ladder, then a barrow, and several rakes for haytime. I was busy about that all the winter.

In the early mornings and in the evenings towards four o'clock, Victoire went to the town to sell the fresh milk. I used to carry her pitcher to the Place de l'Eglise, that very place where I had suffered so much on the day of the fair when I was a little lad. But when the weather was intensely cold and there was very little milk, she did not make as much as twenty sous, in fact, she sold it to the last drop, not even keeping a little to whiten our soup. But the task of taking it round was no joke. The cold stung and stiffened the blue hand which held the handle of the pitcher, the benumbed fingers refused to work; my wife had cause enough for complaint. When there was snow or even rime, it was worse still; then the task was really very painful, and it became evident that it might even be dangerous. One frosty morning, Victoire came home weeping, her pocket half empty; she had slipped in descending the paved street, and the remaining milk—two-thirds, at least—had run out of the overturned pitcher. This accident worried me, for she was in her seventh month of pregnancy, and I was afraid she might hurt herself. So I resolved to take the milk round myself. I had to endure a lot of jeering and chaffing from the

people in the town, for it was unusual for a man to do that kind of thing. In the evenings the small boys would follow me in a band, shouting :

" Look at the milk hawker ! Look at the milk hawker ! Give us some milk, Tiennon. This way, Tiennon, this way ! "

I realized that it was better not to take the rascals' impudence too seriously, and also to laugh at the jeers of the grown-ups. It was the best way. At the end of a week they had all left me in peace. And on the other hand, my customers praised me for being a model husband.

After all, my task gave me considerable satisfaction : each morning the awakening of the town interested me greatly. When I arrived, the only apparent activity was in the blacksmiths' shops. There, one could already see the glowing of the forge and the fiery sparks which escaped from the white-hot iron which was being shaped on the anvil by mighty strokes of the hammer. Work was going on also in the *abattoirs*, in the bakehouses, and the workshops of the sabot-makers. But the shops were still shut. Like the officials and the bankers, most of the shopkeepers were asleep behind their closed shutters. I, who had been rushing about for two hours or more, braced by the movement and the sharp morning air, used to knock at the shop doors with real pleasure. The housekeepers would soon appear, some too fat, some too thin, wrinkled, untidy, toothless, bosoms hanging, eyes with big blue rings round them and wax in the corners, all were ridiculous. The slovenliness of their costumes betrayed their defects, their ugliness, their deformities. Many came to the door, their bare feet in slippers down at heel, with petticoats badly hooked, showing their chemises or rough and often ragged night-gowns, some in dirty or greasy night-caps.

They would say with a yawn :

" It is very cold this morning, isn't it, Tiennon ? "

" My faith, yes, Madame ; it is freezing hard."

" Brrouou ! That's what makes bed so good."

I laughed inwardly to see thus, in their natural state, those fine ladies of the town, those smart shopkeepers, who in the daytime were so well corsetted and becurled.

" Indeed," I thought, " I won't let myself be taken in by appearances after this. Oh, no ! "

However, it was not long before I was taken in terribly.

As soon as I got back from my morning round, I used to take off my clean smock and trousers, and put on my working-clothes. I would give a last forkful to the cows and clear away their litter ; then, after eating a basin of soup and three potatoes baked in the ashes, I would go to old Viradon, a neighbour, where for eight sous a day, I beat with the flail from nine o'clock till three. After that spell of work, I ate some more soup and a stew of pumpkin or haricots ; then there was the grooming to do ; then the milk round in the town and twenty other tasks, which kept me busy till seven o'clock ; then I would settle myself by the fireside and work with my tools, while I tried to prove to my wife that our affairs were progressing well, and that we should have no difficulty in pulling through.

* * * * * *

But in April, when Victoire's confinement took place, it was indeed a different matter ; I had to take care of her and undertake all the household tasks. The previous month I had visited my parents, and had asked my mother to come and stay with us for a few days when the event should take place. She had consented ; but the illness of one of my little nephews had prevented her keeping her promise. Mother Giraud was ill and found it difficult to leave home because of her cows. So in addition to the midwife there was only our old neighbour, Viradon, to help us and give us her experienced advice.

Seeing that at the same time the work on the land had to be done, the garden dug, and the barley, oats and

potatoes sown, you may well believe that I could not keep two feet in the same *sabot;* I nearly lost the habit of sleeping, and it was not in the summer season that I was able to get it back again.

During the summer I went to work on farms as day-labourer. Although I had enough to do on my own holding, I was afraid that our income would not be sufficient if I earned nothing outside. When I returned about six o'clock in the evening, there was always something pressing to do at home, so I started to work by moonlight. My neighbour, Viradon, had advised me to do some gardening, as vegetables sold well in the season when the town was full of strangers. I often worked till nearly one o'clock in the morning, weeding and watering. At three o'clock I again set out to work; Victoire had ceased for a time to do the milk-rounds; the cows being near their time gave no more; but she was able to sell some heads of salad and a few baskets of haricots, and this brought in enough for the current needs of the household.

When Martinmas came, we had the satisfaction of paying the proprietor punctually, and repaying old Giraud half the sum he had advanced.

XIX

THERE were certain kinds of work of which I had very little experience: for instance, before I had started on my own account, I had never done any sowing. The sowing was always done on the farms by the master or his eldest son: at La Billette it was my godfather's task for a certain time. I believe that the custom of specializing on the various tasks still exists a little. There is always the cowman, the gardener, the sower. The cowman never works in the garden, the gardener scarcely knows anything of farm-labouring, nor how to care for the beasts.

When they come to separate, each finds himself at a loss. Consequently, the first time I sowed, I did it unequally and too liberally, and my harvest was affected by it. The neighbours who saw my wheat jeered at me, in spite of the fact that I had told them the reason, and I found that hard to bear.

However, that year the best sowers did not obtain the best results. After a period of night frosts and warm sunshine, a damp spring had followed, and the harvest of 1847 was bad everywhere. Wheat sold at eight francs the double,* and the rye at six francs. In country places all the poor people were in great poverty, and in the towns, especially in Paris, it appeared that it was still worse.

I got this information from M. Perrier, an old schoolmaster, who had become an insurance-agent: he lived near the Place de l'Eglise, and was a customer of ours for milk. M. Perrier read the newspapers, and when anything important happened, he never failed to tell his wife, charging her to repeat it to me.

The poverty of the working people in the capital caused a revolt there soon after: in the month of February, 1848, Victoire brought that news to me one day, from M. Perrier. Then I remembered that at the time that I was shepherd at La Breure in Le Garibier, I had heard the long-sawyers talking of something of the kind: a king turned out and replaced by another king who called himself Louis-Philippe, the tri-coloured flag instead of the white flag, and so on. The next day, when I went on my milk-round, I told M. Perrier about these recollections. He told me that they had in turn put that same Louis-Philippe to the door, and that instead of a king we had now a republic; and he went to some trouble to explain the difference it made.

In the country we trouble very little about the tricks of Governments. If it should be Peter or Paul at the head,

* Twenty litres, a measure much used in Le Berry and Nivernais.

we have nothing to do with that, the same time brings the same work. However, the change of rule was known to us, and made a certain stir.

The Republic did at least one good thing, for which I and many others were able to thank it at the moment ; that was to remove the tax from salt. Before that, we paid five or six sous a pound, and we were nearly as saving with it as with butter : afterwards, it cost only two sous. I understood that it was blackguardism on the part of the old Government, which had allowed such an enormous tax to be put on one of the chief necessaries of life, and which neither the poor nor the rich could do without.

Another innovation which everybody realized, was the establishment of universal suffrage. I know that the workmen in the towns considered it of great importance, and later I understood that they had reason. But just then I did not think the " right to vote " so important as the suppression of the tax on salt.

How well one sees that such reforms can give no pleasure to the rich. The corn kept rising in price : it was said that out of hatred of the new Government, the rich gentry had ordered a supply of corn, which they had stored up to be thrown into the sea, with the object of causing a famine.

Soon after there were elections to appoint deputies. I received several papers on that occasion, and I used to go to M. Perrier and beg him to read them to me and explain them. He was always very homely, and hastened to satisfy me. In their programme, the Republican candidates spoke of liberty, of justice, of the welfare of the people, and promised numerous reforms : the establishment of schools, and the making of roads, the shortening of the term of military service, assistance to the infirm and aged poor. The Conservatives spoke chiefly of the France which they wished to see united, great and strong ; they desired peace, order, prosperity ; they counselled us to distrust the revolutionary Utopians who wanted to over-

throw everything, to make a clean sweep of the secular traditions of our dear country, and consequently, to lead us to destruction. I was far from understanding the exact meaning of all those beautiful phrases, but it seemed to me that the Conservatives endeavoured to dazzle the electors by big words which meant nothing, while the Republicans expressed good practical ideas. I told M. Perrier what I thought, and he made me promise to vote for the latter.

"Say emphatically to your friends and neighbours," he concluded, "that it is the Republicans only who wish to see your condition improved. The others are rich *bourgeois*, who find the old order of things excellent; they have reason to be contented with their lot, and you may believe that the lot of others is of no importance to them."

I thus decided to obey my first impression, which was corroborated by M. Perrier's opinion. But the evening before the voting, whilst I was at work, the priest came to our house and told my wife that all the Republicans were blackguards. He told her about several persons of bad repute, idlers and drunkards, who shouted, "Long live the Republic" very loudly in the streets of the town, when they were drunk.

"If those people came to power," concluded the priest, "nobody would be safe; they would take the earnings of good people, and they would live like lords in the sweat of the faces of others: all honest electors ought to vote for those who represent good principles, that is, for the Conservatives."

Victoire recounted this to me the same evening:

"There," she said, "that is what M. le Curé has told me to tell you. Now you can do what you like."

That worried me, for I knew that all the riff-raff of the town published their Republicanism at every turn. But I reflected that the candidates would not be like the brawlers and drunkards that we saw around us. Besides, M. Perrier,

that excellent man, educated and intelligent, was a Republican. Many other good people, too, that I knew were Republicans. And when I heard that the illustrious Fauconnet was conducting a desperate campaign in favour of the Conservatives, I said to my wife :

" Listen, as for property, we have little more than our two cows ; I don't think they will come to carry them off —and the people who are supporting the priest's candidates are not such fine people, after all : Fauconnet, who is the biggest thief in Bourbon, supports them."

" You surely don't compare Fauconnet to the sots and brawlers who shout in the streets ? "

" Oh, no ! I don't want to insult *them,*" I said, laughing ; " they are not his kind ! "

In my heart I realized, nevertheless, that those same blackguards did the Republican candidates a lot of harm. I have noticed since that the most terrible enemies of those who at elections represent ideas of progress, are the people of doubtful repute who exhibit themselves under colour of supporting them. The best programmes, the best candidates, are disgraced by such contact ; a certain discredit is reflected upon them in the minds of those, who, like nine-tenths of the peasants and myself, base their opinion upon the degree of respect which they feel for the apostles of the various ideas in the country.

All day on Saturday, I was torn by contrary feelings ; but on Sunday I returned to my first resolution : I put my voting paper in the ballot box, for the Republican. That was my way of thanking the new Government for having reduced salt to two sous.

But think of it ! When they made us vote again, six months after, for the President of the Republic, I did not act according to the same principles. All the influential people, the landowners, the stewards, the great farmers, the priests, were charged to say and repeat everywhere that the countrymen ought to give their votes for Napoleon,

while the others only busied themselves with the workmen in the towns. Among all the groups of farm labourers who collected on Sundays after Mass, on the Place de l'Eglise, or at the Town Hall, the election was the topic of conversation.

"My master says that if a Rèpublican was made President, wheat would sell for only twenty sous the measure——"

"Mine has said the same thing," took up another. "The Republicans want those in the towns to get their bread for nothing." "They will lower the price of meat, too, you may be sure." "We shall not be able any longer to live by working on the land."

These clamours spread widely and influenced us: like my neighbours, I voted for Napoleon.

XX

AFTER having lived at La Billette for six years, my parents were obliged to leave, the relations between them and M. and Mme. Boutry had become impossible. They went to the other extremity of the Commune of St. Menoux, on the Montilly side.

My father did not live long at the new farm. In the month of January, 1849, two months after he had gone there, they came to tell me he was seriously ill. I went to see him the next day, and found him very emaciated and broken down, and in a high fever, which flushed his wrinkled cheeks above his long beard.

"My poor lad, I am done for," he said. "Never mind, I am very glad to see you again before I die——"

For a long time he looked at me with his wet eyes; I could scarcely keep from weeping.

The poor man was not mistaken: he died three days after, at dawn, a sad, snowy dawn.

I mourned sincerely for him, for, since I had been able to judge him dispassionately with my full reason, I had realized that he was a good fellow to whom life had not been tender: his brother had lived at his expense, his masters had devoured his substance, his wife had bullied him. It was only in the rare prolonged sittings at the public-house that he had found any pleasure.

My sister Catherine, who was married to Grassin, was unable to attend the funeral; for she was in a situation in Paris, with her husband.

* * * * * *

After this death there was a further revolution in the household. For some time my mother had been at daggers-drawn with Louis and his wife, and tried to set my godfather against them, with the object of separating the two families. But in spite of occasional disagreements, my two elder brothers got on fairly well; they reckoned they could get on still better together than separately, as long as their children were not grown up. Therefore my mother rented a poor cottage on the road to Autry, at the entrance of the market town of St. Menoux, and into this she retired, to live the life which women live who are alone and without resources: to glean, to take in washing, to do all the disagreeable and hard tasks which come their way. As long as she was able to work, she allowed the few hundred francs which was her all, to lie untouched in her cupboard.

Marinette remained with my brothers; they kept her, partly out of charity, but also because she was useful to them.

The poor idiot had, in fact, a great love for the sheep and made a very good shepherdess, except that she was unable to count them on her return. She could spin, and do certain kinds of field work. In short, she earned her

living. As to clothes, she needed very few, for she never went out of the limited territory of the holding.

XXI

VICTOIRE, pregnant a second time, gave us a little daughter. Fortunately our affairs were not in a bad way. Old Giraud was entirely repaid, I paid my rent regularly and had a few hundred-sou pieces saved. But success did not make me work less hard, far from it; on the contrary, it gave me satisfaction and therefore encouragement. When it was possible, I continued to work outside my holding. I had found a certain and permanent occupation to work at during bad weather. This was at the quarry of Pied de Fourche, behind the church, at the east end of the town; there I broke stones for a contractor who made roads. I went to this task, to which I could go at my own convenience when I had finished my morning's grooming, and I returned in time for that of the evening. In the spring I took my food with me and remained later.

At times we were as many as twenty stone-breakers in a row, each working kneeling on a rag mat, in the shelter of a hurdle of straw. From our stone-yard we looked over the whole town: only the towers of the castle on the opposite hill were as high as we were, the roofs of the highest houses were lower; the main street especially, seemed to us like a precipice, and we were tempted to pity the inhabitants of the town for their want of air. To tell the truth, when we had time to breathe, we felt ourselves caressed by the healthy breezes of the country and the forest, we who might well have been objects of pity, for there is not much recreation about stone-breaking. Being always in one position and bent, our legs stiffened

at the joints, and our hands were torn by contact with the too small holly-wood handles of our hammers. We were often overwhelmed by monotony and weariness.

My right-hand neighbour took snuff, and when we appproached each other, he would often throw me his snuff-box, from which I would take very small pinches, in order to do as the others did, clear my head by sneezing. But little by little I acquired a taste for tobacco, and I got a *queue-de-rat* for myself, and had it filled; Victoire was annoyed, and said that we were not so rich that I need put money in my nose, and also that it was disgusting. But her remarks were in vain: my new-born passion was already too strong.

And tobacco was not all. This work near to the town led to other expenses which I carefully concealed from my wife. To get to the stone-yard, I had to pass the house of the contractor, who kept an inn near by. When he chanced to see me arrive in the morning, he never failed to call out:

"Hullo, Tiennon! Come along and 'kill the worm,'" which meant drink a glass of spirits. He offered to stand treat, I could do no less in my turn; it meant that two glasses were drunk and four sous spent.

When we had our meal, there was a new attack: there would always be one of my companions who would say:

"How dry this wretched bread is! If we only had the price of a quart!" By contributing three sous each, we got a quart between four. That glass of wine certainly did us good, but three sous tells in a daily wage of fifteen or twenty!

On pay-days we had to drink again. I had not the courage to refuse, for fear of being considered a cad and being pointed out, but these abnormal expenses worried me; and besides, in spite of my precautions Victoire had got wind of the thing, and I saw that it could not go on.

I realized then what a real calamity it is for the workers

in towns and cities to have too many opportunities. Although they earn more than we do, they are not better off, for gradually they find it natural to spend a little sum every day at the inn, and that adds up at the reckoning. They are more to be pitied than blamed. I know that in the same place I should not have acted differently. But I resolved to fly from the contagion and to seek work elsewhere.

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That was how in the winter of 1850, I took to clearing, in the direction of Cæsar, a portion of a field of brushwood and putting it under cultivation. There it was real country; I earned perhaps a little less than at the quarry, but I benefited in the end, for my only debauch was to draw from my snuff-box. It was in this place that I happened to be duped through my credulity. One March day when the sun was shining—it was very warm even then—among some roots of broom I found a viper just awaking from its winter sleep. Since my boyhood I have had no more fear of reptiles; I watched it moving about for a minute, then I hailed M. Raynaud, a baker of the town, who was supplying himself with faggots from the debris of thorn and juniper which he had bought for his stove.

"Come here and see this fine viper, Monsieur Raynaud. It is already half awake."

The baker came near, examined it and said:

"The devil! More than *half* awake; it wriggles about at a fine rate." After he had looked at it leisurely, he went on in a tone half serious, half teasing:

"You ought to take it alive to the druggist: he would give you at least a hundred sous for it."

"You are chaffing me, Monsieur Raynaud?"

"My faith, no! I assure you that the druggists use them to make their drugs and they buy all that are taken to them."

The faggot makers approached : I questioned the group with my eyes.

" M. Raynaud is right," said one, " I am sure they buy them, sure."

" It is the first time I have heard that," said another.

" And I," said I.

" Well, you try," said the baker. " Take it alive and you will see that he will pay you a hundred sous and maybe more."

" It isn't easy to carry it alive——"

" Put it in your can."

" That is an idea : if I could be certain of selling it for a hundred sous, I would take it in the can and throw it away and buy a new one."

To convince me, M. Raynaud affirmed it a third time.

" When I tell you it is the truth ! "

Although it was not dinner time I ate my soup quickly, without even taking time to warm it ; then with the aid of a split stick of nutwood, I seized the reptile and pushed it with a good deal of trouble into my empty can, on which I put the lid quickly. The baker and the faggot-maker watched me and laughed.

" You'll stand a drink, old man," he said, as he disappeared. " I've made you earn your day's pay. Be sure you tell the druggist that you come from me."

Rejoicing at this piece of good luck, I left my work earlier than usual and called at the house to put on my clean clothes. When I told my wife about the adventure, she cried out :

" Take it out of the house at once. The nasty beast—suppose it should lift the lid and slip in among the furniture ! " She added : " They can make you believe any silly thing, you imbecile ! You will have a new can to buy for your trouble—another twenty-five or thirty sous. I don't want to see that thing any more, do you hear ? Throw it in the ditch, do what you like with it, but don't bring it back."

My face lengthened ; I began to think that my wife was right. I pretended to be absolutely certain of returning with my hundred-sou piece. So I went boldly to the druggist.

" Good evening, Monsieur Bardet."

" Good evening, my friend, good evening. What can I do for you ? "

" Monsieur Bardet, I have been told that you buy living vipers—it was M. Raynaud who told me. I found one in the clearing and have brought it."

" Oh, yes ! I buy them. M. Raynaud is quite right."

He lifted down a big blue bottle.

" See, there are three of them here ; the one you have brought makes four. If you find any more, bring them to me ; I will take them all at five sous each."

I made an involuntary movement and felt that I became pale.

" How much, Monsieur Bardet ? "

" Five sous."

" M. Raynaud told me a hundred sous——"

The druggist smiled in his grey beard.

" Raynaud is a little facetious ; you evidently don't know him. A hundred sous for twenty, he meant to say."

" I have let myself be made a fool of then, I shall have to buy a new can ; I shall be the loser by this. . . . Ah well ! I wish I hadn't brought it."

M. Bardet seemed sorry to see me so vexed.

" Well ! This should teach you not to believe everybody. But you are mistaken, your can is not dirty. See, I will give you something to disinfect it. Dissolve a little of this white powder in a quart of boiling water. After you have cleaned it with this liquid, you may use it quite safely ; it will be as clean as ever."

The powder cost three sous ; I had twenty centimes to pocket. But I had reckoned without Victoire, who swore that the can was of no more use, and threatened to break it

herself instead of cleaning it. So I had to return to the town in the evening, where I bought a cheaper one from the ironmonger's at twenty-five sous. It was not nearly so good as the old one.

I have often made people laugh at my expense when I have told them about that adventure, and I amused myself by imagining some comic episodes intended to make it still more funny. But I bore the baker a grudge, especially as he tried to have me again the next time he saw me.

"Well, Bertin, how about that viper?"

"Well, Monsieur Raynaud, I shall never believe you again; you are a thorough liar."

"What! didn't the druggist want it?"

"Yes, but instead of a hundred sous, he paid me five."

"Five sous? Well, that was what I told you; you misunderstood me."

And he went away laughing.

XXII

From time to time I used to see Fauconnet, whose hair had whitened and whose shaven face, with its wrinkles and perpetual grimace, wore a hideous expression. When he crossed Les Craux, going to Meillers, he would stop and speak to me, and I forced myself to appear amiable, in spite of the contempt I felt for him.

One time it happened that his servant was ill and he came to ask me to take his place. It was after the August harvest and there was not much to do on the holding: so I agreed. When one is poor it is necessary to take work where one can get it, even with employers whom one considers to be scoundrels.

In this daily intimacy I got a near view of that upstart-farmer, who was on the eve of becoming a big landed

proprietor. At home he was coarse, eccentric, sullen, and grumbling. He used to wander about aimlessly from kitchen to stable, from stable to garden, untidy in dress smoking his pipe, yawning, never troubling to do any work. While I stayed in that house, I learned to realize the miserable side of idleness, which is truly not enviable. Work is often painful, hard, oppressive, but still it is interesting, and the best antidote to tedium. Fauconnet was terribly bored. He was always bickering with his wife and the servant, to whom he made contemptuous remarks or unreasonable reproaches. At times he would pour into himself great bumpers of brandy, seeking in alcoholic excitement a remedy for his bad humour and idleness. He was pleasant enough to me ; he would call me into the kitchen to have a glass in the morning, but at meal times he never gave me any wine, pretending that working men ought not to get used to it.

He was a different man when he went out. He was proud of his fast horses and very particular that they should be carefully groomed, that the carriages should always be clean and the harness bright. Astride his horse or in his carriage, he was a public man, Fauconnet, the rich farmer, conscious of his power. He went to the fairs, where he knew he was looked at, envied, respected by the merchants, bowed low to by the workers. Or, even when he went round his own estate to give orders, to arrange the coming sales or to flirt with the young *métayères*, who dared not refuse anything to the master, although he was old and more than ugly. He never spent a whole day without going out.

Only once did I see him cheerful at home : that was the Sunday when the hunting began. He had invited to dinner five or six of his friends, with whom he had been hunting in the morning ; also his eldest son, the doctor, who had just established himself at Bourbon. That was a spree with a vengeance, a real debauch. I had to wait at

table, which I did awkwardly enough, for it was a novelty to me; but even my clumsiness was of use, since it gave the guests occasion to laugh. And that was all they wanted, occasions to laugh. After they had eaten and drunk hard, they told each other ribald stories; accounts of orgies of love and fraud. They talked also about their *métayers*, at whom they railed for their stupidity and submission, and of their tenants, whom they flattered themselves they had made to swallow improbable lies. I realized that they considered themselves to be very superior people, ruling the rest of humanity with all the weight of their big bellies, with all the breadth of their red faces. The young doctor only was apparently not amused. He had settled down in a house of his own next to the Thermal Institute, and he visited his father's house very seldom. His two brothers also made short and rare appearances.

"They have not got their father's habits; they are not his sort," the servant said to me.

I concluded that they, too, most likely considered themselves to be superior men, superior to this farmer who was their father, and to his friends, whom they no doubt despised, for there are no men to whom the word "imbecile" cannot be applied by men still more superior. There is some consolation in that for the men who are not superior at all.

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When the servant was well enough to return to his duties, as I had some time at my disposal, Fauconnet kept me to work with the threshing machine on his Bourbon estate. That was the introduction of the threshing machine in that district: after hesitating a long time, the farmers had finally decided to use it. They continued to provide a third of the hands, as at the time of threshing with the flail. (They have since freed themselves from that over-

costly obligation and now allow the *métayers* to have entire charge of the hand labour.)

The threshing was begun at La Chapelle, the estate on the road to Saint Plaisir. We were all very inexperienced and a little afraid of working round the monster, whose wheels turned so quickly. But the work was not so hard as it is now, because of the very moderate pace at which the engineers worked the machine: they were not long, however, in becoming familiar with it.

The women were the most perplexed, they had never had so many people to feed; now they have got used to it; they buy great quantities of meat and cook it in large stew-pans; there is soup for everybody, and in enormous dishes stews in proportion. But at that time the housewives had been too poor for fifty years to think of such things, and yet the ordinary cooking did not seem good enough for strangers. They continued to plan together (at least, those of Fauconnet's three domains did) and this is what happened:

At La Chapelle, for the morning meal they served *galette* (a flaked pastry cake) and *tourtons* (pasties). I have always had a great liking for our country pastry, these were fresh and better than usual; I can tell you I regaled myself. But at the midday meal they had again *galette* and *tourtons* only, and the same in the evening. At each meal I found it less and less good; my appetite diminished, and it was the same with my companions. I expected that there would be something new the next day, soup, haricots, something, anything. But disenchantment came. When I arrived in the morning, I noticed that the fire flamed in the oven, and I saw a new pile of *galettes* and *tourtons* that they had prepared for cooking. At the three meals of that day, they gave us nothing else. The warmth and the dust always made us thirsty, but this heavy pastry put the finishing touch to our thirst, and disgusted us. Our worn-out stomachs rebelled. I could not relish anything I ate

in the evening I went out without sitting down to the table and many of the others did the same. As we were going to another farm the next day, I believed the obsession would cease : nothing of the kind ! The pastry abounded more than ever ; *tourton* in the morning and *galette* at midday. It was too much ; everybody demanded milk, old milk, even skimmed milk ; milk, no matter what kind.

The housekeeper consented to go round with her milk-pan, but she was evidently uncomfortable, she did not like to serve us with such common food as milk. However, it was such a success that she had to go round three times with her pan to satisfy us all. But the *métayère* did not take the hint : at the next meal the table was spread as usual with the inevitable *galettes* and *tourtons*. I ate nothing at all ; I felt I should be quite ill. Then I went to see Fauconnet and told him I could not work any longer at the machine. The food at home, the onion soup, the rye bread and cheese, seemed better after that experience.

XXIII

One December evening when there was snow and hard frost, the capons began to crow. It was at the end of the evening towards nine o'clock. I was getting ready for bed.

" What is it they want to announce, the dirty beasts ? " said Victoire, trembling in every limb.

" No good, you may be sure," I answered, in a brusque voice in which fear showed.

We were both convinced that the crowing of cocks at sunset and up till midnight was an evil omen : it is the time for sleep, they should be silent.

On reflection, this infringement of rule on the part of the poor fowls ought to seem quite natural to us, for as they

never go out of the dark stable they gradually lose the feeling of time. But we did not think of that and were troubled, because in our childhood we had seen misfortune follow a similar occasion. Besides, in the deep silence of the winter evening, the shrill crowings had a melancholy sound, especially when they were multiplied : the Viradons' cock replied to ours, then some from the neighbouring cottages joined in, and for half an hour there was a concert of piercing modulations, as though it had been the hour before dawn.

When the songs were at an end, Victoire suckled our little Charles (we had a third child, two months old), but she was trembling all the time ; she trembled still more after she had gone to bed. That night we had a troubled sleep, and we decided that the unlucky fowls should be sold as soon as possible.

* * * * * *

It chanced during the months that followed, that all kinds of misfortunes came to us. Since I have grown older, I have been free from a good many of the superstitions of my youth ; but because of that incident I have always retained my fear of cocks crowing after sunset.

In the corner of my stable I had a reserve store of potatoes. The best of my two cows got loose one night, and greedily swallowed a big potato and choked herself. In the morning I discovered her lying on her back, in the throes of death, her legs twitching in short plunges of agony. The potato remained in the œsophagus, it obstructed her breathing, and my attempts to push it down were vain ; vain also were the desperate struggles of the poor beast, who had no wish to die. Nothing was left for us to do but to go for the butcher, who gave me thirty francs for her : I had relied on selling her for three hundred francs at the end of the winter.

I remember that my wife wanted to buy some clothes for our little Jean and to make me a new overcoat and a smock. But we had to postpone such abnormal expenses till times were better, especially as that was not the end of our troubles. A little later, a pig, which weighed at least a hundred and fifty pounds, died. Then the cow that I had bought to replace the poor strangled one caused me a lot of trouble.

On account of the children, Victoire had quite ceased to carry the milk to the town : she had begun to make butter. But it was impossible to make butter from the cream which we got from that cow. We spent hours working the churn ; our arms ached with moving the beater up and down : nothing happened. One evening I got angry : without interruption, from six o'clock till midnight, I worked the beater in the watery liquid ; I succeeded in exhausting myself, in making my shirt wet, in staving in the churn, but not in making butter. The next day I told old Viradon about it and he said it was a spell. A similar mishap had happened to him in his youth ; he had sought a *défaiseux de sorts* (a person who removes spells) who gave him the following advice :

" To go, a little before midnight, to the cross roads at the Place de l'Eglise and to put there a new pot containing six sous' worth of cream ; to turn twelve times round the pot while twelve o'clock was ringing, and to drag at the end of a cord six feet long the chains which are used to fasten the cows ; at the twelfth turn, to stop sharply, to make the sign of the cross four times in four different directions and then run off at a great pace, leaving the pot and bringing away the chains.

" To cut from each beast a bunch of hair, from the head, from the mane and from the tail ; to soak them in the drinking trough every day during Holy Week before sunrise ; to carry them to Mass on Easter Day and burn them in the fire without being seen."

" I have done that with complete success," concluded Viradon, " but the *défaiseux* has to do his part, too."

In spite of my worries, I shook with foolish laughter as I listened to the good man telling me, with a convinced air, the details of the bizarre ceremonies which he had been made to perform. I fancied I could see him turning round his pot, and clanking his chains.

The *défaiseux* was dead ; but he had left to his son the secret of his power, and my old neighbour urged me strongly to go to him. I refused, however, not having faith in such nonsense.

Victoire went to the priest to tell him our troubles. He came the next day, asperged the stable with holy water, and told us not to have any fear of sorcerers.

" It is simply that your cow has milk of a bad quality," he concluded ; " she is in an advanced state of gestation ; improve her food, give her each day a little salt in her ration of meal and you will find she will get better."

We followed the priest's advice and found that we could make some bad butter, which improved quite naturally when, in the good weather, our cows went out to pasture on Les Craux, and when they had new milk. If we were to take into account all that we ought, I don't think we should have much occasion to believe in spells.

* * * * * *

Towards the end of the winter, to close this series of calamities, we had an alarm still more serious, and on that occasion it was necessary, as a last resource, to find a healer.

Our little Charles was suddenly attacked by a serious illness of the throat ; he refused the breast ; his breathing was hoarse, then rattling. Victoire carried him first to the midwife, then to the doctor, but he showed no sign of getting better, rather the reverse. But, on the road to Agonges, there lived a man who treated children for

diseases of the throat; people went to him from all the communes of the canton and even from other places: he had cured babies despaired of by the doctors. One evening the little one seemed so much worse that we decided to take him to the healer there and then.

It was a sad journey. I carried the little invalid in my arms on a pillow covered with an old shawl; Victoire followed weeping; in the silence of the night our footsteps had a mournful sound on the dry, frosty ground. About ten o'clock we had the satisfaction of knocking at the door of the healer, who opened it to us: he was a little old man with an insignificant face; he was attired in cotton drawers and nightcap. He muttered some prayers, made signs all over the child's body, anointed his neck with a kind of grey ointment, and breathed in his mouth three times. This strange scene was lighted by a poor, smoky lamp. I was greatly impressed. Victoire wept silently all the time, After he had finished the man said:

"He will be better to-morrow; you did not bring him any too soon, though. As soon as he is well you must go and burn a candle before the altar of the Virgin."

When we asked him what his fee was, he said:

"I never charge poor people anything: however, I have a box here in which each may put what he wishes."

He took from the mantelpiece a small square box of fumed wood with a slit in the lid: I slipped twenty sous into it and we went away in haste, being uneasy about the two elder children, whom we had left asleep in the shut-up house.

The healer was quite right. Towards morning the baby vomited some watery matter which was like hard phlegm, and at once took the breast. Two days later he was entirely recovered.

I have often wondered, without being able to find any answer, if that cure was a natural result, or if the grimaces of that old man really did have any effect. I know that a number of people, very sceptical, very level-headed, who

fear nothing, even to-day have recourse to these country healers, to have their teeth regulated, or to get them to make prayers when they have sprains of the foot or wrist. And many have declared that they have been relieved. With such examples, one may well be perplexed, differing equally from those who affirm and those who mock. I am still perplexed.

XXIV

ONE day at Bourbon fair, during the Carnival of 1853, my father-in-law drew me apart in the Place de la Mairie, where I was talking to some men, to tell me that he was in a position to get me engaged as *métayer* on an estate in Franchesse, his original commune : he knew the steward very well, they had been friends when they were children.

I had been considering for some time whether I should take a farm, for I realized that if I stayed where I was, I should have to let my children be hired out as soon as they were old enough to take charge of animals, and I disliked the idea of that. I should have preferred to have waited a few years ; however, on reflection, I thought it better not to lose this chance. The following Sunday old Giraud and I went to see the farm in question. It was situated between Bourbon and Franchesse, two hundred yards from the road which joined the two communes. It was called La Creuserie. It was part of the property of M. Gorlier, who was known as " De la Buffière," the name of the neighbouring mansion where he lived during the summer. The estate comprised five other farms : Baluftière, Praulière, Le Plat-Mizot, Upper La Jarry, and Lower La Jarry, a holding called Les Fouinats, and the steward's house, which was close to the Hall.

The name of the steward was M. Parent. He was a man of middle height, with a very large head and a fringe

of grey beard; his protruding eyes gave him an air of being constantly astonished; his thick lower lip hung down, uncovering his broken teeth, and allowing a continual jet of saliva to dribble. He said at once, that out of consideration for my father-in-law, he would engage me as a *métayer*, although the fact that I would be working alone would be a disadvantage. He showed us the farm buildings, which were old and not very comfortable, and he took us to see all the plots of land and the meadows. When we returned to the house he stated the conditions.

Two thousand francs would be needed to pay the lease of cattle, but they would be satisfied with half that amount; they would add the interest at five per cent. on the remainder to the fixed annual tax of four hundred francs, and, for the liquidation, there would be a reserve on the profits. I should have to do all the carting for the Hall and the property; my wife would be obliged to give as rent, six fowls, six capons, twenty pounds of butter: the turkeys and the geese should be divided equally. The master would reserve to himself the right to alter the terms or to dismiss us any year, with this reservation, that we should have at least nine months' notice.

Afterwards M. Parent began to speak about the proprietor, whom he called M. de la Buffière, or more often M. Frédéric and for whom he seemed to have a great respect.

"M. Frédéric does not wish the *métayers* to address him directly. You must always speak to me or ask me for what you consider necessary. M. Frédéric insists that you shall always be respectful, not only to himself but to his staff: he has made me give the present holders notice because they have spoken rudely to Mlle. Julie, the cook. M. Frédéric will not have the game touched: if he found that anyone had set a trap or been shooting, that would mean instant dismissal. When he hunts he never likes to have anyone about in his way: the work must be stopped if necessary: also you must see that the

butter for your rent is of good quality, and the fowls very fat, in order to satisfy Mlle. Julie."

In reply to a question which my father-in-law asked he answered in a low tone that Mlle. Julie was not only the housekeeper, but also the mistress of M. Frédéric, who was a bachelor. That was why we must humour her, for her influence over him was considerable.

I did not know very well what to think of M. Frédéric. According to the steward, who, however, spoke of him as a very good man, he appeared to be an impossible potentate, whose slightest wish must be obeyed. That alarmed me somewhat.

I asked M. Parent to let me have eight days to think it over, which he agreed to. During that time I tried to get Victoire's opinion, no easy matter, for she did her best not to give any opinion. "Oh! do as you like," she said, with her coldest, most weary, indifferent manner, "it is all the same to me."

She was very angry because she was again pregnant: that made her unapproachable. One day when I insisted more than usual, she made a semblance of assent.

"Bless me! if that farm pleases you, take it, that's all."

"But will it please you if I take it?"

"Me! Oh, I might as well be there as anywhere."

I could have beaten her. I decided, nevertheless, to give a favourable answer, and at Martinmas, 1853, we settled down at La Creuserie.

XXV

Our house had two rooms of equal size connected by an inside door: these were the kitchen and the bedroom. The floor was lower than the yard, into which both rooms opened, through great ogival doors darkened by the

inclement weather and strongly bound with iron. In the kitchen, a kind of concrete had been laid at some former time: but that had become delapidated, and there was little left but a quantity of sharp stones showing their noses from one end to the other of the room; in sweeping we dragged away more and more of the cement which had joined them, but they remained there, fixed. In the bedroom was the natural soil, sunk in the middle, uneven under the furniture, with little humps and holes everywhere. The ceiling matched the room: it was of boards, low and delapidated, and supported by great joists very near each other and covered with white mustiness; and in each room, an enormous roughly-cut beam rested upon a vertical post.

Grains of wheat and oats escaped from the granary, and came through the open joints of the boards, and the rats laid up stores on the beams. The light entered only through narrow windows with four small panes; in winter, when it was dark and the cold prevented us from keeping the outside door open, it was difficult to see, even in full daylight. The kitchen was the common room, where we did all the principal work. At the entrance, on the left, was the kneading-trough, and above, the rack with its arches of wood, to separate the big loaves of the batch when they were placed there side by side; on the right, there was a chest for the soiled clothes, then another chest, also a chest of drawers; in the middle reigned the great massive oak table that we had bought at a sale; there was a seat at either side on which we sat at meal-times. Finally, at the end of the room, stood a clock between two beds: our bed was in the corner, nearest to the fire, as is the custom, and on the other side was the servant's. To the left, in the wall at the gable-end, the stone fireplace projected wide and high; above the fire, the mouth of the oven showed its black hole. The bedroom was cleaner and less smoky: my wife had placed there her

wardrobe and the new beds which we had had to buy to accommodate the staff.

The house faced the sun at nine o'clock, but it was much later before it shone on the threshold, because of the proximity of the barn and stables, which were built in front and parallel to it fifteen yards distant at most. In the space between the two blocks of buildings, were the drains from the stables, and these formed a kind of dark, stagnant pool on which floated husks of wheat from threshing-time until the middle of winter. Near to that we also stored the sheep-manure, which we used for manuring in the spring-time. Beyond, in that space, was a wooden trough, long and rather deep, from which the pigs fed, and an old wheel placed horizontally on two posts served as a night perch for the geese. The carts not in use were often there, and along the walls were the minor tools, sticks, and goads; some waste straw and wood, stones and broken tiles were scattered here and there.

The farm was situated on the ascending part of the valley, almost at the highest point, which gave us a magnificent view, from the top of the granary staircase at the gable end of the house. The valley extended over a good part of the Commune of Bourbon, of Saint Aubin, and Ygrande, and was like a gigantic amphitheatre. On the upper parts of these slight undulations could be seen distinctly, green, russet, or greyish fields encircled by thorn-hedges; others only half showed, just enough to let one know that they were fallow land, stubble or pasture; and in the low-lying parts were important spaces where one only saw the trees which enclosed them and which seemed very near each other, almost joining. At the extremity of a great meadow, a copse showed its mysterious little square. Lines of giant poplars could be seen in some places, and at wide intervals in the fields, between the hedges among the trees, ruined buildings of a cottage or

a farm were visible; those were the domains of Baluftière, Praulière, and Plat-Mizot, arranged in a triangle quite near; Upper La Jarry and Lower La Jarry were a little further off, then some others whose names I did not know, some more a long way off, of which I knew nothing, and finally, at the other extremity of the valley, was a thin block of buildings that was the little town of Saint Aubin. Beyond, one could see also, like a great sombre ribbon, the forest of Gros-Bois; still further on, other valleys, other villages; even beyond known distances, one could see standing out black masses against the blue of the heavens, a line of peaks which they said were the mountains of Auvergne.

Beyond our house was a narrow valley, where beautiful meadows succeeded each other as far as the eye could reach; then a little hill which towered above us, and upon which we could see the town of Franchesse, with its small square belfry.

The first days of our installation, the country appeared wrapped in mist; afterwards I saw it in its winter dress, then, with the cornfields naked, washed by the rain or spangled with frost, then, when the hedges were like mourning-borders round great skeleton trees: I saw them, all white under the snow, disguised as if for a masquerade; I saw them awaken, fluttering in the cool April breezes, showing, little by little, their magnificence, all the whiteness of their flowers, all the greenness of their leaves; I saw them in the full sunshine of summer; then, as the harvest introduced its golden note into the accentuated verdure, they appeared prostrated as in deep sleep; I saw them when the leaves took on their red tints, which is their time of white hair, and which precedes their peaceful death, their contact with the earth from which all comes and to which all returns: I saw them in the royal purple of beautiful sunsets, and then darken slowly and as if with reluctance: I saw them at last as in a dream, bathed in

the vague mystery of clear moonlight. And how many times when contemplating them have I said to myself:

"There are people who travel, who go very far, for ambition, or necessity, or pleasure, to satisfy their taste, or because they are obliged: they have the faculty of being in ecstasy before varied scenery. But how many others see always the same thing! For how many life holds its all in a valley like this; in less, even; in only one of the undulations, in one of the recesses perhaps of that valley! How many people, down the ages, have grown, loved, suffered, in each of the habitations which one can see from here, or in those which have been there before, upon that expanse of fertile country! How many even have never gone so far as to one of the points where the sky lowers!"

This thought consoled me for not knowing anything outside the two cantons of Souvigny and Bourbon. I came to find some charm in the varied aspects of my familiar landscapes: I found even a certain pride in the possession of that vast horizon, and I pitied the inhabitants of the low-lying places.

XXVI

M. PARENT, the steward, often came to see us and was very liberal with his advice. But his advice about cultivation was neither very interesting nor first class. He always returned to the subject of M. Frédéric's habits and how we ought to behave to him when he came back.

It was June when the master came to live at La Buffière. By a chance which was no doubt calculated, he paid his first visit to us in the evening, when we were all together at supper in the kitchen. M. Parent accompanied him. I rose and made a sign to the others to do the same, and

I left my seat and went towards the visitors. M. Gorlier eyed me from head to foot.

"Is this the *métayer?*" he asked the steward.

"Yes, M. Frédéric, it is."

"He is very young. . . . The wife?"

"That is me, Monsieur," said Victoire, approaching.

"Ah! You don't look very strong?"

"She has had three children," said M. Parent, in a timid voice. (The fourth, born prematurely, had not lived.)

M. Frédéric asked us our ages, my wife's and mine, and questioned us about our upbringing. We were both very nervous in the presence of this powerful and formidable man we were sick of hearing about. He saw that we were nervous and took the trouble to speak in a friendly tone:

"Don't be afraid. Good Heavens! I don't eat people. Parent has told me that you are very well-meaning and that you work well. Go on like that and we shall agree all right. To obey and to work, that is your business; I don't ask anything else. For instance, don't plague me about repairs. It is a principle of mine not to do any. And now, good evening. Sleep well, my good people."

He spoke slowly, rolling his r's a little; his small grey eyes blinked constantly; his complexion was a deep red, almost violet; his beard was short and thin, but was blacker than his hair, although he was over sixty. (I found out after that the black was not real; he dyed it.) His face, in spite of the look of good health it revealed, was disagreeable and wearied. Those who have played with all the pleasures rarely look happy.

M. Gorlier often came to see us, sometimes at the house, sometimes in the fields. He would come, playing with his stick, chat for a moment about the weather and the work, then go off again. But he was never polite as he was the first evening. Like Fauconnet, he "thee'd and thou'd"

everybody, and as he had no memory for names, he invariably addressed the person he was speaking to as " What's your name."

" Well, What's your name, do you like this weather ? " " Mother What's your name, we will soon be taking two of your chickens for rent."

Mlle. Julie, the cook-mistress, a fresh-coloured woman, already mature, with white skin and desirable figure, came one evening to ask for the two chickens which Victoire had been specially fattening for several weeks. She weighed them, felt them, and deigned to say that she was satisfied.

" You must always have them like that, Victoire ; they seem perfect. That is a magnificent cock."

" Yes, Mademoiselle," said I. " Indeed, I wish it was my belly that was going to be his cemetery."

The big woman noticed the remark.

" What did you say ? " she asked.

I turned pale, fearing that I had displeased her.

" Go on, say it again ! "

" Mademoiselle, I said that I wished my belly was going to serve as a cemetery for that fellow there. It is a saying of the country, which I used in joke ; you need not be vexed : I know well enough that fowls are not for me."

Mlle. Julie burst out laughing, frankly.

" I shall remember that saying, Tiennon, and I'll serve it up to others whom it will amuse, you may be sure. I've never heard it before."

She repeated it without delay to M. Frédéric, for he said the next time he saw me :

" What's your name, you have some capital sayings ; my friends Granval and Decaumont are coming on a visit shortly : I shall bring them to see you, and you must try to think of some curious things like the one you told Mlle. Julie the other day about the cock."

He kept his word. Several times during August, he came in the evening with the two gentlemen. They

arrived smoking their pipes, while we were at supper and sat down and watched us.

"Talk, my good people, don't take any notice of us," they said each time.

But we could do nothing of the kind, you may be sure. We spoke only to answer them when they addressed us directly. The servants, who slept in the room, were able to escape as soon as they had finished eating, but I had to serve them with amusement until ten or eleven o'clock. It mattered little to them how late they went to bed; they were able to get up late. It mattered little to them that I lost my sleep, though I had to be up at four o'clock as usual. And it was simply, as I say, to make me serve them with sport that they settled themselves in my house. They made me talk, only that they might laugh at my incorrect speech, at my simple and awkward replies. If I said anything with seemed specially comic to them, M. Decaumont would bring out his notebook.

"I must make a note of that," he would say. "I will use it for some of the rural scenes in my next novel."

Mlle. Julie came one day and I ventured to ask her why M. Decaumont wrote down the uncouth things which I said in spite of myself. She said that he was a great man, whose business it was to make books, and that he was celebrated. A great man! A celebrated man! that little fat man with a face like a priest's, and ridiculously long hair, falling upon his shoulders.

"Ah! A celebrated man is like that, is he?" said I.

Mlle. Julie began to laugh.

"Good heavens! Yes, Tiennon, he is much like anybody else, in spite of his cleverness. With his long hair one would take him for a fool instead of a learned man; and he is amused with everything, like a child."

Ah, well! I did not find the actions of this maker of books quite straightforward. I was angry with him for writing down my answers to publish them, so that other

bourgeois like himself might laugh in their turn. Was it my fault that I spoke incorrectly? I spoke as I had learned, that is all. He, who had no doubt remained at school till he was twenty, had learned to turn fine phrases. But I had something else to do during that time. And at that very hour I was employing my faculties otherwise and quite as usefully as he: for earning one's bread is, I suppose, as necessary as writing books. Ah! if I could have seen him working with me, that famous man, digging, mowing, or threshing, I believe that in my turn I should have had occasion to laugh. I have often wished that I could have had all those knaves who jeer at peasants at work in the fields for a few hours, under my direction.

XXVII

I WAS not the only one who served as a target for the amusement of the master and his friends: my neighbour, Primaud of Baluftière, did his share too. I must say that good old Primaud's face at first sight invited ridicule: he had a flat nose, a big, toothless mouth, which opened wide at every turn with a great foolish, noisy laugh, and he had a comic way of looking at the sky with one eye when anyone spoke to him. He was as simple as could be, and anyone who took the trouble could make a fool of him. Finally, he had the peculiarity of being passionately fond of bacon. Now M. Frédéric knew of that peculiarity. Nearly every Sunday morning, under one pretext or another, he sent for his *métayer* to go to the Hall, and he would give him an enormous slice of bacon. He was left alone in the kitchen, and he regaled himself, as they well knew. After a quarter of an hour, the master would join him.

"Have you had enough to eat, Primaud?"

"Oh, yes, M. Frédéric!"

" But there is a big piece of bacon still on the dish ; you mustn't leave that. See, I know you can manage to swallow that." And he would put it on Primaud's plate.

" It is too much, M. Frédéric, my belly is full ! I can't take any more."

" Go on, What's your name, you are joking ; no doubt you are thirsty. Julie, give him a glass of wine."

On his way home, Primaud used to pass through our yard. He would often call at the house or come to see me at the stables.

" Tiennon," he would say to me, " I have had another good feed."

" Ah, so much the better," I would reply. " That's always the same fool-trap ; I wager you have been eating as much bacon as you wanted."

" More than I wanted, old man ! Just imagine, M. Frédéric came in and served me himself with a great piece, with his own hand, you know. I could not refuse, especially as he made them give me some wine."

He felt himself much honoured by this flattering attention. It never occurred to him that in that there was something hurtful to a man's dignity. Perhaps he even considered that the greasy tricklings from the bacon on each side of his mouth were evidences of the attention, and marks of glory. He went home delighted.

But that weekly debauch of my favoured fellow-worker had behind it a sinister motive. Unknown to himself, no doubt, Primaud played the sorry part of informer. Through him M. Gorlier obtained all the information he wanted about the people on his estate, and the inhabitants of the Commune. Three years before, when Napoleon—whom they then called Badinguet—had made a kind of counter revolution in order to get himself styled Emperor, two men of Franchesse had been sent to Cayenne, through, it was said, some careless gossip of the bacon-eater.

The master had made him understand that it would be a very good thing for the country to rid it of those who proclaimed their preference for the Republic; and the poor man was eager to point out all those whom he knew to be wretched Republicans.

One might excuse Primaud, because for his part he was stupid and not spiteful, but I can find no excuse for M. Frédéric for having used such means of getting information, any more than for using his influence afterwards to injure the people of his country.

Having been warned, I distrusted my neighbour, and only told him things that there was no need to hide.

At that time Primaud already went by the name of the "bacon-eater." He has been dead a long time, but the nickname has survived, and there is a kind of legend attached to his name in Franchesse; they still say of anyone who has a great fancy for bacon, "he is a real Primaud."

XXVIII

My life was laborious and fatiguing, but it had its pleasures. Being head of a farm, I felt that I was a kind of small king. My responsibilities caused me anxiety, but I was proud of sitting at the head of the table beside the loaf, from which I cut big slices at the beginning of each meal. Above all, I was proud of having the corner seat, the place of honour in the fireside circle.

I was head cowman, and I helped with the grooming of all the animals. In summer I never missed getting up before daylight for the ploughing or mowing; and before starting on that, I always gave a little bran to the sheep, prepared the pigs' breakfast, and went to see the oxen in the pasture. I was often up an hour before the servants,

but that did not prevent me exerting myself and getting about as quickly as possible at work during the day. Of course I had the direction of the work: the others, in their places behind me, were obliged to regulate their pace according to mine, and I may say without boasting that it was no joke to follow me.

I had had the chance of getting a good servant, a lad of just over twenty, named Auguste; we called him Guste. He was strong and plucky, and worked as hard as I did. The second was a boy of fifteen, half shepherd, half labourer. I also engaged a day labourer for the summer: during the first years this was a certain Father Faure, an old, experienced man and a good worker, but a great gossip and rather slow. He always had some story to tell. I fancied he took that course in order to make us slacken the pace of the work, and take it a bit more easily. One day, having arranged with Guste, I resolved to go on still more quickly than usual, so that there would be no time to talk. When we had mown three swaths in that way, old Faure was obliged to say that it was time to call a truce.

"If we go on like this till midday, we shall cut a cursed lot," said he.

"If the master wants it, we must try," said Guste.

Old Faure went on: "Once at Buchepot, at the Nicolases', we mowed like that three days running. It was big Pierre who was at the head: he did put a good edge on, that brute, he did go at a rate; his brother-in-law could only just keep up with him. The big chap chaffed him, then they got angry. I believe they went so far as to fight. I must say, though, that they had a grudge against each other beforehand; I know all about it. This is what happened——"

He believed that I was going to lean on the handle of my scythe, as usual, to listen to what had passed between big Pierre and his brother-in-law; but, instead, I went

on mowing at the same abnormal rate; and when we were at the end, Guste and I, he was a bit behind.

"Curse it!" he said, "I have caught an ants' nest and spoilt my edge. I once mowed in a meadow where the same thing happened, and we were obliged to hammer them out at the first breakfast."

He turned round and seemed astonished that we were not listening, but were already a long way off. From one swath to another, he got more and more behind. There was one place where, the grass being very hard, we had to sharpen often, which compelled us to slacken. Then Faure believed he could rejoin us; but he would arrive just at the unfavourable moment when we again found the tender grass: we went on quickly, while he pegged away, unable to keep what he had gained.

When the servant brought the soup, old Faure did not want to eat until he had made up for his delay. When he arrived panting, his face streaming, his shirt soaking, our meal was finished. We were rising to go on again. He was furious and pretended that he did not want to eat, but to come with us and do his swath along with us. To make him consent to take his meal, I was obliged to tell him that we would wait for him, which we did, though Guste was very anxious not to. Poor Father Faure sulked for eight days at least, but he was not cured of his mania for telling his reminiscences: twenty times at least he repeated, alluding to the incident of which he had been the victim:

"My scythe might have been better: if I had had the one I broke two years ago, you would not have left me behind, you may be sure."

* * * * * *

But I did not always have the servants on my side. There were painful occasions when I felt that they were

all allied against me: Guste, old Faure, the boy, and the servant; their hard faces expressed discontent, hostility; their looks showed hatred; I felt myself an enemy. That occurred mostly on days when the heat was intense. After the midday meal, they were overcome by fatigue and idleness; they wanted to have a nap. So did I, I should have dearly liked a rest; I was as exhausted and overcome as they were. But I roused myself violently and tried to find encouraging words to drag them along.

"Come along, lads! Let us hurry up and load; it looks stormy; we may get the hay wet."

Sometimes I tried to get at them through their pride:

"We are going to be the last to finish: at Baluftière and Praulière they are more forward than we are; if we want to get it in the same time as Plat-Mizot, we shall have to bestir ourselves."

They would get up, relieving their feelings by great oaths:

"Good God! It is not possible to work in such heat; there is no animal that could stand it."

Faure said:

"I want to do something to get into gaol, to see if it is any worse than here."

As we worked, I strove to cheer them up by telling them silly yarns, and smutty stories, which made the servant blush. They laughed and said even stronger things; the time passed, and the work got done. To be gay, not to spare oneself, that is always the best way to get the most from others.

Sometimes in the course of those trying times of haymaking and harvest, during the hot evenings, we used to see M. Frédéric and his friends drinking beer, seated at a little table placed expressly in the park, in the shade of a group of great trees.

"How well-off they are, the pigs," said Guste, who,

when not in their presence, showed no respect for them.

The others also said disrespectful things, but I kept silence, or even tried to stop them if they went too far. It is always better to say nothing about those under whom one is placed. The poor ought to know how to keep their thoughts to themselves.

To finish one kind of work in order to begin at once on another which is behind, to make the days eighteen hours long, to sleep five or six hours only—a light, uneasy sleep —that is a regimen which is not fattening, but it prevents monotony. Six months each year I followed that regimen to the letter. For after the harvest came the manuring, the ploughing, the sowing; till nearly Martinmas I continued to rise at four o'clock in the morning. The ploughing was particularly hard owing to the situation of the farm on an ascending part of the valley, nearly all the fields were on the slope. Clay mixed with stones predominated. All that made the work hard for the labourer and the oxen. The poor oxen lifted themselves regretfully when we went in the morning twilight to fetch them from the meadow, which was their pasture in September. They were nearly always asleep under the same oak, white masses in the mist of the early dawn, and we had to give them hard prods with the goad to make them move.

"Get up, you jades! Get up, my hearties!"

It was a great trouble to them to have to go out and really it made me feel for them: the pasturage was good; in the meadow there was a great pool of very clear water; the shade from the hedges was wide and fresh. It cost me something to drive them from that Eden, to make them spend long, painful hours dragging the plough up steep fields. I felt that I had to apologize to them sometimes:

"It really is stupid, but it has to be; I, too, would

rather be resting, old chaps; however, I have to work. Let's go on then with a good will."

They had some good times during the winter months, and my work was not quite so hard: I rose as late as five o'clock and went to bed at eight. But the anxieties as the head of a farm are the same at all seasons. At that time it was the question of fodder which occupied me most. One must not give too much, and at the same time one must contrive to fatten the beasts, to give a sufficient ration to the newly-calved cows, to the heifers to be sold in the spring, and also the working oxen, that I did not like to see getting thin. I used to measure my hay loft, taking some points as landmarks, marking off such and such a portion to last up to such and such a time, and in that way I managed never to be taken unawares. But in bad seasons I had to mix a good dose of straw with the daily ration, and even then had great trouble to make it last out; when I saw it diminish rapidly, I used to tremble all the winter with the fear of being in want at the end of the season. If one has to buy fodder even for one month, to feed a lease of cattle numbering twenty-five beasts, the profits of the year are much reduced: I took charge myself of the distribution of it to all the cattle, and on days when they went out I was rarely absent at grooming time. I went very little to the inn, well knowing how the time passes there without being noticed, and that there was a great risk of being late when one got talking to others. The memory of my father's weakness, the battle of Saint-Menoux, which cost me a trial, often haunted me and gave me a salutary fear of debauchery.

My one passion was a pinch of snuff. I increased the early dose. I had already had, since my first installation at La Creuserie, five sous' worth of tobacco each week, and it came gradually up to six sous: I am still at that. At work, when I arrived at the end of a furrow, and would

stop an instant to examine the new one, or if I busied myself looking at the curves with a view either to making them smaller or larger, if possible, then mechanically I drew out my snuff box; in mowing after each swath, Pop!—a pinch: in weeding, when I stopped a moment to straighten myself to breathe, my hand glided into my pocket to find again my *queue de rat*. The worst days were those when my provision was exhausted. That often happened on Saturdays. I dared not, chiefly because of Victoire, send anyone specially to Franchesse to buy tobacco for me, but how long the time seemed and how uncomfortable I was! I wanted to wrangle with everybody; nothing was right.

It was indeed an excusable weakness; but the inward satisfaction that I felt in my work was certainly the best of my pleasures, and the most healthy. To contemplate the returning green of my meadows; to follow passionately in all their phases the growth of my crops and potatoes; to see my pigs improve, my sheep become fat, my cows have good calves; to see my heifers develop normally and become fine; to keep my oxen in good condition in spite of their fatigue, to keep them clean, well-kept, their tails combed so that I could be proud of them, when, in company with the other *métayers* I went to do the ploughing for the château; to fatten duly those I wished to sell; that made my happiness. You must not believe that I thought only of the pecuniary result, the legitimate profit which ought to come back to me from my share of the harvest or the sale of the animals; no! Much of my effort was due to disinterested ambition, the desire to be able to say: "My wheat, my oats, have been commented on. When I take my beasts to the fair they are admired because they are fine. The *métayers* of Baluftière, of Praulière, of Plat-Mizot, are jealous when they see that my oxen are fatter than theirs, and my heifers better."

When I met the neighbours going to or returning from the fairs, or in winter when we repaired the boundary hedges, we always talked about our beasts, and I would try to appear modest.

" Oh ! my calves are not anything great this year. My sheep don't fatten as I expected. My oxen have worked too hard : I shall make nothing of them."

Sometimes the same neighbours would come in for a little while in the evenings. And I would invite them, as is usual, to go round the stables. Then I enjoyed their surprise, and their compliments were very gratifying to me. When, some days before the fairs, we brought the beasts together to weigh them, if strangers admired mine among the others, great was my joy. It became intense if the same thing happened on the day of the fair, and in order to gain still more admiration, I would reply :

" It is not because they have had too much rest, poor fellows : they worked up to the end of the sowing. There are so many expenses one can't do otherwise : they have only eaten two sacks of barley meal and three hundred pounds of oil cake."

" Go on ! You haven't got them like that with nothing," the others would say incredulously.

The fact is, I often lied a bit.

In that way I gained a reputation in the district for being a good cowherd. Some words which M. Parent had used at an inn at Franchesse in the presence of a few big-wigs, were repeated to me. They were :

" The best worker I have is Tiennon of La Creuserie ; he makes the most of his knowledge, and with the beasts, there isn't anyone like him for carefulness."

That speech often returned to my memory and intoxicated me. Often, especially when I was grooming, I have felt the excited fluttering of my heart under my greasy blouse. I expect that is how generals feel after they have gained battles, and, my faith ! it seems to me

that my satisfaction was as legitimate as theirs, and less likely to arouse future remorse: for my success did not exact the sacrifice of human lives.

At other times, in the fields, during spells of work, I would again enjoy that passing fullness of happiness. Above all, it was in mid seasons, in fine weather, when the breeze, caressing like a loving woman, carried scents from afar, aromas from the infinite, healthy breezes dispensing vitality. To be a husbandman, to live in contact with the soil, with the air and wind, filled me with a proud contentment; and I pitied the shopkeepers and artizans, who passed their lives between the four walls of rooms, the industrial workers imprisoned in hot workshops, where the air was vitiated; and the miners who worked underground. I forgot M. Gorlier, M. Parent; I felt myself the true king of my realm, and I found life beautiful.

XXIX

THE birth of our fourth child (the little one was born prematurely and died immediately) had exhausted Victoire. She was often ill, and was much changed and aged. Her face was thin, her cheeks hollow, her tawny paleness was accentuated, and her great black eyes had big blue circles round them. She had frequent attacks, sometimes simultaneously, of colic and painful neuralgia; the latter caused her to wear a handkerchief round her face for several days together. She lived in a perpetual state of irritation, she became more and more absent-minded, and dwelt on the dark side of life. She would enumerate with a bitter laugh and a great profusion of detail, all the annoyances she anticipated.

"We shall have to make the bread on Saturday; and the butter, and pluck the geese: there is no end to it."

Or, sometimes :

" We must do the washing : we have no more clothes. And the bad weather keeps on. Good Heavens, how worrying it is ! "

She lamented in the same strain if one of the children was ill, if the harvest promised badly, if the eggs were not a success, if the garden was short of vegetables, if the cows gave less milk. Everything was a subject for complaint. At meals she never sat at table, but busied herself preparing the food and serving it, or looking after the little ones.

" But, look here, wife, do take time to eat," I would say sometimes.

" Oh ! I have had as much as I want," she would answer.

The fact is, she took nothing but a little clear soup, which she swallowed as she moved about ; I was ashamed of my healthy appetite, of my two dishes of thick soup. On the days when she suffered from her stomach complaint, she *levait ses gognes*,* saying that nothing tempted her. I urged her to make some soup of a better quality for herself, or to cook an egg, but she said she did not want anything, and would take a cup of soup out of the common dish.

Although the servant did the rough work, Victoire still had a great deal to do ; the children, the poultry, the cooking and a good part of the housework, without reckoning, when there was enough milk, the butter and cheese-making ; all this was enough to occupy a more robust person than she. She knew well how to make the most of the commodities which she carried to the Bourbon market every Saturday. She was also very economical, and could be heard scolding the servant when she was wasteful with soap, lights or firewood. Indeed, the poor woman had no easy time.

* A Bourbonnais expression applied to people who are ill and dull and disgusted with things.

Our house was rather in disrepute; they said I hurried the work too much, and that my wife was ill-natured and selfish. For these reasons servants looked at us twice before engaging with us. We were obliged to pay the highest standard wages. Fortunately Victoire was an excellent mother: the little ones seldom suffered from her bad temper. She complained of them, declared they were unbearable; on her bad days she used to say that they would make her head split, but she never beat them. For my part, it was only very rarely that I had the leisure to occupy myself with the children: even on Sundays I hardly found a few minutes to dandle them on my knees; but I can truly say that I was not a churlish father. If, because of our laborious life, they were not overloaded with caresses, coaxings and cuddlings, at least they were not cuffed, and my wife and I had the satisfaction of feeling that they loved us.

* * * * * *

When any of our relatives came to see us, Victoire made an effort to be amiable. Except on the Patron Saint's Day, we rarely had visitors; we never considered old Giraud a visitor. He had retired, and had come to live again at Franchesse, and came to see us frequently. The poor old man had had the painful news of the death of his son, the soldier in Africa; he had succumbed to a bad attack of fever some months before the expiration of his second term of leave, when he had reckoned on returning to France and getting a situation.

My brothers' children came in turns to invite us to their weddings. We were generally forewarned of their visits and made some preparations for them, it being the custom to make a little feasting for guests. When I was not too busy, I would go to St. Menoux for the wedding. I remember one time I forgot myself and got drunk: the

good wine seemed to wrap my brain in a rosy cloud. For the moment I had forgotten my cares ; I was gay, I sang, I danced like the young folk ; all the more as Victoire, who had little taste for going out, was not with me.

One unexpected visit was that made by Grassin and his wife, who were making a tour in the district, after an absence of ten years. One evening at nightfall they and their little boy arrived, and they laughed a great deal at our extreme surprise. I hardly recognized Catherine in the lady wearing a hat, and who looked so well ; and her husband with his shaved face, and his fine cloth garments, was not much like the Grassin of formerly. Their little Georges was refined, lively, and as gentle as could be ; he wanted to play with Jean, Charles and Clementine ; but they, too little used to seeing strangers, were sullen, and avoided him in spite of all our efforts. I spent a happy evening chatting with my sister and my brother-in-law. They went off the next day, for they had only a fortnight's leave, and as they wanted to see all the members of the two families, they could not make a longer stay in each house.

Two or three times the glass-blower from Souvigny, who had married Victoire's elder sister, came with his family. He was a middle-aged man, stout and tall, with a fat, pale face, and a thick red moustache. He coughed ; his chest was doubly exhausted by his work as a blower and by drinking. He thought of little else than revolt and death. The idea of death haunted him.

" In our work," he said, in his raucous and disagreeable voice, " we are used up at forty ; not many live to be fifty. For my part, it will not be long before I am pulling the roots of the dandelions."

That prospect made him anxious to enjoy what remained of his life ; he demanded good cooking, meat and wine every day, and that did not prevent him spending a good deal of money out of the house ; two

or three drams were necessary in the morning, an appetizer in the evening, and great debauches on pay-days and holidays. And although some months he made as much as ninety francs, money was never plentiful with them. There were times when the butcher, baker and grocer refused to give any more credit; those days he had frightful fits of rage, and scolded his wife and children furiously. His wife, who looked much older, even than Victoire, had prematurely white hair and a pitiful expression of resigned terror. The children were meagre little creatures, cunning and sly, and precociously vicious.

My wife, in whom her sister had often confided, knew all the worst of that household, and feared her brother-in-law, and when he came, she spared neither money nor trouble to satisfy him. The glass-blower's visits worried me also. I understood as little of the political questions about which he talked, as I did of the matters concerning his work, and his sarcastic humbug did not amuse me. He was just as little interested in farming, which he affected to despise. That created constraint between us: I felt real relief when he went. The days following these visits, Victoire showed herself more peevish than usual, as though to make up for her efforts at amiability. From that point of view it was fortunate that the visits were of rare occurrence.

XXX

THE third year of my residence at La Creuserie, I found the opportunity to be unfaithful to my wife.

"Oh! indeed," you may say, "with a life so fully occupied, how could you find time to think of amorous intrigues? It is all right for the rich, who, not knowing

how to kill time, run here and there, according to their caprices, with the hope of finding something new."

Well, the thing happened all the same, entirely by chance, it is true. And I can't help thinking that there really were extenuating circumstances.

I could have found opportunities in the house even, among the servants, some of whom would not, I think, have been so severe as little Suzanne of Fontbonnet. But I had too much respect for my home to do that: I know that in matters of that kind, the thing always ends in discovery and in quarrels difficult to make up, and is a deplorable example for the children.

So, as it often happens, my first fault was committed one day when I was not thinking about the matter at all. It was after the middle of July; we had brought in the last hay and rye: the wheat was not ripe. A storm had done some watering the evening before, and I profited by that period of lull to harrow one of my fallow fields. The field was a good distance from our house, to the right of the road between Bourbon and Franchesse, and near to the small holding of Fouinats.

I had gone to the harrowing very early in the morning, and as I had said that I wanted to make a long day of it, Victoire had sent my breakfast by the servant. I ate my soup under the shade of an old pear-tree, not far from the cottage; I could see the walls and the thatched roof, on which grew some green plants. The labourer who lived there, a little red-haired man who stammered, worked regularly on the farms; his wife, a blonde, attractive woman, also did a day's work occasionally: they had no children. Now that July morning was warm and the soup was too salt; after I had finished eating I was very thirsty and I had no water. Naturally I thought of going to ask Marianne for a drink; I knew she was at home, for I had heard her call the fowls. My oxen were resting, blowing and ruminating at their ease. By way of precaution, I

unhooked the chain which attached them to the harrow, and hastened to the cottage.

Marianne was dressing, and had on only a short petticoat and a chemise. She had drawn forward her loosened hair to pin it up again. A ray of morning sunlight played among it: it appeared silky and attractive to me; it seemed surrounded by a golden aureole. Her face, tanned by the sun, had rosy tints in it; her bare shoulders were round and full; the nape of her neck showed, white and velvety, and her ample bosoms, plump temptresses, appeared above the opening of her chemise.

In short, she was beautiful to me, and at the first moment I felt a little fever run through my body.

"Good morning, Madame, I am disturbing you," I said, as I entered.

She half turned her head:

"Oh! it is you, Tiennon—you see me in a queer state."

"You are in your own home; surely you have a right to be free in it. I have come to beg for a drink."

"That is no trouble."

Without taking time to do anything to her hair, she went to the dresser and took down a yellow earthenware pitcher, which she filled to the brim, and found a glass, but I refused it, and drank *à la coquelette** nearly all the water that was in the pitcher.

"Indeed you were thirsty," said Marianne, smiling through her loosened hair, "or else you find it better than at your own house."

"Perhaps it is both," I replied, "you know that change increases desire."

(The phrase that I used was not so refined, but that was the sense of it.)

She understood my allusion perfectly: her cheeks flushed, her eyes became bolder, her smile grew mocking.

* That is, letting the water run into the mouth, out of the pitcher, held up high.

"That depends—there are some things that always have the same taste."

"Do you know that from experience?" I asked maliciously.

She did not repulse me; she seemed rather to provoke my caresses, and before I quitted the cottage, I had tasted in her arms that fleeting forgetfulness of everything, that moment of supreme happiness, which one finds in the accomplishment of love.

I was much troubled when I went out: it seemed to me that everything outside would proclaim aloud what I had done. I was half astonished to find my tranquil oxen again in the same place where I had left them: to find the sun shining as before, that the green of the hedges and the squares of the fields had the same look, that my fallow field had the same reddish tint of pale clay, that the quails sang as before in the yellowing wheat, that the swallows and the wagtails flew round me as though nothing abnormal had taken place. And when I returned to the house, my day's work done, I felt a great satisfaction in observing no change in the looks of my wife and children and servants, nor in the steward when he came in the afternoon. That quieted me and helped to bring my act into a more just proportion.

My relations with Marianne continued for eighteen months, more or less regularly according to circumstances. In order to save appearances, we were both careful not to get ourselves noticed. Therefore it was necessary to have plausible excuses for going alone to the neighbourhood of Fouinats; it might be to do some work, or it might be to go and see my beasts in the pasture. There were times when good excuses were hard to find; then I had to wait several weeks without seeing her. Alas! we needed to be prudent: in the country everything is noticed, everything is discovered. My mistress never asked me for money, and I did not offer her any, of course. But I allowed her to

put her goats into the neighbouring fields, and also to take grass from them for her rabbits, and I willingly shut my eyes when her fowls did some damage to the land sown with corn. The servants were puzzled at this tolerance ; they watched ; they saw that I stayed in her house, and that caused gossip. The matter having been reported to M. Parent, he dismissed Marianne. She went to live a long way from Franchesse, on the road to Limoise : thus ended our fraudulent love.

Old Giraud heard rumours ; he took me aside one day and rated me soundly. But fortunately Victoire never knew anything of the affair.

XXXI

In various ways the progress of the century touched us. There were, however, some extremist enemies : each in his own sphere of action : M. Gorlier, the proprietor, M. Parent, the steward, and my wife, did their utmost to retard the general advance.

The schools were being used. The shopkeepers of the town and the best-off of the country people sent their children : there were a few free places for the poor, and these chiefly benefited the little ones of the *métayers* of the mayoralty.

I should have liked to have had my Jean taught to read and write, so that he could keep the accounts. M. Frédéric was a municipal councillor, and a friend of the Mayor, so I thought it might perhaps be wise to speak to him about it. One day when he came to our house and complimented little Jean on his good looks, I ventured to say timidly :

" Monsieur Frédéric, he ought to have a few years at school now."

As he withdrew his pipe from his mouth, he sent out three great puffs like sea foam.

"The school, the school! What for, good heavens! *You* have not been to school: that doesn't hinder you from working and earning your bread. Put your little lad to work early, it will be better for him and for you too."

"But there are times, Monsieur Frédéric, when to be able to read and write and count is very useful. In order that he may learn to do that, so that he may be less stupid than I am, I will try to do without his help during the winter."

"Just tell me what more you could have if you were able to read and write and count. Education is all right for those who have time to waste. But you manage to spend your days well enough without reading, don't you? Well, your children can do the same, that is all. Besides, you ought to know that a year at school costs twenty-five francs. If you send the eldest to the class you can hardly help sending the others. It will take a lot of money!"

"Monsieur Frédéric, I had thought that you might perhaps obtain a free place for me."

"A free place! The number of free places is very limited: there are always ten demands for each. Don't count on that, what's your name, don't count on that. I tell you again, send your boy to take care of the pigs, that will be better than sending him to school."

M. Frédéric rammed his pipe angrily; his voice, his gestures, betrayed impatience. I understood that he desired the ignorance of the *métayers*' descendants to be perpetuated. I held myself in, fearing to make him angry by insisting. And my children did not go to school.

* * * * * *

As to farming matters, I was certainly not one of those who like to throw themselves into novelties and expenses

without knowing what the result might be ; but when I was convinced of the superiority of a tool I adopted it without delay. Since my arrival at La Creuserie, I had supplied myself with two good ploughs which went more quickly than the very best of the old kind. I should have liked the steward to do for the land what I did for the tools ; I tried especially to persuade him to use lime, knowing that everyone who had any experience was delighted with it. But M. Parent became more and more frightened and pulled a long face, saying that it would entail considerable expense. There was only one end to attain : to contrive to give the proprietor a sum equal to that which he had been given the previous year. That is how, if for one reason or another the revenues happened to be lower, M. Frédéric also made a wry face and grumbled :

" The income from my property will soon be no more than will pay the taxes."

However, we, the *métayers* of the six farms, agreed to return frequently to that question of lime ; we insisted so strongly that M. Parent ended by speaking to the master, who answered with his most morose air :

" If I wished to occupy myself with the management of my property, I would not employ a steward. Manage yourself to get from the farms all that they are able to give in such a manner that the profits will increase. It is not my business to show you how to arrive at that result."

M. Parent remained in a state of perplexity, hesitating between the fear of laying out money to get good results and the desire to increase the future profits. But fear won and he did nothing.

But one day the master came to see us in the harvest field, and being in a good mood, he asked me if the harvest promised well.

" Neither well nor ill, Monsieur Frédéric," I replied ; " it certainly would have been better if we had used lime."

" It gives good results then, this lime ? " he asked,

with an indifferent air, twirling his cane round the head of a big thistle.

"Oh yes, Monsieur Frédéric, one often pays the expenses the first harvest; after that the harvests of hay and clover which follow the wheat are worth much more, and that is clear profit; what is more, they say that the land feels the effect of it for five or six years."

The master went away without saying a word; he visited Primaud of Baluftière, Moulin of Plat-Mizot, and all the farms in succession; he asked each the same question, and being convinced of the unanimity of the opinion, he immediately gave the steward orders to satisfy us.

Three days later M. Parent came to announce that he was going to find carters to bring some chalk to our fallow lands.

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It was also for reasons of economy that Victoire opposed all reforms in her department. As a result of the improvement of the small mills in the country, it had become possible to separate the bran from the flour. A good many began to take advantage of this improvement, there were even some who were using wheat instead of rye, and who ate the same kind of bread as the bourgeois. However, we spoke of those people with a little irony; we said that that was going too far and would not last, that they were running to ruin.

Without going so far as that at one stroke, although I still continued to put two measures of wheat and three of rye in each sack, I was quite determined to be done with the bran. Each time I sent the grain to the mill I made the same proposal, which Victoire disapproved of.

"We have to pay the servants enough already, without feeding them on white bread."

I despaired of conquering her resistance, so I thought of a stratagem which succeeded very well. I ordered the

miller to take out all the bran and instructed him to say when he brought the flour that it had been done by mistake. Victoire dared not propose to go back on that. And from that time we had good bread, especially as I lowered the proportion of rye until it was left out altogether ; that was when the quantity of wheat had increased at our harvests, owing to the use of chalk.

It was a great day for me when I saw the little round loaf, which in my childhood had been reserved, put in the most prominent place on the table, and when I cut a share for each person from that round, appetizing loaf. The young people of to-day consider our good wheat bread quite indifferent if it is just a little hard. Ah ! if they were deprived of it, and had it replaced by the black and gravelly bread of former days, they would learn to appreciate it as it deserves.

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I quote as characteristic these three examples of opposition to new ideas, but there were many others on M. Gorlier's part with regard to intellectual improvements, on M. Parent's part with regard to farming, and on my wife's part in the concerns of the kitchen.

XXXII

It is the years of great disaster that the farmers can never forget, they are like sad landmarks in the length of their monotonous existence. For those of my generation 1861 is such. That year was twice cursed for me, for in addition to my share of the collective calamity, I suffered from an individual catastrophe.

In the spring, one of the last days of April, while training

some young bulls, in an unfortunate moment I was knocked over and trampled on. Result, a broken leg, two ribs battered in, to say nothing of other injuries and bruises.

Dr. Fauconnet came to repair me; he tortured me for hours, bandaged my leg with strips of wood and linen bandages, and ordered me not to move for forty days.

I suffered terribly; agonizing tinglings passed through my leg, my body was broken and bruised, the fever was so troublesome the two first weeks that they were afraid serious complications, proceeding from internal injuries, might supervene.

The neighbours who came to see me questioned and chattered round my bed, vying with one another; they tired me and all the noises of the household tired me also: the sweeping and polishing, the clatter of the cooking pots at meal-times, the moving of the dishes and spoons, even the noise made by the mouths supping the soup. I often saw Victoire weeping; the doctor whom she had called in would promise to come at once and often did not come till next day: those long hours of waiting added to her misery.

Being so far from help is one of the penalties that we landholders suffer. Illness strikes a dear one prostrate, the doctor does not come; we are in despair at our powerlessness to relieve him, a terrible anguish fills the house.

Dr. Fauconnet was even less to be depended upon because he was absorbed in politics and spent many hours at the café every day. He was a Republican and made a desperate opposition to the great bourgeois of the country and to the government of Badinguet. All the advanced people of Bourbon swore by him; after their evening potations there were always some who went to shout in front of his door:

"Long live the doctor! Long live the Republic!"

That delighted him while it dismayed his old father, who had retired to his château at Agonges. After the crisis

at the beginning, as soon as I was well enough to listen to him, Dr. Fauconnet used to talk to me about the subjects dear to him. He wanted to tax capital, to suppress permanent armies and the taking of oaths, and to have free education. He spoke of Victor Hugo the great exile, and pitied the victims of the *Coup d'Etat*. Then he criticized the municipality of Bourbon and flung epigrams at the Mayor and his colleagues. No doubt all municipalities make mistakes, all Mayors are guilty of favouritism, and it is not difficult for someone who is well posted-up to oppose them. But in my own mind, although the doctor had the air of speaking reasonably, I was not too sure that he should be taken seriously; for that great overthrower of the bourgeois was himself one of them. I am sure he would have done more for the people if he had gone to see his patients regularly and charged less for his visits, instead of haranguing at the café every day while he drank big glasses of beer.

In any case, apart from my illness, I had other things of more interest to think about than the doctor's discourses. Imagine me tied to my bed at the time when all the important work was beginning, obliged to leave everything to be superintended by the servants! My Jean was only fourteen years old and not able to act as master; I was constantly wondering how the beasts were being taken care of, if the men were getting on with the work, or if they were wasting time. As my illness decreased my anxieties increased, but I might rage or get unnerved, I had just to wait.

I felt the veritable joy of a child on the day when, my toilet made, I was able to get up and move about. My leg was still weak, but I was not at all lame. From day to day, with the aid of a crutch, I managed to go further from the house. I visited all my fields and was happy to see that the crops were really good.

"It is going to be a good year," I thought, "that will

enable us to recover, without too much trouble, from the heavy expense which my accident has caused."

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Alas ! I had not reckoned on the hail ! On the twenty-first of June it came, and did frightful damage. Right in the middle of a full summer day, in broad daylight, suddenly it became like night, so black had the sky grown.

At every moment the sinister illumination of the lightning pierced the darkness, and after each zig-zag of fire the thunder roared in crescendo. And then the hail came down, first as big as partridge's eggs, then like hen's eggs, battering the roofs and breaking the glass. This was followed by a downpour of rain and the house was flooded. Owing to the floor being on a lower level than the yard the water used to come in under the door whenever there was heavy rain ; but this time it came in from the granary through all the joints in the boards. It fell on the tops of the beds and on the table and the cupboard ; it streamed between the pointed stones of the kitchen, and in the bedroom all the holes in the floor were filled. The women lamented and covered the furniture with cloths, but it was too late.

When the rain ceased we had a very mournful investigation to make outside. Around the buildings, all along the walls, the débris of the old mossy tiles had accumulated ; on the west side especially there were big holes in the roof, through which we could see the grey laths of the roofing, some were even broken. The country appeared bruised under the premature defoliation of the hedges and trees. All the dead twigs, some small green branches, leaves of sweet briar and sprays of acacia were broken off ; and among all this pitiable wreckage we found the dead bodies of little birds with ruffled feathers. The corn had no longer any ears, the stems were lying level with the ground, some leaning half-over in attitudes of suffering.

The hay, as though flattened with a mallet, lay, the whole length of the meadow, like a soiled tablecloth. The clover showed the under-side of its riddled leaves. The potatoes had their tops broken. The vegetables in the garden were a memory only.

The whole valley had suffered equally; at Bourbon, at Saint Aubin, at Ygrande, the ruin was complete all round. Slaters and tilers were the only people who had occasion to rejoice at this catastrophe. Demands arrived for masons and tilers from everywhere at the same time, for several months after they did not know what to do first. On the day after the storm carts went continually to the tile works for supplies, exhausting the reserve stock at one stroke. The ordinary output was insufficient to meet the abnormal demands, more than one proprietor was obliged to use slates to recover his damaged buildings; that is why here and there one sees roofs with tiles on one side and slates on the other: the old people like myself know all those which are souvenirs of the great hail of '61.

We had to begin much earlier than usual to gather in the shapeless wreckage which was all we had for crops, and that was almost worthless. The hay, soiled and dusty, made the animals ill. The small amount of grain which we were able to get from the cereals was unusable, except to make bad meal for the pigs; even the straw was too broken to be gathered properly. We were obliged to reduce the litters. We had to buy grain for sowing and for food. The few sous I had saved fled that year; I was even compelled to borrow from the steward to pay the servants.

XXXIII

As a result of his reduced income and the expenses incurred for indispensable repairs after the hail, M. Gorlier spent all the autumn and a great part of the winter at La Buffière.

He was in an impossible humour, cursed and swore continually and did not take the trouble even to dye his beard : the scattered hairs showed white against the crimson skin.

All the same he went away towards the end of January, accompanied by Mlle. Julie ; they went to Nice, a country where the sun shines all the winter and where great fêtes take place at the Carnival. Neither of them saw La Buffière again : M. Gorlier died suddenly, from an attack of apoplexy, twelve days after his arrival there, and his mistress (no doubt fearing to meet his heirs) never returned. Rightly or wrongly, they declared that she had appropriated the money for the journey, which the dead man had possessed.

The property passed to a certain M. Lavallée, an Infantry officer in garrison in a northern town : his wife was the niece of the dead man.

Owing to this windfall, M. Lavallée resigned his commission, and came to settle at La Buffière with his family.

The Sunday after his arrival, he summoned the steward and all the *métayers* to the great house, of which I knew only the kitchen. But on that day we were taken into a fine room with such a well-waxed floor that we could scarcely stand up. Old Moulin, of Plat-Mizot, was nearly stretched on the floor, which made us laugh finely ; only we dared not burst out laughing, for fear of annoying someone. On the contrary, we kept near the door, upright and silent, and looked long and with astonishment at all the fine things we were able to see. There were arm-chairs and sofas covered with stuff which had a pattern of blue flowers and were trimmed with fringes, and they seemed surprisingly soft. A little table in front of the fireplace was covered with a cloth which matched the arm-chairs, and presently I saw that the wall-paper had the same blue flowers. On the mantelpiece of pink marble veined with red stood a beautiful yellow clock under a globe, there were also candlesticks in each of which was a pink candle. These

objects were repeated in a great glass that had its frame veiled with gauze, and which rested on the chimney-piece. On each side, in *jardinières* with painted flowers and supported by delicate round tables, were plants with green leaves, like some which grew in the ditch in my large meadow. One of the corners was occupied by a whatnot of pretty wood, it was covered with knick-knacks of all kinds: statuettes, little vases, and photographs. The only large piece of furniture besides the table was a big object in a kind of dark red wood, of which I could not guess the use. In a low voice I asked M. Parent what it was, and he said it was a piano. That beautiful room contained, in fact, only useless things; I did not see one object which responded to a real need. I thought of our dark kitchen with its dilapidated concrete, our room with the holes in the floor, and I wondered if it was just that one should be so good and the other so bad.

We had been there ten minutes or more when M. Lavallée appeared. He was a man about forty, rather small, fair, thin, and very fidgety. In spite of our protestations, he made us sit on the fine arm-chairs with the blue flowers, which he took the trouble to place in a row himself, facing the French window opening upon the park. M. Parent and Primaud the bacon-eater shared a sofa. The master seated himself in front of us, and observed our faces, then he questioned us successively, commencing with M. Parent. Afterwards, he told us that he intended to do some good farming, and counted on us to enter into his schemes.

"In a few years from now we ought to win in the competitions," he concluded.

M. Parent, much moved, applauded, stammering, shaking his big head, and rolling his big eyes; his lower lip hung down more than usual, and allowed a still bigger jet of saliva to drip. That interview gave the master a chance of judging that Parent was not a man to revolutionize

agriculture and perfect cattle: a little time afterwards he was discharged.

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Parent was replaced by a big young man with a sombre face, called M. Sébert, who had studied in a school for agriculture, at Rennes in Brittany. M. Sébert entered on his duties at Martinmas, at the same time that the master left La Buffiére to spend the winter in Paris. When Sébert came to examine my cattle he declared at the outset that he would have them changed.

"Take care of your oxen, we will sell them; we will sell the cows too, as soon as they have had their calves; we will also sell the heifers and the pigs; and buy other oxen and cows and sheep and pigs."

At each of the six farms he said the same thing: we thought it strange, for he sacrificed not only the inferior beasts: he wanted to sell them all, the good and the bad.

There was not one week during that winter that he did not make us move about, half of the night on the roads, and freeze for several hours on the fair grounds. We went regularly to the fairs at Bourbon, Ygrande, Cerilly, Lurcy, and often to those of Souvigny, of Cosnes, of Cressanges and Le Montet. It was very fatiguing, very tiresome and by dint of much repetition caused a lot of expense, for we could not come back without food, and the innkeepers made us pay a big price for their bad stews. And of course the work of the fields did not get done while we were travelling about in that way.

When the master returned in April, all the cattle had been changed, and was not more valuable, also we were several thousand francs in debt, for when M. Sébert acted as buyer, he took very little trouble:

"There is a suitable beast," he would say. "Let us have it; good beasts are never too dear."

"It is easy to satisfy one's whims when one is dealing

with other people's money," was what we *métayers* said among ourselves.

We were all furious with this queer fellow who was ruining us.

At his first visit, M. Lavallée asked me :

" Well, Bertin, how do you like your new steward ? "

" Monsieur, he is too fond of commerce, he only buys and sells ; that cannot make anything."

" Yes, you see he is renewing your stock with choice animals. In two or three years from now, you will be going to the shows and taking prizes."

All the time that the master was at La Buffière, M. Sébert almost left us in peace ; he limited himself to making us sell those of the new beasts which showed any defects. But after M. Lavallée had departed, the history of the preceding year repeated itself. It seemed to us that he made us change everything again, for no reason, out of pure caprice.

In the following spring the unanimity of our complaints made the master understand that his steward had cheated him. In the private deed which they had drawn up it was stipulated that, in addition to his fixed salary, the steward should be paid five per cent. on the sales and as much upon the purchases. That clause explained all : the improvement of the cattle had been Sébert's last concern : it was solely to fill his pocket that he had bought and sold without intermission. M. Lavallée wanted to discharge him at once ; but the private deed held him to an engagement for six years. Before he would consent to go, Sébert demanded an indemnity of thirty thousand francs, then he compromised and deigned to accept the twenty thousand francs which the proprietor offered him. The knave had actually saved, in the course of his two years of management, as much as that, if not more. He went to Algiers and settled there, where he became a great vine grower, and where he was no doubt much respected : is it not only

right that we should respect the possessor of a fortune so honestly acquired!

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That costly experience had one good result. It disgusted the master with his projects for scientific farming. He talked no more of becoming the gentleman who takes prizes at shows. Besides, we all assured him that the rewards were given by favour rather than for merit, and that even the prizemen always incurred losses. Then, too, he began to find less pleasure at La Buffière, and his wife was thoroughly wearied of it. For these various reasons M. Lavallée soon had no other ambition than to draw as much money as possible from his property. He told us that he intended to keep the management in his own hands, and he simply engaged to act as his deputy a young man from Franchesse named Roubaud, the son of a small proprietor in the neighbouring town. Roubaud could read and write, he held at the same time the positions of foreman and steward; but he was less of a manager than book-keeper. We *métayers* had more liberty and things went better.

XXXIV

M. LAVALLÉE had two children—a boy and a girl: Ludovic and Mathilde; they often came to our house with their father, or with one of the servants. Ludovic was the same age as my Charles; the little girl was three years younger. I was astonished one day to hear the cook, and another time the coachman, address those children as "Monsieur" and "Mademoiselle." I took the coach-

man aside and asked him if it was necessary to use those titles, which seemed ridiculous to me. He explained that it was the custom to do so from the cradle, with the children of the rich, and one must submit to the rule in order to satisfy the parents. So that being the case, I did it at our house and ordered the others to follow my example. Everybody laughed.

" To ' Monsieur ' and ' Mademoiselle ' those two brats ! " said the servant ; " it's too much."

The fact is they were unbearably rude, that " Monsieur " and " Mademoiselle." In their father's presence they were a little quieter, but with the servant they played all sorts of tricks, and it was another thing altogether when they got into the habit of coming alone. In the house they ferreted everywhere, and upset everything. With sticks they knocked down the baskets which hung from the beam, they mounted on the seats and even on the polished table with their boots on. Outside, they frightened the fowls, separated the little chicks from the mother, chased the ducks until they fell panting, in fact one died one day. Once they opened the wood shed which was used as a hutch, and the rabbits took to their heels ; several were lost. Another time they scattered the sheep and we had endless trouble to get them together again. In the garden they ran across the beds, on the new seed and the dug vegetables ; they shook down the unripe plums and the unusable pears. In short, as no one dared to say anything to them, they became perfect little tyrants. The girl especially seemed to be much happier when she saw we were dismayed at their tricks.

Occasionally I would venture to remonstrate timidly: " Look here, Mademoiselle Mathilde, you are doing a lot of harm ; it isn't nice to do that."

She would smile maliciously and go on worse than ever.

" It amuses me, so there ! "

To such a reason any reply was useless.

But it was little Charles who suffered most from the master's children. They wanted him at once for a playmate, and as he was unwilling, his mother and I forced him to agree.

" See, Charles, don't you want to play with Monsieur Ludovic and Mademoiselle Mathilde, when they are so kind as to want to play with you."

But the poor child did not think much of the honour. To play with companions to whom he had to say " Mademoiselle " and " Monsieur " seemed more a duty than a pleasure.

Besides, experience soon proved that they did not want him in order to treat him as a companion, but as a slave, and to torment him.

One day they took him into the park where M. Lavallée had just put up a swing for them. He was obliged to push them one after the other, more or less fast, as they ordered him, and for as long as they chose. Then the two tyrants made him take a turn on the seat, and they pushed him backwards and forwards violently, laughing very loudly because he was afraid. It frightened him to see that it needed very little more to make him strike his head against the post ; his head swam and he expected to see the ground open below him. But the more he begged them to stop, the more they swung him fast and roughly. When he did manage to get down he was as pale as a sheet, he staggered and trembled and had to sit down on the grass to save himself from falling.

" Oh ! what a coward he is ! " said the little bourgeois, delighted.

They were crunching sweets ; Ludovic, who was good-natured at times, offered Charles some.

" Have some, they will make you feel better."

But his sister interfered.

" Mamma has forbidden us to give him any, for it will give him a taste for them. You know quite well he is

not like you; he and his father are only tools to serve us."

I felt intensely miserable and had a strong feeling of anger and revolt when my poor boy repeated those words. I was certainly not angry with the vicious little girl, but with her mother, who had taught her to despise the workers.

I took a great dislike to that fat, luxurious woman, with her languid and haughty look, who spent her days —so said the servants—half lying on a sofa, her long loungings varied by short sittings at the piano.

"The 'tools' are very necessary to you, you doll," I thought; "without them you would die of hunger, with all your wealth, for what useful work are you capable of?"

Another time the children were playing at horses, Charles of course being the horse. He was fastened at the height of his arms by long strings called reins. Ludovic held the ends behind, and Mathilde cracked sharply a little whip which was more than a toy.

"Gee up then!"

The horse made the round as in a riding school, where the master hardly moves. Then came a moment when Charles was tired and wanted to go at a walking pace. But that did not please Mathilde.

"Gee up then! Run! Will you?"

As he showed no willingness to obey, she struck him full in the face with the whip, making a red furrow. Charles began to weep; he wept silently, not wishing to make a noise so near to the big house. Ludovic went up to him, touched to see him weeping.

"She has hurt you?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"It is nothing. You just bathe it with fresh water."

Ludovic dragged him right into the kitchen and the servant washed with a wet towel the red weal which still burned on Charles' face.

Mathilde looked on pitilessly:

" It serves him right : the horse would not run."

Just then Madame Lavallée happened to come into the kitchen to give orders for dinner ; she found out what had occurred and said :

" Mathilde, you are very naughty. Ludovic, you should not let your sister behave like that."

She then spoke to Charles.

" You see, my boy, Mathilde is lively ; when you play with her you should not cross her."

She made the cook give him a biscuit and a little wine, and sent all three away to play together again.

" Go along, go back to your games, and try not to quarrel."

As a result of that experience Charles made difficulties about returning to play with the two tyrants. He came into the fields with me ; he hid to escape from them. One day they wanted to start playing with him again. He was in a low, damp meadow taking care of some cows. Before their arrival he was amusing himself making a *grelottière*. (That is a kind of small oval basket woven with rushes, in which is placed two or three little stones, right in front of the mouth : when the object is shaken the stones make a faint noise like little bells.) Mathilde wanted very much to possess this rustic toy, and my boy refused to give it to her, for he bore her a grudge for that cut of the whip. As she insisted, holding on to his clothes, he pushed her, saying :

" You are always plaguing me ; you shall not have it. You are nothing but a mean little cat."

Then she began to whine.

" I will tell mamma, yes, yes, yes—I will tell her that you struck me, that you were rude to me, ugly peasant ! And you shall be sent away from the farm, you and your parents."

She went away scolding, furious with rage.

Ludovic was at the edge of the pond near by, throwing

stones at the frogs which he saw in the water. After his sister disappeared he went to Charles and said:

"You know she is quite capable of saying that to mamma: you were stupid to do that."

"I don't care what she says. I can't bear her teasing any longer; I don't want either of you to come looking for me; you treat me as if I was your dog."

And he called his cows together and led them out, leaving Ludovic to his frogs.

M. Lavallée came the same evening to speak about the incident, for Mathilde had fulfilled her threat.

"Decidedly our children don't agree," he said. "I have forbidden mine to come seeking Charles, and I will see that they obey my orders."

A week may have passed during which we did not see them; then they came as before. Fortunately, not long after, they departed for Paris.

I heard afterwards from the gardener, who had it from the cook, that Madame Lavallée had been very angry at the affront which my boy had offered to her daughter. For a time she had insisted that we should be sent away, as that good child demanded with screams, but the husband refused to make a tragedy out of a children's quarrel.

The following year Charles, who was almost in his thirteenth year, began to be regularly employed: that gave us a pretext for saying to the little bourgeois that he had no time to play with them, and he was able to avoid the tyrannical companionship with which no doubt they would have continued to honour him.

XXXV

My mother was very old and unhappy. She still lived at Saint-Menoux, in the same cottage, and although much

bent by age, she continued to go out to do a day's work when her health allowed her.

But for several years she had suffered from rheumatism, which tortured her head and her stomach, and at such times she hardly left the fireside.

I went to see her every year at Christmas, when we killed the pig, and took her a basket of fresh bacon and a little black pudding for a Christmas present. In 1865, when I paid my usual visit, I found her in bed, and it made me cold to the heart to see the distressed expression on the old face. The rheumatism had become acute, and had kept her in bed for six weeks, with no one to help her except another old day worker in the neighbourhood, who took her some bread and water and helped to make her bed.

" I shall die alone here. One fine morning they will find me dead from sorrow and suffering and cold and hunger! "

After saying that, she gazed at me with a sombre look, and began to rail against my brothers and their wives, then against me. All the rancour stored up in that old bitter heart poured itself out in biting words. Nothing was left of the small savings which she had taken with her when she had left the community, and she declared that my brothers had not given her enough then, and had grudged it. That idea, born no doubt from spiteful gossip, had grown in her in the course of long solitary reflections, the suspicion had become a certainty: she called my brothers scamps and my sister-in-law Claudine a slut. She repeated those words endlessly:

" The scamps! The slut! "

With her long dry hands stretched out from under the bed cover, she made threatening gestures, and sometimes she rose up altogether in a furious exaltation: her parched face, with its protruding bones, was harder than ever, and the grey locks of hair which escaped from under her black night-cap gave her the look of a sorceress uttering a curse.

I tried to calm her, to prove that she was exaggerating, then I busied myself lighting the fire, for it was very cold.

"Don't burn so much wood; can't you see there is hardly any left?" said my mother.

Her store was indeed meagre, there were only a few scattered bits in the corner of the fireplace, and two or three barrow loads of big, uncut logs between the cupboard and the bed. She complained:

"I have such a kind family that my potatoes have been allowed to freeze. The house is like ice; the wind comes through the trap door of the loft."

The potatoes were under the kneading trough, and some had rolled across the room. Those on the top were as hard as stones, but the others were not frozen, and I told my mother so.

When the fire was burning I helped her to get up and to get the soup ready; then I cut the rest of the big logs, and went to a neighbouring farm to buy two trusses of straw, which I put in the loft to prevent the cold wind from coming through the door.

While she was eating, my mother showed a slightly better temper; she talked about Catherine, who was her favourite. Each year at Martinmas, Catherine sent the money for her rent; and when she came, she brought a whole lot of good things; sugar, coffee, chocolate, and even a bottle of spirits.

"If I could let her know how I am, she would be sure to send me a parcel of tit-bits."

In order to satisfy this desire, I went to the schoolmaster to get him to write a letter to Catherine, and then I went to the wood merchant and ordered a cartload of wood. Finally, on my return, I called at the house of the old day worker, and promising to pay her, begged her to take care of my mother regularly.

It was a good deal: reflection showed me that it was not enough. Before returning home, I wanted to talk to my

brothers. They had not been living together for a long time. My godfather was at Autry: he had had misfortunes with his animals and two of his children had been ill for a long time. Louis was at Montilly, and was well-to-do: Claudine was proud and rather arrogant.

The next day I went to see first one and then the other. I pointed out that it was our duty to co-operate and support, our mother and said what I had done for her. Louis promised to pay for her bread. My godfather undertook to keep her in vegetables, and to send his young daughter to take care of her when her rheumatism kept her in bed.

I returned to La Creuserie well content. Thanks to my initiative, my mother was sure of necessaries until her death, which happened three years later.

XXXVI

Our children grew up hardy. I was much pleased with my eldest boy, who was plucky, and showed an interest in his work. He worked well and began to take my place at the groomings. But his chief failing was extravagance. Every Sunday he would go, sometimes to Bourbon, sometimes to Franchesse, and not return until night, after having made a good meal at the inn. Ah! those rare forty-sou pieces which my father used to give me in my youth would not have gone far with him, and I believe that it would have been a good thing if he had had to be satisfied with that amount. It is true that the times had changed and trade was better; servants' wages had been doubled; money circulated more. That was why we lived less roughly, and considered stupid such amusements as *vijons*, soirées and forfeits—which cost nothing. The inn began to be the necessary frame for all diversions.

Jean was passionately fond of billiards; he did not dance much, and was shy with the girls. We had at that time a servant named Amélie, we called her 'Mélie; she had a face like a man, a large mouth and rotten teeth; had been an old maid for a good many years. Indeed, it was because she was ugly and old that we kept her; her manners were ugly, too; but it is too risky to have young servants in the house with lads: there is always a tendency for them to have too intimate relations when they are not on bad terms with each other. The first inevitably brings about love affairs, which often have disastrous results; the second provokes perpetual dissension, a constant necessity for making peace, and a lot of little miseries which interfere with the progress of the daily work. At different times I believed that I saw 'Mélie, in spite of her age and her disagreeable face, making eyes at Jean. He was tall and dark, with regular features and had even then a strong moustache, in fact he was a good-looking lad. I believe he was stupid enough to respond to her advances. One winter evening, they went together to grind the potatoes and prepare the pigs' food. The potatoes were cooked in a wretched shed made of dry branches and covered with broom, which leaned against the wall of the barn; close to the fire was a great stone trough in which the potatoes were crushed. Suddenly I had an inspiration to find out if the couple were taking advantage of this opportunity to do something foolish. Having opened the door cautiously, I crossed the yard and advanced very quietly alongside the barn, close to the wall of branches which surrounded the shed. The lantern gave a feeble light in the interior, which was filled with warm steam from the potatoes. When these were crushed I saw my imbecile of a boy go close up to the servant, kiss her, and rub his face against hers. It lasted only a moment, and they went on again with the work. He took some pails and went outside to bring water from the pond while she poured bran

and meal from a big basket on to the sticky heap of potatoes ; after that she mixed it all with the water which he brought. When the last job was done, they embraced and kissed again. Finally they unhooked the lantern and got ready to return to the house ; then I made off quickly and got back before they did.

I said nothing to Victoire, it would only have made her furious. But the next day when we got up, I caught Jean in the barn and gave him a lecture :

" An old woman like that, and ugly too ! you ought to be ashamed ! Elsewhere do as you like, but at home, behave yourself ; you hear me ! "

A little later, while attending to the pigs, I told 'Mélie that I would put her to the door without any explanation, if I ever saw anything again. I believe the lesson was learnt, at least I did not see them at their underhand tricks again.

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Charles was quite the opposite to his brother ; in face he resembled me, but he got his character more from his mother. He was rather surly : he had always the air of complaining of some injustice, of wishing harm to us all. Going to and from work he would stay behind under any pretext, so as not to mix with the common group. When he went to Mass on Sundays, he never accompanied the others. And in the winter, when we happened to spend an evening at Baluftière, or Praulière, or Plat-Mizot, he would not go with us, he would stay in the house that evening and go out the next one. He seemed to be happy only when he was in direct opposition to everybody else in everything, and he was not at all obliging. Not being cowman, he was never willing to do the grooming under any circumstances. On Sundays he would stay in all day, and disappear just at the time that the beasts required

attention. As Jean always returned late, all the work on resting days fell to my share, for the servant was absent too. The strange thing was—and it made me still more angry with him—that although Charles was so disagreeable at home, he was ready to talk pleasantly to the neighbours.

It did not seem to me that we had made any difference between him and his brother, or that he had any cause to tax us with injustice. From the age of seventeen I had given him as much money as the elder boy for his little pleasures. Victoire had always bought the same kind of clothes for them at the same time. I could not understand what it was that made him so surly. Perhaps there was no special reason : perhaps it was his natural turn of mind which made him see the black side of things, nothing more. I believe that the teasing he had suffered at the hands of the little bourgeois had helped to sour his spirit. And later, I suppose he was jealous of the little supremacy which Jean enjoyed as cowman.

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The character of Clémentine, the youngest, was a mixture of the two others. Some days she was even more affectionate and frank than Jean, and at other times, on the contrary, she was as difficult as Charles, if not worse. She had so many of the better qualities that we were the more inclined to satisfy her caprices. Like all young girls, she had a mania for finery. At that time we certainly had no conception of the present-day luxury, but we had even then left behind much of the simplicity of my young days. That was the time of the fashion of lace bonnets, which were very costly, and which required constant ironing. And the dresses began to be complicated : there was a lot of costumiers in Bourbon who ran with the fashions, imagining that they could make their customers adopt the crinoline, which made them look as fat as barrels !

All the girls of the town were soon supplied, and it was not long before the country girls wanted the same. Clémentine insisted on having one; but I supported her mother in an energetic refusal.

"No, indeed! I don't want to see you dressed like an actress! They look as if they were inside hoops."

But it was in vain that I tried to ridicule that crinoline which had taken her fancy: a hundred times she returned to the charge, and she sulked for several weeks when we persisted in our refusals.

Occasionally we gave her permission to go to dances in the daytime, but we generally declined to allow her to go to them at night (which took place at the fêtes and soirées) even in the company of her brothers or the servant. Nevertheless, when Victoire was well enough she sometimes consented to take the girl there herself. So when a night ball was in prospect, a fortnight in advance, Clémentine would begin teasing her mother:

"I say Mamma, do let us go"—coaxingly. "Do let us go, little Mother."

"Go along, you worry me! We shall see when the day comes."

When the day did come, nine times out of ten the mother was not inclined to go; then the little one went to bed furious, restraining her tears with difficulty. The days following she was in an impossible temper, not speaking a word, and doing her work sullenly. I have a remembrance of a batch of bread which she made a mess of the day after an evening dance at Plat-Mizot, to which her mother had been unable to take her because of a bad attack of neuralgia. Clémentine denied having spoiled the dough on purpose, but I was sure that her bad humour had something to do with it.

However, when nothing went against her, she worked well and was very affectionate and gentle. Her mother had sent her for a short time to a dressmaker at Franchesse,

she had also been taught to make our shirts and blouses and to iron them. Then, too, she would hurry to fasten our cravats when we went out, to brush us, to bandage our fingers when we tore or cut them, and to take thorns out of them. And if one of us had a cough, she was always the first to make a *tisane*—an infusion of lime flowers, marshmallow, violets, and blackberry leaves. She was much loved for all these little attentions. Even Charles became more expansive in his sister's company, and sometimes I have seen him speaking quite confidentially to her, and both of them laughing.

Unhappily the poor child was not strong. When we had to send her into the fields in the summer, although we tried to save her from the hardest tasks, she used to get so thin that it was quite pitiful.

XXXVII

'SEVENTY came, and the great war, again one of the years which one never forgets.

The harvest had been got in early; we were ready to put up the second and last rick when, on the twentieth of July, towards ten o'clock in the morning, M. Lavallée came to tell us that the government of Badinguet had declared war against Prussia. He took me aside to tell me that Jean would be called before long.

You can imagine how much pleasure that announcement gave me! Jean was just at the end of his twenty-third year; I had bought him out at the " drawing " and he was engaged to the daughter of Mathonat of Praulière; the banns were fixed for the first Sunday in August; the wedding for the end of September. I wondered if they would have the effrontery to take him after all, in spite of the money which I had paid to save him from the service.

Alas ! it was not long before that was settled : five or six days later he received his summons, and on the thirtieth of July he went away.

I have always present in my mind the incidents of that morning, the memory of which is one of the saddest in my life. I can see us all, silent, round the table for the last meal, with Jean dressed in his travelling clothes. He had returned with red eyes from Praulière, where he had been to say farewell to his sweetheart ; he made a great effort not to weep, he even tried to eat ; but the mouthfuls which he swallowed seemed to tear his throat. I could eat nothing either ; and Charles and the servant were in the same state. On the kneading trough, Victoire and Clémentine were preparing the conscript's little pack, a few clothes and some food. Each moment we could hear great sighs which were really strangled sobs.

" I have put in three pairs of stockings," said my wife, her voice so changed that everybody trembled. " I don't know if you will be able to get them into the soldiers' boots," she continued.

" Oh ! the boots they give are big," he replied, with an effort. Hanging on the wall near the chimney there was a wooden salt box, the colour of tobacco juice. I looked at it mechanically ; some flies were moving on the lid. Jean tapped with the handle of his knife on the edge of his plate, on which were an omelette and some potatoes. Rats running about on the beam made some half-crushed grain fall down : the omelette was sprinkled with it. A cat mewed, the servant gave it a spoonful of soup on the floor. In the yard the cock flew on to the closed wicket gate : he was a fine fire-coloured sultan, with a large vermilion crest ; he cackled, clucked, and appeared to be coming inside, as he often did to pick up crumbs. But Clémentine chased him away roughly. Victoire went on :

" I have put in a piece of ham, two hard-boiled eggs, four goats' cheeses—— "

The sounds which came from her oppressed throat were raucous, hardly distinct; she continued, however:

"No bread—you can buy that on the way."

He nodded his head for "yes," and the painful silence began again.

When the package was at last tied, Clémentine and her mother sat down beside the bread trough, leaned their elbows on it, their heads on their hands, and sobbed violently. We, the four men, remained round the table, sad and embarrassed, before us the almost untouched food, which no one could eat. The position became so mournful that I took on myself to hasten things. Jean was to meet at Bourbon five or six others who were also going, and whom he knew. The appointment was for midday, and nine o'clock had only just struck. Nevertheless I said:

"Let us go, my boy, we *must* go; you will keep your companions waiting."

"Yes, the time is getting on," he answered.

He got up and everybody did the same. The servant had come back from taking care of the sheep: she was a little girl of fifteen whom we had got in place of 'Mélie; he kissed her:

"Good-bye, Francine."

He kissed the hired man "Good-bye," also his brother Charles; great tears were rolling down the side of his nose.

He went over to Clémentine:

"Good-bye, little sister."

"I will go with you to the end of the road," she said. She took the packet under her left arm and put her right one through her brother's; Victoire hung upon the other; I walked beside her. It was in this order that we crossed the yard, that we came on to the Bourbon road, which had been made several years before. Not one word was exchanged.

The sun was pale like a winter sun: a rather strong west wind was blowing, making the leaves of the oaks

curl, and twisting the tops of the high poplars; it had rained the preceding days and the weather was not yet very good. At Baluftière and further, at the entrance to two or three farms, some washing was drying, touching with white the green hedges, which looked dark in the distance. In several fields we saw oxen grazing; a blackbird whistled; we heard a quail cry four times running.

After we had gone about a hundred yards on the road, and as we had got to a turning:

"Let us go back, let him go on alone," I said brusquely, as though it was an order calling for immediate obedience.

They stopped, and the two women gave full vent to their grief. Like passionate lovers, first one and then the other clasped him in their arms.

"Oh! my boy, my poor boy, they are going to take you away, the scoundrels. I shall never see you again, never——"

"Jean, my Jean, my brother, say you will let us have news of you. Oh! why don't we know how to write! Above all, don't get killed,—say, my Jean!——"

He, altogether unmanned, wept hot tears also; and I felt that in a moment I should do the same. I pushed my wife and daughter away and embraced Jean in my turn.

"Go on, my boy, you *must* leave us, let us hope it will not be for long."

I took the package that Clémentine had laid on a heap of stones, and gave it to him. Then brusquely he disengaged himself from the dear embraces which held him and strode away without turning his head. I had to drag away Victoire and Clémentine, who, but for me, would have followed him, I believe.

"Poor child, I shall never see him again; I shall never see him again," repeated Victoire obstinately.

For three days she ate scarcely anything. I was afraid

that she was going to be quite ill. However, little by little, in the ordinary course of things, her great grief grew less and was replaced by a latent sadness. And Clémentine soon began to smile once more.

We commenced work again as though nothing had happened; we got the hay in; the threshing machine whistled and grated; we started the manuring, then the digging.

Nevertheless there was a new occasion for misery on the subject of Jean when he told us in a short letter that he had been sent to Algiers, on the other side of the great "river." It was not only his mother who believed him to be lost. But another letter told us that the passage had been good, that he was well, was not unhappy, and his companions were all people from our neighbourhood; that reassured us a little.

M. Lavallée had again gone to Paris with his family; it was said that he had put on his officer's uniform again to go to the war. Of the events of that war we knew but little, except that it did not go very well for France. Roubaud, the keeper-steward, took in a newspaper, and we often went to get the news from him. His house was always full in the evenings: his auditors came to him from the six farms belonging to the property, and from other places too, so keen was the anxiety. At the beginning of September, the newspaper announced that Napoleon was a prisoner as the result of a great battle, which had been lost, that his government was down, and that a Republic had been proclaimed in Paris. The following Sunday I learned at Franchesse that the Mayor had been discharged and replaced by Clostre, the linen draper, who was a Red. At Bourbon Dr. Fauconnet was Mayor.

These changes would have left me indifferent enough if we had not learnt some days later that the new government wanted to attempt the impossible, in order to repulse the Prussians, who were advancing on Paris. To begin with,

it was proposed to levy all the young men of eighteen to twenty years. That touched me closely, because Charles and the hired man were in a fair way to be called. In fact, they were summoned a little later to the "drawing by lot," and to go up for review at the same time, and they went in the first days of October. That event caused a lamentable repetition of the scene which had taken place when the eldest had gone; a profound desolation followed.

Once more I was the only man! the only man on a big farm, and it was the time of the many autumn labours, the time to take up the potatoes, to dig, to sow. I managed, however, to get hold of old Faure again, and I engaged him from week to week until the end. With the aid of Clémentine and Francine, who came to drive the beasts, I was able to sow my corn just the same as at other times.

The *métayers* on the other farms were in the same state, or nearly so. Everywhere one saw women in the fields doing the men's work.

At the war things went from bad to worse. They said that all the great generals had sold themselves to the Prussians, and that one of them, called Bazaine, had been blackguard enough to hand over an entire army. And they were always advancing, those Prussians; they besieged Paris; they spread into the departments. Roubaud's newspaper announced that they were successively in Bourgogne, in Nivernais, in Berri: in their progress they sowed desolation everywhere, pillaging the houses, violating the women, and setting places on fire on every side. We began to be very frightened, the more so as the alarm spread, making us believe that they were quite near; that they were at Moulins, at Souvigny, in La Veurdre; and false though the information was, it none the less helped to redouble the state of anxiety in which we lived. The wildest ideas sprang up in our minds; some hid all their treasures in deep ditches and in the hollows of oak trees,

one old maniac buried his money under a heap of manure in a field; another proposed to take all the young girls of the country to Auvergne, to hide them under a bridge.

In certain Communes they organized national guards to attempt to resist the Prussians, should they present themselves. We knew nothing about it at Franchesse, but at Bourbon Dr. Fauconnet formed a most important guard. He got a stock of guns, and twice a week he called together for practice all the suitable men, from eighteen to sixty years old. An old exciseman, who had been a sergeant during his leave, was given the command of the militia with the title of captain; he had as assistants two ex-corporals; the old soldiers were heads of companies or squads. At the first meetings about a hundred were present, who were taught to march in step and in line, to carry a gun, and to fire. At the end of the second practice, the little troop crossed the town in good order, they were accompanied by the drummer of the *garde-champêtre*, the clarion of the firemen, and a band of enthusiastic children. The doctor was delighted; he gave them wine—a quart between three—and some white bread. But he conceived the unlucky idea of placing a permanent guard of ten men at the Town Hall, to be ready for possible eventualities. Installed there the next day, the permanent guard stayed three hours. The sergeant, Colardon, a carpenter, chief of the station, deserted first, because he was sent for to make a coffin.

"Urgent work!" he explained, quite reasonably.

The others were not long in escaping in their turn under different pretexts and the Town Hall was abandoned. The doctor was furious and went to find the old exciseman-captain, and demanded that he should punish the culprits severely; but the good old man laughed in his face, and the permanent guard was not renewed. The attendances at the practices became smaller and smaller. At the third meeting they had no more than fifty, at the fourth twenty,

at the fifth eight, and at the sixth there was only M. Fauconnet and the captain. Such is the history of the national guard of Bourbon.

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To the terror caused by the prospective arrival of the Prussians, was added other terrible and very real scourges. First, it was the cold weather which came early and became more and more severe. Then followed an epidemic of smallpox, which had many victims. The disease raged violently, so violently in our neighbour's house at Praulière that at Christmas it caused the death of Louise, Jean's fiancée ; her young sister was disfigured, and wept bitterly for her lost beauty, regretting that she had not died too.

When the Mathonats were all stricken so that there was hardly one able to take care of the others, Victoire and Clémentine said they intended to go and nurse them, if they needed it. But that terrible malady was said to be so contagious that I was not at all willing to let them go, fearing that they might get the disease too. I said that we had enough trouble of our own, that, after all, the Mathonats were nothing to us, that they had relatives a little further off, whose business it was to look after them. As the women persisted in spite of what I said, I thought of making out that I was ill, so I began to be very sullen and miserable, eating nothing and pretending to be feverish. By rousing their pity for myself, I managed to delay their visit. They went to Praulière only after the death of Louise, when the malady was on the wane. We had the good fortune to escape.

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As though to give a sense of divine punishment to all these evils, the sky was often speckled with red marblings, at times it even became a uniform purple on one side of

the horizon, as though covered with a bloody shroud. I suppose that these were unimportant atmospheric phenomena, of which we should usually have taken no notice; but in those days of woe, of disaster and misery, they gave us lugubrious notions. The red sky announced deadly battles; it was the blood of the dead and wounded which stained it. The terror grew; we spoke of the end of the world as a quite probable thing. Besides, every Sunday the priest enlarged on the idea of divine vengeance and on the horrible calamities; he appeared to be pleased at the universal misery; he crushed his auditors by showing them that it was the enormity of their vices which had caused such frightful scourges; he was delighted when he saw the women with anguished faces, and when they abandoned their too fine dresses of the last years.

"Your pride is lowered," he said, "but it will be lowered still more; your humiliation shall become deeper!"

The women wept and the men bent their heads sadly.

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At long intervals letters arrived from Jean or Charles. The older, still under the sun of Africa, was fairly happy. But Charles, who was with Bourbaki, in the army of the Loire, suffered a great deal from cold and often from hunger. He said he was badly clothed, and that they had to make long marches in the snow, wearing boots with cardboard soles. In the Côte-d'Or, he was in a battle, and had a near view of the Prussians. Afterwards he went to the Jura Mountains, where the winter is more severe than here.

When the postman brought a letter, Victoire and Clémentine would run to Roubaud's house to have it read. But the steward often found it difficult to decipher it, he was not very expert, especially in reading writing, and the letter was usually written on crumpled and stained

paper by an obliging comrade, who scribbled for Charles a few lines with a pencil which hardly marked.

Each of those letters bore signs of the circumstances under which it had been written, and also the amount of education possessed by the writer. One day a long one arrived, which gave such heartrending details that everybody wept. Several were examples of bad taste and contained coarse jokes, almost insults.

Roubaud did not undertake the replies, pretending that he was too busy, but it was chiefly because of his want of skill. Clémentine used to go to Franchesse to a grocer's daughter, who knew how to write; she was obliged to go specially on a week-day, because on Sundays the grocer's customers were so numerous, each urged by the same motive, that of finding the young girl.

Ignorance seemed a great hardship during those months, for we had more consciousness of it then than usual.

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A troubled spring succeeded that sad winter. The war with Germany had come to an end, but there was still war: Paris, in revolt, struggled against the army. While nature, rejoicing in her annual reawakening, spread out her gifts lavishly, French blood still flowed.

Paris was conquered, the rebels were massacred by hundreds, by thousands, and our warriors returned. They returned, except all the latest conscripts, whom they kept for their term of service—and Charles was one of them—and except, alas! those who were dead, and those who had disappeared, of whom no one knew anything. The husband of a young wife at Saint-Plaisir was one of those. No news of his death had come, but since November he had ceased to write and he did not reappear. Three or four years later, the little wife married again. But afterwards they told her that there were

always soldiers of '70 arriving; they were those who had been taken prisoner, and condemned to several years in a fortress for having tried to escape; we saw them again only at the end of their term of imprisonment. So the poor woman lived in constant terror of seeing her first husband return. He never came back. Nevertheless, there was a rumour on this subject, which with time became a legend. Some people declared that they had seen him at Bourbon, and were assured that he was determined to disappear without showing himself, so as not to create difficulties for his former wife, who had then another husband.

XXXVIII

JEAN returned early in June, in time for the haymaking. His experience during his sojourn in Algiers had made him rather indifferent. Fearing that it would grieve him a great deal, we had refrained from telling him of the death of his fiancée. He took the sad tidings very quietly.

"Poor little Louise, I did not expect that," he said simply.

But it did not make him lose a meal nor a holiday, and less than a year after his return, he married Rosalie, a daughter of Couzon, at the Carnival of 1872.

Two months later, at Easter, it was Clémentine's turn; she married François Moulin, of Plat-Mizot, the sixth of a family of nine.

The daughter-in-law and the son-in-law both came to live with us at La Creuserie, and this enabled us to do without the servant and the man whom we usually kept. But it made three families, and when there are three families in one house, things never go on long without some friction.

Rosalie was no beauty: her hair had a bright fairness, nearly red, her neck was sunk in her shoulders, and she had red spots all over her face. But she was resolute, energetic and bold, talked a great deal, and worked to match. Clémentine was much less robust, especially as she became pregnant at once and suffered from a kind of languor which made all work a trouble; she used to make *tisane* for herself, and sugared water, and little dainties, and she ceased to help with the washing. Rosalie did not hesitate to talk sarcastically about ladies who were ill if they put their hands into cold water, and who were obliged to take care of their little healths by taking dainties.

On baking days they took it in turns to knead and to attend to the oven. But one day the bread which Rosalie had kneaded was not a success, and she said it was Clémentine's fault for having lighted the oven too late. The next time, my daughter, in her turn, declared that the crust of the bread was burnt, and that it was upon her sister-in-law that all the responsibility fell, because she had over-heated the oven. By common consent, they decided that one should do it all, so that they could not blame each other for defective work. From this arrangement Rosalie came out very well, better indeed than Clémentine, who made violent efforts to do the kneading satisfactorily.

We had just provided ourselves, with the master's consent, with a donkey and a little carriage. That was the cause of the enmity which began in the month of August, between the two young families. Clémentine had spoken first of taking the carriage and going with her husband to the fête of the Patron Saint at Ygrande, for Moulin had an uncle in that Commune. Then Jean and his wife expressed their intention of going to Augy, for the same fête day, to see a brother of Rosalie's who lived there; they also wanted the donkey and the carriage.

The two women disputed a little; my daughter-in-law said to my daughter that an invalid, a good for nothing, ought not to go out driving; Moulin interfered and called Rosalie a dirty beast. The quarrel rankled and threatened to last a long time. Victoire was much distressed. But I put a stop to the quarrel by declaring that Clémentine should have the carriage because she asked first. Jean's wife was absolutely furious at my decision: she gave me black looks for several weeks. And from that day, the two sisters-in-law never spoke except to mock each other, and to vilify each other.

Besides, Moulin had not the gift of making himself liked. He had a mania for giving advice on every subject; he even took on himself to give advice to me about the grooming of the beasts, to *me*, who was considered one of the best animal tenders in the country. You can imagine that that did not go down very well, and Jean did not hesitate to let him know that it annoyed me. This resulted in a tension which made the daily intimacy unpleasant.

XXXIX

Victoire had never been able to reconcile herself to Charles' absence. If a letter was delayed a few days beyond the time that she expected it, it was enough to make her fret; if a sentence in that letter made any allusion to night watches in the cold, or painful marches under the hot sun of summer, or even for nothing: the piercing thought that he was so far away was enough (he was in Brittany). She had dark visions in which he appeared to her suffering and ill, dying perhaps, in a hospital, without tenderness and care. The end of his

term drew near, however; but there was another disappointment; some tardy manœuvres kept him away from the end of September to the end of October. Victoire's agitation and fears increased as the days of waiting became fewer. She had fattened the best chickens; she wanted to sacrifice them on the return of her son. Behind the barn there was a vine arbour, which I had planted at the beginning of our stay at La Creuserie, it was very productive at that time; it was well-situated, and that year it bore some superb golden grapes.

"Oh, dear! how much he used to like them: if only I could manage to keep them till he comes back!"

During the next meal she said to us:

"Look here, I forbid you to touch the grapes on the trellis in front of the barn; they are precious; I am keeping them for Charles."

We all promised to leave them alone; only Moulin remarked that before the arrival of the soldier, the insects would no doubt have destroyed them all. Victoire watched, and soon saw that what her son-in-law had said was true. Because they were sweeter than the others, and the sun was so warm, the hornets and wasps buzzed round, vying with each other in extracting the juice from the finest berries; some of the branches were almost bare, having only the hard fruit and the flabby, dried skins left on them. That state of things had to be remedied, otherwise the poor soldier would run a great risk of not even tasting the fine grapes that had been specially reserved for him. Maternal love makes women ingenious: my wife searched in her rag drawer, and with pieces of old linen, worn thin enough to allow the air to penetrate and resistant enough to keep the greedy insects off, she made some bags, put a running string near the top. Clémentine and Rosalie, who were not in her confidence, watched her making these, and were puzzled. When thirty were tacked together, she leaned a ladder

against the wall of the barn, climbed to the height of the grapes, and enclosed thirty of the finest bunches in the protecting bags.

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Towards the middle of October, little Marthe Sivat, a dressmaker of the town, came to get some chickens for her sister's wedding breakfast.

" I say ! are those grapes you've got up there ? " she exclaimed, looking at the trellis. " You have known well how to keep them. Now I think of it : they told me to get some for the dessert ; will you sell me some, Madame Bertin ? "

My wife would not hear of selling the grapes.

" No, my girl, no ! If I've taken so much care of them, it is because I want them myself ; I wouldn't sell them if I was offered more than they are worth : I am keeping them for my boy Charles."

" Ah ! your son is coming back this year ? You are quite right. You must take care of them ; we'll find something else for the wedding dessert."

And laughing, skipping lightly, little Marthe went away.

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A few days later a poor woman, whose husband was ill, came. He complained constantly of his stomach, he was feverish and had no appetite :

" I've been cooking eggs for him for several days," she explained, " but now he won't look at them. I took him a bit of meat yesterday ; he didn't touch it. His only wish is for grapes : I've come to you to buy some."

Victoire was sorry for her, and gave her three of them, saying she would give her those for her invalid ; but she was careful to repeat :

"They are not for sale, you see: I am keeping them for Charles, who is coming back from the army."

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The whole of that year the Lavallées had not appeared. Mathilde had been married in the spring, in Paris of course, and they stayed on in the capital until August, to enable M. Ludovic to pass his examinations. Just then they were in Savoy, the chimney-sweeps' country; they were at a thermal establishment, where the waters have the singular virtue of making the women thin and their husbands fat. Afterwards they visited at the houses of friends, and it was only in the last ten days of October that they came to La Buffière to spend the latter end of autumn.

It was the evening before Charles was expected to return, that they paid their first visit to us. Contrary to her usual custom, Mme. Lavallée came with her husband; she was quite as proud as formerly; but having got stouter in growing older, she had become still more listless; she walked with short steps, continually having to balance her fat body; we used to call her in fun, one of the old towers of Bourbon. He was still slender and alert; he was hollow-bellied, and his overcoat hung loosely on him. His face, with its varied expressions, was so thin that it had become angular.

After the obsequious bows of the first moments, I took M. Lavallée to visit the stables, where it was absolutely necessary to have some repairs done. During that time the lady, who did not want to sit in the house, glided slowly round the yard with Victoire. Chance decreed that she should see the trellis and its little white bags through which the grapes showed.

"What, Victoire, grapes still! Do you know they are very scarce? We have not one at the château, and it is

my favourite fruit. Tell me why you have taken so many precautions to keep them till now."

Victoire hesitated a moment, then she said :

" Madame, it was that I might have the pleasure of offering them to you."

" Oh ! Thank you ! You must bring me some this evening."

Victoire cried :

" Rosalie, get the little basket at once and take the ladder from the barn, gather those grapes and take them to Madame's house."

The daughter-in-law obeyed with a sigh, and said ironically :

" It wasn't worth while to take such care of the grapes ; my brother-in-law won't get much good from them."

For once Moulin made a chorus :

" What a miserable business it is ; we are as much slaves as they were in the olden times."

I was silent, realizing how much those remarks were deserved. I seemed to hear the explicit answers of Victoire to Marthe, and to the poor woman with the sick husband :

" No, no, I don't want to sell them ! I am keeping them for my son Charles."

And a little cry of admiration from the lady had been enough to make her offer them very humbly !

" It is quite true," I thought, " we are still slaves."

Victoire certainly felt a little remorse for this action, which contradicted all her past manifestations of maternal love, but on the other hand, she felt a certain pride in having been able to pay court to the proprietor, of having made her look favourably on us, and in offering her a gift which pleased her : but under the lash of her many thoughts, she replied in a conciliatory tone :

" Don't say any more about it : it isn't my fault ; I had to please the lady."

XL

AFTER having lived at La Creuserie for twenty years, I was hardly any better off than when we went there; it would have been only just enough, if I had been able to spend the thousand francs that I still owed for my share of the lease of cattle. There had been a period during which more fortunate people had made a good deal. But M. Parent's hesitations had not allowed me to make any profits during the first five or six years; then I had been set back by the hail of '61, and Sébert's rascalities; and then when set afloat again, and in a fair way to make something—and that in spite of the Draconian methods of M. Lavallée, who had raised my annual rent two hundred francs—came that new disaster, the war.

Afterwards, thanks to a succession of good harvests, I had finally been able to make some little profit; and after the death of my wife's parents, which happened with a month's interval in the winter of 1874, I found myself in possession of about four thousand francs.

Now, it was very worrying to keep this money in the cupboard; to begin with, it did not gain any interest there, and then I was afraid of thieves, for in the summer, the house was often left unoccupied. The notary at Bourbon, whom I consulted about it, did not know just then of any advantageous investment, so I thought of M. Cerbony.

M. Cerbony was one of the great busy brewers of that district. He had three farms, and was a grain and wine merchant; he dealt also in manures and seed. In fact, he monopolized all the rural businesses. He was still a

young man, with a smiling face, and was very sympathetic. Unlike most of the farmers-general, who were arrogant and vain, he was homely and jovial, shook hands with everybody, and spoke in patois to us peasants. At the fairs he paid for numerous drinks, and his entrance into a café was justly considered by the landlord as a real stroke of luck. He had built large shops and a one-storied house with balconies and arabesques, which made a grand show. He lived in fine style and travelled a great deal ; he went every week to Moulins, where, although he was married, he kept a mistress, they said ; he also went frequently to Nevers and to Paris, or the south. We knew nothing of his origin, but he was reputed to be very rich, and it was said that he did all his business from choice, and not from necessity.

I had heard that M. Cerbony received money in the same way as a banker, simply giving a note with his signature as a guarantee. As I had confidence in him, I went to see him one Sunday morning after the first Mass, under the pretext of selling him my small lot of oats. Having found him alone, I said timidly :

" Monsieur Cerbony, I have a little money at my disposal, I want to place it somewhere : will you take it ? "

" How much have you ? " he asked in his ringing voice.

" I can give you four thousand francs, Monsieur."

" It is too little—I can use ten thousand at the end of the month. See your neighbours and friends ; make it ten thousand francs among you."

" Monsieur, I don't know anyone who—— Yes, though—I have a neighbour who ought to have about two thousand francs."

This was Dumont of Lower La Jarry : he had told me about it one day when we were both cutting the boundary hedge.

" All right, that is settled, bring me the six thousand francs at the end of the month, I shall be obliged to find the rest elsewhere ; so much the worse—I must do it to please you, however, seeing you are a customer. Oh ! I forgot to say, that I pay five per cent., like everybody. Good-bye."

The same evening I went to see Dumont of La Jarry to get him to combine with me ; to my great astonishment he showed no enthusiasm :

" Cerbony, Cerbony," he said, " he's a man who does a lot of business, but we don't know if he is rich : suppose this should turn out badly ? "

" But, stupid, he makes money as big as himself. If I had his earnings for one year, I should live at ease for the rest of my life."

" Fiddlesticks ! If he earns a lot, he spends a lot; you know that as well as I do. Look here, Tiennon, I should like to lend you my two thousand francs, but on condition that I deal only with you ; let us go to the notary together to make out a bill. I shall only ask four and a half per cent. interest ; Cerbony will pay you five, you will have a half per cent. for your trouble."

I was so deluded that I was on the point of taking Dumont's money on those terms, but Victoire and Jean dissuaded me.

At the appointed time I carried my four thousand francs to the busy brewer, explaining to him that my neighbour had lent his money elsewhere just before I went to see him ; I added hypocritically that he was very sorry to miss such an opportunity. Cerbony had an outburst of bad temper :

" It would serve you right if I sent you about your business. However, hand over what you've got ; but mind, it is only to please you."

He emphasized those words, and his face again wore its usual genial smile, while he spread out my gold coins

and felt my bank-notes. I was delighted at his friendliness.

Alas! my delight did not last long.

* * * * * *

It was the end of November when this business was transacted: on the first of March the following year, that is to say, three months after, when we were loading wood in one of our fields beside the road, the Franchesse postman arrived from Bourbon, where he went each morning to get the mail; he stopped to talk:

"Have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Cerbony—the famous Cerbony—bolted three days ago. At the beginning of February his wife went with a lot of luggage: since then he has been continually going on expeditions; the servants knew nothing; the house has been a little more empty and the shop too. On Tuesday he pretended he was going to Moulins; he ought to have returned in the evening; he hasn't been seen since. But yesterday a letter came from Switzerland saying he would not be back again. They say his affairs are in such a muddle that nobody will be able to put them right; he is in debt to everybody."

I was on the wagon piling up branches from the cut trees; I felt a sudden faintness, then a kind of giddiness which made me stagger. Jean saw it and gave me an anxious look, while he exerted himself to hide his trouble and to answer the postman.

At Bourbon, where I went the same evening, everybody confirmed the news of the disaster. I did not want to go to the notary, who was cunning, and who had probably laughed at my misfortune, being given that way, especially about money invested outside his office. But I went to see the clerk of the justice of the peace, a kind-hearted

man, to whom all the country people went in difficulties. Almost weeping, I told him my business. He seemed touched to see me so heart-broken ; he tried to comfort me, but said that he could do nothing to help me.

" Besides, there is nothing to be done at present ; you will be called with the other creditors ; you will only have to give your money to the trustees."

At home there were lamentations without end from Victoire :

" After all the trouble we have taken to save a few sous, to lose all at one time ! My God, what a misfortune ! And the poor money which came from my parents ! My God ! My God ! "

Everyone was sad and very vexed. Charles alone showed himself a philosopher, and to console us said :

" What can you do ? Don't think any more about it : it is lost, it is lost. Well ! it will change nothing in your way of living ; you would have worked just the same if this hadn't happened."

In my misfortune, I had the consolation of saying to myself that I was not the only one to be taken in ; fools of my kind were many. I congratulated myself above all on having taken Victoire's advice about Dumont's money. For the honest Cerbony had made a practice of taking as much as possible from his victims. A poor old gardener had borrowed in that way several thousand francs from a third person, in order to furnish the gentleman with the amount he demanded. Robbed of his savings, and unable to repay his creditor, one night the old man climbed the rock from which rose the towers of the old castle, and threw himself into the lake and was drowned. In the early morning the laundress saw something floating on the water. It was the old man's corpse.

I had to take a great many annoying steps ; to go several times to Moulins ; to associate myself with the other victims in order to consult a solicitor. After two

years, when all was settled, they gave us five per cent. I received two hundred francs. In various expenses I had spent that amount.

XLI

WHILE in the army, Charles had lost his surliness ; he was pleasant to everybody and had plenty to say. He expressed himself better than we did. At first he even laughed because we talked so badly.

" I think it is stupid to talk like that," he said ; " when we go among people who talk properly we feel awkward, and can find nothing to say, or else we say silly things in a way which makes them laugh at us. I don't see why, because we are peasants, we should talk nonsense."

" It would be funny," said Rosalie, " if we were to begin to talk like the lady at the château. It would soon be noticed ; everybody would say : ' Listen to them trying to set up for gentry.' "

" Nobody but fools would say that," Charles answered ; " and if we know that we have some intelligence we ought to despise the opinion of fools. I don't ask you to adopt the manners of Madame Lavallée : all that I want is that we should murder our words less."

No doubt what Charles said was reasonable enough, but he did not manage to get us into the habit of talking any differently ; on the contrary, it was he who, little by little, came to use almost entirely his former way of speaking.

XLII

MY son-in-law and my two boys were in their prime : as for me, I still held my ground. We four might easily have made the farm profitable. But that state of things did not last for more than two years, for the strife between

the two young families continued, and Moulin was obliged to go. Thanks to the efforts of his relatives and to mine, he was able to rent the little holding of Les Fouinats, and Roubaud, the steward, promised to employ him as often as possible at the château, as assistant to the gardener and general man.

In spite of that, the parting with our daughter was a great grief to Victoire and to me. We feared that she would be unhappy. She had only been married five years, and already she was pregnant for the third time. Her health still gave us a good deal of anxiety; she became thinner and paler and always looked depressed.

At first Clémentine, alone in the little house, found the babies very tiring, and used to come regularly every second day to visit us. Each time she came, her mother used to give her a pitcher of milk, and now and again filled a basket with cheese, butter, fruit, and even tarts on baking days. However, having too much work to do, it was not long before the poor child paid us fewer visits, and, finally, owing to her condition, she stopped coming altogether. Then it was my wife who went to see her, and she used to take some provisions with her. But one fine day, Rosalie interfered. It happened when the cows were nearing their time, and there was so little milk that we had to do without ourselves. Even then my wife wanted to take some to her daughter, but our daughter-in-law seized the opportunity to say that she had had enough of it, working and killing herself for the others, that she too would go if things went on in that way. Victoire having answered gently that a few half-pounds of butter, a bit of cheese, and a little milk was not a great deal, she replied in a sharp tone that it was enough to keep the family in groceries, and that it was hateful to see Clémentine enjoying as much as she wanted of those things while those who had the trouble of preparing them had to go without.

"We shall have enough to do," she added, "if all that

comes in at the door is to go out of the window ; we shan't be able to supply ourselves."

This paltry opposition of Rosalie's, which occurred on every occasion, made my wife very unhappy ; she complained when we were alone ; we discussed it at length during the night. Though we gave each of our children an annual wage, they were not in a community, and were not in any way masters. But we recognized, nevertheless, that they had certain rights of control and criticism. They contributed to the prosperity of the household, they co-operated in work which they would continue on their own account later, and in spite of the yearly reward which their work brought them, we had to admit that they might consider themselves defrauded if the products of the combined work went out without bringing in any profit. It is only fair to say that Charles did not trouble himself ; he even approved of the gifts being made to his sister. But the elder, goaded by his wife, supported her objections.

Therefore we had to give no more presents to Clémentine, at least openly. We became cunning. I often carried to her, hidden under my smock, little packages of provisions and food. But Rosalie's sharp eyes were everywhere, and it was very difficult for Victoire to make the smallest thing disappear without her knowledge ; and there were more and more violent scenes when she discovered that some gift had been made, unknown to her.

But a more important event happened, which relegated our family troubles to a second place.

XLIII

WITHOUT boasting, I may say that the farm had become valuable, and that, too, since it had been under my care. I had taken as much trouble as if it had been my own,

or, as if I had been assured of spending all my life there. I had cleared out the stones entirely from some parts, rooted out the brambles from the corners, thinned out hedges that were overgrown, and dug ponds in the fields where there were none. The gardener at the château had given me some lessons in grafting; through my efforts all the wild trees in the hedges had become good fruit producers. The lane which led to the road and which neither M. Lavallée nor his uncle would repair, I had made passable. I had never hesitated because of expense: all the fields had been limed a second time and gave good harvests; the meadows produced double, thanks to the compost and the manure; and my cattle was about the best among the six farms. Business continued to be pretty good, so I hoped before long to find myself in possession of a sum equal to that which I had lost.

But one day Roubaud came to me looking very crestfallen and said:

"The master wants to raise the rent three hundred francs, to date from next Martinmas."

I was overwhelmed. Ten years before I had been obliged to resign myself to an increase of two hundred francs which he had been pleased to impose, but which was somewhat justified by the advance in the price of cattle. But this time I could see no plausible excuse for the new increase, which made my rates amount to nine hundred francs, apart from my rent in kind. The market price of cattle was not higher than it had been ten years previously. If the products of the farm were increased, it was entirely due to the outlay made in common, and because I, the farmer, had improved it by my toil. I swore by all that I held dear that I would go to the devil before I would consent to one sou of increase. Roubaud said:

"Think it over; you are not obliged to give a definite answer to-day."

I replied that it had been all thought over, and renewed my oaths : the injustice made me too sick at heart.

However, after having talked it over at great length with Victoire and the boys, I offered a hundred francs, then a hundred and fifty. As though he was afraid to face our discontent, the master stayed in Paris. At the end of a month, he ordered Roubaud, who had sent him our answers, to announce to those *métayers* who had not already submitted entirely to the new conditions, that they must provide themselves with quarters elsewhere. That was a definite dismissal to the tenants at Plat-Mizot, Praulière and to us.

I should never have believed that that poor, restless Lavallée hid such perfidy under his affable exterior. Later, Roubaud quoted this saying of his :

" *Métayers* are like domestic servants : in time they become too bold ; one has to change them from time to time."

XLIV

A GREAT weariness, physical and mental, overcame me. At every age there is for each, some period of vexation when the daily miseries seem more poignant, when everything conspires to sadden one, when one wearies of the life which drags along. But in our declining years these impressions are more bitter and more mournful. I was approaching my fifty-fifth year. My face had lost its ruddy colour ; the white threads multiplied in my beard, and it had snowed heavily on my temples ; at last hard work seemed hard to me ; my muscles were weakened : it was the prelude to decay.

The blow was truly a brutal one. On this farm of La Creuserie I had spent twenty-five years of my life, the

best years of my full maturity, and I was identified with it. To the neighbours, to all who knew me well, was I not "Tiennon of La Creuserie," and to others "Father Bertin of La Creuserie?" To everybody my person seemed inseparable from the farm; it was impossible to separate our two names, they were so linked together by custom. Indeed, was I not linked to each part of the domain? to the barn in which I had heaped up such stores of fodder, to the stables in which I had tended so many animals; to the fields whose smallest veins I knew —the seams of red, of black, or yellow clay, the flinty and stony parts, as well as the free and deep soil; to the meadows which I had mowed twenty-five times; to the hedges which I had cut, the trees which I had pruned, and under which I had taken shelter from the rain, or sought shade in the hot weather. Yes, I was strongly linked, linked by all the fibres of my nature, to this land from which a gentleman was driving me without any other reason than that he was the master.

It was then that things of which I had never thought before, passed through my mind. I began to reflect on life; how cruelly stupid and dull it was for poor people like us. Never any pleasure: Work! work! always work! The winter passes away, the fine days return: we must profit quickly by them to sow the oats, to harrow for the wheat, to dig. April comes with its mildness; the peach trees are pink and the cherry trees white; the buds open, the birds sing; all very beautiful for those who have the leisure to enjoy them: but for us, it means only that we must hurry with the digging, with the planting of the potatoes. May arrives, the famous "merry month of May," often dull and rainy, but whose young green foliage is always a pleasant sight; we must break up the fallow land, clean the ditches, dig again. It is June, with its beautiful sunshine, the hedges are decorated with wild roses, the acacias heavy with white perfumed clusters;

there are flowers and nests everywhere: but in that beautiful season we have to rise at three o'clock in the morning to do the mowing, and we have to work without stopping until nine or ten in the evening. Then July, with its days of warm languor; how good to have nothing to do, to rest, stretched idly on soft sofas in closed drawing-rooms, or to sip fresh drinks under shelter in a park, or even to lie on the grass in the meadows in the thick shade of leafy trees. The rich do well to come and live in their country houses at such a time. But for us there is no leisure for afternoon naps. In great haste we have to finish the hay; the rye ripens. The rye is cut; we must hasten to beat it, for the straw is needed to bind the wheat, which is calling us. Courage! To the wheat! Let us beat the dry stalks with great blows! Let us bind the glowing sheaves! Let us build up the heavy sheaves into stacks. It is so hot, the workers can do no more. But I, the master, must lead on the others:

"The work will revive us. Moving about will give us air. Courage, lads. Courage!"

Or even, by way of variation:

"Let us hurry up to finish the wheat. With this heat the oats will ripen quickly; we shall be behind."

August is in full swing, and burns us finely. The harvest is finished. Drover, quick with the oxen, we must cart the manure while the roads are dry. To the loading, you others: cut, from the great heap in the yard, the little equal cubes that you will place neatly on the cart. How annoying! the machines are at work: we must go and help our neighbours with the threshing. But when we return all dirty with dust, and with swimming heads and weary limbs, quick to the interrupted work, to the spreading of the manure, to the digging! September: the days shorten; let us lengthen them; the work presses, the potatoes are ready for lifting; let us continue to get up at four o'clock in the morning. Courage, lads! Here

is October and its sowings, the rain may come; let us take advantage of the fine weather while we have it; let us still get up early in the mornings. Courage, lads! Ouf! Here is November at last: it is winter, the quiet season. It is the season of quiet, but not of rest: there is still work in plenty—digging, thatching, trenching, and working in the meadows, brambles to be got rid of, hedges to cut, trees to prune; above all, there are the animals, which are once more in the stables and for which we must care. Up at five o'clock even now; let us do the grooming at night; we shall be ready all the earlier for work in the fields, and all day we splash about in the mud, bemired to the thighs, and with wet feet. The evenings serve very well for cutting rations of root-fodder for the oxen and the fat sheep, and to cook the potatoes for the pigs.

"Courage, lads! We must not remain idle by the fire."

It does not give much warmth that fire; the wood is damp, the chimney smokes. But just because it does not give much warmth, we should be more ready to shiver if we did not work; and so, movement is beneficial. When the snow falls however, we have holidays. Oh! only half-holidays, for the two daily groomings have still to be done, and then we have fences to make for the fields, rakes for the hay-making, to put new handles on the tools which need them; in the summer we had something else to do than amuse ourselves with such trifles.

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Yes, there it is, the farmer's year. Has he any right to complain of it? Perhaps not. All the poor are in the same case. All the workers toil without respite. But in their shops, in their factories, the citizens, the villagers do not have the outside elements to reckon with—not at

all, or at least very little. In *our* lives it is the weather which plays the greatest part, and the weather which delights to thwart us. There is the rain, the ceaseless rain ; the land is soaked, to move the soil would be folly ; the grass grows in the cornfields and we cannot dig them again ; the digging, the sowing are late, and that is against us. There is the drought, the endless drought, the vegetation fades ; at times we have to go a long way to water the beasts, for there is no water in the ponds ; and if we persist in trying to dig we tire the oxen, we wear ourselves out, we risk breaking the plough at any minute. A shower follows, trifling, but enough to prevent us loading the hay, binding the wheat, enough to upset the programme of one day. Here is a storm and we tremble in fear of hail. Here is the snow which lasts several weeks, hindering outdoor work, causing a delay which it is hard to make good again. Here is frost without snow, with sunshine by day, and that destroys the roots of winter cereals. Then there is fine weather in the autumn, and no frost comes to kill the insects which harm the wheat at its birth ; but it comes in May to spoil the young plants and destroy the buds on the vines. At every season of the year, for one reason or another, we have some cause to complain about weather which is unfavourable to our labours or our harvests.

But the harvests are not all, there are the animals. We do some breeding ; seven cows ought to give us some calves each year. As soon as a cow nears the time of calving it is necessary to watch her, to rise several times in the night to go and look at her, in order to be able to aid nature when the moment comes, and afterwards to take care of the mother and the new-born one—these are essential parts of the work. Also the young calves are subject to diarrhœa, they waste and die. Then there is a pulmonary affection which attacks the sheep, destroying half of the flock and causing us to sell the remainder at a low price. And the

pigs cough, and have a stiffening of the hind quarters, and don't eat: we have to doctor them; with great difficulty we cut the poisonous pustules on the tongue, and in spite of all that they die. Then an epidemic of thrush breaks out: all the animals are ill or lame for several weeks, the working oxen often unfit for all work and the cows' milk unsaleable.

We have beasts to sell, we happen on a bad fair; we have to part with them for much less than their value. At other times we are taken advantage of by rogues of merchants. When we buy, on the contrary, we pay dear for animals which we find have many defects.

After the threshing we sell the small amount of grain that we have over at a low price, because we find ourselves short of money. The rich proprietors and big farmers, who have capital and convenient storage, wait till later and often profit from a considerable rise in price.

* * * * * *

And all the time we have *to be there*, on the same bad roads, wearing the same old patched clothes, dirty, with the beasts' hairs sticking to them, living always in the same old ugly sombre houses which no one will repair. Elsewhere there are places not like ours, which are more flat or more hilly; there are rivers much larger than the one at Moulins, there are mountains, there are seas; but of all that we see nothing: we are tied to the corner of the earth that we cultivate. And we never see the fine towns with their curious monuments, their promenades, their public gardens, and we enjoy none of the pleasures they offer. In the towns, even in the small ones, at Bourbon even, there are very fine shops; only it is not for us that they show their magnificence. Oh! the good smell of fresh bread, of white bread with golden crust, which the bakers make every day! But it is not for us, that bread.

And it is not for us that the butchers hang well in view whole animals. Our meat is the pork which we salt each year and of which a piece, more or less rancid, makes the daily meal. From the pigs the butchers prepare some fine appetizing things which are bought by the gentlemen in the towns: sausages, Italian cheese covered with jelly, small tempting hams. But those things are too fine and too dear for us. The smell is pretty good when on Sundays we pass the confectioners' shops, but the dainties they contain—nice-smelling buns, juicy cakes, tarts which make the mouth water—never make the poor country people suffer from toothache.

There are some things which we ought to have the benefit of, however: the produce of the poultry yard and the dairy, for instance. But bah! to us the trouble, to others the enjoyment! We only use the smallest part of these provisions; we carry nearly everything to the people in the towns and we even take them our best fruits and vegetables. We must have a little of their money, for they sell dearly enough whatever we are obliged to buy from them: their cloth, their *sabots*, their hairdressing, their groceries, their drapery goods. The doctors, because we are so far from the centres, charge us big fees for their visits; the priests for their prayers, and the lawyer, when we need him, relieves us of a twenty-franc piece for nothing. All those people, good heavens! perhaps they are right; they need to earn money to live better than we do, to procure the nice things which we do without, for nothing in the world would induce them to share our ordinary way of living. And if the collector of taxes also imposes rates more and more heavy it is that the government may give enough to its officials to live in an honourable manner, not the sordid life of the producers.

To add to that we have to do business with masters who exploit us, thieves like Fauconnet, imbeciles like Parent, blackguards like Sébert, scamps like Lavallée. And if we

do manage to save up a little we take our savings to scoundrels like Cerbony, who run away with them.

And yet for all that we are happy. M. Lavallée told me one day that this had been affirmed a long time ago by a man called Virgil, and that we ought to share that man's opinion.

For several weeks, months perhaps, these thoughts, just but discouraging, haunted my mind. Indulging in too much reflection of that kind always makes one unhappy : such was my sad experience during that period.

XLV

I RENTED the big farm of Clermorin at Saint Aubin, close to the outskirts of Bourbon. It contained about a hundred and seventy acres and was the property of a family of small middle-class country people. There was an old gentleman, tall, lean and white-haired, with an oily manner and a nasal voice, and his two daughters, old maids of over forty, with harsh faces and who were very bigoted.

We had to consent to a lot of things which were hardly their business, as, for instance, not to swear, and to go to Mass every Sunday and to confession, the men once a year at least, and the women twice.

M. Noris was an agriculturalist, that is to say, he spent his life doing nothing, for one could not call the management of two farms " work." He lived near Saint Aubin in a big, very plain old house ; a covering of ivy badly hid the cracks in the grey walls. Our new master was a type of petty local *bourgeoisie*, he had always lived in the country, and Moulins was his only capital. At Moulins he belonged to a Society for the Promotion of Agricultural Interests which was composed entirely of *bourgeois* like himself, who called

themselves farmers. The said society tried to play an important part in organizing competitions for which they solicited grants from the government (although it was the government's implacable enemy), and in addressing petitions to the Chambers to ask them to tax foreign agricultural produce.

M. Noris was niggardly ; I was not long finding that out. He haggled about expenses, preferred to sell beasts in bad condition rather than buy oil cake or meal to improve them ; and we never dared to speak to him of buying manure.

" No, no," he would say, " no phosphates ! the farm manure ought to be enough."

And he would shake his old bird-like head with terror. For a member of the Society for the Promotion of Agricultural Interests, that was not very good reasoning.

From the same motive of stubborn avarice he rarely sold his merchandise at the first fair. His preliminary estimate was always fixed at too high a rate, and he never wanted to abate it. We would bring our beasts back, take them to a second fair, from which we would sometimes bring them home again. At the third fair the master would sell them from sheer weariness, and often at a lower price than that which had been offered to him at first.

M. Noris had many other annoying habits. For instance, he never wanted to balance his books at the end of the year. The *métayers* on the other farms had not had their accounts made up for fifteen years. When the poor people had a pressing need of money he would, with a curt word, give them a sum which was always lower than the amount they asked. Once at Bourbon fair my predecessor had demanded a sum which he required to be paid at once ; our worthy master had no better manners than to scatter a dozen hundred-sou pieces around him, saying in his nasal voice :

" There, there is your money ! There it is, you can pick it up ! "

And the other was obliged to pick it up from the mud, to the great indignation of decent people and the delight of foolish ones.

I did not believe in letting our accounts be delayed indefinitely. Charles had an idea :

" You ought to go and see the master and ask him for more than he owes us," said he.

So I actually went to see him at his house a week after Martinmas.

" Monsieur Noris, I want to settle up, I am in great need of money."

" You have hardly any to take, Bertin ; the profits are not much this year."

" You owe me, I believe, about eleven hundred francs, Monsieur." I knew that was at least double the amount.

" Never in this world ! Never in this world ! "

And jumping up, he threw himself on his account book.

" I owe you five hundred and thirty-six francs, neither more nor less."

I pretended to be surprised and I also pretended to have forgotten a sale of sheep, and finally insisted on having my money.

He grumblingly paid me four hundred francs and declared that he could not, for want of money, give me the balance. I was obliged to pay myself during the course of the year. I had in my hands the money from the sale of some bulls, so I kept back the hundred and thirty-six francs which were due to me ; he made a grimace but dared not show any annoyance.

Every year, in order to get him to settle up, new ruses had to be resorted to, and as he made up his accounts very irregularly we nearly always had some slight difficulties.

M. Noris had a passion for horses and hunting. We had a fine bay mare which foaled each year. Generally the farmers who have a mare use it to go to the fairs and to do their errands, and sometimes in the work of the fields.

But by the master's orders ours was exempt from all heavy work : he would say :

" Work spoils a mare and tells on the foals."

But the real reason was that he did not want his *métayers* to have the chance of riding in a carriage, which seemed to him an unsuitable and quite superfluous luxury. He took the young foals home as soon as they were a year old and had them prepared for the race course. He paid us very little for them, although he always made a good deal out of them.

In spite of his great age he hunted in the autumn. Game abounded, chiefly rabbits : round one very small copse they swarmed so thickly that they destroyed half of the nearest cereals. But it was useless to complain of the mischief that the rodents did : M. Noris would never decide against them. When he was walking round he liked to see them scampering away in the furrows at the approach of his two big greyhounds, and he would not allow many of them to be killed. His keeper, a great hirsute and brutal man, whom he had chosen carefully, watched also with excessive vigilance. It was enough that a person should cross a corner of the property with his hands in his pockets for the keeper to arrest him. To tell the truth, in that case he did not take proceedings against him ; he did not go beyond commanding the alleged delinquent to appear at once before the master. The master would reprimand him, make him pay a hundred sous or ten francs, and the thing would stop at that : that, at least, was not actual blackmailing. But when there was the least evidence the proceedings went on. One of the neighbouring *métayers* had an action brought against him which cost him eighty francs, because one day the keeper discovered a spring trap in the quickset hedge which separated the field in which he was working from one of our fields. The poor man has sworn to me a hundred times since that he had no idea that the trap was there, and that he certainly

had not set it. Poachers were not the only people who incurred the implacable hatred of M. Noris: Republicans were in the same case. On both he would have had the most severe penalties inflicted, the most extreme punishment. He wished to see them all in prison, or banished to the far colonies. The destruction of a nest of young rabbits or a partridge's nest, or even the firing of a gun on the land, put him in a furious rage. In Bourbon the children used to follow him in a band, shouting "*Vive la République!*" and singing verses of "La Marseillaise," or even singing, like a chant without end, "*'Blique, 'blique, 'blique, 'blique, 'blique, 'blique!*"

It nearly maddened him every time; he dared not cross the town out of school hours. It is said that in 1877, when he was suffering from an attack of bronchitis which had nearly killed him, someone had come to announce that the result of an election had been favourable to the Republicans; he rose up in bed with a sudden bound and in a breathless whisper he exhaled the deep hatred in his heart:

"The brigands!—There is, then, no more room at Cayenne!"

And he fell back on his pillow, helpless, fainting.

One time, four years later, he came to our house at an election time. He saw some bills and newspapers that had been sent by Dr. Fauconnet, the Republican candidate.

"Don't have those diabolical papers here. Put them in the fire! The wicked pamphlets! Put them in the fire, the bad papers! You will bring some evil on yourselves if you keep them here."

I objected that no one could read.

"Their very presence is dangerous," he said.

And he himself threw them in the fire; then he concluded:

"The keeper will meet you on polling day at the door of the Town Hall and give you the papers to put in the ballot-box, you understand?"

Workmen, tradespeople, contractors of every kind were carefully chosen outside the Reds ; and he made us do as he did—keep at a distance all those who avowed themselves Republicans, and spend nothing at their shops.

That was his way of revenging himself on the Republic.

XLVI

THE two ladies attended specially to the execution of the clauses concerning religion. It gave us all trouble enough to conform to them. As far as I was concerned, I used to go formerly to Mass almost every other Sunday, that is to say, I had kept the habit of my youth. When I went to Bourbon or Franchesse on Sundays, I seldom missed going to Mass, and I did not approve of those who spent their time at the inn instead of going to church. I was far from believing all the priests' tales, or their theories about Paradise and Hell, confession and fast days ; I looked on all that as nonsense. It seemed to me—and my opinion has not changed—that the true duty of each person lies in a very simple line of conduct : to work honestly, to cause sorrow to none, to help when we have a chance, and to come to the aid of those more unfortunate than ourselves. That programme, which the best of us do not follow, is worth all the sermons. If we conform to that as nearly as possible, I believe we need not fear anything either here or elsewhere. But with regard to that famous eternal life which is to come after this, the priests talk a great deal about it without knowing anything. I, as well as others, have noticed that while they expect this celestial joy, the priests in nowise turn their noses up at earthly pleasures ; they drink good wine, they don't disdain choice food, and they know how to screw money out of the faithful. As to their creed, whether they believe in it or not, that is

their business. I acknowledge that I am completely ignorant ; but I do say with regard to the question of the future of the soul, that the shrewdest person in the world, even the Pope himself, knows no more than I do, for no one has come back to say what is going on there. Therefore, I thought seldom of death and never of eternal salvation, and I had quite given up going to confession since my marriage. I know some who were faithful to that custom and were not any better for it. Victoire confessed, and so did Rosalie ; neither the one nor the other was kinder as a result. My wife continued to be cold and ill-tempered, my daughter-in-law snappish and rude ; they acted exactly the same the day after as they did the day before.

" Then what is the good ? " I said to myself.

All the same, I firmly believed in the existence of a Supreme Being who governed all, who ruled the course of the seasons, who sent the rain and the sun, the frost and the hail ; and as the farmer's work is only done well if the weather is favourable, I tried to please the Master of the Elements, who held a good part of our interests in His hands. For that reason I seldom missed the ceremonies when the success of the crops was the subject, and I clung faithfully to all the little pious traditional rites which are practised in the country on numerous occasions. I always went to Mass on Palm Sunday, with a big bunch of boxwood, fragments of which I placed afterwards behind the doors. I placed behind the doors also, small crosses of osier which were blessed in May, the hawthorn of the Rogations and the bouquets containing the three varieties of the herbs of Saint Roch, which keep the animals from illness. I joined the processions of Saint Mark, who cares for the good things of the earth, and some days after I went to the Mass of Saint Athanasius, the preserver from the hail. I never failed to sprinkle the haylofts with holy water before storing the fodder. On beginning to cut a field of wheat I made the sign of the cross with the first sheaf, and I also

made it when vitriolizing them, and again on each loaf of bread before cutting it, and on the backs of the cows with their first milk after calving. I did not think it ridiculous to see a candle lighted during a thunder-storm. I lifted my hat before the wayside calvaries, and each morning and evening said a bit of a prayer. I ought to say that I did all that as much from habit as with the idea of pleasing God : I had always followed those practices and they seemed natural to me. But I could not see that missing Mass on a Sunday or failing to fast on a Friday ought to bring endless punishment, any more than it seemed right to attribute to the priests the power to absolve all sins at confession.

My boys agreed, at least in appearance, with my way of seeing things. Jean attended Mass fairly regularly once a fortnight, as I did. Since his return from the regiment, Charles went scarcely once a month. It was he who found it specially hard to be obliged to go regularly.

" A pretty business it is," he said, " if one is to be continually poked in with the priest."

One Sunday he went to Bourbon in the morning and never put his feet inside a church. But the next day, while we were in the fields, the women had a visit from Mlles. Yvonne and Valentine Noris.

" Victoire," they said, " your young son was not at Mass yesterday. "

" He went to Bourbon, Mesdemoiselles, he must have gone to Mass there."

" We don't believe a word of that. Charles ought to come every Sunday to Mass at Saint Aubin, as you all do ; he can go and walk at Bourbon or elsewhere afterwards, if he thinks fit ; but Mass first. Tell him distinctly that he cannot neglect that duty which we have commanded without the thing becoming known to us, for our surveillance is quite an established fact, and if he persists in disobeying, you will all suffer for it."

He was obliged to yield, forsooth! He was obliged even, as I was, to go to confession at Easter. It was the only way to be at peace; for those ladies had spoken the truth: nothing escaped them; I believe that we were spied on by their keeper and their servants.

But that was not all: swearing was strictly forbidden. But Charles had got into the habit of swearing in the army. As soon as something went wrong he would let out a "Good God," or a "Thunder of God!" adorned with various prefaces. I had tried to persuade him to get out of the habit, or at least to restrain himself in the presence of spies. But it was difficult for him, and one day he allowed a great oath to escape and the keeper heard it. The two old maids set to without delay.

"Victoire, your son continues to say bad words, to swear; we will not have that here."

They went so far as to reprove me for saying bad words, they had heard me use the expression, "Thunder take me!" My faith! I told them squarely that the expression was as necessary to me as my pinches of snuff and that I could not promise not to use it. In fact, those words came to my lips unconsciously, and it was the same with Charles and his oaths.

Ah well! although they were always poking in the church, at the confessional, at the holy table; although they had an exaggerated horror of swearing, they were not any better for that, the two old trollops! They were as hard as rocks and as malicious as their father.

The winter of '79–'80 was a very hard one. An intense cold prevailed for two months. In the night we could hear the cracking of the trees made brittle by the frost. The sparrows, the wrens, the robins sought refuge in the stables. It was quite easy to catch them, they were so exhausted; every morning we used to find, near the outbuildings, some of those poor little birds frozen to death. The dismal ravens croaked in companies round the approaches to the

farms, even daring, pressed by hunger, to come picking furtively on the manure heap. Among the poor people the misery was acute. The day labourers, who were out of work, took it into their heads to wander about the country looking for dead wood, some were stupid enough to fell whole trees in the night. A great maple disappeared from one of our fields. M. Noris and his daughters came to inquire about the theft and I heard Mlle. Yvonne say to the keeper :

" You must make frequent rounds in the night, and if you happen to see any of those wretches, don't hesitate : fire upon him—you have the right to do it."

That is how those bigots practised charity, the chief virtue of the humanitarian Christ, the Christ of gentleness and pardon. Their charity was exercised in low revenge, in treacherous blows aimed at those who were so unfortunate as to displease them. They considered that they had done enough if they gave a sou once a fortnight to the poor of the commune, and on Friday some dry crusts to the warfarers : on other days nothing at all.

If there is a Paradise, Mlles. Yvonne and Valentine ought to have some trouble to obtain admission, in spite of all their genuflexions.

XLVII

My godfather's wife was dead, and I had to take my sister Marinette under my care, for the dead woman's daughter-in-law did not want to keep her.

" You have never had her," said my godfather ; " it is certainly your turn : besides, you are the only one who can afford it."

I might have objected that he would not have offered to take her when she was young and less of an imbecile, if she had not been useful. But I preferred to say nothing,

and to consent with a good grace to take my poor sister into my home.

When the news was announced there, Victoire, in a plaintive tone, and Rosalie in an angry one, joined in a litany of exclamations, saying that we had no need of that, that we had enough work and worry already. I allowed the storm to pass over, saying as little as possible. (Silence is always the best means of shortening the length, and weakening the importance of scenes of that kind.) But when, on the appointed day, I went to fetch Marinette, my wife and daughter-in-law submitted readily enough, I must admit: and it was not I who had to put up with the trouble she gave.

Indeed, the poor woman's company was no pleasure to anyone. Her brain was so weak that it held scarcely any trace of reason. She still spoke very little, or said only quite silly things; but she often mourned in a kind of plaintive chant, which worried everyone and frightened the children, then, suddenly, without any motive she would begin to laugh stridently and painfully. She was not at all useful; for a long time it had been impossible to trust her with the sheep.

Her presence in our house caused some gossip in the neighbourhood at first; they talked a great deal about the poor idiot who never went out, and who cried a great deal: she was the mystery, the ulcer of our home.

However, I never regretted having taken her. In saying that I was the only one able to take charge of her, my godfather was quite right, for I had more resources than my two elder brothers, although my position was not brilliant.

* * * * * *

My godfather had never been able to scrape as much as four sous together. He was then at Autry, in a poor

farm, whose owners, formerly rich, wanted to appear so still. Seen close at hand, the life of those people was ridiculous, and they were laughed at by everyone in the Commune. The husband, a great simpleton, who had been dissipated, and had allowed himself to be drawn into unfortunate speculations, was partly the cause of their precarious condition at that time. His wife, at any rate, considered him absolutely responsible for it; she took the management of the household into her own hands; she kept the money and even did not give him enough to go to the café once a week. The consequence was, that the weak and bored man prowled about the town of Autry, not knowing how to kill the hours of the day. He would go to the carpenter's shop, to the farrier's, would accost the peasants and help the *garde-champêtre* to post the bills on the church walls. Sometimes someone would say in an ironical tone, knowing that he was penniless:

"Will you stand a pint, Monsieur Gouin?"

"It is impossible, I must get back: they are waiting for me at home."

"Ah! But come all the same: I'll pay."

Then they were no longer waiting for him at home He, the gentleman, so much did he like to drink, would accept without shame the contemptuous hospitality of hard-handed workmen. In his own home, all the satisfactions of a gourmand were refused to him. Mme. Gouin-Agathe, as everybody usually called her, kept the key of the cellar in her pocket, and also that of the sideboard in which the spirits were kept, and she only opened those sanctuaries on grand occasions. At meals a bottle of wine used to appear on the table, but only in an honorary capacity; all the week it remained intact, unless some intruder presented himself at the psychological hour; otherwise, the bottle was emptied only on Sundays.

Agathe was niggardly about the smallest things; she

was like the wives of the poor day labourers: she was grudging about lights, and firing, butter, soap, even pepper and salt. The servant had no white bread; she helped herself to some of the loaf of thirds which was the dog's food; if she had not done that, she could not have satisfied her hunger. Three glib-tongued servants went anæmic out of that hole.

The truth was that the Gouins wanted to continue to make a good show in the world of smaller squireens in the district. They went visiting at various mansions, sometimes even dining there. When it was necessary to return those dinners, the house was upside down for a fortnight.

"Do it well and spend little, that is the end to attain," said Agathe.

They did it well, so as not to appear reduced: but the expenses were heavy and a heartrending time followed; for several weeks the employers condemned themselves to onion soup and thirds bread, and the bottle of wine was only emptied when it was in a condition to make the salad. In the course of one of those days, M. Gouin called at my godfather's house during a meal time. They offered him some dried pears, which had been cooked, and which he had looked at covetously: he ate half a dish of them.

Of their ancient splendour there still remained to them a carriage of passable appearance, which Agathe called the victoria. From time to time they would go to Moulins to make purchases or even to pay visits, or in good weather simply to take an airing. Then she would send the servant to tell my godfather that he was to take the old mare from the farm. At the appointed hour, he put the horse in and climbed on to the seat, for he had to act as coachman. The equipage was truly comic, and gave rise to jokes without end. Even now I can see that old mare with rough hair of a dirty white, often bespattered with mud from the pastures, dragging along,

slowly, heavily, the once fine carriage; the old countryman in smock and *sabots* turned into a coachman, huddled on his seat, awkwardly handling the whip; and in the depths of the carriage, spread proudly on the faded cushions, that couple of hungry *bourgeois*.

You can believe that the Gouins, swollen with vanity, preferred to make themselves miserable rather than change their way of living; to grind down in a fine fashion the *métayers* of their one farm. There were not many who stayed longer than two or three years under their yoke. It was generally only very poor people who consented to work for them, and they always went out again in a more destitute condition than when they entered. One of the sayings of the country was that the proprietors collected in their granary the skins of the numerous *métayers* whom they had fleeced.

My godfather was, therefore, very far from being in a state of prosperity.

* * * * * *

To make a fortune is the dream of all workers. My brother Louis believed at one time that he had realized it. In the twelve years from 1860–1872, he had managed to save eight thousand francs. Then the devil tempted him to want to be a proprietor. A pretty little holding of five hectares was being sold at Montilly, he bought it for fifteen thousand francs. He rode a horse, had a spring carriage, and a goat skin, and he went to the fairs looking like a great farmer. He played cards every Sunday, and often invited friends to feast at his house. They made him a municipal councillor: he was very proud of that. When we met at Bourbon, he used to look at me from a height, and it evidently cost him a painful effort to condescend to talk to me.

His wife, Claudine, was even prouder than he; she got fat; she wore jackets made in the fashion, bonnets with

a double row of lace, and a gold chain round her neck. It was remarked that she bought a lot of coffee, and sugar by the half loaf. Victoire, who was not able to do the same, said to me one day :

" Claudine plays the great lady, I wonder how long it will last ? "

It only lasted five or six years. The old proprietor of the holding, who had been paid half the amount required, had taken a mortgage for the remainder. Louis paid him interest at five per cent., and thus gave him a sum nearly equal to the tenantable value of the property. Further, having wished to do some repairs, he was in debt elsewhere ; he could then only run down quickly. When he became aware that he was on a dangerous course, he tried to struggle against it : he sold his carriage, went less to the café and set to work ; but the mischief was done ; the harm was irreparable. The former proprietor, to whom he owed three years' interest, took possession of his holding again, giving just enough to pay the other creditors. Left without any means, my poor brother was reduced to living in a miserable hovel, and to working here and there as a day labourer. He died two years later of congestion of the lungs, which he contracted one very cold day when he was breaking stones on the road to Moulins.

Claudine, who knew so well how to play the fine lady, was obliged to take in washing, and to beg for charity. Her career had a very sad end.

XLVIII

In the autumn of 1880, we were visited at Clermorin by Georges Grassin and his wife. Georges was the son of my sister Catherine. He had just married, and he took

advantage of this occasion to renew his acquaintance with his Bourbon relatives; for he had never come among us since the time when his parents had brought him as a boy. My sister and her husband, having only this one child, had kept him at school until he was eighteen. From the University he went into the Army for a year, and he had since occupied a responsible position in a great business house. Georges and his wife came straight to our house with the intention of making it their headquarters, one of my nieces at Autry having written to them to say that I was best able to accommodate them. When the letter arrived announcing their coming, Rosalie exclaimed:

"Parisians! They will be setting up for gentry! They will talk fine, my friends."

Victoire, very worried, wondered where she should put them to sleep, and even what food she could prepare for them. They discussed it, and finally it was decided that we should give our guests the bed in the room in which Charles and little Tiennon, Jean and Rosalie's child, slept: they would use the shepherd's bed in the kitchen, he having consented to make up a bed for himself with some blankets in the hayloft.

The day came; Charles borrowed a donkey from a roadman in the neighbourhood, put it in our little carriage, which we had kept, although we had no use for it on that farm. He went to meet the Grassins, who were to arrive at Bourbon by coach from Moulins about five o'clock in the evening.

They reached our house a little before dark. I was busy carting manure: I came with a nearly empty cart, into the main road, from a side road about two hundred yards from home, and appeared right in front of them. Georges and his wife walked in front arm in arm: Charles led the donkey by the bridle; the baggage was piled up in the carriage; there was a big trunk, two bags, and a hat-box.

I cried "Woa!" to my oxen, and stopped them. Charles said:

"This is my father."

The two young people exclaimed together:

"Ah! It is Uncle! Good evening, Uncle."

They threw themselves on me to kiss me.

"Poor Uncle, we are very glad to see you."

"So am I, my Nephew, so am I, my Niece," I stammered.

I let my goad fall from my hand and allowed them to kiss me.

"I am not in a very nice state to receive you," I said, rather confused when the first excitement had passed.

In fact, my *sabots* were nearly worn out, blunted at the toes and coated with manure, and the other parts of my clothing, the grey linen trousers torn at the knees, my blue check shirt, even my old straw hat frayed at the edges, had their share; my feet, which were naked in their *sabots*, my hands with thick horny fingers, were also plastered with it. In addition to all this, it was Friday, and I had not been shaved since Sunday, so that my face was hirsute and prickly. I wondered what impression I was making on the elegant little Parisienne, so fragile and dainty, whose black hair smelt so nice. To touch her seemed a profanation. She wore a blue floating dress with lace facings, a big straw hat trimmed only with a bunch of daisies, and her fine varnished boots creaked at every step.

"Those boots are too fine for our roads, Niece."

"Yes, indeed, Uncle, your roads are rather rough; they have much need to be levelled."

She smiled gently, and that smile corrected the rather too serious expression of her face; it was a long face with a thin nose, pale cheeks, and big, deep, black eyes.

In spite of his thirty years, Georges looked youthful, although he had a slight, red-blonde moustache and a scanty beard of the same colour cut to a point at the chin.

He was dressed in fancy black and white check trousers, black jacket and round, soft hat; an immaculate milk-white collar was round his thin neck, and a large blue bow, with a white pattern, was spread out on his waistcoat.

I shouted to the oxen to make them go on again, and I walked beside Georges, who took his wife's arm. He gave me news of his parents, who were still in the same house, in the service of an old lady of seventy. They did not want to leave her, as they counted on being remembered in her will.

"So, Uncle, you are just getting back from the fields with your cart," Georges said, after a silence.

I answered a little absent-mindedly:

"Yes, Mons——" (I nearly said "Monsieur." Heavens! he was like a gentleman, that nephew).

"Yes, Nephew, I am just starting the manuring."

"Oh, yes, the manuring;" he appeared to reflect; "the manure from your animals, the product of the dung and the stable litter?"

"Yes," I answered, with a rather mocking smile. It seemed a stupid question.

His wife asked for other explanations, which drew from me the answer that I was taking the manure to where we sowed the wheat.

"Oh, how horrible!" said she, with a little cry. "The wheat our bread is made of, does it come like that—in the manure?"

"Mixed with the soil," said Charles, "the manure is not seen again."

Georges went on: "That astonishes you, Berthe? The earth would exhaust itself, you see, if we ceased to provide it with fertilizing matter."

"Is your cart comfortable, Uncle?" asked Berthe. "My cousin's was not very nice; I got into it for a little while on the road. I got a pain at my heart, I was shaken so much."

We arrived in the yard. Victoire, Jean, his wife, and the little one came forward to meet the Parisians: there was a general embracing. Georges and his wife kissed even Marinette, whom we had tried to dress in clean clothes. She submitted unwillingly, and then began to make her usual plaintive chant, which made a painful impression on Berthe.

Victoire had wondered uneasily if our nephew and niece were accustomed to fast on Fridays.

"Pooh! Do you think townspeople pay any attention to that!" Rosalie had exclaimed. "They don't trouble much about forbidden days; they have no religion."

My wife had prepared milk soup, some green haricots with butter, a roasted chicken and a salad with nut oil. The meal was only for the guests. To have cooked extra for everybody would have been too costly. She served them on a little table in the room. But Berthe was troubled:

"But what about yourselves? Oh! no, we don't want to dine alone; we have come to be in the family."

I told her that we had our meal afterwards, at eight o'clock, when it was too dark to work any longer out of doors.

"But, indeed, Uncle, at least you will come and keep us company, you and my little cousin."

And she made little Jean sit near her.

Victoire said to me:

"Well, yes, Tiennon, you had better dine with our nephew and niece."

I changed my trousers and *sabots*, and put on a smock and took my place beside them. They ate with enjoyment, but a very small quantity. However, they declared the milk soup excellent, and regaled themselves with haricots, which were tender, and with which Victoire had not stinted the butter. On the other hand, they ate very little of the chicken: that was more common for

them than the milk and the fresh vegetables. I noticed that they were full of little attentions to each other.

" Do you see, Georges ? " or " Isn't it, Georges ? " she would say about everything.

And he :

" See, Berthe, that will make you ill, my darling ; you are eating too many haricots——"

For dessert they had some black plums.

" Those plums are not good for you ; do not eat too many, little one."

I thought such ways rather silly. In the country, if wives and husbands spoke like that, everyone would laugh at them. At the bottom we love each other as much, but we are never so liberal with tender words.

From time to time, when Victoire came to serve them, Georges and Berthe complained again because she had prepared two dinners, and forbade her to do it in the future, seeing that they were quite ready to wait till a little later. At his mother's request, Charles had brought a loaf of white bread from Bourbon, for our household bread was eight days old and was already hard : nevertheless, they had a fancy to eat that.

" We want to be quite country people, Uncle," they said.

Without a pause they questioned me about everything, asking how many sheep we had, how many cows, and how we did the milking.

" I shall come to see all the animals to-morrow," said Berthe. " Let me see, you get up very early—at six o'clock ! "

" Oh, Niece ! by six o'clock we have already been at work for two hours."

" You get up at four o'clock ! Really ! Oh ! Uncle, we are lazy ; Georges goes to his office at nine o'clock ; we get up at eight, never earlier. But here, we are going to get up in the early morning."

When the meal was finished, we had to return to the kitchen, for there was no door communicating with the outside. The others were having their supper. After they had swallowed their soup, they crumbled as usual some bread in the great red earthenware dishes and steeped it with cold milk. Berthe was astonished at that:

"But that is another soup—— Do you eat two soups at dinner?"

She realized at that moment, without any doubt, that this second dinner had not taken much time to cook. I proposed that we should take a turn in the fresh air, for I saw that their presence worried the women about the dishes. Jean and Charles joined us, and we went together round the meadow near the house. The walk was monotonous; the moon gave a little light, but the sky was dark and the wind fresh. Georges, having felt his wife shiver, repeated at every moment, although she denied that she was cold: "You will take cold, my darling, I am sure of it: we must not be late."

Thanks to Charles, who kept his head well enough, the conversation did not languish so much; but for my part, I said very little; at first because I felt it ridiculous to talk so badly before those who talked so well, and also because I dared not ask questions about the town, seeing that my questions would have been at least as simple as theirs about the country.

When we returned to the house, before saying "Good-night," Victoire asked the young people what they would take in the morning.

"Don't make anything special for us, Aunt," they said together, "we will eat soup, like everybody else."

They had no doubt that the morning meal was the most important, and that we would have a dish of bacon. Of course my wife took no notice of their reply: she made coffee for them.

But they said so much again in the morning about not wanting a table apart from us, that they wished to eat with us, and as we did at the midday meal, that we felt obliged to satisfy them. For that reason we sat down to table at twelve o'clock, a whole hour earlier than usual. And there was a lot of unusual things: to begin with, wine, then a juicy omelette made with fresh eggs, some beefsteak, cream cheese powdered with sugar, and pears from an espalier in the garden: we could have sold twenty-five of these for at least twenty sous at Bourbon market, but Victoire had a fancy to have a dish at each end of the table. The dishes at the end nearest to the visitors contained food which was like the other in appearance only, for our omelette was made with potatoes, the beef-steaks were pieces of grilled bacon; the cheese had hardly any cream and no sugar; the pears alone were the same, but my wife gave the shepherd an angry look when he dared to take one:

"You ought to be able to find enough in the fields," she said; "fallen ones are not scarce just now."

Then the members of the family knew that the fine ones were only for ornament, and no one presumed to touch them.

At the evening meal we made no more attempts to save appearances. There was milk soup for everybody, as usual, and the Parisians had a vermicelli soup with a *purée* of potatoes and a bit of roasted veal. Berthe appeared to have a marvellous knowledge of how to prepare those small fine dishes, and helped Victoire with her advice.

The following days our guests accepted the superior fare without protest. I believe they were a good deal astonished to see that we lived so barely, and yet we were faring better than usual.

"We must not let them pity us too much," I had said to my wife.

Georges and his wife slept late in the mornings as they did when in Paris. On their account we closed the old, dilapidated shutters, which had always been open; Jean and his wife slept in the same room, and made the least possible noise when they got up, and the young couple stayed in bed till seven o'clock and later. Rosalie said that the only quiet time in the whole day was when they were on their backs.

As soon as they got up, Berthe, in a dressing-gown and slippers, would run here and there crying out with astonishment, like a child. She made a tour of the garden, and went into the hen-house to hunt for new-laid eggs. She liked to see the little ducks and the young chickens fed. She even went into the cow-shed when the cows were being milked, but between the badly joined stones there were holes full of liquid manure, which she had a lot of trouble to keep out of; once she lost one of her slippers in a hole; some dirty drops stained the bottom of her light dressing-gown with brown spots, and, in the preoccupation that followed that accident, her clothes were further soiled. She was afraid, too, of cows; she uttered piercing cries when we loosed them and they crossed the stable quickly to suckle their young. For these various reasons she did not stay long, and did not want to cross the threshold of that dangerous place again. When she was tired of running about outside, she busied herself with embroidery, lace-making, and little accomplishments which she seemed well-up in.

Georges came to join us in the fields; once he went with us to the ploughing, but he soon got tired of that; he also went to the ponds to fish for frogs. The young man never went out of the house without kissing his wife's forehead and saying "au revoir" to her. On returning he would embrace her again: she would say, coaxingly:

"Have you had a good walk? And your fishing? Let us see if you have had good luck, my Georges."

She herself would open the little thread bag in which he always brought home some frogs. No one knew how to cook them, so our nephew was obliged to do it himself.

Rosalie said: "I don't know how they can eat such filth: they're too much like toads."

Rosalie's ratings, and her words, free from all hypocrisy, amused Georges and Berthe a great deal. But they were immediately saddened when Marinette would look at them fixedly, with big eyes like an animal's, pointing at them with her thin finger and laughing her foolish laugh; or when she made her endless chant, piercing and mournful.

On Sunday, Charles hired a horse and spring cart from the grocer in the town, and we took our visitors to Bourbon. They wanted to explore the towers of the old castle, but were so tired after climbing to the summit of each, that they regretted it, and declared that it was not at all interesting, only just a heap of stones. The fountain of warm water pleased them better, and the works of the new Thermal Establishment. Afterwards we made a halt at the balcony of a café overlooking the main street, from which they could see the procession of invalids: soldiers of all regiments, men and women of all conditions, nearly all limping, to whom a season at the baths was expected to give back their good legs of other days, free from pain.

We came back by the forest and arrived home at nightfall. They were delighted with their outing.

But it rained on Monday, and the day passed dully. Georges could not go out, and was very bored: he smoked cigarette after cigarette, and wrote letters—after he had been to the town to buy ink, for we had none. The rain ceased in the afternoon and he felt inclined to risk going out, and Berthe wanted to go too. But there was too much water and mud for her to go out in her boots; she therefore put on Rosalie's Sunday *sabots*, but her feet soon turned in them, for she had no idea how to wear

them; she went a hundred yards and then returned, fearing she would sprain her ankle. During the whole evening she had not one smile, and her great eyes shone in her grave face with an intensity through which her weariness showed: she was nervous and fretful.

Georges and Berthe stayed till the Saturday, eight full days. I don't know if they took away with them a good impression of their stay amongst us, although they had had the satisfaction of drinking big bowls of fresh milk, which they liked very much. I believe it troubled them to see that we had gone to some expense on account of their cooking. They pitied us also, I think, for working so hard, for having so few pleasures, and for being so dull. They stood to lose many of their illusions about the country.

"Niece," I said to Berthe, on the morning of their departure, "tell me if you would find the days long if you had to stay here always?"

"It is true, Uncle, I should not find it easy to become a farmer's wife. To be happy in the country, I should have to be in the same position as your proprietors: I should want to have a comfortable house, a garden with gravel paths, with flowers and shady places, and a horse and carriage to go out in."

"I," said Georges, "would like the country for six months in summer, to hunt, fish, and wander in the fields, and to cultivate the garden."

I made this reflection which I did not venture to put into words:

"All townspeople are like that, they only want the *pleasures* that the country can give; they have formed a cheerful idea of it because of the pure air, the meadows, the trees, the birds, the flowers, the good milk, the good butter, the fresh vegetables and fruit. But they have not the least idea of the discomforts of the workers in the country, the peasants. And we are in exactly the same

position, when we speak of the advantages of the town, and the pleasures it offers; we have no thought of the conditions of the toilers to whom work is the only resource."

When the young people had gone, I felt—we all felt, I think—a sensation of relief, such as prisoners must feel when they find themselves in the free air. From the first their presence had caused some inconvenience, for there were always times when we felt obliged to stay at table, delaying our work, in order to keep them company; but, above all, we felt a kind of restraint and awkwardness. It is always trying to live with people of different character and manners, even when they are our kin. When we have no ideas in common, the position is sure to be uncomfortable.

The shepherd was the only person to regret their departure. The same evening I heard him say to the servant:

"I should not have been sorry if those Parisians had stayed a long time: we had better food."

XLIX

WHEN Victoire went to Franchesse to visit Clémentine, she always came back feeling very miserable. Clémentine had just had a fourth child, and Moulin had quarrelled with the gardener at the Château and was out of work. Their diminished means did not assure even necessities for the larger family. They were behind with their rent, owed for two sacks of flour to our successors at La Creuserie and for clothes to a shop in the town.

Poor Clémentine wept when she told all her troubles to her mother. She never went out, even to Mass, because of the children, for their father did not want to take

charge of them. But the worst trouble was the state of her health; she was always ill and became more and more weak; one of the nuns at Franchesse, who sold a few medicines and understood a little about illness, told Clémentine that she was suffering from chronic anæmia.

"You must rest and have nourishing food and wine," the nun had said.

That was a cruel irony for her, with four children on her hands, all needing clothes, and whom she feared to see in want of food also.

"She is pitifully thin and so weak she can't hold herself up," Victoire said, weeping, one day when she had been to see her daughter, in the month of October, 1880.

A few days later, on All Saints' Day, I went in my turn to Les Fouinats. My heart was wrung by the aspect of poverty which filled the cottage, and which reminded me of my mother's home in the last days of her life. Clémentine—aged, with an exhausted air and pale as death—was suckling the youngest child; it was pulling greedily at her dry breast. She smiled, however, when she saw me. As I asked her about her health, there came to me the memory of another scene which had been enacted in that cottage one summer morning, when I had gone there to ask for a drink of water from the occupant.

"I am not over well, Father," she said; "I am needing some good things, which I am not able to give myself."

Her breath was short; her sentences ended in a slight change of key and were almost inaudible. I spent the rest of the day with her: when I left, I gave her twenty francs, and suggested that I should send for the doctor, but she refused:

"I am not ill enough to have the doctor; besides, we can't afford it."

In the country it is usual to have recourse to the doctor only when we are very ill. If the case does not appear very serious we make *tisane* and treat ourselves. The

doctor's carriage in the rough, muddy roads around the farms is a luxury which is disturbing, and which foretells the Dance of Death. Those who see it are agitated: they say:

"The doctor has gone to such and such a place, to see so and so."

And they are ready to believe that the said person is done for. Alas! that was indeed the case with Clémentine. Some days after my visit, she became so much worse that she was unable to get up. Then her husband sent to Bourbon for Dr. Picaud (Fauconnet, Councillor-General and Deputy, had ceased to practise). M. Picaud found her very ill; he said that jaundice had followed upon anæmia, and he ordered her to wean her baby at once. The child was taken by Moulin's sister, who brought it up by hand; one of his brothers took the eldest child, who was already strong, and we undertook the second, a little girl of six, and the third, a little lad of three. Rosalie made a grimace when the children arrived, but she soon got fond of them, and afterwards was quite devoted to them.

Victoire installed herself at Les Fouinats, at Clémentine's bedside, but all her care was fruitless. The poor child's condition grew worse from day to day, and on the twenty-fifth of November, a day of dense fog, she died. She was thirty-one.

This event caused the postponement until the spring of Charles' marriage with Madeleine, the Noris' servant.

L

EVER since I had worked for his father, and especially after he had set my leg and attended me, Dr. Fauconnet had always taken notice of me. When he met me at

Bourbon during the vacations, he never failed to speak of "that old brown owl Noris, who ought to be sent to jail."

Councillor-General and Deputy for several years, M. Fauconnet was an influential man in that district. During the vacation, the Château d'Agonges, where he had lived since his father's death, was besieged by people begging favours, for they knew that he was able to render all kinds of services: he would stop legal proceedings, find situations, and reform the young people.

But he was no longer the ultra-Republican who had formerly made such a furious opposition to the Empire; he was a good *bourgeois* and supported the Government, having a fear of and contempt for extremes, either on the side of the Reds or the Whites. He was very busy about the construction of a narrow gauge railway, which was to run from Moulins to Cosnes sur l'Oeil by Bourbon, Saint Aubin and the mineral district of Saint-Hilaire and Buxières.

When M. Noris died, his daughters hastened to let the two farms to a well-known farmer-general, who brought his *métayers* from elsewhere and discharged us. Personally, I was indifferent enough about that. For a long time I had intended to leave Jean and Charles free to work together, and to rent a small farm to retire to with the mother. This dismissal gave me a reason for putting this plan into execution.

Nevertheless, I did not want to fail the boys, but to help them to re-establish themselves. When Dr. Fauconnet was spending a vacation at the beginning of January, I took the opportunity of going to ask him to accept my sons as *métayers*, for I had heard that one of the farms which he had inherited from his father was to let. He agreed, and before he left for Paris the business was concluded. The conditions were not any better than with the other great proprietors, his political enemies;

he was as stingy as they were. He, who pretended to desire their welfare, fleeced the poor people who moved in his sphere as though he had been a common Gouin, which was not calculated to give weight to his affirmations.

I hired for myself, still in Saint Aubin, at Chat-Huant, a holding of the same size, not far from the one I had occupied on Les Craux in Bourbon. The rent was rather high, but with the interest from my savings, for which the notary had found a good investment, I reckoned I should be able to make the two ends meet comfortably.

Marguerite, Clémentine's poor little girl, stayed with her uncles: we took with us her brother Francis, who was going to school; and we also took Marinette, for I was afraid she would be unhappy anywhere else.

I felt it very strange, and so did Victoire, to live in such a limited place, and I found it hard to get used to solitary work in the fields and tiny meadows. I had more leisure and less anxiety than on the farm; but sometimes I wearied of having to do everything alone. Once more I had to do the mowing and to gather the sheaves, all heavy jobs that my lads had not allowed me to do when we were together. I hardly waited till it was necessary, before I took a labourer to help me in the summer.

LI

Out of school hours little Francis was good company for us. In the winter evenings his youthful animation brought a ray of brightness into the dull household of the old folks; thanks to him, we still had a little of the noise and movement that one is used to in large families; the change was less painful to us.

Besides, he had a good disposition: although lively

and very sharp, he was obedient and good-natured. We spoiled him. Victoire made milk soup for the gentleman, because he did not like bean soup ; she gave him big pieces of bread and butter ; and the best fruit in the garden was kept for him.

Francis would very often beg me to tell him stories ; he remembered having heard me tell them to his sister and his cousin, and he wanted to learn them.

I knew some of the old stories which we hand down on the farms from generation to generation. I knew "The Green Mountain," "The White Dog," "Tom Thumb," "The Devil's Bag of Gold," and "The Beast with Seven Heads." After he had begged for a while, I would begin :

"Once upon a time there was a great beast with seven heads who wanted to eat the king's daughter. The king had told all in his realm that he would give his daughter to the man who would kill the beast : but no one dared to undertake the adventure. Now there came from afar a young countryman, bold and courageous, who went resolutely to the forest to meet the big beast, and he had the good luck to kill him. He put the seven tongues of his victim into his pocket and returned to his village, where he had left his mother ill : he did not want to go to the palace until he had reassured himself as to his mother's health. Now a wicked wood-cutter had watched from afar the killing of the beast ; when he saw that the good young man did not go up to the palace at once, he went and cut off the monster's seven heads and carried them to the king, pretending that he was the exterminator. The king did him great honour, and commanded his daughter to fix the date of the wedding. But she distrusted the wicked wood-cutter, and found ways of delaying the ceremony under various pretexts. In the end, however, she had to name the day, for her father was angry. That same day, at the very moment when they

were forming the procession, the good young man returned from his village. When he came into the capital he was astonished to see green arches and paper garlands in all the streets, and from all the windows streamers floating in the wind. He asked what happy event had caused the town to be decorated, and they answered that it was in honour of the wedding of the king's daughter to the slayer of the beast with seven heads. Then he ran right to the palace and approached the king and his daughter, near whom stood the wood-cutter.

"'That man is a liar,' he said, pointing to him. 'It is I who killed the beast with seven heads.'

"The wood-cutter was very haughty, and reminded him that he had brought the seven heads, and the king threatened to have the young man arrested. But without moving, he said:

"'He has been able, Sire, to bring you the heads, but not the tongues, for the tongues are here.'

"And he took from his pocket, folded in a handkerchief, the beast's seven tongues. The king sent for the heads, and satisfied himself that they had no tongues. Then he had the wicked wood-cutter arrested, and gave his daughter to the good young man."

Francis was all ears: as soon as that tale was done, he wanted another, and he made me exhaust my repertoire each time. Monsters, devils, fairies defiled before us by the dozen; and also kings and princesses of Dreamland, princesses who wore beautiful dresses, the colour of gold and silver and azure, and who rose from being guardians of turkeys: and as a contrast there were shepherds gifted with supernatural powers, who hewed down whole forests in one night, and the next day constructed magnificent palaces, and this made them worthy to become princes.

When I finished, the little one demanded explanations, which I found was more embarrassing; he appeared to believe that all those things had really happened, and he

wanted to know the "why" and the "how" of each episode. I began to think that perhaps I was wrong to repeat all that nonsense to the child, seeing that he attached so much more importance to it than he ought. I preferred that he should have a taste for riddles:

"Look here, Sonny, what is it that we throw up white and falls yellow?"

He would think, then:

"I can't find it, Grandfather."

"An egg, great stupid."

"Oh! yes, ask another."

"All right; what is it that travels without making a shadow?"

He remembered having heard that one.

"The sound of the bells, Grandfather."

"What is it that every morning makes a tour of the house and then hides in a corner?"

"The broom."

"What has an eye at the end of its tail?"

"The frying-pan."

"What is it that neither wants to drink nor allows to drink?"

"The bramble."

"In a big black field are some little red cows——"

He did not allow me to finish.

"The oven when we heat it; the embers are the little red cows."

"There are four looking at the sky, four treading upon the dew, four carrying the breakfast; and they all make one. What is it?"

This time, embarrassed silence.

"I don't know, Grandfather."

"It is a cow, not one of those in the oven, a real cow; her horns and her ears look at the sky; her four feet tread on the dew; her four udders are full of milk—carry the breakfast. There."

When Francis began to work at problems, I puzzled him very much by asking him about the number of sheep the shepherdess had.

" Look here, Sonny, see if you can find the solution of this problem. Listen carefully. A gentleman was passing a shepherdess ; he asked her how many sheep she had. She answered : ' If I had as many more as I have, plus a half, plus a quarter, plus one, that would make a hundred.' How many had she ? "

After puzzling a long time, he was obliged to give it up, and I had to tell him that the number of sheep was thirty-six.

On days when I wanted to make him laugh, I told him stories of Father Gorgeon. Father Gorgeon, dead a long time ago, had left the reputation of being a practical joker and an expert liar. Several of his stories have become legends, and are known throughout the country.

" Now, Francis, open your ears :

" Once Father Gorgeon lost his sow. Three whole days he searched for it ; he scoured the canton without success, and returned home very disconsolate. But when he went into his garden to gather some sorrel, he heard a grunting that seemed to come from an enormous gourd at the end of a bed of haricots. He hurried up to it : the sow was hidden there, in the inside of a great pumpkin ; she had some little ones, eight piglings, pink and white and very lively, and there was still some room left.

" One morning in August he went to his potato field ; he was much puzzled to see the soil raised in places. At first he thought it was due to the working of moles underground, but not at all : having dug with his hoe, in order to find out, he saw that it was simply that the potatoes had grown with such unheard-of rapidity, that they had made these abnormal swellings."

Father Gorgeon had been a poacher, and his sporting tales were even more extraordinary still.

"One day, in winter, having fired at some starlings on a service tree, he killed so many that he took home several sacks quite full, and during the whole week the dead birds kept falling from the tree.

"Another time, passing by the edge of a lake, he saw some wild ducks floating quietly on the surface of the calm water. He had no gun, so he conceived the idea of throwing to them a cork attached to a long thread, the other end of which he held. Ducks are very greedy and digest quickly: one threw itself on the cork, which it swallowed and passed five minutes later; another immediately swallowed it in its turn, and thus from beak to beak, the cork passed through the bodies of twenty-four ducks, which, because of the thread, found themselves impaled. All Father Gorgeon had to do was to draw them out of the water and carry them off."

* * * * * *

But it was not long before Francis knew my collection of stories and riddles and funny tales as well as I did, and I was no longer able to amuse him. He then began to tell me the things he was learning at school. He talked of kings and queens, of Joan of Arc, of Bayard, and Richelieu, of crusades and wars and massacres. He had the air of knowing all that had happened during those dead centuries. Of course I gave only an absent-minded attention to all those things; and when he would ask me afterwards in what year such and such a battle took place, at what time such and such a king had reigned, and what had been the exploits of such and such a famous man, I would make stupid mistakes, even to the extent of being a thousand years out, which made him laugh very heartily. With geography it was the same thing. He spoke of mountains and rivers, of seas, of provinces and towns; and afterwards, when the names came back

to my head, I used them at random, and always wrong, giving the name of a mountain to a river, or calling a sea a country. It is not at sixty-five that we can put new things into our heads.

There were times when I felt a little vexed to find myself getting lessons from this child; however, I was proud of him, and happy to know that he had some taste for his school-work. When I went to the market at Bourbon, I always brought him a newspaper, and he would read it very loudly in the evenings. I found a pleasure in listening to him, in spite of the fact that there were many things which neither of us understood. Unfortunately Marinette often interrupted the reading with a burst of laughter or lamentation, which annoyed the little lad a great deal.

When he was bigger, he began to buy a paper every week at the shop of Father Armand, tailor and clerk. This paper contained stories and coloured pictures; in it we saw the portraits of celebrated men, plumed generals, soldiers with bags and guns, and pictures of accidents and crimes. Francis pasted above the mantelpiece a whole series of these illustrations.

When the time came, however, for him to try to do manual labour, I regained my lost superiority: I had even to show him how to do something twice over, and that gave me great pleasure.

LII

One Sunday I had a fancy to go to Meillers, to see once again the farm at Garibier, where I had been brought up, and which I had left nearly fifty years before. The road alongside the corner of the wood, where the pines with the resinous scent grew, had not changed its aspect. When I

turned aside into the yard, the dogs rushed at me, barking, just as Castor used to do in bygone days, when strangers came. It was I who was a stranger in the place which had been so familiar to me long ago! The old barn, low and dilapidated, had disappeared; there was now a fine new one with high, rough-cast walls, and the roof-tiles still kept a little of their new colour.

On the other hand, the house, such as it was, very old even in my time, was still standing unrestored. The farmers-general naturally tried to get the proprietors to give them good quarters for their beasts, of which they owned half, but the houses of the *métayers* were of little importance. They had, however, provided something which was very useful for the people; a well, quite near the door. There were still rushes growing in the yard, and the pond surrounded by willows was the same, except that they had made a sloping bank of stones on one side for the beasts, so that they might drink more easily. The willows had aged greatly: one was missing; some rotten débris escaped from the tottering trunks of the others.

I did not know the people who were living at the farm, so I had no reason for going to the house. I crossed the yard slowly, gazing at everything a long time, and then I rambled along the lane to La Breure. Here also it was the same, still narrow in places, still enclosed between high, quick-set hedges, whose leaves September had yellowed; the same oaks towered over the banks, with their roots protruding and their branches thick with leaves, except that some had been cut down, and only their stumps were visible. Some of the too deep ruts had been levelled; the water had created new ones; these were the only changes to be seen in the Rue Creuse. But at the end I did not find my familiar Breure: they had cleared it; the bracken, the heather, the broom, the brambles had been exterminated; it was transformed

into an honest cultivated field, where only some grey stones still showed their noses, recalling the old state of things. Without emotion I wandered about this plot of land, which was no longer the same, contenting myself with scratching the surface here and there with the end of my stick, or the point of my *sabots*, to see what the nature of the soil was, and if it seemed to be of good quality. I saw once more the horizon I had so often contemplated, the fertile valley, afar, the naked hillock which rose in front of the forest of Messarges. Memories of the time when I was a shepherd there assailed me in a crowd; for a moment I forgot the rest of my existence; I felt myself to be again the little lad of long ago, free from impressions, whom a mere nothing amused, whom a mere nothing grieved. This, however, was an illusion fugitive as lightning.

I roamed about some of the cultivated fields of the farm, which I also found unchanged now, save for some trees hewn down and some brushwood cleared. I went into the meadow at Suippières, beside the spring from which we used to get our water: it was abandoned; the oxen in the pasture came there to drink, and their feet had picked the soil from its bed round about the edges. I went along a boggy ditch, the home of some green frogs, where I used to gather yellow irises in the spring: the same thread of clear water ran along the bottom on the same grey mud. I followed the way to Fontivier along which I had gone, carrying on my back Barret, stricken to death; that memory gave me a pang of anguish. Finally, after a round of three hours, I gained again by Suippières the little lane from Meillers.

As I was passing the mill on the way to Saint Aubin, I found myself face to face with Boulois of Parizet, who was returning from Mass. Since my marriage we had been bitter enemies; Boulois had never been able to forgive me for having abused his confidence in marrying

Victoire, whom he had coveted. When we happened to meet at fairs, he gave me furious looks, and I appeared as though I did not see him. So this unforeseen encounter stupefied us both. Boulois looked at me as usual, with anger in his eyes : but the evil light soon fled.

" Hullo ! are you here ? " he said, stopping.

I stopped too :

" Yes, I wanted to see my old home."

" Ah ! "

He was silent for a moment, visibly embarrassed as to what line to take. Then he held out his hand and said in a nervous voice :

" And how are you, old man ? "

" Oh ! very well, thank you : and you ? "

" Like other old folk, one time ill, another time well, more often ill than well. Tiennon," said he, after a short silence, " I forgive you for that dirty trick you played. I have sulked long enough ; we might be friends again."

" It really was mean of me ; I quite realize that—only, you know, I had no position."

" Yes, in enabling you to take a farm, that marriage did you a good turn ; perhaps without that you might have been a day labourer all your life, which is not very cheerful. My faith, no ! As for me, I have married another of whom I have no cause to complain. So let's say no more about it."

We stopped a moment to talk, passing in review the principal events of our lives. He had never left Parizet : at the death of his father the management of the farm had come to him. He had worked well, brought up five children, played some good games of cards, and drank a good deal. The proprietor was one of those rich men of whom there are not many; he held Boulois in great esteem and had just built for his use a new room in which he reckoned he would grow old and die : his eldest son had, of course, succeeded him on the farm.

He had, indeed, a great many things to say, and at the end of a short quarter of an hour's conversation, we found ourselves embarrassed again. The past is a pit where our impressions of the moment are endlessly accumulated, layer by layer, and which finally holds only a formless mass, risky to disturb and in which it is difficult to find anything clear.

The mill was not working. I looked at the tall brick chimney which appeared in profile with its blackened top against the clear sky. Boulois contemplated the vast lake which the slight breeze moved gently and on which the sun made reflections like melting ore. He suddenly broke the reverie in which we were both plunged.

" Tiennon," he said suddenly, " come and have some soup with me."

I refused at first, but he insisted, and I ended by accepting. When we arrived at Parizet, towards three o'clock, the women were just about to grate some quinces to make cordial.

" Wife," said Boulois, " I have brought my old communion comrade ; it is rather owing to him that I married you, you know ; you ought to like him for that. We are hungry ; give us something to eat and drink."

She was a short, stout woman, troubled with asthma : she had a simple smile.

" There is nothing very grand, you are too late ; we had our meal two hours ago."

She brought the remains of the thick soup which had been kept warm, and cooked some eggs on a plate, and took a whole goat's cheese from the sideboard. Boulois pressed me to drink at every minute and his hand trembled with happy excitement.

" Do have something to drink—do eat something ; do you remember the time when we went to the catechism ? "

We remained at the table a long time : we had to taste

three different kinds of liquors. The memories from the past came before us more easily and we talked a great deal. To please him I had to go and see the garden afterwards, then the animals. There was so much to do that it was night before I left. It was nearly eight o'clock when I got home, and Victoire was anxious about my long absence; she made a scene, but it was not in her power to annoy me. I was satisfied with my day, happy at this reconciliation: and then to have drunk a little glass, that contributed also to my rose-coloured thoughts, so much so that I felt myself as light as a young man, and carried away by joy.

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Alas! misfortunes follow closely on the good days. During the week we had a letter from Paris announcing the death of my sister Catherine. She had remained on duty till the end: death had struck her before the old mistress, from whom she expected to inherit something.

LIII

THE narrow-gauge railway which Fauconnet had presented to us passed right at the end of one of our fields, and crossed the road nearly level with the ground, at a hundred yards from our house. Its establishment had given rise to recriminations without end. Certain small proprietors, although they had received ten times the value of their land, grumbled continually about the great damage it had caused. Others criticized the outline, which they considered idiotic. The line certainly made curves of which no one could demonstrate the necessity. They said that the contractor, sure of a good profit, had intentionally

increased the mileage. They declared that Dr. Fauconnet and the other gentlemen of the Council-general had let themselves go, and had designedly squandered the rate-payers' money. When there were elections for the Council-general, the opponents of the Councillors made this argument fit their purpose. In the same place would they have made no mistakes ? Would they have managed to satisfy everybody ? Assuredly not ! But at elections any plea is good.

In spite of its curves, and in spite of all the clamour to which it had given rise, the railway progressed : eight or ten times a day I heard its whistlings and rumblings, and saw the train pass. At first the other borderers and I feared for our animals ; we were afraid that being in the pasture they would break the fence that enclosed the line, and also that the level crossing would be dangerous. Therefore we petitioned the company against these desperate inventions which were disturbing the peace of the poor people of the country. All the same, having always played the part of optimist, I tried to make Victoire understand that she exaggerated when she said that we should not be able to keep any more goats or pigs or fowls, because they would all be killed. The fact is, we never had to mourn the loss of anything except two geese.

But it was Marinette chiefly that the train terrified. The sound of it made her tremble convulsively, and when it was in sight, she would fix her empty eyes obstinately upon it, pointing her finger at it till it disappeared ; she said it was the devil, and it incited her to talk constantly of magic.

When I was working near, I, too, always raised my head, to see the procession pass. Each day there were two goods trains, rather long, and made up chiefly of uncovered trucks laden with chalk going, and coal returning. But the trains were much longer still on the days of the fair at Cosnes : then there was a long line of closed wagons containing

grunting pigs, or other beasts too closely packed ; through the shutters we could see only their uneasy heads. The regular passenger-trains usually consisted of two or three carriages, often of only one. It had almost the look of a toy ; the little engine with its low furnace towing the long brown carriage, taking it out with a sage slowness across fields and meadows and through woods. I got to know all the men in the blue blouses soiled with grease and coal, firemen and drivers, who conducted the trains ; also the others, those who wore gilt-edged caps and black tunics with yellow buttons, who usually occupied one of the platforms. I even got to know a good many of the passengers. They were frequenters of Moulins, always the same people, or nearly always : *bourgeoisie*, large farmers, shopkeepers, and priests. Except on fair days, there were never any peasants or workmen : they have neither money nor leisure to go for outings in trains.

" Those are rogues," thought I, " people who manage to pass their time at the expense of the producer, and who outside of the market don't bother about him."

In fact, there were times when some of those over-fed idlers, showing their high-coloured faces at the carriage doors, seemed to smile ironically at me, the old labouring peasant.

LIV

I HAD a lease of six years ; when it expired in 1890, I hesitated a good deal about renewing it. I was seventy years old and very feeble. Victoire, although three years younger, was more decrepit than I. Francis was nearly thirteen and was able to go out to work and do something for us. In fact, I placed him out at the next term of St.

Jean. However, in the end, on account of Marinette, I took out a new lease. How could I take her to my sons' house, seeing that they had been free from her presence, and that she became less and less bearable ? Her death was a thing to be desired, but we could not kill the poor wretch ! I prayed that Victoire and I might survive her, for I wished earnestly that she should always be sure of necessaries, and Victoire was kind to her, although she complained constantly of having to support her.

But alas ! that did not come to pass. My poor wife was carried off suddenly the next summer, and I had the great grief of feeling that in a measure I was to blame for her death.

When I had no workman, a neighbour generally helped me to bring in my wheat. One day when rain threatened he was absent ; I was obliged to fetch Victoire, who cared little enough for the job, to pack some sheaves, which we had bound the evening before, on the cart ; she was very hot at first, and then got soaked with rain, it having come before we were able to return. That night she vomited blood ; two days after she was dead.

I engaged a very old and deaf widow to take care of my house. She was not very skilful in the dairy, so, for the first time in my life, I had to make the butter and the cheese. But the worst of it was that Marinette took a delight in being disagreeable to her ; she would take the saucepan from the fire and turn it upside down, or sometimes, in the old woman's absence, would hide the kitchen utensils ; then she would laugh to see her worried. The old woman told me she would not come again if that kind of thing was to go on. I was obliged to stay in the house for several days to take care of the poor idiot. When she was about to do some stupid thing, I used to take hold of her wrists very firmly, and fix on her a threatening look ; I managed to terrorize her in that way and make her quiet. On the other hand, knowing that she was very fond of haricot

salad and fritters, I used to tell the servant to prepare one of these dishes : thus, vanquished and satisfied, Marinette ceased to pursue her with her hatred.

Before very long, I had some new anxieties. I had to hand their mother's property over to my children, and for that I was obliged to return my mortgage. I had to go several times to Bourbon, and I found myself once more, awkward and embarrassed, in the notary's office : I felt affronted by the disdainful way in which the head clerk shrugged his shoulders. He was a great scented fop, who, if I did not immediately understand his explanations, seemed anxious to let out what he was thinking : " What an imbecile this man is ! "

For a long time I kept in the house the two thousand francs which remained to me after all was settled. They were in the drawer of the cupboard, and I used to hide the key in a hole in the stable wall. When the servant wanted to arrange the linen, she would ask me for the key with a sulky air, as though accusing me of being suspicious. Against my will, I took my two thousand francs to the bank at Bourbon.

And my life went on, monotonously, between these two old women, one deaf, the other an idiot. Francis came sometimes on Sundays, and his visits always gave me a little happiness. But they became less and less frequent as he grew up, for he began to go out more : the company of young lads of his own age seemed more attractive to him than that of his old grandfather among his dull surroundings.

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One day I took the train and went to Saint-Menoux, where my godfather, who was eighty-one, had returned to live. Cancer was consuming his face. It had begun by an irritation to which he had paid hardly any attention ;

then a circle was formed at the left side of his nose ; then a hole appeared which little by little increased in size, making his face a mask of hideousness. The day on which I visited him, he took off the linen and dressings which hid the wound, and showed it to me, bloody and repulsive, horrible ; his nose was simply a mass of live flesh from which flowed a red fluid, and his eye was almost gone.

The poor old man suffered, suffered without respite ; he never had one hour of peace ; he spent long nights without sleep. And he suffered also in his mind, for he felt he was an object of loathing to all. They had made him understand that he must not sit at the table : they poured his soup on his bread in a special bowl, which remained unwashed for a week ; they no longer allowed his little grandchildren to come near him ; the servant had refused to wash the cloths which he wrapped round his face ; and he had heard his daughter-in-law say one day as she set herself to do this sickening task :

" Will he never die, then, the disgusting old man ! "

" Oh ! " he said to me, after having told me all this, " how often do I want to kill myself ! I think of hanging myself to a tree, or a beam in the barn, or even throwing myself into the water. Up to now I have had the courage to thrust back the idea, but I do not say that I shall always do it : resignation has its limits. Oh, my God ! the misery ! And it may last a long time like that : I have a good stomach, I eat well."

I longed to try and comfort him, but I found nothing to say, so much did I realize that the deep despair in his heart was as incurable as the cancer which gnawed his face.

LV

AFTER ten years my boys left M. Fauconnet's estate, not being able to get on with him any longer. As he aged, the doctor became ecccentric, surly and tyrannical. He was no longer a Deputy : he was too old, and his Republicanism too faded. For the old red ox-blood was now only a pale rose colour. He was all for order and propriety, and swore implacable hatred to the Socialists. He almost imitated M. Noris, whom he had mocked so much in the old days : the cry of " Long live Socialism ! " made him purple and furious.

The last year that my lads were with him, they were using the machine one day of great heat, and the wind of revolt blew upon the exhausted threshers. The doctor had come to see them towards three o'clock in the afternoon, at the most trying moment ; a young servant perched on a rick shouted defiantly the good formula, " Long live Socialism ! " and the others responded. M. Fauconnet looked at the shouters in turn and was about to get into a passion. But he saw there were too many of them, and that he was powerless against this disrespect shown him, so he restrained his anger and sought out Jean, and commanded him not to tolerate that outcry. That is how the people in authority act when they are no longer masters of the situation : they make their inferiors execute their caprices, when they, the powerful, the respected, are not able to make a stand for themselves. The doctor, whom they continued to defy, went away, leaving the workers to their misery and malice, the latter having mitigated the former for a moment.

M. Fauconnet must nevertheless have his turn. When, in the evening, they carried the grain to his house, he never offered one miserable glass of wine to those of the threshers who had gone with the drover to pile up the sacks in the granary. They went away very discontented indeed, crying repeatedly: "Long live Socialism!" and they returned in the warm night after supper: for an hour they made a tour of the Château, giving enough and to spare of the prohibited cry, which they alternated with the still worse one of "Down with the Bourgeois!"

* * * * * *

My lads took once more a farm in Bourbon, at Puy-Brot, between the Ygrande and the Saint-Plaisir roads. The master, a certain M. Duranthon, was a young farmer-general, with a long, light auburn moustache, and an arrogant air. He passed for being a good business man, and he was renowned for Martinmas valuations.

In the agreement, Draconian to a degree, he put one clause, stipulating that the nursing cows should not on any account be milked: consequently the women could not sell either milk or butter without incurring a fine of fifty francs. The rest was in keeping. Duranthon, cunning upstart, took from his *métayers* the last of their liberties, and reduced them to the level of working machines.

"And you accept all that without resistance?" I said to Charles on the day that he announced that the lease was signed.

"What can we do? If we had not accepted, ten others were ready to do so, and in this district it would be hard enough to find another vacant farm."

LVI

In 1893, on Easter Sunday, having arrived early in the town to attend High Mass, I had a chat with old Daumier, an old man of my own age. We were in the square in front of the church. Some young girls, fresh and pretty, in fine new dresses, brushed past us.

I said to Daumier :

" If they could come back, the women of the old days, those who have been dead fifty years, wouldn't they be astonished to see those dresses ? "

" They would think they were in another world, old man. Indeed, Saint Aubin follows the Paris fashions, but who knows if we won't go back after all this advance ? "

" Oh no ! now it is started it will go on whatever happens ; the Bourbon caps, like the lace bonnets, will never be seen again."

" Do you think that is a good thing ? "

" Consequence of the times ; what can you do ? It is good for trade."

The bells rang joyfully, calling us to Mass. The weather was bright and the sky serene ; the spring sunshine was tempered by a fresh breeze. The blackbirds piped gaily in a meadow near by, where the tender green mingled with the yellow of the primroses. The swelling buds were bursting on the old elms in front of us in the square. The distant bells of Bourbon and Ygrande mingled their peals with the shrill vibrations of ours.

On the walls of the church and on the tree-trunks were spread big green, yellow and red posters, that separated long streamers stuck on askew :

" Look ! " said Daumier, " there you are, those who can

read have something to amuse them. That means that we are going to vote for the Deputies soon ; it seems even that one of the candidates is going to speak here after Mass."

" Ah ! which of them ? "

" Renaud the Socialist."

A neighbour joined us and told us that it was not Renaud, but one of his friends, who was working the small Communes in his name.

" It doesn't matter ; shall we hear what he has to say, Bertin ? " said Daumier.

" My word, yes, if you like," I answered.

* * * * * *

After Mass we went and sat down at the table in the inn where the orator was to hold his meeting. The room filled in ten minutes, and the potman was obliged to improvise some tables outside. But he whom they expected was not there. He arrived on his bicycle, but not till nearly two o'clock. As he entered, everyone gazed at him as at a curious animal. He was a little dark man with an unhealthy complexion, and he walked in with lowered eyes and a timid air. At the end of the room they had reserved for him a small, narrow table, and from behind this he began to talk in the midst of the hubbub of the persistent chattering. He spoke at first slowly, as though with difficulty seeking his words ; then, having won attention, he gained confidence and straightened himself, his eyes shone, and his voice became firm. He described the poverty of the workers, to whom everything was promised and for whom nothing was ever done ; he attacked the bourgeoisie, and the priests, whom he accused of being accomplices in the fooling of the people.

At his left a drunken old fellow with a congested face got up frequently and called out :

" It isn't true ; you are a freemason ; down with the freemasons ! "

At each interruption of the drunkard, laughter sounded from all the tables : the clamour ceased and was succeeded by a humming which was a long time before it died away. The orator stopped for a moment, then exerted himself to reconquer attention when the tumult was decreasing. His conclusion, uttered in a voice strong but full of emotion, brought complete silence. He said :

" Unhappy workers, whom labour binds, whose footsteps misery dogs, workers in the country whom everybody devours, can you say that you are men ? No, you have not the right : you are slaves. We have had four revolutions in less than a century ; not one has really enfranchised the people ; they remain in poverty, they remain ignorant ; the rich sneer at them while they live on them. The true revolution shall be that which shall make the people rule. Work without respite to gain that, my friends. Your voting paper will tell you how to obtain that. Do not allow yourselves to be represented any longer by the bourgeoisie, who do *their* business, not yours. They appear to be tearing each other to pieces, but that means nothing. Monarchists, Buonapartists, Republicans agree together the better to dupe you. Proletariats, show that you have had enough of them ; let them see that it is for you to say what your will is ; be represented by one of your own kind ; vote for the Socialist candidate, the citizen Renaud ! Then, after voting, continue to act. To win your rights, form yourselves into groups, unite : that is the way, being weak, to become strong. And the new dawn shall end in light ; the day will come when you will cease to work for capitalist exploiters, who, at your expense, enjoy their infamous revels : husbandmen, you shall own your fields, as the miners shall own their mines, and the factory-workers their factories. Then there shall be no more idle owners nor intermediate parasites ; no more masters nor

serfs; there shall only be the great mass of humanity in touch with the riches of nature. It is for you, comrades, to hasten the coming of the new time——"

"He is a Divider!" a man beside me said in a low voice.

Another went on:

"His name is Laronde; I know his father, he is my brother-in-law's cousin; his father is a ploughman at Couleuvre; but he left him, no doubt because he was too lazy to work on the land."

"In any case, he has a good weapon," said a third.

Laronde had ceased speaking; he wiped his face, which was covered with sweat. Some of the young people applauded and cried: "Long live Socialism!" "Down with the bourgeoisie!" In the middle of the room the drunkard stood gesticulating, railing all the time against the freemasons; some *métayers* took themselves off fearfully, afraid of compromising themselves in this revolutionary assembly. Daumier said to me:

"They ought not to let men talk like that. It only makes dissension in the world, making people believe things that can never happen."

"How do you know that that will not happen?" I said. "Think of all the changes we have seen in the course of our lives, of all the greater comfort that is in them now."

"We are not happier nor richer for it; when we have that, we want something else; and comfort does not prevent us from getting old."

"Growing old is not everything; we must think a little of the pleasures we can enjoy while life lasts, and there are more of those pleasures now than in the old days, say what you like."

Laronde crossed the room, bowing to right and left and smiling. He went out and mounted his bicycle, being stared at by a lot of women who had come to the door of the inn to look at him. He went on to Ygrande, where he was to speak in the evening.

After he had gone, everybody began to discuss what he had been saying; some approved, others found fault with it.

A master quarryman, a fine speaker, having heard my replies to Daumier, approached:

"Most certainly we shall continue to go ahead," he said, "because we shall make new discoveries which shall entirely change and simplify our methods of work. But science only is capable of securing to us in this life the improvement which everybody desires. Politics are powerless and useless. The statesmen never really make laws for the people. The great bourgeoisie, whom we disdain rather at the elections, none the less conserve all their influence, you may be sure. And as to Renaud, Laronde and their like, they are only ambitious men who want to take the places of the others, and to become bourgeois in their turn. 'Come down from there that I may take your place'—it is always the same story. The opponents, those who have not the responsibility of power, think themselves capable of doing wonders, and when they are the masters, they hasten to imitate their predecessors. When the Socialists come to have a majority in the House, you will see if they don't abandon three-quarters of their programme. Then will rise up more Socialists who will seek to turn them out of office: it is in the nature of things. Oh, politics!"

Several smiled and nodded their heads in approval of the diatribe of this disillusioned person, but a merchant, a friend of the retiring member, M. Gouget, answered:

"Politics must come to the aid of science by wise reforms. Don't you believe that it is to the Republic that we owe the schools and the shortening of the term of service? If we had a majority of good Republicans like M. Gouget, we should soon have the progressive tax, which would reduce the charges to poor contributors; we should soon have pensions to assure necessities to old

workers; the black men, the hooded women, would no longer have the right to stupefy infancy in their schools, which the great proprietors furnish with scholars. Ask the *métayers* if they have the right to send their children to the lay schools. At last the State will break all relationship with the Church; the priests cease to be office-holders; those who want their services can pay them. That programme has been from all time, that of all true Republicans; it is that of M. Gouget, who has always supported it with his vote; unfortunately, up to now the majority remain hostile to these principles. And many electors, who understand nothing, withdraw their confidence from M. Gouget under the pretext that he is incapable of bringing about the reforms that he preaches. As if he was alone!"

I began to talk too at the same time as the friend of the retiring member. I had been accustomed to vote for M. Gouget and my intention was to remain faithful to him. Nevertheless, addressing the master quarryman, I proclaimed myself a Socialist:

"You may be right: it is certain that we have the right to be sceptical, the right of saying to politicians who ask for our votes: 'That's no more use, come now! We have seen too much of that.' Politics are all humbug. Politicians are all rogues, or sweeps, or ambitious men. There will always be some who play, and some who are martyrs to work; always some who devour, and always some who will be discontented. Yes, we may show ourselves very incredulous, but on the election day, it may perhaps be our duty to vote for the Socialists, should it only be to worry the bourgeois, who give us so much worry. The bourgeois have a horror of Socialism, because they are alarmed about their peace, their goods, and their incomes, but *we* have nothing to fear; our hands are our incomes, there is nothing to blind us."

"You believe in division, Father Bertin; you want to have your holding without paying rent. But if they sent

you to such and such a place"—he mentioned some bad holdings, badly situated—"what would you say? That would not be so convenient and the Dividers would have some trouble to save their heads. But individual ownership is not nearly dead yet."

"We can't change things that have always existed," said old Daumier.

"I am not so much of a Divider as you seem to think," I said to the quarryman. "Division is impossible, and besides, I believe they hardly mention that. They talk of holding all things in common, which doubtless would not be much more convenient, for, in order that society (based on this principle) might be truly beautiful and good, men would have to be individually better than they are—nearly perfect—a condition which is not near yet. But they speak also of the common ownership of the land, and that seems to me more easy to realize and to be desirable. In any case what goes on at present is revolting, you must admit. Do you think it just that one individual should possess a whole Commune, while so many others, by selling their labour, can hardly drag their bread out of it from day to day? Do you think it natural to see old men die of hunger and poverty, while idle revellers waste money in an unheard-of manner, spending, they say, in one night what would feed several poor families for a whole year?

"As to your objection," I said, turning to old Daumier, "allow me to say that it is pretty stupid. My late grandmother could remember the time when the priests went on to the fields to collect their tithes, when the masters had all kinds of privileges and exorbitant rights. At that time there were, no doubt, people who maintained that these things, having always existed, could not be suppressed. They were suppressed, however, and now, it seems to us that they could never have existed. Maybe a good many laws and customs of the day will be called upon to disappear before long. And our descendants will be

astonished, perhaps, that they have been kept until now. To speak of the things that concern ourselves, do you think that things would be any worse if there were no more farmer-generals, if each worker farmed his own domain? That should be quite possible, now that the young know how to read and write. And we should have to feed fewer big-bellies who do nothing."

"Well said!" exclaimed the quarryman, rising to go and joining two of his workmen, whom he wished to pay.

"Bravo, Father Tiennon. Long live Socialism!" exclaimed three young people who had heard me. And they offered me coffee. But I felt myself a little giddy with the noise in the room and the heat and smoke. I looked at the clock.

"No, my friends, no; it is time for me to go and look after my cows."

Daumier interposed:

"Come along, let us have some coffee with the young lads, old Socialist."

"No, really; I have a little headache, which makes me feel not so well. Besides, I have talked enough. Up to now I have said freely what I think; now, I know I should only repeat myself, or say stupid things; that is always what happens when one stays too long at the inn. Good-bye."

And I went, leaving old Daumier, who gets abominably drunk. It is the only time in my life that I have talked politics so much.

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The elections were quickly forgotten, and the discussions and the dreams of social improvement which they had aroused, in the presence of the great disaster which came upon us that year: all the spring, all the summer without rain; a constant sunshine which burnt the plants down to

the roots ; a mocking harvest of hay ; an indifferent harvest of corn ; pastures scorched, dried up ; all the ponds empty ; the animals fallen away to nothing : such was the schedule. I was obliged to go to the wood to rake the dry leaves, of which I had made a provision for stable litter, and to buy fodder from the South that a merchant sent to Saint Aubin in trucks ; I realized that year that the railway could be of service, even to peasants.

LVII

DURING the great heat of 1893 my poor martyr of a brother died. As the result of contact with a dirty fly, the wound on his face swelled up, became bluish, and he had the horrible convulsions of tetanus, which finally carried him to the annihilation of that death he had so longed for.

At the end of that same year my old servant left me to go to the service of a priest. Marinette, she said, was too much for her. I hired another, a big woman with a masculine voice, unkind and unreasonable, who pestered me with the constant repetition of the same tales, got offended at every turn and upset my sister when she played her pranks. Later, I discovered that she levied a tithe on the sale of my provisions at the market at Saint Hilaire, and that she drank cups of coffee and sweet wine at my expense. I kept her though, preferring to bear all that, rather than to change again, knowing that I should never find the ideal housekeeper.

During the late and hard winter of 1895, Marinette and I had influenza, and Madeleine, Charles' wife, was obliged to come from Puy-Brot to take care of us. That attack carried off Marinette, who had been failing for some time. I was very glad that I survived her. For myself, I believed

that I, too, was near the end, I felt so weak, so wasted by the fever, and exhausted by a horrible cough, which tore my stomach. I recovered, however, very painfully, to tell the truth, after being languid and stiff for several months ; I found that I had no more than half the vigour that I had kept till then.

Then I looked forward to the day when, my lease having expired, I might return among my children.

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During that time my thoughts were often melancholy. I thought of how I was left alone, like an old, forgotten tree in a copse, in the midst of the pushing of the young ones, an old tree escaped from the axe of the ominous woodcutter under whose blows had fallen, one by one, those whom I had known. Dead, my old grandmother, of the brown shawl and the Bourbon cap. Dead, Uncle Toinot, who had served under the great Emperor and who had killed a Russian. Dead, my father and my mother, he kind and weak, she often ill-natured and harsh from having been so unhappy. Dead, the father and mother Giraud and their son the soldier from Africa, and their son-in-law the glass-blower, who always talked of pulling the dandelion roots. Dead, Victoire, the good partner of my life, whose faults had grown to be little evident to me, as mine to her, when we had got used to each other. Dead, my little Clémentine, gentle and rebellious. Dead, Berthe, delicate Parisian flower, the result of a painful confinement. Dead, the Fauconnets, father and son ; Boutry, Gorlier, Parent, Lavallée, Noris. Dead, all those who had played a part in my life, including Thérèse, my first sweetheart. I saw them often ; they defiled in company before me in my dreams at night, in my memories of the day. In the night they lived again for me ; but by day it seemed to me that I walked in a line of spectres.

And because of that, the idea of death had now no terrors for me. Ah! my first melancholy emotions in La Billette, at the death of my grandmother! The tightening of my heart at the entrance of the great long box in which they placed her, and my sharp, sincere grief when I heard the shovelfuls of earth fall upon the coffin down in the grave! I had seen too many of such scenes since, and my heart now was hard and resolute. At each new funeral my indifference increased, so much so that I was frightened at it myself. However, my turn approached; I thought vaguely that soon it would be me that they would nail in such a case, in a case that would also descend with ropes to the bottom of a yawning hole and upon which they would throw by shovelfuls the great heap of earth lying at the entrance, like an infinite barrier separating the dead from the living! But even that thought did not move me.

Besides, apart from those moments of weakening and morbid fancies, I was interested in all the energetic growth which expanded around me. My sons were serious men, men growing old from the present hour. My grandsons represented the future; they appeared to believe that it would never end. Nevertheless, behind *them*, infancy prattled, grew. . . .

LVIII

It is already five years since I have come back among my children. They are not bad to me. Rosalie, even, shows me little tendernesses that astonish me. Madeleine is very devoted, very loving, and allows her sister-in-law to rule. Harmony reigns in the household and I am very content. In spite of that, a separation is imminent; they are becoming too numerous to remain together.

The reason is that there is a third family. My grandson, the son of Jean and Rosalie, who returned from the regiment three years ago, was married last Martinmas. I have a granddaughter-in-law: I shall soon have a great grandchild. And Charles has two daughters who are likely to marry also. It is getting urgent that my two boys should each have their farm. Duranthon, who likes them, has promised to place the one who goes out in another of his farms.

As for me, I am the old man!

I do little services for one and another. The daughters-in-law say to me:

"Father, if it doesn't trouble you, you might . . ."

And to please them, I supply the kitchen with the wood which is necessary; I feed the rabbits; I look after the geese.

In summer my lads often beg me to do one thing or another, when time is scarce. And I take the cows and the sheep to the fields, I even take care of the pigs, as though it was seventy years ago. I end as I began; old age and childhood have their analogies; extremes often meet. When we make hay, I toss again and rake. When we load, I preach prudence; I urge them to make the carts lighter; I give advice which they don't always take. The young like to be daring, to risk all for all, to be knowing. But fatal to rashness is the experience which age gives. And I am old!

My strength declines more and more, my limbs stiffen; they say the blood does not circulate in them. In the winter I always have cold feet; every night Rosalie puts a warm brick wrapped in a cloth in my bed; but for that they would remain icy all night. I am bent; in vain I try to straighten myself, to look in front of me as in former days: no, it is the point of my *sabots* that I examine in spite of all. The soil that I have handled so much seems to fascinate me, it seems as though it rises towards me to

defy me, it has the air of saying that it will soon have its turn. I see things enlarged and I shake a little ; I make gashes on my face when I shave : it happens that when I go to Mass I don't recognize people whom I know quite well ; I even did not know my little Francis when he came to see me after he returned from his term of service ! I am always a little hard of hearing, and at times very deaf, especially in the winter. At such times I cannot follow the conversation ; when they address me, I have to make them repeat what they have said several times, and in spite of that, I understand badly and answer wrongly, which makes them laugh at me. When I have eaten, if I remain seated, I go to sleep, and in the night, on the contrary, I am often unable to get to sleep at all. I have most absurd lapses of memory. I remember very well the striking incidents of my youth, but the things which happened the night before escape me. It seems as though my mind might be so much fatigued by the events which have occupied it through the length of my career, that it finds itself powerless to interest itself in those which happen now. The result is that I am too fond of talking of the things of former days which I recall, and which interest no one else, and I show an artlessness about new things that makes people laugh at me. I appear a little ridiculous. On my grandchildren's faces I often read this phrase of the language of to-day :

" How the old man ages ! "

Oh, yes, I am the old man ! It is well to recognize the fact with a good grace. My organs have had their day ; they long for the great rest.

And truly one sees many astonishing things. In my youth everybody travelled on horseback because carriages could not go along the bad roads. Now there are carriages that have no need of horses. I was taking care of the pigs this summer in one of the fields which is bounded by the main road. Nearly every day I would suddenly hear a

noise, shrill and disagreeable, which got louder and louder, and the motor-car, carrying men fantastically dressed in caps and oilcloth jackets and wearing goggles like stone-breakers, would pass rapidly, raising a cloud of dust and leaving behind it a disgusting smell of petrol.

One day a child from a neighbouring farm was taking a herd of cattle to a meadow which was separated from the road by a fence. From the direction of Bourbon one of those carriages came at full speed, much more quickly than our locomotive. The driver sounded his horn, the bellowing of the siren was three times louder than the puffing of the machinery. That frightened the cows and they started to run like mad creatures. Two of them went down a side road to the left ; two others jumped over the hedge and went through a field of oats ; the other three continued running. I joined the poor weeping child on the road ; he said he could see them at the bottom of a long hill, a mile and a half away at least, fleeing still before the car, which moved at the same rapid rate. I helped him to get the four others together and to put them in the pasture, and then I sent the child to tell his master. A man set out to find the three runaway cows ; he returned a long time after, bringing two only, the other had died of fatigue at the side of a ditch ; he went to find a butcher at Ygrande to take it away. In talking of the incident at our house he has often said to me :

" Ah ! we were wrong when we complained about the railway ; the train has its own road and passes at stated hours : with care we can avoid it. But these motor-cars are truly the instruments of the devil, invading the roads, passing when they like, and doing us mischief."

I had said the same at first ; but afterwards I thought that I had no need to trouble about those things. A man of a former period, a grandfather with a shaking head, it is not for me to pass judgment on that subject. The young people will get used to these vehicles of progress ; they

will detest still more the rich people for causing them annoyances every day, and sometimes accidents, through thoughtlessness or sport.

For me, what does it matter? I am more and more difficult to rouse. I ask only one thing, to remain in fair health to the end. So long as I can assist my children they will keep me easily. They will still be kind, I have no doubt, when I become good-for-nothing. But I dread being a trouble to them, becoming paralysed or blind or falling into dotage, or suffering from some lingering illness. It would be too painful to know that I was an encumbrance which they would wish to see disappear. I remember how I saw my grandmother thus, a long time ago, and recently my poor godfather: that would be too sad. Let death come; it does not frighten me; it is without bitterness and without fear that I do it the honour of thinking about it at times. Death! Death, but not horrible decay, coming to burden the young, the healthy, the ordinary life of the family, with the body done with work. Let it strike me whilst still at work, so that they may say:

"Father Tiennon has broken his pipe; he was very old, very worn-out; but he was busy all the same; he worked right to the end."

But let not my funeral sermon be:

"Father Bertin is dead: poor old man! In his condition it was a happy release for him and a blessing for his family."

From life I have nothing to hope, but I have still something to fear. That I may escape this last calamity is my one desire.

THE END

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