BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Down Donkey Row

The Two Husbands

Rue de Paris

Market Day. The gendarme, with his bicycle, is a familiar sight in the countryside.

The Gallic Land

COUNTRY LIFE IN FRANCE

by

Len Ortzen

With

33 photographs by John Saunders

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter I

MARKET DAY

ON THIS SUNNY but still chilly morning in early summer a large number of horses and carts were converging on the small country town. From villages and farms they bumped and jolted slowly along narrow, pot-holed lanes until a better-kept, asphalt road was reached; then the horses began to trot steadily, the well-sprung carts to sway a little, and the large, high wheels rolled readily towards the town. It was a weekly excursion for all; a change from everyday work in the fields, as much for the horses perhaps as for the two or three peasants, men and women, riding in each cart. They sat stiff and upright just within the shadow of the hood that covered most of each high cart, rarely speaking, looking straight ahead, their minds no doubt set on the serious struggle before them; that of selling all the produce that lay in the back of the cart, and getting as much as possible for it. Here and there in a rutted lane a horse and cart were closely followed by an ancient, decrepit car or a scarred motor-van that fumed and fussed impatiently, seeking an opportunity to swerve and pass ahead. The horses and carts appeared so much more cared for than the mechanical vehicles, and were so much in a majority, that it really looked as though the motors belonged to a bygone age. However, nearer the small town, when the horses and carts mingled with cyclists and pedestrians pushing handcarts, the whole unruly,

straggling traffic was frequently hooted at and passed by lorries and polished motor-vans bringing goods from the industrial town to the country market.

By half-past eight most of the stalls had been set up in the large cobbled square. The grey stone wall of the ancient church that formed one side seemed to afford protection to the stalls almost leaning against it. The mossy, tiled roof of the market hall in the middle of the square towered above the stalls clustered around it; stalls that were merely boards on two trestles, holding richly-coloured mounds of fresh green vegetables and ripe red fruits; stalls with canopies adding other touches of colour with their red-and-yellow or blue-and-brown stripes. There were stalls, too, outside most of the shops, taking up much of the narrow pavement. Indeed, there seemed to be far too many stalls, or too many selling the same kind of goods for such a small town.

The same busy scene could be found in any of the country market towns scattered across the map of France, one every ten or fifteen miles; but not, in any one area, on the same day. Here, market day was on a Friday; in the next market town it was held on a Tuesday. For farther back than anyone could remember it had been thus. It mattered little to the shoppers which was market day; if anything they preferred arrangements as they were, for they could visit two or three markets within a week if a decision on an important purchase had to be made. But to the stallholders, some of whom attended several markets, it was a very useful arrangement.

A shopping crowd was gradually collecting now, mainly housewives of the town who were only looking round as yet. Some of the regular vendors, too, were still approaching

the market. There were peasants from the villages seven or eight miles away, tethering their horses and carts in the side streets or on the open space behind the church, tying the reins when possible to little iron rings set in the ground; and, by contrast, an occasional lorry or motor-van from the county town was manoeuvring to discharge some of its load of manufactured goods.

Inside the market hall were the stalls belonging to shopkeepers of the town. Here were the butchers, with their red-and-white carcasses of meat hanging from hooks set in the old oak beams; the poultry and cheese stalls; the pastry-cook and the saddler; while the farther end of the hall was taken up by peasant-women sitting on wooden benches with their baskets of eggs and butter at their feet, some with a live duck or a couple of chickens squeezed into another basket. They sat patiently in two long rows as others had done here for generations.

When, now and again, another woman came to join them, she merged easily into this nondescript, shabby old regiment. They all resembled each other, if not in height and bulk, certainly in age and dress. None of them could have been less than sixty years of age, and many looked well over seventy. This may well be because no peasant family is likely to release a younger woman from the hard work in the house or on the farm to do the comparatively sedentary job of going to market; or only in the exceptional circumstance of no aged relative, a mother-in-law or a grand-aunt, being available from the family's labour strength. To find a young face among the women vendors it was necessary to walk past the commercial stalls, those selling manufactured goods from firms in the large towns and who 'did'

the markets of the region. The appearance of these few young women hardly corresponded with the popular English conception of French *chic*; but that is Parisian rather than French. These young women were at least dressed in bright colours and used make-up; a few wore slacks, and had recently been to a hairdresser. There was certainly enough about their appearance to mark them as city-dwellers, to French country eyes. Not that the young women of the country town were unable to appear looking attractive, even elegant; but that was something reserved for Sundays and special occasions, certainly not for market day.

Anyone who approached the old peasant-women seated in the market hall to haggle and buy from them would soon discover, however, that a lusty individualism existed beneath each drab uniform. Apart from their appearance the only similarity between them was the price of their wares. To go from one to the other asking the price of their eggs and butter made you wonder how these women, who rarely met from one market day to the next, could so quickly and surely come to an agreement; especially as the price fluctuated from week to week and increased considerably as the year progressed. The answer could be found behind the church as the horses and carts arrived. There, as one or two women climbed down from their carts with their baskets and another one or two were about to set off to the market square, a quick, muttered exchange of opinion took place. 'Yours not laying so well either?'—'Twelve francs apiece, don't you think?' A nod or two, a rapid, practised glance at the size of the eggs in the other baskets, a passing reference to butter, and the matter was understood.

Indeed, to go round the whole market, in which food-stalls were in the majority, gave you the impression that price-controls existed here as much as in England. It was possible to find a stall selling something a trifle cheaper than elsewhere, but usually there was just that much difference in the quality of the food. The cheese that was five francs cheaper had just about that much less fat content; the meat at fifty francs a pound cheaper was less tender and had less taste; the potatoes were specked or otherwise inferior just to the extent of the one franc reduction per pound. You could not but admire the commercial finesse and exact balance of values attained by these stallholders.

All this constituted a challenge to the housewives, who set off to market in a frame of mind not unlike that of their husbands when going out for a day's shooting. This was a day of excitement too, if only because there were crowds of people in the town, animation, noise, making it very different from any other day of the week. Everyone felt this; the housewives set out for the market square wondering what they would find there and who they would meet. Because a certain thing had been available on the market last week was no guarantee that it would again be on sale this week; nor, if on sale, that the price would be the same. The market was always full of surprises, agreeable and disagreeable.

The shoppers' mental approach to the business of marketing was no different from their grandmothers'—who would have noticed little change other than the prices. Neither had the methods of shopping changed. The housewives of the town still preferred to go to one stall for this, to another for that; there was no large stall selling a variety of different things,

even as there was no multiple store in the streets. The business of filling one's capacious shopping bag was considered a serious detailed matter which must be done without haste. An important point was to have one hand free all the time in order to examine or taste in passing. This seemed to be almost an automatic gesture with most of the women, absentmindedly picking a haricot bean from a stall and nibbling it or accepting a few cherries held out by a stallholder. But all the time their minds were concentrating on the matter in hand. They knew, before entering the market square, what they were going to buy and how much they were prepared to pay. Most of the housewives came only to buy food; not a week's supply nor even three or four days' but just enough for the family's needs today and perhaps tomorrow. Food must be fresh, everyone was agreed. That was one of the attractions of the market, this buying direct from the producer; secondly, although prices were scarcely lower than in the shops, every farthing saved meant an increase in one's self-esteem, a point in one's favour as a shrewd shopper rather than a minute gain over the high cost of living; and, on the market, there was a wider choice.

The shoppers circulated slowly around the stalls, in and out of the market hall, passed and repassed the rows of aged peasant-women. They assessed the relative sizes of eggs, decided which vegetable stall was the best and, in some cases, picked out the vegetables to be weighed. Here and there small groups of people stood chatting, blocking the passage between two rows of stalls or taking up most of a narrow cobbled street leading into the market square.

Market day was also an opportunity for meeting friends and acquaintances, for discussing business affairs that might

or might not be concluded that day, for obtaining news of other villages in the district, and for doing odd jobs. This at least was the idea of the men who attended the market. *On fait des affaires*—a phrase that included many images of impromptu meetings carefully pre-arranged, of long conversations containing numerous oblique references, of drinks in cafés. *Des affaires*—that meant any sort of deal, big or small, from finding someone who wanted to buy or who might possibly buy the horse you wished to sell, to bartering a bundle of faggots for a pound of sugar. And if an important deal was concluded—as a result, very likely, of other long conversations on previous market days—one of the men might go along to the only bank in the town to draw notes with which to pay the other. Within the memory of not-so-elderly people all major deals were concluded by striking the fist three times in the palm of the hand (a practice that has not entirely disappeared). Neither seller nor buyer would then have gone back on his word; and the price would have been paid at Michaelmas or some other local day of reckoning. Now life was complicated unnecessarily by pieces of paper, bureaucratic forms, receipts, and cashbooks. But not to any great extent here; these people succeeded between them in keeping such nonsense and dangerous evidence to remarkably small, reasonable proportions.

The bank, which only opened on market days, was comparatively busy; there were never more than half a dozen clients in the small room, but most of these came to pay in or draw out large wads of notes that the sole cashier took a long time to count. It was rare to see anyone present a cheque drawn by another person. The bank room became a meeting-place too, and throughout the morning there were

usually one or two pairs of clients talking quietly between themselves while waiting their turn with the cashier.

The leisurely atmosphere of the weekly market, its almost old-world flavour, was thrown into relief by the presence, in one part of the square, of the commercial stalls and by their hustling, huckstering methods. The difference between town and country, between the industrial and agricultural worlds, between the factory and the craftsman, was more marked than at an English market. The two did not merge; there was here an impact that could almost be felt. On the one hand there were the stallholders selling their own produce, the peasant-women with their baskets; and, in a second degree, shopkeepers like the butcher, the poultryman, the pastry-cook, the shoemaker and mender, who had on their market stalls either something they had bought from the producer or had made with their own hands and tools. On the other hand there were the much larger stalls that sold mass-produced goods, clothing, crockery, ironmongery; stalls that for the most part were kept by strangers to the town, by people '*qui n'étaient pas du pays*'. The latter stalls were in a minority, and they were doing far less trade than any of the others. Obviously, they could not expect many customers. Their goods were the kind of things that a household seldom requires, and most of these cost a fairly large sum of money. Moreover, to the customer, here, the purchase of some such commodity, a rug, a length of curtain material, a coffee set, was a matter for much deliberation and a preliminary family consultation. Even then it was necessary to visit several stalls, to examine, compare, haggle, and still put off the decision. A preliminary tour was likewise made before any sort of purchase, as a matter of course,

for vegetables, eggs, meat. But ten minutes or so sufficed for these things; they were daily, most necessary purchases, whereas it was always possible to wait another week before buying a pair of sheets. The sales that were made by these commercial stalls were due mainly to the fact that their wares cost a little less than similar articles in the shops, or because they had something not obtainable here and so the purchaser saved the return fare to another, larger town.

These stalls aroused a certain amount of disdain and suspicion. They represented the middlemen class; and the French have not yet really admitted middlemen into their economic system. These stallholders walking up and down before their mass-produced goods brought an atmosphere of factory and machine-mindedness into this country town. An atmosphere which, to the market crowd, was redolent of something inhuman. These factory products and their middlemen seemed to lack something that was of particular importance to this crowd of peasants or people of peasant origin, something which has an important place in all aspects of French life. Even these stallholders themselves looked less contented and satisfied with their job than did the other stallholders in the market place. Their wares were on the whole less well arranged, and treated with scant respect. They were unable to take an interest in their merchandise like that shown, for instance, by the butcher or the shoemaker. And any shopper in the market was happier when making a purchase that brought him or her into direct or close contact with the producer.

The butcher, taking great care over tying up a joint, had himself chosen the whole animal; and now this small part of the carcass he had carved up would soon be cooked and

served by the housewife taking it from him. Some such reflection may well have passed between the two as the money and the joint changed hands. A reflection instantly chased away, no doubt, by the thought of one that there was not enough profit in the transaction and of the other that such a large sum bought very little meat. Nevertheless, the feeling was there; the business of buying and selling was personal, dignified, human. As it was when dealing with a peasant woman who had herself gathered these vegetables you were going to eat at lunchtime. Or when dealing with the shoemaker, as he deftly pressed the leather of a shoe with whose supple qualities he was intimately familiar. *A nous deux!* Whereas when it was necessary to deal with a commercial stall there came into the prospective buyer's mind, apart from this feeling of becoming embroiled in a machine system, a vision of a long line of unknown, vague people interposing themselves between him and his purchases. All of whom, moreover, would take a portion of his money.

These stallholders tried to overcome the disinclination of the shopping crowd by loud sales-talk, which alone set them apart from the others. There was, just now, a man trying to sell aluminium kitchen utensils from the back of a lorry parked in a corner of the square. He kept up a constant flow of patter as he picked this and that from the lorry to make a collection of half a dozen different saucepans and bins. He gradually reduced the price by half, but was rewarded only by stares or smiles. He put a large container on the ground and stepped into it. 'See the size of it, ladies! Use it for anything. Wash your feet, make the family's soup in it . . .' He soon had a fair-sized crowd round him, but he continued to exhaust himself without making any sale. It was a free

show and, after all, market day was an entertainment as well. A woman who did decide, suddenly it seemed, to spend half of a man's weekly wage on a set of aluminium containers was looked at with surprise, suspicion, and scorn.

'A pair of chickens used to buy a pair of boots', grumbled a farmer, returning to his wife's stall from inspecting one selling factory-made boots and shoes. 'Now they're asking the price of two pairs of chickens.'

'Yes, and when we charge more for our chickens', said his wife, addressing the world in general, 'everyone says we're profiteering, taking advantage of people's hunger, and I don't know what else besides.'

'True enough', agreed the next stallholder. 'I can remember the time when you could post a letter for the price of an egg. Now you have to sell two eggs to buy a stamp.'

'You can say that, now there are plenty of eggs about and they're cheap', snapped a customer, perhaps the wife of some salaried worker in the town. 'But how about in the winter, when you peasants get the price of two stamps for an egg?'

'But, my good lady, chickens always have laid less in winter! We have fewer to sell. We don't get any more money. But the Post Office does! Ah, you city people, you don't understand anything about anything.'

The sharp division between town and country, or rather city and village, urban ideas and rural, was marked, too, by the transport used and the clothes worn to come to market. The clothes of many of the peasants, their crumpled felt hats and patched corduroy trousers, looked as if they had been inherited. Some of the women wore a large pouch attached to a belt round their waists, in which they kept their takings. Nearly all these stallholders had a small slate

and a piece of chalk handy, ready to use for any addition of more than two amounts. Whereas some of the commercial stalls were actually using cash registers.

The market was at its height now, the crowd of shoppers as large as it would ever be. The peasant-women in the market hall, having sold most of their wares, were debating among themselves—but with very few words—whether to increase the price of their remaining eggs by a farthing each. The warmth of the sun, and the sight and smells of all this food, made everyone more cheerful; especially as some of it would soon be converted into cooked, appetising lunches. However, to look too cheerful was misplaced; after all, you were here on business whether spending or earning money.

Some of the stallholders were considering whether the time had come to do their own shopping. There was one old peasant-woman, at her vegetable stall by the church wall, who was drinking a cup of black coffee probably laced with rum, and at the same time talking and attending to her customers.

'You won't find any waste on those lettuces, my little lady, you've made a good choice. Spring onions to go with them? I gave the last away long ago. You ought to come earlier to market. *Soyez matinale, ma petite dame, soyez matinale.*'

Her stall, set up on two trestles, presented a cheerful and enticing appearance like all the other fruit and vegetable stalls. Everything on it was freshly picked, and the root vegetables had been scrubbed until they gleamed. But the stallholder was drabness personified; she was a small round woman with a wrinkled face and her grey hair was drawn back into a bun. Summer and winter alike she appeared in this market wearing the same dark, dingy, nondescript

garments. To judge by her shape below stall level she was wearing the traditional number of petticoats for a peasant.

'Out hunting at midnight, we were', she was saying now. 'Midnight. And up at five this morning. I haven't got really warm yet', she added, regretfully putting down her cup in order to use both hands to weigh some peas. 'Snails', she went on to a newcomer. 'Our garden's surrounded by fields, and we were out hunting them at midnight. Hundreds of them', she continued non-stop, rummaging for change among the dirty crumpled notes in a battered tin. For another customer she did a little sum with a stump of chalk on the lid of the tin, then rubbed it out with the side of her grimy hand. 'Peas, my little lady', she cried without looking up, sensing rather than seeing someone going slowly past the stall. 'Lovely peas—picked this morning. Look—' Rapidly she split a pod and held it out. 'And they're all like that. You can go all round the market, you won't find any better. Two kilos?'

She counted out the change with a triumphant flourish. But the customer lingered—ah yes, for parsley; free to the regular customer, a small charge to the casual. Then the stall-keeper looked round and called to the next stallholder to keep an eye on things for her, put the battered tin box into a large basket, and walked away. She made a semi-circle to reach the market hall in order to glance at her horse and the covered cart in which she and her husband had come to market, that was standing with others in a yard. That was all right; her husband was no longer in the café, either; he ought to be finding out the price of that seed, and then there was the brake of the cart that needed repairing. Nothing but expense when you came into town.

As she left her pitch the church clock struck ten; and the *curé* in his long black cassock swept past the stalls towards a side door of the church.

A short distance away a woman was wrapping a pair of corsets round her portly body. At the next stall the vendor and his customer, the owner of one of the town's two restaurants, were discussing the merits of a crate of apricots and tasting them as they talked. The restaurant owner kept looking at the box-trailer, attached to his bicycle, in which were stacked the lettuces and haricot beans that he had already bought from the stallholder.

'It's the only lot on the market,' the man was saying, spitting an apricot-stone on to the cobbles. 'And I thought of you when I had the chance of getting them at the wholesale market in town.' The other must have murmured an acceptance, for the stallholder began to write out and add up the cost of the items on a little pad.

'Ah no! No bills', exclaimed the restaurant owner. 'No bills. Just tell me how much, and here's the cash.'

The town-crier was wandering round the market, stopping here and there to ring his bell and then to shout out the announcements that were scrawled on a dirty piece of paper he was carrying. He wore no uniform of any kind, not even a peaked cap; his hand-bell was his only badge of office. Neither he nor the market crowd seemed interested in his announcements until he stopped near the butchers' stalls at the entrance to the market hall. 'At eleven o'clock this morning there'll be a sale', he began with a grin, 'of meat. The butchers have decided to bring down their prices, and will be selling at half their usual rates.'

A couple of butchers made a show of chasing him away

with their cleavers, while the crowd looked on cheerfully. 'Go and try that near the butter women', cried a burly butcher. 'They've put up their prices since last week, which is more than we've done.'

Today was something of a day out, a change in routine, for a number of officials and semi-officials. There were two dark-blue uniformed gendarmes slowly walking round the market, pushing their bicycles. One of them was a sergeant with small silver stripes on his cuff. It seemed unnecessary for one of his rank to be doing the simple duty of patrolling the market, but possibly he was carrying out a reconnaissance for his wife or looking for something he wanted to buy. Anyway, the two of them were spending most of their time shaking hands and chatting with stallholders.

Another two men were going from stall to stall collecting dues and handing over little, numbered slips of paper in return for the money. A postman in a drab blue uniform and a peaked cap was strolling up and down the street leading from the main one into the market square. Now and again he took a letter from the gaping satchel hanging on his chest and handed it to someone who came looking for him or to someone in a passing cart. In between times he stood chatting with an acquaintance or disappeared altogether, having been taken into the corner café for a drink.

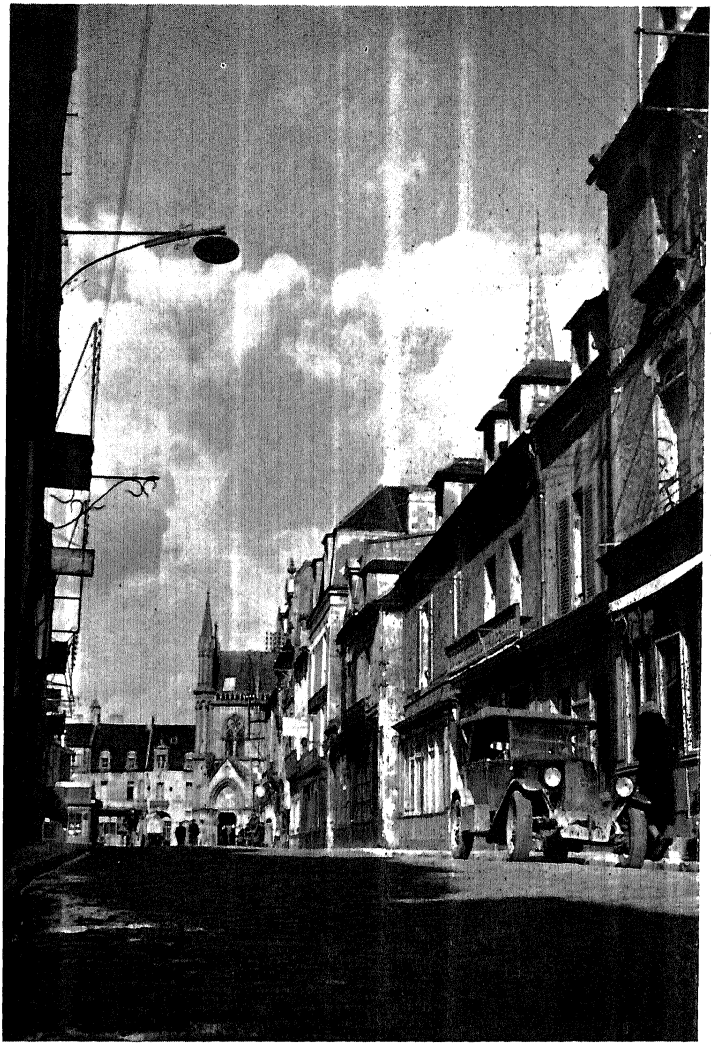
The church bells suddenly began to ring joyously over the market, and a wedding procession started walking through the Gothic porch into the cobbled square. The smiling bride in white and the bridegroom with a large buttonhole in his new blue suit, arm in arm, headed the long column as it walked round the square to avoid the stalls, past the shoppers who hurried to line its route, past the bank and the postman

and the gendarmes, to the photographer's in the main street. Behind the bride and groom, who walked along chatting together and not in the least perturbed or embarrassed by all the stares and comments they received, were the bridesmaid and the best man, the near relatives and the not-so-near ones, with friends and neighbours straggling at the rear. As the onlookers turned back to their affairs the *curé* came hurrying between the stalls to catch up the wedding party.

The bells stopped, and the market seemed to do the same. Preparations for departure had already been going on at some of the stalls, and now became more evident as the shoppers gradually disappeared and other stallholders began to pack. Carts jolted over the cobbles and rolled out of the town. The rhythmic clopping of the horses was interrupted now and again by the impatient hooting of a car or lorry; but soon, within a mile or so radius of the town, there were only the high carts, each just within view of another, trotting briskly and evenly back home.

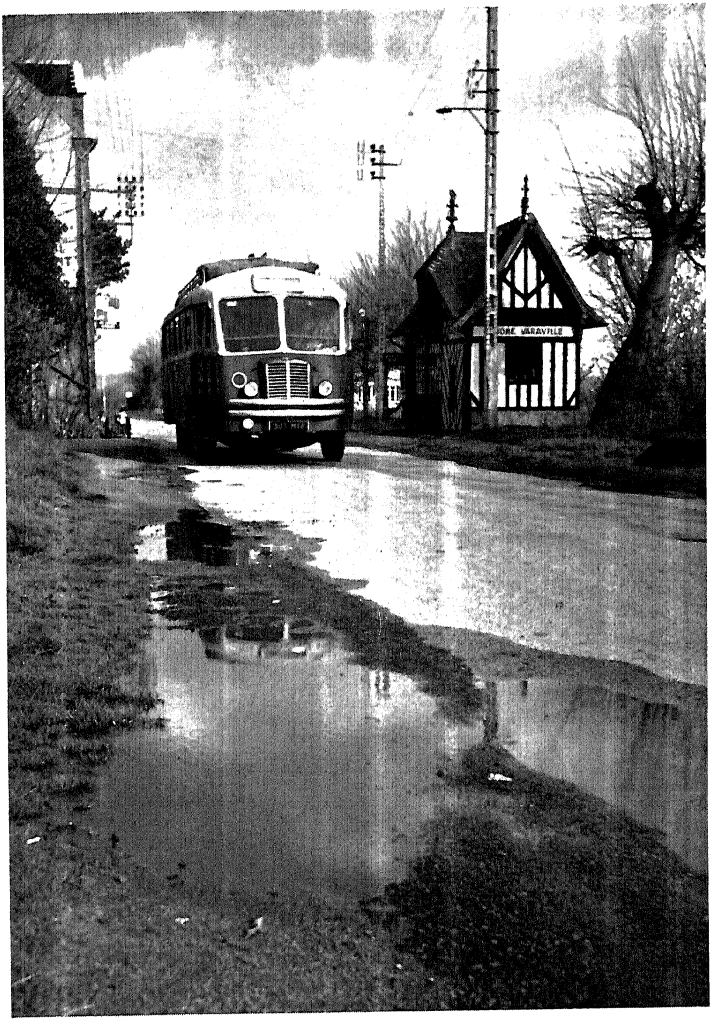
The old peasant-woman, sitting next to her husband in their covered cart, was counting the takings in her tin box. 'You didn't get the brake done, did you?'—'No', replied her husband. 'But I saw him about it'. She nodded approvingly, still counting. 'He might bring his price down by next week, when I bump into him', he said. 'It'll hold out until then at least.'

In the market square little remained except two or three lorries whose owners were already having lunch in a restaurant; and an untidy mess of paper, squashed fruit, and shavings, and horse-dung. It would be cleared away later, later in the afternoon—after lunch.



The main street of a country town. It comes to life three times a day

The butcher, taking great care over tying up a joint, had been prodding the whole animal in a field a few days ago.



The cross-country buses are often the sole means of public transport. But, first, let's try to arrange to go in a friend's car!

Chemin vicinal. Car-owners who use these roads keep a horse and cart as well!

Chapter II

COUNTRY TOWN

ON A NORMAL WEEKDAY the town seemed much less important. With its population of about fifteen hundred the place would no doubt have been considered just a large village, if in England. There was no factory chimney rising above the collection of buildings, no railway station within five miles, no cinema or lending library, and the bank was now closed. Yet it was a town much more than a village in a French sense.

There were very few towns larger than this in the whole of the *département*, or large county. It was a *chef-lieu de canton;* that is, the centre of an area divided into a number of *communes*, the lowest unit in the French administrative system. A *canton* is itself a sub-division of an *arrondissement*, whose chief town is referred to as a *sous-préfecture*, as it is the seat of the Sous-Préfet and his staff, who are the administrative channel between the Préfecture, in the capital of the *département*, and the *communes* within their area. These *communes*, each administered by a mayor and a municipal council, can be of any size. But of the 38,000 *communes* into which France is divided, 35,000 have a population of less than two thousand.

This *chef-lieu de canton* had no more administrative powers than its smaller, surrounding *communes;* it was only a *commune* itself. But it was the residence of representatives of

various government departments and of professional people, and it supplied the needs of the surrounding villages and farms.

It was the sort of town that, with innumerable others like it, forms the hard core of French country life. The *chef-lieu* naturally changes in appearance and in character according to its regional position, but fundamentally one is much like another, serving the same purpose.

Most of this town was built along the main road that traversed it. At each end the surface of the road suddenly changed from asphalt that needed repairing to cobbles long worn uneven, just where a low-placed, rectangular, concrete signpost showed the name of the town in large capitals. Between the two widely separated signposts the town sprawled about in a leisurely fashion, each building giving itself plenty of room. They were all different from each other, detached or semi-detached with little alley-ways winding round to the back or to houses set farther away from the road. Yet there was a certain harmony of the whole, and it was not lacking in the picturesque. There were hardly any gaudy, blatant advertisements such as, unfortunately, one is accustomed to seeing even in a small town or village in England; there was nothing to jar or to distract the eye when making first acquaintance with the town.

Near the middle of the long cobbled stretch was the Mairie, the administrative centre, clean and well-built, a small triangle crowning a larger rectangle. It stood back from the road, leaving a small square in front that was called the Place de la République; in the middle of this was a little grass plot surrounding the town's war memorial, a large statue of a steel-helmeted infantryman supported by

an angel with widespread wings. Three sides of the base of the statue bore each the date of a different war, and the 1914-1918 side was filled with a list of names grimly long for such a small town. The smaller list of the 1940 side was divided into three categories: Prisoners, Deportees, Shot. Almost opposite the small square was the narrow turning that opened out into the market place with the church at the far side; so that the two buildings representing opposing ideas and beliefs within the nation, the Mairie and the Church, seemed to be trying to keep an eye on each other. Symbolically, the church clock never quite agreed with the striking of the clock in the triangular top of the Mairie.

On a corner of the Place de la République was the town's one hotel, the Cheval Blanc, though the hotel was but a small part of the whole business. The ground floor of the two-storey building was a large café that became a restaurant at the far end. Here you could buy stamps and cigarettes and tobacco, as was denoted by a large red cigar-shaped sign sticking out from the building. It was also the local agency for the regional bus company, and was the stopping-place for the half a dozen buses that passed through the town during the day. On the cobbled pavement were a few shrubs in green-painted tubs, and a couple of rickety chairs and little tables; the front of the café had been freshly painted a lively blue, and across the top now appeared the words, inspired perhaps by a recent visit to Paris or some city by this obviously progressive-minded owner, 'Bar du Cheval Blanc'. Bar! cried the elders of the town with provincial scorn. Bar, they said as though it were written slightly differently, and went to the Café-Restaurant du Centre on the corner of the street leading to the market. Still, the

outside appearance of the Cheval Blanc gave a touch of alert modernity to the otherwise old, meditative aspect of the town.

At either extremity of the main street was an official building. One, the Post Office, seemed to have been added to the line of buildings as an afterthought and then disguised to look something like a north-country public-house, but without the latter's appearance of well-being. There was a creeper sprawling along the front, and a wooden bench stood near the door. The only indication to a stranger of the importance of this building was the blue letter-box in the wall and, above, a long wooden sign half obscured by the creeper. At the other end of the town the Gendarmerie seemed to hold itself aloof; it was, in fact, separated from the town by a small field. Here were housed, with their families, the dozen or so gendarmes who were mainly responsible for law and order in the *canton*.

Between these two the line of buildings on each side of the street was ragged; some of the houses had a courtyard in front, some a small garden; some faced the road, others were turned sideways to it. They looked old and tired, yet seemed solid enough, these brick-built houses of varying heights. When a heavy lorry or a laden bus clanged and roared over the cobbles it was difficult to decide whether the buildings were roused from their slumbers or shaken to their foundations. They were colourful, with their shutters painted green or blue or brown, their grey-blue or red roofs; the shops that formed part of every second or third building were painted different colours. Yet they all had a rather dilapidated look. Even the larger houses of the doctor and lawyer gave this impression of modesty and of being in

reduced circumstances. Perhaps this was due to the fact that, to English eyes, the doorsteps should have been freshly scrubbed, the brass door-handles polished, a coat of fresh paint given to the shutters and window-frames. In addition, most of the smaller houses needed minor repairs; there was brickwork to be refaced, shutters to be re-hinged, broken masonry to be mended. But these were no doubt rented houses; and rents are so ridiculously low that no owner can afford to keep his property in good repair. Not only are rents controlled at six or seven times the pre-war rate, whereas building and repair costs have multiplied twenty-five times, but it is an inherent policy that less than five per cent of a family's revenue should be spent on housing. In all cases, however, the inside of the houses would have told a different story from the outside. And, particularly in the country, the good things are usually found concealed in back places.

If the doctor, for instance, had immodestly improved the appearance of his house or bought a new car to replace the pre-war model parked outside his courtyard, if he had indulged in any of what the French suspiciously refer to as 'exterior signs of riches', he might very well have lost a good many of his clients. For how could he have come by this wealth other than by excessive charges to his clients? Moreover, such noticeable signs of prosperity would very likely have accorded badly with his declaration of income. Further along the line of shops and houses was the office of the *percepteur*, the tax-collector, who lived above it. He obviously took the same point of view as the doctor—as he collected money for the government, perhaps it was more important in his case—and his house, too, seemed to be trying to

assume a lesser importance. Even the sign on the wall announcing that the office was open to the public on two afternoons a week was of very modest proportions. During the rest of the week the *percepteur* spent most of his time going around the countryside on his numerous duties.

Opposite and beyond the Gendarmerie were two farmhouses standing back from the road. The country came right into the town, without any sharp division, in more than a territorial sense. The smells that drifted about the town were of the country, wood-fires and manure and leather. Most of the small amount of traffic was composed of farm waggons that rumbled slowly over the cobbles, a cattle truck or two bringing beasts to the slaughter-house just off the market square, and now and again an old car driven by a farmer with business to do in town. Along the main street and in the market square were several water-taps to which some people went throughout the day with buckets and pails, just as in the surrounding villages and many of the farms.

The two garages in the town carried out as many repairs to farming equipment as they did to lorries and cars. There was usually a harrow or a farm waggon standing outside each garage, sometimes next to a motor-car that was for sale or one being filled up with petrol. One of the garage-owners still had a busy blacksmith's business just round the corner in a side street. This assembled evidence of the slow evolution of country life was also seen in the shop next to the Bar du Cheval Blanc. The owner sold guns and cartridges, bicycles, oil-lamps and cart-lanterns, electric torches and bulbs and wireless sets; his stock of electrical equipment filled only a small part of his shop. The shoemaker and

repairer had a small selection of city shoes for sale, to meet the requirements of some of the younger generation, but most of his window display consisted of heavy boots, leggings, sturdy shoes, and slippers, nearly all made by himself and his apprentices.

The disposition and number of shops in the town appeared to have been finely calculated and arranged by common consent. Each seemed to have just enough work to keep a man and his wife and a son or a daughter or one assistant employed; when there was more than one shop of a kind they were situated as far apart as possible. There were three butchers' shops and three general food shops; the largest of the latter was in the market square, and sold vegetables and fruit and wines and spirits as well as all kinds of groceries. It was a fairly large shop, dimly lit, that receded deep into the building and smelt of fresh coffee, sawdust, and ripe cheeses. It was the sort of place that kept any number of good things in its mysterious depths; the slow-moving owner and his wife behind the solid cash-desk were always blinking in the perpetual half-light; you lingered on, if you went there to shop, wondering what else you might buy, and no one hurried you. This was the only shop that sold milk; most families got their daily supplies from nearby farms, thus continuing a habit which had been necessary during the Occupation.

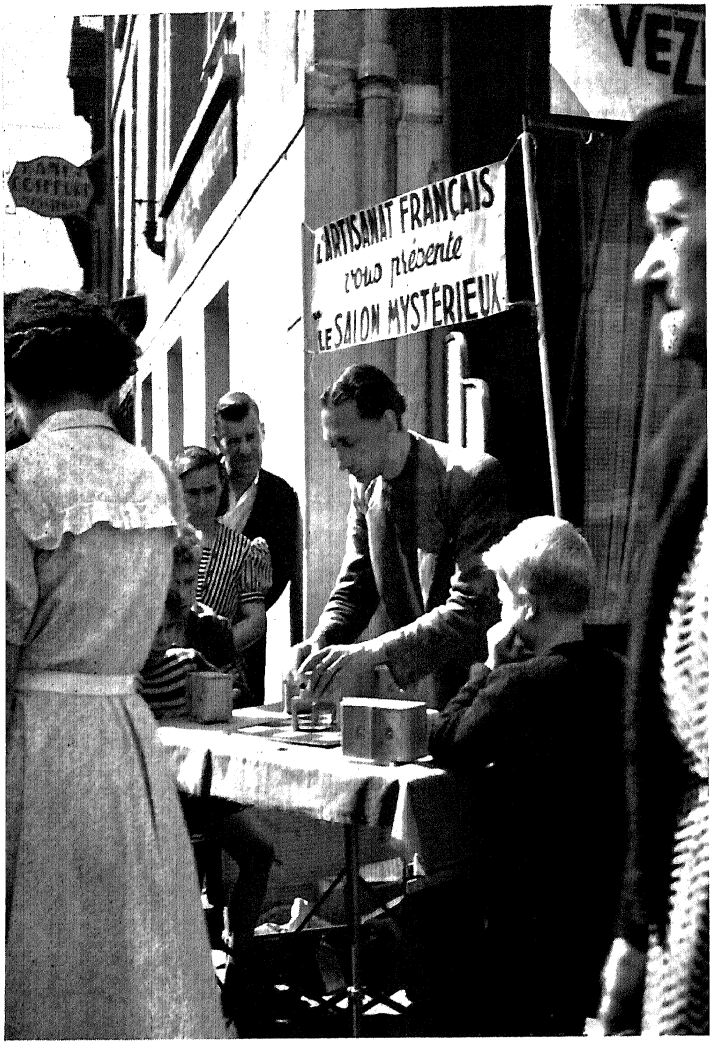
There were two bakers, one of whom also made pastries at week-ends. But no other shop had a competitor, very likely because none of the others was a food shop. In fact, for these, there may not have been even enough custom for one of a kind; most of them tried to sell a wide selection of goods. The haberdashery shop was also the newsagent's, so that its

stock ranged from pins to postcards, from lace to ink. The picture-postcards of the town that were on sale were reproduced from photographs taken many years previously but the only apparent difference, after close inspection, between the postcards and the actual view was that the women pictured in the streets all had skirts sweeping the ground. The clothing shop next to the Café du Centre was evidently prepared to clothe completely any member of the family whatever the sex or age. The furniture shop further along the main street had little window space for comprehensive display, but the owner had his own workshop at the back and would make any piece of furniture to order.

Most local people took their custom to their own shops from a sense of solidarity and self-interest. I must buy from my neighbours, they said, because my neighbours buy from me. Even if the customer did not earn a living from some kind of trade, it was more than likely that a relative did. From family solidarity and interest sprang this feeling of local interdependence. By buying from a stranger at a market stall, you might save a few francs, but against that commendable saving was the fact that you might thereby mar good relationships with a local shopkeeper. The town lived on itself as much as possible; its work, its social life and relaxations, such as they were, came from its own resources and the surrounding countryside.

Three times during the day the town became active and alive. It awoke at an early hour, and this first hour or two when almost everyone was making preparations was perhaps the busiest. Long before the first lot of bedding was thrust over an upper window-sill, the butchers and the bakers had been at work. Their shops were the first to open,

On the Market Place. Shopping is a serious, detailed matter devoid of haste.



The cheapjack—'a stranger, not of the countryside'.

soon after seven, just as people began to appear in the streets. Young children ran across to the baker's to fetch warm long loaves, the *curé* stepped silently from his house and with a faint swish of cassock hurried into the church a few yards away; he was followed at close intervals by a couple of nuns and half a dozen elderly, black-clad women who appeared from different directions.

There was a pungent smell of coffee and a moist, appetizing odour of warm bread drifting about the side streets, mingling with the tang of wood-fires in the keen early-morning air. More windows were opened and then almost blocked with mattresses and dangling bedclothes; the sounds of voices filtered into the streets and courtyards, and seemed to arouse the rest of the town. Other shops opened their doors, and the owners or their wives appeared sweeping last night's dirt briskly into the gutters. In the main street two or three people were waiting outside the Cheval Blanc for the first bus of the day; another one or two intending passengers were having coffee in the 'Bar' and the café opposite. By now the people who had jobs were leaving their homes, the women who were daily servants at the larger houses, the few girls who were shop assistants, the men and women who worked at the Mairie, the roadmender and the gravedigger, the apprentices and the Post Office employees. A few children arrived in the town from the farms on the outskirts, and made their way to the school buildings behind the Mairie; some gendarmes set out on bicycles, two by two, to patrol the district. By half-past eight the last of the children were clattering to school, most of them to the State one and a few to the Church school next to the *presbytère*.

All the shops were now open; sounds of hammering came from one of the garages and the blacksmith's; the hairdresser was cleaning his windows. Most of the women had already done a good part of their housework. The town seemed to settle down to enjoy the morning after all the bustle of shifting things into position, as it were; almost everyone had helped to set the stage, and now disappeared into the wings.

The next wave of activity came between eleven and midday, beginning with a flurry of housewives intent on buying food for the midday meal. The French everywhere insist on fresh food for their meals—frozen and tinned meat, for instance, was unsaleable even during the war and post-war period when fresh meat was scarce—but this daily pre-meal shopping expedition seems an unnecessary extreme. The shops were almost empty of customers during the first half of the morning, but very few people considered doing their shopping during this slack period when they would have been served more quickly; and surely, surely the food bought then would not have been less fresh! The reason may be that the people do not like parting with money until the evil moment just cannot be put off any longer. A housewife will stock butter in order to save money later in the year when butter is much dearer; but if she needs a lemon today and knows she will need another tomorrow she is unlikely to buy both together.

So the town was still busy with women carrying home large black American-cloth shopping bags when the children came running and shouting from school at eleven-thirty. Soon the shops began to close with an impatient bustle, and some of the people who had left for work earlier now

returned to their homes for lunch. There was a final sound of shop grilles crashing downwards and of large gates banging shut, and then a silence spread around the town. It was the first real silence of the day and was scarcely interrupted during the next two hours.

There was no further collective activity in the town until six or seven o'clock. Then the food shops became busy again, though on a smaller scale than before lunch; the two cafés did more trade than at any other time of the day; small groups of men and young people were standing on street corners and in the market square, chatting and perpetually shaking hands. There were more children about too, a few playing in the market hall, but a greater number running errands, going off to collect milk from nearby farms, fetching loaves that had just been baked, bringing cans of milk from the grocer's in the market square—'There, it's still warm', said the grocer proudly, showing that he, too, got his supply from a local farm.

It was a period of the day when people seemed the most satisfied, when they were prepared to expand. The day's work was over or nearly so—except for the women, busily preparing the evening meal—and soon everyone would be sitting down at table again. Towards seven-thirty the shops began to close and the people drifted rapidly away to their homes. Another period of silence settled over the town, not to be broken again except by a few rare passers-by and an occasional vehicle that sped along the main street. Soon after eight o'clock the last bus ground to a stop outside the Chevel Blanc and then rattled away again. But these sparse sounds, like the occasional burst of laughter or loud voice from the still open 'Bar', seemed only to accentuate the

somnolence of the town as a whole. If lights had appeared in the downstairs windows they began to vanish and reappear upstairs for a short while, between nine and half-past; soon there remained only a few scattered windows sending groping yellow fingers of light between the darkened buildings.

The daily routine of living was firmly based upon the two sacred periods devoted to lunch and dinner. This civilized attitude appears something of a paradox to English eyes, and noses, that notice the obvious defects in sanitation and public hygiene. The amount of money spent on food seemed out of all proportion to that spent on public works. This, however, was a matter surely dependent on the people's sense of values and their civic outlook. It was no doubt inconvenient to fetch water from the street pump; but these people were used to inconvenience and hard work, both of which were considered preferable to parting with money. The attitude to public works depended on the nature of the work. To enlarge the slaughterhouse or repair the market hall was a matter that could, after a struggle, receive the grudging approval of the townspeople; for either matter was in the town's commercial interest. But few people could see any advantage whatever in increasing public taxes to repair the side streets, improve the drainage, or modernize the urinal. The outlook of the people had long been like this; and now the cost of materials and labour had increased so much since the war, food took such a large proportion of the family budget, and national taxes were so heavy, that the town's finances could not or would not bear any public expenditure beyond the unavoidable necessities.

Moreover, these were civic matters. Food, on the other

hand, was a personal matter between the people themselves, and so everyone was willing to co-operate. The food shops stayed open late and did not close for a whole day each week; they opened in the morning on Sunday and Monday, which was the rest day of the week—equivalent to an English Saturday in a five-day week—for the remaining workers in the town. And any local authority that tried to suppress these practices . . . but such a supposition is impossible.

So the weeks went by in the town, with little change as the seasons altered. Life was centred on the family and home and one's work. Conversation revolved around the affairs of neighbours, local events and business matters; the regional paper was considered far more interesting and was read more than the Paris papers. At reasonable intervals throughout the year the town livened up and enjoyed itself thoroughly. There were the Foires—Fairs in the ancient sense of the word, with a cattle as well as a shopping market and with a family travelling fair or two in attendance; and there were the seasonal festivities.

After each occasion the town settled down readily again, without regret. Its daily round got going quickly and smoothly enough; the bolts of the Bar du Cheval Blanc were slammed into their sockets, marking the end of the day, and not many hours later the bakers and the butchers were busy behind their closed shop-fronts. The town seemed unlikely ever to change, in habits or in size. There was no obvious reason for it to do so; it fitted in well with the surrounding countryside, it was unobtrusive, unambitious, just the right size for its job.

Chapter III

RURAL COMMUNICATIONS

As YOU TRAVEL through the French countryside certain sights become familiar, until they seem to be essential, eternal parts of the landscape: a decrepit bike or two lying by the wayside and a few bent figures working in the fields, a pair of plough-horses silhouetted against the sky, a thin church spire poking upwards from a distant cluster of buildings. In spite of the great variety of the country, the different scenery, these sights persist and impress themselves on the mind. They change a little with the region; in the north, the figures are weeding their fields, in the south they are bent pruning their vines; the horses are replaced by oxen, the spire changes to a tower. The bent figures and the horses become fewer on the large wheat-growing plains where tractors are more in evidence, but you may travel the length and breadth of the country without touching such areas. In any case there is always evidence of a passionate attachment to the fertile earth. Noticeable, too, is the scarcity of large towns and the preponderance of agricultural life.

The main roads are broad and noble, gently descending and effortlessly rising again with almost mathematical precision; they point ahead purposefully, possibly bending a little once every two or three miles, concentrating on their task of getting to Paris as quickly and as directly as possible. These, the Routes Nationales, with their clear, well-placed

signposts and red-topped kilometre stones, are the responsibility of the State; each is much like another, and is kept in good repair. To the villages and small towns that lie just off one of these main roads, scattered along its great length, it is 'La Grande Route', the highway that leads to a very different world. The secondary roads vary in condition from region to region, each *département* being responsible for the repair and upkeep of the sections within its boundaries. These roads, the Routes Départementales and the Chemins de Grande Communication, having blue and yellow-topped kilometre-stones respectively, are the cross-country links between one *chef-lieu* and another, and usually lead to the city of the region or the capital of the *département*. They are generally good-class roads, varying in number according to the needs and importance of the region. But with the third class of road there comes a definite drop in standard, and their only uniformity is in their general poor state of repair. These Chemins Vicinaux are the lanes best known to country people, the lanes from village to village and on to the *chef-lieu*. Each *commune* is responsible for the lanes within its area; and to pay for the whole or part of their upkeep there is a special local tax, the Taxe Vicinale, due from everyone in the *commune* who is eligible to pay taxes.

The repair work on the first and secondary roads is done by the Ponts et Chaussées, a branch of the Ministry of Transport, but the cost is met by the authority responsible. The Chemins Vicinaux, however, are usually kept in repair by a roadmender employed by the *commune;* sometimes he is shared by several neighbouring *communes*. He is a character you often meet in the village lanes, with his barrow and

heap of stones. He no doubt does his best, but often with insufficient means, and he is struggling against the results of years of neglect. The amount of taxe vicinale paid by each person varies according to the rates assessment, but is never very much. This tax used to be payable in kind, by so many days of work annually on helping to repair the lanes; in some regions south of the Loire this system still continues. Apart from the general aversion from paying taxes of any kind, nearly every villager is agreed that no more money should be spent than the amount strictly necessary to enable a bicycle or a horse and cart to pass along the lanes without incurring grave risk. As for those people in the *commune* who own a car or lorry, *they* should be asked to pay more before anyone else. To which the car-owners reply that the State fleeces them of enough already, that they pay taxes not paid by others, petrol tax, driving licence, road tax 'and one doesn't know what else besides'. Everyone is agreed that '*ça ne rapporte pas*', that there is no possibility of anyone making any profit out of improved road surfaces. And there the matter rests. The few car-owners continue to keep a horse and cart, partly for use in the winter when the chemin vicinal is often impassable by car or lorry. Besides, in any case, many *communes* just cannot afford to keep their lanes in good repair from their own resources. The lanes are sometimes many and the population sparse; a *commune* of a hundred inhabitants may have as great a length of chemins vicinaux as a *commune* of five hundred. A rural *commune* with a second-class road passing through it is, in this respect, a fortunate one.

The Routes Nationales seem to express certain French national characteristics, with their logical, controlled

gradients, their spacious conception, and their clear, direct approach from one point to the next. The Chemins Vicinaux, on the other hand, tend to express the individualism of the French, their ancient *gauloiserie*. For the most part, each village lane goes its own happy way without the least concern for what others in the area are doing; it rears straight up over a hill, or goes all the way round; it winds about quite often, like the rolling English lane. But that, a peasant will tell you proudly, is because the rights of property have been respected. Follow a lane, and it will possibly lead you, with a typical *je m'en foutisme*, to an un-signposted fork. Even if there is a signpost it is often impossible to read it; they are tall iron ones with the directions embossed in minute lettering and usually covered with rust. They are no doubt just the right height for people in a high-wheeled cart, but scarcely for travellers in a low, modern car or even on bicycles.

To travel at all it is preferable to have your own means of transport, at least for cross-country journeys. To get to or away from Paris is simple enough by public transport; the railway system and the Routes Nationales exist principally for that purpose. But a cross-country journey by public transport is often an adventure; usually it turns out well, however. Whether cross-country communications are few because country people travel little, or whether travel is infrequent because the transport is lacking, is a debatable matter.

When travelling on a cross-country trainy ou usually find that there are a good number of passengers on it. But it may well be the only train of the day, or at least the only one stopping at all stations along that line. And the country

people who form the great majority of the passengers will not have embarked on this journey without much forethought and prior organization, except for the unfortunate ones on their way to a funeral or on some unexpected business. Most passengers, you find, are going to visit relatives, to attend some family celebration; and as much use as possible is being made of the railway tickets. During the preceding weeks the intending traveller exchanges letters with his or her small army of relatives. Parcels and messages are received from cousins and aunts and sisters-in-law for transmission to other relatives, not only to those living at or near the destination, but also to relatives living somewhere along the route, who are bidden to meet the train. And if a business matter or two in town can be fitted in, so much the better. The amount of luggage per passenger is considerable; and it is all carried into the compartment, partly to be at hand for distribution and partly to avoid supplementary charges. It is contained not in one or two trunks or large suitcases but in as many separate boxes and attaché-cases as can be carried by the person or group, and most have hard sharp corners that easily take the skin off other travellers' shins.

Amid all this encumbrance there is much to enjoy about local, cross-country travel; it is informal, friendly, and full of variety. Each halt is a long one; many stations appear to be miles from any village, yet there are always a number of people waiting with parcels and bags and boxes of all shapes and sizes, a host of friends and relatives to see them off, and a quantity of merchandise to be loaded into the train. The passengers clamber up the high steps of the carriages, sometimes carrying live ducks and chickens, and continue the conversations and arguments they were having

on the platform. There is always much movement and restlessness in the compartment. People keep feeling the urge to go and stand in the corridor, if there is one, or to stand and look out of the window—the wooden or barely upholstered seats, it is true, are not very comfortable even for a short journey—and there the people comment on the growing corn, the ripening vines, the weather, and the quality of the herds of cattle. If midday is approaching everyone returns to the compartment or gets up and reaches for parcels of food. Cloths are spread over knees, the children have large serviettes tucked under their chins, and everybody produces long lengths of bread, large clasp-knives, hard-boiled eggs and slices of cold meat, little tins of butter, and bottles of red wine. There is sometimes a convivial, corpulent man from a wine-growing district who proclaims the superior merits of his bottle and insists that everyone shall have a swig. The children have their hair combed and are generally tidied up at the end of the meal, and a mother suckles her baby. None of this, of course, interferes with the natural flow of conversation.

Suddenly there is a great upheaval and commotion as the train begins to slacken speed. People struggle towards the end of the carriage with their arms full of luggage. The train stops and the people clamber down, hindering those who are trying to climb up—or the other way round.

As a number of people travel no farther than two or three stations, say fifteen or twenty miles, the occupants of a compartment are constantly changing, and your curiosity is continually aroused and rarely satisfied. Meanwhile the train rumbles and climbs through the countryside without undue haste, frequently crossing roads where the red-and-white

barrier is holding back a little local, patient traffic. They all look much alike, these numerous level-crossings; the small brick house and its long narrow vegetable patch bordering the track, the woman—the *gardienne de barrière*, very likely the wife of a railway employee—standing holding the handle of the winch that operates the barrier, perhaps with a baby in the other arm, having briefly interrupted her household work.

The cross-country trains are gradually decreasing in number. For several years the railways have lost money and have been considerably subsidized by the Government; fares have been increased, but this has made most people even more reluctant to travel without very strong reason. Many branch lines now carry only goods traffic or are not used at all. So the country buses are becoming more and more the chief means of public transport. This is a trend that has been developing for a considerable time.

A generation ago many of the minor branch lines were still functioning. They were single-track lines that usually ran by the side of the road; and the little train with its two or three wooden carriages seemed more like a tram both in appearance and in its proximity to the road traffic. *Le petit train départemental*, as it is referred to with nostalgia by elder people in whose minds it is a symbol of a happier epoch, gradually disappeared. Presumably the companies which then owned the railway systems found that these branch lines could not be run profitably, or the competition from buses became too great. In some places the little wayside railway halts are now used as bus shelters and ticket offices; and now and again you come across the single track by the roadside, rusty and overgrown with grass and weeds.

The bus services rarely supplement the trains, but replace them, or provide a means of communication where otherwise there would be none. This is perhaps just as well for the buses, as their fares are exactly the same—so much per kilometre—as third class on a train. Their services are irregular and, compared with those in England, infrequent. Yet the time-tables are generally designed to satisfy the major needs of local travel, though little attempt, if any, is made to link up the services of one bus company with those of another. Like the small towns, the local bus companies seem to exist only for the immediate district and do not want to have anything to do with activities beyond; or is it because the people, the customers, are so minded?

In any large country town it is rare to find a municipal bus station. The bus terminus, if you ask someone for guidance, is either indicated by a large vague sweep of the arm that seems to embrace half the town, or a café is pointed out as being that used by the company whose bus you seek. The bus companies do not all use the same café, of course. That, apart from making things too easy for the stranger, would suggest federalism; and these bus companies are highly individualistic. Neither is there any better co-operation with the train services. The arrivals and departures of buses are apparently arranged with little thought for people travelling also by train, and sometimes even ignore altogether the presence of a railway station. The French find nothing unusual in this; after all, the two services are entirely separate. But the French are not the people to miss the chance of custom, and the reason for this lack of co-operation is, most likely, that such custom is too scarce.

Country people seldom travel further than their nearest

large town, because there is little need for them to do so. Indeed, there are far fewer reasons than in England for people to go beyond the confines of their village. The distances between villages and between village and town are greater. Each *département* is almost a complete entity; administratively, with its Préfet who represents the Government and all the Ministries, it is an autonomy. During the immediate post-war years when rationing was still in force each *département* lived on itself; for instance, there was plenty of butter in the dairy-farming *département* of Calvados but hardly any olive-oil, while in the Var *département* in the south there was a surplus of oil but practically no butter. The wheat-growing areas had more and better bread than others; one year, during the crucial period between spring and harvest, each *commune* was ordered to fend for itself to provide a bread ration. Much less industrialized than England, France has less commercial traffic on its main roads; fewer people own motor-cars, and fewer still have a telephone in their homes.

To ordinary people, particularly those who live in villages, a journey of more than twenty miles or so is a major expedition. It is not the distance itself that makes it so, but the fact of travelling beyond their normal and natural boundaries which gives importance to the journey. Even when there is a bus or train that fits in with people's needs they do not necessarily use it as a matter of course. If the journey is not urgent the first thought is to 'look for an opportunity' of getting a lift in a neighbour's car or lorry, or to 'wait for the possibility' of getting a lift back. But such private transport is not easily found, and so, *hélas!* the traveller has to count his money and set out by the local bus.

Chapter IV

COUNTRY BUS

ON A DARK November morning a man and woman were waiting at the bus station of a small town for the bus to Lisieux. From inside the dim garage came irregular sounds of a mechanical coughing and spluttering. A driver, with his peaked cap stuck at the back of his mop of curly hair, sat at the wheel of a bus, coaxing the engine. It was an old bus, and smaller than the other two single-deckers in the garage; an honourable bus that had seen much service. The driver coaxed again but now the only response was an asthmatical wheeze, a pathetic complaint at being selected for the early journey instead of one of the younger, sturdier buses.

'When's the next bus, do you know, monsieur?' the woman asked the man in a troubled voice.

He, dressed in the rough and ready clothes of a small shopkeeper who wants to keep warm without appearing prosperous, looked at the woman with some surprise. But the faint light from one of the rare street lamps showed him that she was a stranger to the place. A Parisienne, very likely; that elegance was not often seen in the provinces. Come to visit her relatives, perhaps.

'Next bus? But madame, there isn't a next bus to Lisieux. At least not until tomorrow, and then it'll be this one again.'

'Then it seems to me that there won't be any bus. And I've got a train to catch.'

The man smiled under his long thick moustache. 'Oh, madame, as the bus is still here we've every hope of going on it.'

At last the garage proprietor, who had been idly watching, went and started up one of the other buses; backed it just in front of the small bus and then tied a hawser between the two. They both came out of the garage and went round the block. When they returned the smaller bus was shaking with anger at this treatment and complaining noisily with all the force of its engine. The driver kept in his seat. 'If I'm reported missing you'll know why!' he shouted to the other.

The two passengers for Lisieux climbed into the bus, bought their tickets from the driver, and sat down just behind him in the hope of getting some warmth from the engine. The Parisienne stood her suitcase in the gangway between the seats.

'Shall I get back tonight, do you think?' the man asked the driver.

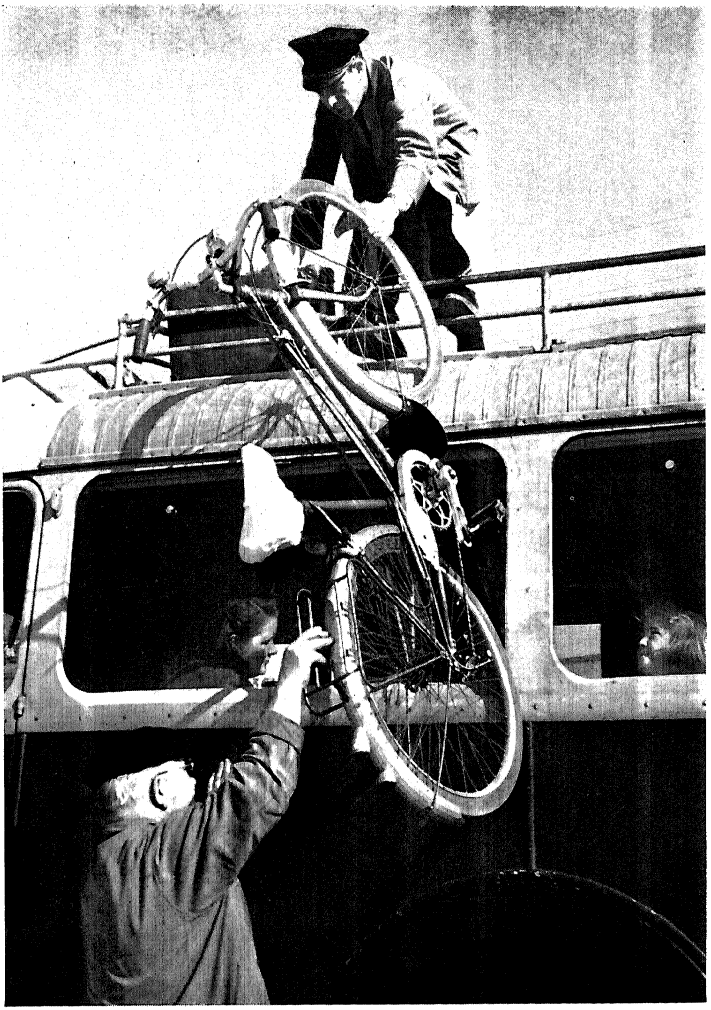
'Get back! It'll be a fine thing accomplished if we get there. But if we do——, if we do, there'll be a bus back at the usual time this evening. A different one from this, though, believe me.'

The driver leaned sideways from his seat to shake hands with the garage proprietor who was standing by the open door.

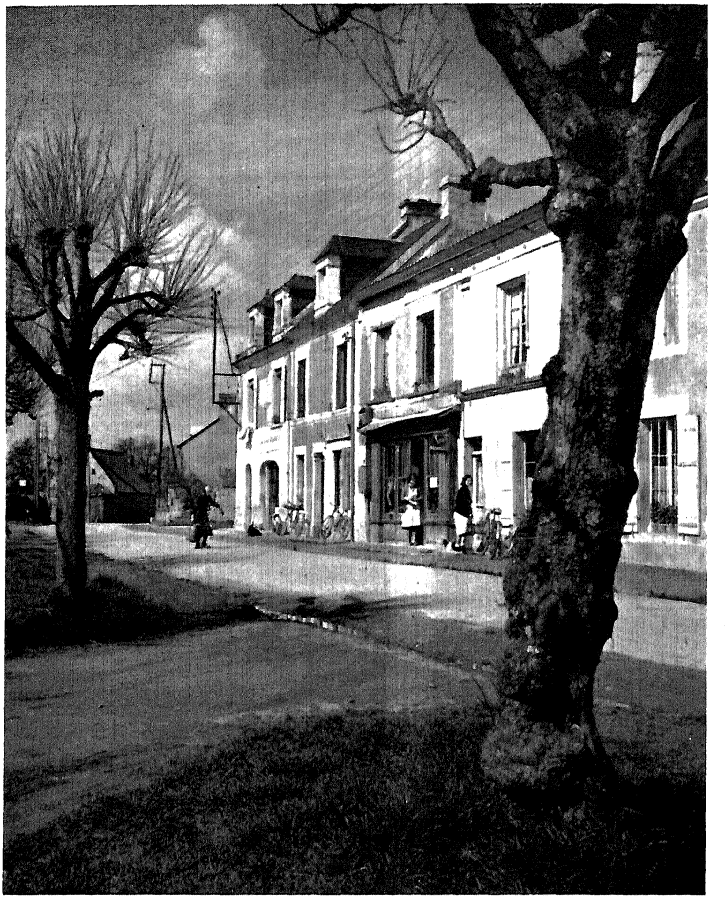
'*Au 'voir!*'

'*Bonne chance!*'

The bus bounded forward, as though now accepting the



The country bus driver expects many of his passengers to be accompanied by bicycles, prams, crates, and other large luggage.



The village main street at midday—or, by the official time, one o'clock.

compromise of a single journey. The driver reached for a lever, and the rattling open door closed itself with a crash. The man behind lit a cigarette and proffered his packet of Gauloises to the driver. He accepted one, and both men began to puff away contentedly just a short distance from a notice facing them: 'Smoking forbidden'. This was one of several notices; 'Absolutely forbidden to Talk to the Driver', and three relating to the numbers of seated and standing passengers permitted and the maximum weight of luggage allowed; although from these last three the essential figures were missing. The regulations concerning the obligatory display of these notices had been obeyed, and that was the main and final thing about them.

'How late are we in starting?' asked the driver, leaning his head backwards.

'About twenty-five minutes.'

'Oh well, that's not too bad. We've got time to spare!'

The lighted bus raced through the dark streets with a cheerful clatter until it stopped outside a café. The lights beaming out from the window and from the bus joined together to make a flood of brightness. In the café a young woman was dusting the chairs that were standing on the tables. An older woman, well wrapped up, who was sitting near the stove surrounded by a number of packages, now rose to her feet with relief showing in her eyes. The driver hurried into the café, leaving his engine running; and the man passenger quickly followed to join him at the counter.

Two minutes later they were both back in the bus, followed by the woman.

'To The White House', she said above the noise of the engine, handing a tattered note to the driver. From his seat

he consulted a list of fares stuck on the driving-board; turned the handle of a rickety machine that stood at his side, and from which there issued a small flimsy ticket; flung back the lid of a tin box on his right and rummaged in it for some small change. Then he gave the ticket and the change to the woman.

'You're late', she said, not disapprovingly but as someone who makes a remark that is indisputably correct.

'We're going to change all that', replied the driver as the woman moved up the bus with her bundles and packages. He wriggled in his seat as the bus started off, almost impatiently. A hundred yards further on it was out of the town and speeding along a good lane. The bus vibrated with its effort as now the lane began to climb, gradually, to the top of a hill where daylight appeared to be waiting. The small houses and cottages scattered irregularly along the lane, each standing back at the end of a long kitchen garden, all had one window that was a patch of dull yellow in the grey morning. But a number of these yellow patches disappeared, so it seemed, with the passing of the bus. At the top of the hill the driver switched off the lights in the bus, and the last drapings of the night were withdrawn across the fields at the same time.

The houses were now few and far between; farmhouses that were smaller than the barns and stables around the large yard, and old half-timbered, brown-and-white thatched cottages set amongst orchards in which mounds of cider apples were lying under some of the gnarled, straggling trees. The dwellings showed signs of life, here and there, as the bus charged along the lane; a woman hanging out a long line of washing, an old man stumbling up the garden

with a pail of water, a youth fetching an old bicycle from a shed.

The morning was fine but cloudy; the tinted leaves of the woods on the hillsides, beyond the fields and orchards that bordered the lane, seemed as still and enduring as in a painting. The three passengers sitting silent as the bus sped along the empty lane were suddenly startled by a long and loud blast from the horn. The driver had seen his next stop in the distance, a café and a few barns at a road-junction. The effect of this strident heralding was the issuing of a small cluster of people from the café. With a further flourish on the horn the driver stopped the bus, only slackening speed a few yards from the café.

A farmer's wife and her two young daughters clambered up the steps of the bus. They were dressed for a visit and were carrying baskets and bags from which flowers and vegetables emerged; a freshness of early morning came into the bus with them, to struggle against the fumes of the engine and the Gauloises. The husband stood on the step, clad in his working clothes, and reached forward to shake hands with the driver before paying the fares for his family.

'*Alors, tu restes?* Are you staying behind?'

'Well, someone's got to do the work. Besides, they're going to see my sister-in-law.'

'So you'd rather stay and do some work, eh? Well, mind you do. No playing about while the missus is away.' The cheerful driver pushed his cap to the back of his head and prepared to let in his clutch.

'What time do you come back?' called the husband from the roadside.

'Oh—seven-fifteen, seven-thirty. Somewhere around that time.' The bus began to move.

'Don't forget to ask about the calves!' the farmer shouted to his wife.

The lane to the left was the direct route to Lisieux. But the bus moved off to the right. The driver was going to cast about the countryside, to visit villages and hamlets within a wide orbit, before heading directly towards his destination.

The bus did not have the lane completely to itself now. First it met a sturdy young woman on foot carrying two milk churns slung from a yoke; a little further on it swept past an ass bearing an old woman and pulling a handcart containing a couple of churns. A farm labourer held his two plough horses into the side of the lane as the bus approached; and then a horse and waggon loaded with timber caused the driver to sound his horn imperiously and at length.

'The White House', called the driver, slowing down. 'And we're barely fifteen minutes late.'

An ageing woman with her hair drawn straight back into a bun—a woman '*d'un certain age*', as the French politely say—got into the bus carrying a small, battered attaché-case. She shook hands with the driver and then, after a start of surprise, with the farmer's wife.

'How's school getting on, mam'selle?' said the driver, busying himself with issuing a ticket. 'I must drop in some time and brush up my arithmetic.'

The bus started off again with alacrity. The clouds were lifting now and the day was becoming brighter. Every so often the bus passed two or three children walking hurriedly in file at the side of the lane. They all carried large bulky

satchels; and most of them wore a scarf tucked into a pinafore, black on a boy, coloured on a girl, that buttoned all down the back. Each little group looked up as the bus passed them and quickened their steps for a few moments, as though reminded of the mile or two they still had to cover. Here and there, by a solitary cottage, a figure stopped work for a moment, stopped sawing up logs or rested two pails of water, to watch the bus go past and disappear.

At the next village the schoolmistress and the driver got out. She walked across the small, cobbled square; he climbed up the iron ladder at the back of the bus and was heard tramping about the roof. A length of rope thwacked against a window and hung dangling. The end of it was grasped by a young peasant with patched trousers who tied it to the handle of an ancient pram, and then began to lift the pram horizontally by its wheels.

'But no! Not like that!' came the voice of the driver. 'Push it upwards. One end first. Vertically, to me! That's plain enough, isn't it?'

The man passenger got out and disappeared into the café, followed by the driver and the young husband. The bus engine suddenly stopped; and there was an attentive silence in the little village square. After a few minutes the three men and the café-owner came out carrying a large crate between them. There followed more business with the rope, the driver trampling about on the roof, the men pushing from below, and the crate bumping against the windows.

'Did you weigh this?' the driver cried to the café-owner, when the crate was at last hauled on to the roof.

'No. I've got nothing to weigh that on. But I charged the maximum for it!'

The driver seemed satisfied. He got into the bus, followed by the young husband, whose wife and the farmer's wife were already discussing the baby's ailment. 'My missus is going for an examination too', announced the young husband importantly as he got his tickets. 'Do I have to pay for the pram?'

'Of course you have to register the pram. And any other luggage you've got. How about that?' said the driver with a grin, indicating the swaddled baby. 'Going to register that?'

There was a hubbub of conversation now. Even the bus seemed to want to listen instead of starting up its noisy engine. The driver bent over the wheel, coaxing the engine with self-starter and accelerator. A cluster of children, clutching their satchels and with fresh mud on their clogs, dawdled in the square to stare at the bus. A farm-waggon rumbled slowly past with a load of red-and-yellow cider apples.

At last the engine spluttered complainingly into action. The bus hurried out of the village, soon passing the farm-waggon, and followed a winding lane with high, untidy hedges. Outside a blacksmith's shop a peasant, hearing the approaching bus, interrupted his conversation to take hold of his two horses; a tractor hesitated at a farmyard exit to let the bus pass, and an elderly couple filling sacks with apples in an orchard straightened their backs to watch it speed along the lane.

A village was quickly traversed without a stop, past the farmhouses, the square Mairie and its school-annexe, the café-grocery, and the grey stone church with its cemetery; the last was tidy and filled with chrysanthemums like all

the other cemeteries, for All Saints' Day had come at the beginning of this week.

The driver settled more comfortably in his seat. He had been given another cigarette, and now and again he made a contribution to the general conversation going on behind him. The lane suddenly became a cobbled street; the driver changed gear and turned the bus round on the sloping market square of Cambremer, just as a clock was striking eight. The shops of this small town were all open and the owners were sweeping them out or arranging their goods. The humid air was calm and peaceful like the little town itself; an aroma of wood-fires, coffee, and dank autumn leaves drifted slowly about, and over all was the heavy odour of crushed apples coming from a cider-press near by.

The scene in the otherwise bare market square, during the five-minute wait of the bus, might have reminded the travellers of the days of the stage-coach. The group of intending passengers passed their heavy luggage up to the roof and then began to exchange long kisses of farewell, two on each cheek, with their relatives who had come to see them leave. Two or three passengers got out of the bus to stretch their legs, while the driver descended from the roof to greet and shake hands with people he knew by name. He became the bearer of messages and commissions—'Will you please give this letter to my son Georges, you know, as you pass his place. He'll be looking out for you.'—'Can you collect some photos for me in Lisieux?' If it were not for the sound of the engine you might have expected to see the change of horses being brought out from the inn yard; to hear the thwack and clink of harness, the blare of a post-horn, and the swish of a long whip.

There came the blare of a horn; but it was the mechanical horn of the bus, which was now more than half-full, warning any tardy passengers. It seemed to remind the driver himself of something, for he suddenly squirmed from his seat and hurried across the cobbles to one of the open-fronted butcher's shops. The passengers saw him buy a couple of steaks, shake hands with the butcher, put the package into a pocket of his overalls, and hurry back to the bus.

Like a horse heading for its stable, the bus now put on extra speed and settled down for a final run. But after a couple of miles the driver turned into a narrow lane and stopped at a fork dominated by a calvary; the slim steeple of a village church could be seen rising above some trees half a mile or so away. The farmer's wife and her daughters collected their bags and packages from the seats around them and got out of the bus, saying a general farewell to the passengers remaining.

'What time do you come back?' she asked.

'Say half-past six. You won't have missed me if you're here by then. Have a nice day!'

The narrow lane suddenly met the wide main road to Paris; the stops became more frequent now, and the new passengers more numerous. At each café or road-junction there were two or three people waiting, usually a housewife going on some major shopping expedition, and a girl or young man on their way to work in office or shop. After the second of these stops there was always a good deal of handshaking, '*Bonjour*', '*Ça va, et toi?*' as the newcomers moved along the bus to the few remaining seats. At one stop, outside a café, the driver looked round after issuing the tickets and asked for news of a missing regular. Someone

pointed to a man walking along the road towards the bus. The driver issued another ticket and drove slowly forward to pick up the man.

The now laden bus began to protest a little, adding a complaining note from its engine to the loud friendly conversations among the passengers, a number of whom were standing in a close line all along the bus. But the road went downhill now, down towards the large, new blocks of buildings that had risen painfully from the ruins of Lisieux; the local landmark, the huge white dome of the basilica of Sainte Thérèse on the opposite hill, notified the bus passengers that their journey was almost ended. The bus mingled with the cars and lorries entering and leaving the town, and stopped by some waste ground. 'Here we are', said the driver cheerfully, opening the door. A nearby clock showed that it was five minutes past nine, which was the time the bus was due to arrive according to the time-table.

'Is this as far as you go?' the Parisienne called to the driver, who was now on the roof lowering the pram.

'This is the terminus', the driver replied, non-committally. 'Why—do you want to go to the station? I expect there's a few others wanting the same. Just a minute, and I'll run you down.'

And he did.

Chapter V

VILLAGE OF FRANCE

IT MIGHT HAVE been any village of a farming region. Pop. 162, Tel. (Commune in the Canton of Thibouville), says the Post Office directory for the Eure *département;* the sort of bare facts that appear against the majority of place-names. A village linked to a road by a narrow, pot-holed lane along which little traffic passes; a lane that, nevertheless, concentrates on its business of going from one village to the next along its length. As the villages concentrate on their task of —what?

More than half the population of this *commune* live in the village itself, in the farmhouses and cottages grouped round the square. The lane suddenly ceases to run between fields, has the Mairie and school on one side and the stone wall of a farmyard on the other. It turns a corner and spreads out to become the village square, irregular in shape, with houses and cottages on three sides. These are of different forms and sizes, some of stone, some half-timbered and thatched, separated one from the other by narrow, beaten-earth paths. The uneven, stony earth of the square goes right up to the walls of most of them, and is kept away from the doors by, at most, a single worn step. At the far side of the square stands the church, surrounded by its small, walled cemetery, blocking the lane's direct exit from the village. So the lane curves right and then left, skirting the cemetery

wall, passes between two farmyards, and is then out in the fields again, having done its rough-and-ready duty to this village and now heading towards the next.

On a morning in late summer the only apparent sign of life was a horse and high, hooded cart passing the Mairie. The village was, as usual, brooding over itself and maintaining its air of secrecy. Like almost any other village of its kind it had little more than the bare essentials; there were no frills or refinements to it, such as an English village might have; no pretensions; nothing to show that it was less poor than any of its neighbours. A few cottages had a front garden, but each was less than a stride in width; packed, nevertheless, with richly-coloured flowers. Indeed, there was colour all round, colour that touched up the solid, work-aday appearance. There were crudely painted, heavy shutters, green or blue, pegged back against the grey stone walls; window-boxes, laden with flowers and painted the same colour as the shutters, leaned crazily from narrow sills; and pots of geraniums and begonias hung from nails above front doors. The roof-tops were red or blue-grey, shining under a brilliant sun in a blue, cloud-flecked sky. Nearly every window was curtained with a minimum of material, so as not to prevent the necessary and gratuitous light from entering; but each wisp of curtain was of a gay material, generally red-and-white or blue-and-white checks. Such touches of colour were given to the village as long as they did not entail additional expense or give an impression of prosperous display.

The only building that looked as if it had received any attention during the last decade was a red-brick one opposite the church porch. It had quite a long frontage, containing

the village café at one end, and the village shop at the other; the middle room was the kitchen of the house and the connecting link. This was the hub of the village, of the outlying farms, of the whole *commune*, in fact. The middle-aged couple who kept the establishment, Monsieur and Madame Bresson, were the most important people in the *commune*. Not, perhaps, on grounds of wealth; nor did either of them hold high official position. But everyone had occasion to visit their establishment at long or short intervals; it was the centre of local daily life.

On entering the village square your eye was naturally drawn to it. The narrow length of pavement in front, made of stones and cobbles, was the only one in the village; and had been put there by some previous owner or tenant. There was the red, solitary petrol-pump standing in front of it; and electricity cable and telephone wire both led to it. The shop window, the only uncurtained window in sight, contained posters and notices that partly obscured the haphazard display of a variety of goods. The café part was not so obvious. It had no special name, no outstanding sign; it was not an individual building.

A French village café does not make itself as apparent as an English village pub; it has no need to advertise its presence, for all the local people know where it is and travellers are remarkably few. Its popularity, or otherwise, depends on the personality of the owner. Instead of talking about 'going down to the Crown' the villagers say they are going —in this case, for instance—'*chez* Bresson'. The café is thought of as a room in a friend's house set aside for amicable gatherings round a bottle or two. It is smaller than an English village pub, because it does not pander to social

discrimination by having separate bars, and because there is no large brewery concern to build cafés with more extensive premises even if the need existed. Moreover, the village people are more accustomed than the English to keeping a supply of drinks, cider or draught wine or beer, in their homes.

After some acquaintance with French villages you develop what is almost an intuition concerning the whereabouts of the café. You notice, perhaps, a couple of old, muddy bicycles leaning against a wall; there may also be a horse and cart standing near by. The nearest window is larger than those of the neighbouring buildings, and has two or three faded advertisements for apéritifs stuck on it. You look closer and, yes, there is the word 'Buvette' or 'Café' painted across the fly-blown expanse of window, or superimposed on it in white letters, one or two of which are very likely missing. If there is a shop in the village then the café is more apparent; or rather, the shop is apparent because of its window display, and you go there knowing that, almost certainly, one room of the building is set aside to serve as a café.

This was the case with the Bresson establishment. Their kitchen, the focal point of the house, had one door leading into the café and another, opposite, leading into the shop. Like village shopkeepers in England, the Bressons stocked all manner of things: food and clothing and pins and paraffin, brooms and envelopes and tobacco; but no newspapers. The villagers who wanted a daily paper became subscribers and had copies posted to them from the newspaper offices. Whereas most English village shops seem to have become merely providers of things 'that I forget to get in town'

and of unexpected needs, as a result of improved bus services and tradesmen's vans coming out from the nearest town, the Bressons were still in the position of English village shopkeepers of forty years ago. They were still the main supply link between the village and the region's chief shopping centre, twenty miles away.

But their establishment was more than a mere shop, even a village shop. They sold wine and spirits; kept the sole petrol-pump and held the only tobacco licence for miles around; did Post Office business, and were authorized to receive Customs and Excise dues. They had the only telephone in the village—'It's for public calls, as well, you know', Mme Bresson says and then adds with much pride, 'You can make calls at night on it, too.' The *commune's* supply of bread was brought by a baker from Thibouville three times a week and left for individual collection at, naturally, the village shop. A butcher came from Thibouville every Sunday morning and set up his stall within, of course, the Bresson establishment.

It was not only the centre of local life but also the channel through which passed the inward and outward flow—small and sluggish though it was—of business and news. The village had three daily, regular contacts with the outside world, with the *bourg*, as the *chef-lieu*, in this case Thibouville, is usually called. These were more than sufficient. There were the two milk lorries which called at the farms and came through the village early every morning. The drivers usually stopped at the Bressons for petrol or coffee and rum. From them the Bressons received news and sometimes messages from outlying farms; and in exchange would give one or other of the drivers a message to deliver, which had been

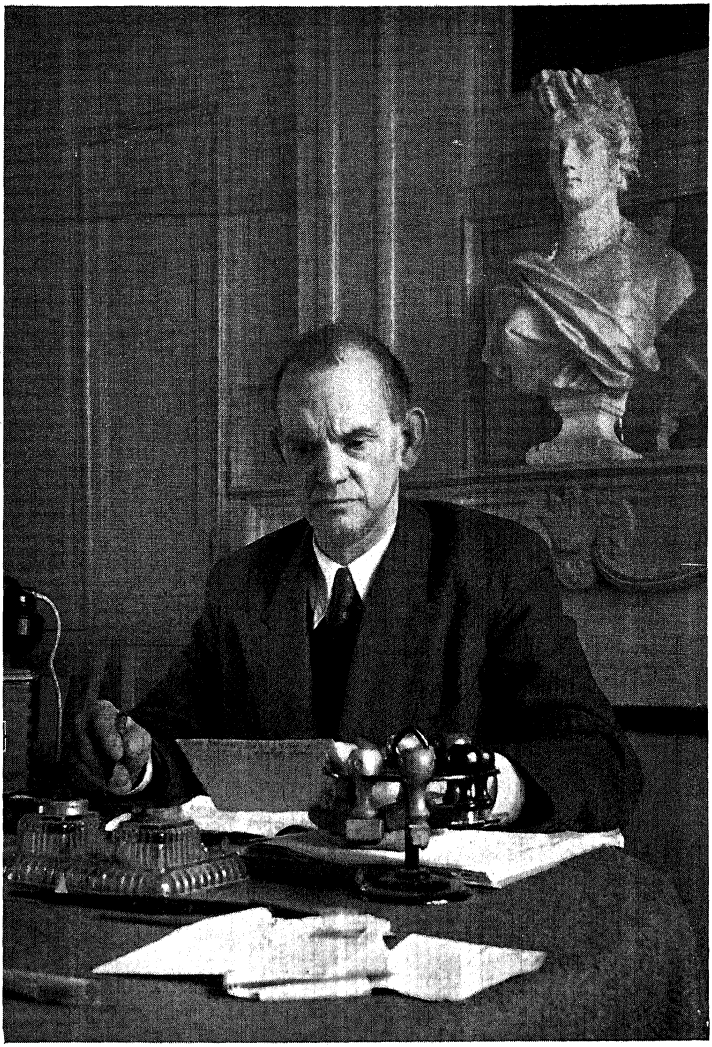
confided to the Bressons by some villager. It might be, for instance, a message for the butcher at Thibouville, saying that such a family would want extra meat the coming Sunday. There was, of course, the telephone; the telephone that could work at night too, that had been installed by the progressive-minded M. Bresson. But the telephone cost thirty francs or so, for even the simplest message. The telephone, like a telegram, was a means of communication to be used with the greatest discrimination, for matters of urgency such as a death in the family or summoning the vet when a cow was in difficulty with her calving. In any case, to get one's thirty francs' worth it was at least essential to have a long message to send; to spend that much money merely to ask for an extra kilo of meat (which would cost a day's wages; but that is between ourselves) would make one the laughing-stock of the village, a spendthrift, a person known to have money to burn. Besides, the telephone was a recent innovation that could not be relied upon; even the milk lorry had not really stood the test of time. A far more reliable means of communication was the postman; not necessarily as a carrier of letters but as a bearer of messages.

The postman, who delivered more catalogues and newspapers than anything else, was the third and last of the daily visitors to the village. He was more accessible than the lorry drivers; he went past at a slower pace ('Of course he's got a bicycle now', says Mme Bresson) and was more inclined to stop for a chat. The letters for posting, the few that there were each day, were either handed individually to the postman or given to Mme Bresson. There was a stated time for the daily collection, no doubt ordained by some authority

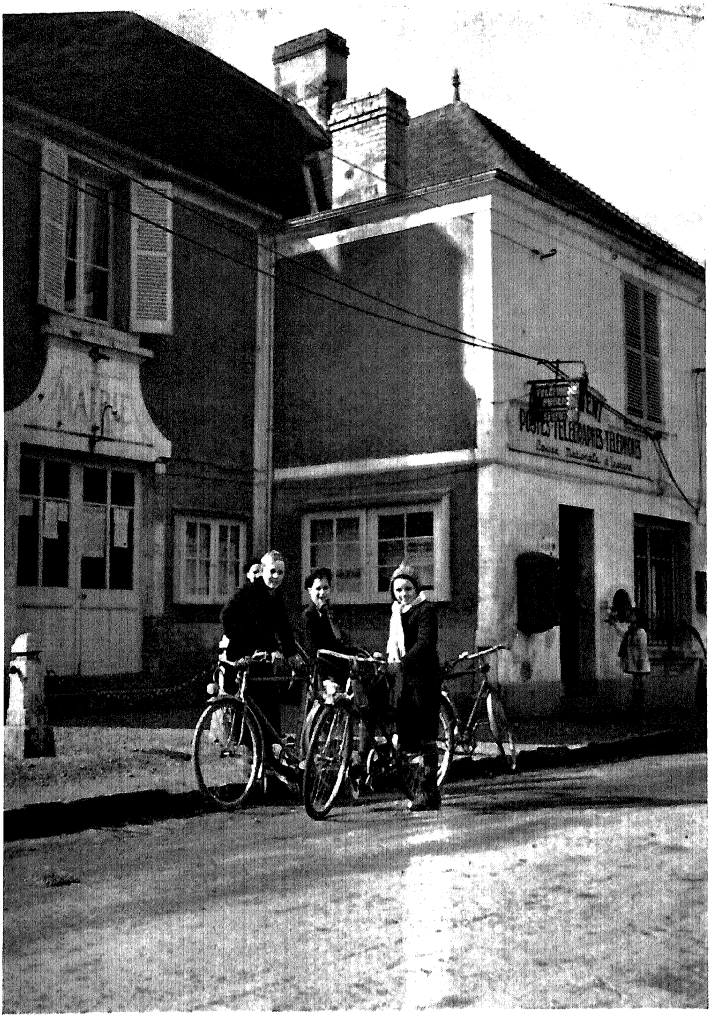
in a distant town; but it was the postman who mattered and he was inclined to be somewhat erratic in his movements. The letter-box was distrusted, particularly as few people knew the time of collection anyway. Everybody considered it far safer to deal with another human being, and usually it was to Mme Bresson that letters were confided. She kept them on a table in her kitchen, where they—and she too—awaited the daily visit of the postman.

Once or twice a week a couple of gendarmes on bicycles passed through the village, on a routine patrol. Inevitably, they called on Mme Bresson; partly in the hope of picking up useful bits of gossip and partly to look over her official books and registers. The thrice-weekly visit of the baker meant that Mme Bresson was bound to see regularly at least one member of every local family. When anyone left the village on business it was exceptional for that person not to call first at the Bressons'. If a car was being used for the journey it almost certainly needed a supply of petrol. If, as was more likely, a horse and cart was the means of transport, or a bicycle, then a halt at the village café for a coffee and rum or a draught of cider, according to the season, was deemed necessary. Moreover, it was a preliminary savour of the world outside, of the world of affairs; and, no doubt, the traveller's wife had ordered him to look in at the Bressons' 'to collect the news'.

When a farmer wanted to sell some of his produce, his grain or his cider apples, the transporter was obliged to call on Mme Bresson. She, as the official intermediary for fiscal stamps and dues, filled in the form permitting the driver to transport his grain or cider apples—or, as might have been the case if the village had been in a wine-growing area, his



'How can an English village get along without a Mayor?' asked M. le Maire.



The village Mairie—a modest building but probably busier in proportion than that of a large town.

barrels of wine. The driver could, of course, have gone on his way without the form and risked being stopped by gendarmes on patrol. But the fine was so heavy and the form cost so little, in this region, that the prudent farmers considered the risk not worth while. Besides, it was the buyer and not the seller who paid the tax. The compilation of the form took at least ten minutes of Mme Bresson's time, without counting the pauses for conversation, and the tax payable was a ridiculously small amount. Mme Bresson had to put on the form the nature of the load, the names and addresses of the people selling it, receiving it, and transporting it, the route that was going to be taken, and the time of setting out on the journey. The driver usually had to consider at length in order to give all this information, which increased the time spent over the business. It seemed just another of the many footling indirect taxes that the French have to cope with in their daily lives. Yet there was a little more depth to the matter than that. It was a small skirmish there in Mme Bresson's shop, a trifling part of the continual gigantic struggle between the Government to collect revenue and taxes, somehow, and the people to avoid paying them wholly. (Or do the people try to avoid paying because the State has imposed so many and such a comprehensive range of taxes?) The counterfoils of the forms that Mme Bresson issued went to check the total supplies delivered to any particular distillery or grain merchant; this small tax—a relic, incidentally, of pre-Revolution seigneurial levies—served as a control over payment of other higher taxes (particularly high, for the French, in the case of stocks of wine and spirits), and over a farmer's statement of his total harvest.

Mme Bresson did not collect the money from the driver

each time. She waited until the end of the season and was then sent the total amounts due from the Farmers' Co-operative and the distillery and cider factory. She passed the money to the tax-collector and forwarded her counterfoils to the tax-inspector. Whatever she received for these official services must have been minute. But the drivers often had a drink in the café while the official business was being done, and this extra trade was useful to the village establishment.

The window of the Bressons' shop also contained public notices which should have been displayed outside the Mairie. But the Mayor opened his office on only two afternoons a week, so it was obviously considered that notices in the village shop were more likely to be seen. Inevitably, then, the Bresson establishment served as a sort of annexe to the Mairie; official business was discussed there, and unofficial preliminaries to the meetings of the *commune's* eleven councillors took place. With all this and the varied trade in the shop—which was, however, sparse and slow, because the needs of the villagers were few and infrequent apart from food—the Bressons and their establishment were the very core of the village, its clearing-house and general management. Mme Bresson passed her days in her kitchen, ready to go through one door or the other and fulfil, in a moment, any of her numerous functions.

The kitchen was small, contained all the essentials of a kitchen and nothing more, and was scrupulously clean. The floor was of red and white tiles; a plain table stood in the middle, with four white-wood chairs round it. There was an electric cooking-stove against one wall and a fuel-burning cooking-stove against another; the latter was the one used most often. The fireplace took up most of the third wall; it

was bricked up, and had once been a fine old-fashioned open fireplace with, perhaps, a soup cauldron always hanging on a chain above the logs. Now a few potted plants usually stood in the recess.

This part of the building, at least, had been altered and modernized. It was the most important part of the house, for the Bressons spent more time here than in any other room. And as they had electricity laid on, why did not the whole of the village have it?

'Because it would cost more money than most of the villagers think it's worth', Mme Bresson would explain. 'The Mayor's trying to raise a loan, to install more electricity in the *commune*. But it's doubtful, I think, whether many more people will have it. Around here, they don't trust these things. They're frightened of fire; and say there'll always be power-cuts, anyway, or strikes in the city. Perhaps they're not far wrong there. The people who've got electric light always keep their oil-lamps trimmed and handy. Besides, you can't change their outlook in a day. Those who've bought cars still keep a horse and trap in the stable—though that's partly because some of the lanes are too bad for cars in winter.'

Mme Bresson was quite content to stay at home and look after affairs while her husband went round the countryside collecting and delivering orders. She was tall, rather angular, and had a slight stoop as though perpetually leaning forward to listen or to confide. But whatever she heard or said must have given her much amusement; for in her light-blue eyes there was always a twinkle, and on her pale lips a quiver that could quickly turn into a smile. Her days had a certain routine to them but not enough to make the weeks monotonous.

In any case, she enjoyed every minute of them. She had a general maid, a village girl, who did all the housework and so left Mme Bresson free to deal with the business. This was far from taking up all her time, but she could always hand over to the girl the work she was doing when called into the shop or the café. 'Just keep stirring that sauce, *ma fille*', she would say, for instance; or 'Keep looking at that casserole in the oven, *ma fille*, and put the potatoes on'. For most of her own duties in the house were to ensure that a good meal awaited her husband on his return from his rounds.

He was a big, round, red-faced, jolly person with a small moustache and a deep resounding voice. He liked to talk, drink deep, and eat well. Not for him the finnicking business of form-filling and the deciphering of scrawled orders taken to the shop by the young daughter of a village family, nor the arranging of stock and the keeping of accounts. Rather the wide open fields, the rutty lanes—negotiated on his wife's bicycle—leading to some farmhouse where, even if no immediate order was obtained, good relationships were maintained over a bottle of old cider or a glass or two of wine. There were people to be met with in the lanes and fields too, and affairs to be discussed, in a careful, circumlocutory fashion, for M. Bresson was an agent and negotiator for all manner of things. Once a week he got out his car and delivered the orders he had received. Once a fortnight he went far afield, to the capital of the *département*, and bought goods to satisfy his customers. And twice a day he arrived back home, his cheeks flushed (by the wind and weather, let us say), his eyes twinkling like his wife's, and with a healthy appetite ready to do justice to and appreciate the meal she had prepared.

It was a good life, they would both agree. They had come to the village about twenty years ago from Paris, where they had kept a grocer's shop, because M. Bresson was in ill-health and had great need of country air. To judge by his present appearance and good spirits the change had long ago proved entirely successful. He and his wife had become complete villagers and had no intention of moving. Like their neighbours they felt independent and self-sufficient. If a stranger were to ask how they, the village community, managed for other things, he would receive at first a stare of incomprehension, while their minds cast about vaguely for the things that they appeared to lack. A little prompting would probably be needed. 'A doctor, for instance?'—'He's at Thibouville, five miles away.' 'Or a vet?'—'At Thibouville, five miles away.' 'And to go to a cinema?'—'At Thibouville. . .' Yes, five miles away; they gave the impression that this distance was of little consequence, because it rarely entered into their daily lives. 'And can you get there by bus?'—'Bus! We haven't any buses. Well, we *can* get one by walking three miles, but it doesn't go to Thibouville.' 'And how about a bank?'—'A bank? A bank. Oh, yes, there's one at Thibouville.'

The village was self-reliant and independent, in a stubborn sort of way, to the extent of ignoring, or spurning even, the few minor changes and disciplines of the outside, urban world. There was nothing exceptional in this. Typically, being in an entirely rural area, the village maintained its own way of life in a manner impossible for an English village, even if the population were as obstinate.

The Bressons sat down to lunch, with the maid, at the comparatively late hour of one o'clock. At least, that was the

time by their kitchen clock; and this was confirmed by the wireless. But practically every other clock in the village and the surrounding countryside would show the time to be midday. Everyone kept to the sun's time and ignored the official time.* '*L'heure légale*' was their way of referring to the latter, on the rare occasions when it was necessary to differentiate. Normally, everyone knew that a stated hour was in accordance with their own time, '*l'heure ancienne*', the time their forefathers had used and they intended to go on using.

'And nothing can be done about it. I'm forced to conform with it', says M. Bresson, in his deep voice, amusement showing in his eyes. 'If I came back for lunch at noon—official time—and left at two, it'd mean that I'd be stopping work when people were ready to see me, and going back to them when they were still at table.'

Even the school and the church had to conform. 'What else can the schoolmistress do', usually says Mme Bresson when the subject is raised, 'when all the children turn up an hour late? And if she sent them home at the official time, they'd arrive before their meals were ready. Of course, the education authorities in town don't approve of it. They like to feel that in every primary school the same thing is happening at the same time. But there's nothing they can do about it either. Our schoolmistress has been here twenty-five years. She's well-liked and does her job well. And it wouldn't be easy to replace her, to get a young woman teacher to come and live alone in the school building here. These days, they don't like coming and burying themselves in the country. No, if the education authorities sent an

* In France, summer-time is continued all through the year.

official here, to admonish our teacher, he'd get a very warm reception, believe me!'

Such conversation brought a twinkle to the eyes of both Mme Bresson and her husband; not a surface humour but a secret mischievousness, as though they too enjoyed this passage of arms with authority and really approved of it.

As the French papers occasionally print reports of villagers armed with garden forks and billhooks chasing away investigating officials—come, it is true, to probe into such important matters as income-tax returns and wine stocks—it was not improbable that these villagers would have risen in wrath against an inspector who came to create discord between them and the village teacher.

The priest was perhaps in a stronger position to maintain *l'heure légale*. But it was doubtful whether he, too, wished to maintain it. He was an old man who had lived long enough in the heart of the country, and whose daily life was simple enough to fit in easily with his parishioners. Even if he considered that it was eleven o'clock when he began Mass on Sunday mornings, while his congregation maintained that it was ten o'clock, the essential was obtained: the congregation and the *curé* were present at the same time. For it was imperative for the village, as well as for the *curé*, that Mass should be held in the church every Sunday morning.

The village had not had a resident priest for eighteen years. The *presbytère*, the vicarage, had for long been let to a village family. But for eighteen years the present *curé* had been coming from his own parish, a neighbouring village, twice a week. He came to celebrate Mass on Sundays and to hold Catechism classes every Thursday, the day the school

was closed; and he gave similar services to two other villages which, likewise, lacked a *curé* of their own. As he grew older the twice-weekly tour of the villages had become too arduous for him on his bicycle, so the villagers had subscribed to buy him a small, second-hand car.

The old *curé* had accepted the offer and had learnt to drive sufficiently; he had his religious duties to perform. Some villagers, like Mme Bresson, had readily subscribed because they needed the spiritual succour of the priest. The church, the village church, must remain a living force. Indeed, the church no doubt had had more money spent on it, some of it public money from the communal budget (since the church was State property, held by the *commune*), than had been spent on any other public works. The results were not particularly visible, on the outside, but the interior was liberally lit by electric chandeliers, some of the wall decorations had been recently restored, and a costly (for a village) statue of the Virgin Mary had a board above it giving the names of the councillors in office when the statue was bought.

Other villagers, like M. Bresson who rarely went into the church, had subscribed mainly for commercial reasons. The church must continue to draw people to Mass on Sunday mornings. Thus, families from the outlying farms and hamlets came into the village who would otherwise stay at home or go to another village church. The village square was a meeting-place on Sunday mornings; business affairs were discussed, news exchanged; one could be almost certain of meeting people instead of making a journey hopefully and 'losing one's day' because the person was not at home. The butcher and the baker and the cooked-meat man, knowing that trade awaited them (and what they sold

was in part, after all, the produce of these fields around the village) came out from Thibouville and set up shop. And the Bresson café did a busy trade.

In such a manner did the weeks go by in this village of France; the farm work and the appearance of the land changed from season to season, but fundamentally the village remained the same. Perhaps the only change in the appearance and life of the village for at least a generation was due to the creation of a village hall. This was a long wooden building with a galvanized roof, reminiscent of an army barrack hut, standing on an open space between the Bresson house and the Mairie.

M. Bresson and the Mayor had been the sponsors of this innovation. Once or twice a month, on a Saturday or Sunday evening, a dance was held in the village hall. Young people came from neighbouring villages to help make a good attendance. The organizers took care not to clash with dances held in other village halls or cafés, for there were not enough people in the district to support two entertainments in one evening. Moreover, the younger generation had developed the habit of going about a great deal more than their parents had ever done; on Saturday or Sunday evenings they went off in little groups of three or four, on bicycles, or even in a parent's car, to neighbouring villages, sometimes to Thibouville and even farther afield.

This was part of the restlessness of the young people, said their elders without approval or real understanding; a number of them seemed dissatisfied with life and prospects in the village and on the farms. Several young men had left to seek a livelihood in town. Their reasons for doing so were not all the same. One or two, whose fathers were farm

labourers, were attracted by the comparatively higher wages and wider horizons of the workmen in town and city; others, either because there were more than sufficient members of the family to work the small farm or because of personal inclinations and ambitions, became apprenticed to carpenters or cobblers or found work in a garage.

Many villages in France have the same sort of story to tell. Perhaps it is not a bad thing from a national point of view, considering that the rural population—by which is meant people getting their living directly or indirectly from the land—is still about equal to the urban population. Also, the loss of man-power need not cause so much concern as a similar situation in England. The use of mechanical equipment has a long way to go to reach its limit. There are, for instance, about a hundred and thirty thousand tractors in use in the whole of France: in Great Britain, which has so much less agricultural land, there are nearly three hundred and fifty thousand.

In this village, however, the departure of a few of the young people was not as great a cause for anxiety as in some of the neighbouring villages. There was no desperate long struggle to replace an unnatural loss of man-power due to the war. All five prisoners of war had eventually returned safe and sound; whereas of the eleven prisoners of war of the next village only six had returned.

But in any case this restlessness of the young, the departure of one or two every year, seemed not to have affected to any extent, so far, the even daily round and traditional way of life—no more than the occasional burial in the cramped village cemetery or the rare acquisition of some modern mechanical equipment. There were enough people who stayed

and worked the land with the same loving intensity as their forefathers.

The war had passed by three miles away along the high road, first in one direction and then in the other. But the village had not been touched by it, physically. During the years between the passage of the armies an enemy unit had been billeted in the village; but the old way of life had been scarcely disturbed.

The village had closed in on itself more than ever. The five missing sturdy men had been replaced gradually, temporarily, by a few young city men, none of whom said much about himself and all of whom soon adapted themselves to work which, very likely, their parents or grandparents had thoroughly understood. The enemy had left hurriedly; all that marked their stay was a ransacked house, a dilapidated billet. That, and some unpleasant feeling over black-market deals in butter and meat. A little later, too, there were a couple of British graves in the little, confined cemetery round the church.

They were of two airmen whose bodies were taken by the villagers from a plane that crashed near by. For some years, until the arrival of R.A.F. investigators, no one knew their names. 'Now the parents of one of them come here every year', Mme Bresson is pleased to point out. 'They stay here with us for a couple of days. We can't speak to each other, but we get on famously with signs!'

Now the dilapidated billet was still an empty shell of a house. The two British graves were kept tidy and tended by the Bressons. The black-market deals were almost forgotten —though reference to them was sometimes made when a quarrel broke out. The young city men had left long ago

and were no longer remembered; the five ex-prisoners were once more on intimate terms with their land and were determined not to leave it again for any cause or country.

The village was back to its normal way of life; in truth, it had not taken very long and it had never deviated very far. It was too solid and enduring. And it was going on, the village with its land and farms around it, concentrating on its business of caring for the soil and getting the maximum produce from it by long hours of work; slowly adopting modern methods, grudgingly and without any enthusiasm; and occasionally releasing one or two of its young people to increase the industrial population.

It may be scorned, together with innumerable, similar communities, as backward and reactionary. Yet it is sane and healthy, in its crude, physical vigour; and it possesses many of the good things of life. Its people found something long ago, some human, satisfying way of life, in this ancient land of France, and their descendants cannot yet see anything in the modern world to better it.

Chapter VI

THE HEAD OF THE VILLAGE

ABOUT A HUNDRED yards beyond the church of this quite large village within sight of Chartres cathedral, was a cluster of grey-blue stone buildings sharply defined in the limpid winter sunshine; the school, the Mairie, and the Post Office. The Mairie was solid, square, and contained only two rooms. The walls of the larger, outer room were freshly distempered in a light grey and were almost plain. A long table barred approach to the farther door; it was covered with papers and documents and worn ledgers, a couple of glue-pots, a rack of rubber stamps, an ancient telephone, and some sheets of coloured fiscal stamps. Behind it were seated the two village schoolmistresses, bent over their work and writing with scratchy pens. A man and two women were occupying three of the dozen or so chairs ranged along the wall from the table to the outer door. M. Fouquet, the Mayor, who was sitting on the chair next to the table, drew the telephone towards him; he wound the handle of the ancient instrument with one hand and reached for a document with the other. 'I'm going to see what I can do about your affair now, Emilie', he said, addressing one of the waiting women.

Opposite the row of chairs was a small stove and a few logs; on the marble mantelpiece stood a bust of 'La République', the woman who represents democratic France, with a

tricolour sash tied round it. One angle of the room was largely occupied by two voting booths standing side by side, their interiors hidden by two grey blankets that were not unlike those issued by army quartermasters. Above the mantelpiece, above 'La Républlque', was a framed certificate showing that the *commune* had received a kind of 'mention in dispatches' for its conduct during the war; on the opposite wall were hanging two large coloured plans drawn to scale, one of the cemetery showing the period for which each plot was let, and the other of the whole *commune* showing the ownership of the land. The only furniture in addition to the chairs and long table was a hat-stand and a glass-fronted bookcase filled mainly with piles of forms and stacks of files.

There was something about the atmosphere of the large room that was difficult to place. With its forms and papers and line of chairs, the clinical simplicity of the walls and furniture and, for the moment, the predominant sound of scratching pens, it seemed like any public office. Yet it had character —a character common to most village Mairies, very likely; one that was human and warm, and which banished the impersonal, cold objectivity of a public office. The long table was not a permanent barrier between staff and public like a high counter; and if it was intended to be a temporary one the Mayor was seated on the wrong side of it. Once a month it was pulled out into the middle of the room and the municipal councillors drew the chairs round it. Here there was a bond between the officials and the public; their sentiments merged together across the paper-strewn table. The appearance of a public waiting-room became less noticeable, while the atmosphere of a club committee-room began to spread.

'But I tell you the gateway has been made so narrow that

she can't get in with her pram', M. Fouquet was barking into the telephone.

There was a silence that became prolonged. 'Ah, I'm hanging on here like an old maid', exclaimed M. Fouquet, slamming down the telephone and vigorously giving the handle a few turns. 'I'll try again later, Emilie.' He looked across the table at the elder schoolmistress. 'There's nothing you want me for, for the moment, is there? Nothing more to be done to the budget?' He uncrossed his gaitered legs, put away his spectacles, and reached for his hat. 'I must get back to the shop for a while. My wife's expecting the doctor to look in and see how she's getting on.'

He shook hands with the waiting villagers, and beckoned to me to go with him. We walked along the lane that was the main artery of the village, past the church and the two cafés and the baker's. The neat houses were scattered along the lane, each a little different from the others and standing in a long, narrow garden. Some of them were gay pavilions with a veranda back and front, while a few looked as if they had been sliced off the end of a block. Behind them, on either side of the lane, the wide flat fields stretched out towards the horizon.

It was not until we were within sight of his grocery shop, at the other end of the village, that M. Fouquet spoke. I had supposed his mind to be still busy with the affairs of the *commune*, very likely with the details of the budget which had been worrying him for some days. He stopped suddenly in the middle of the lane.

'But, tell me, how can an English village get along without a mayor?' said the Mayor, wrinkling his brow. 'Who, then, directs the affairs of the village?'

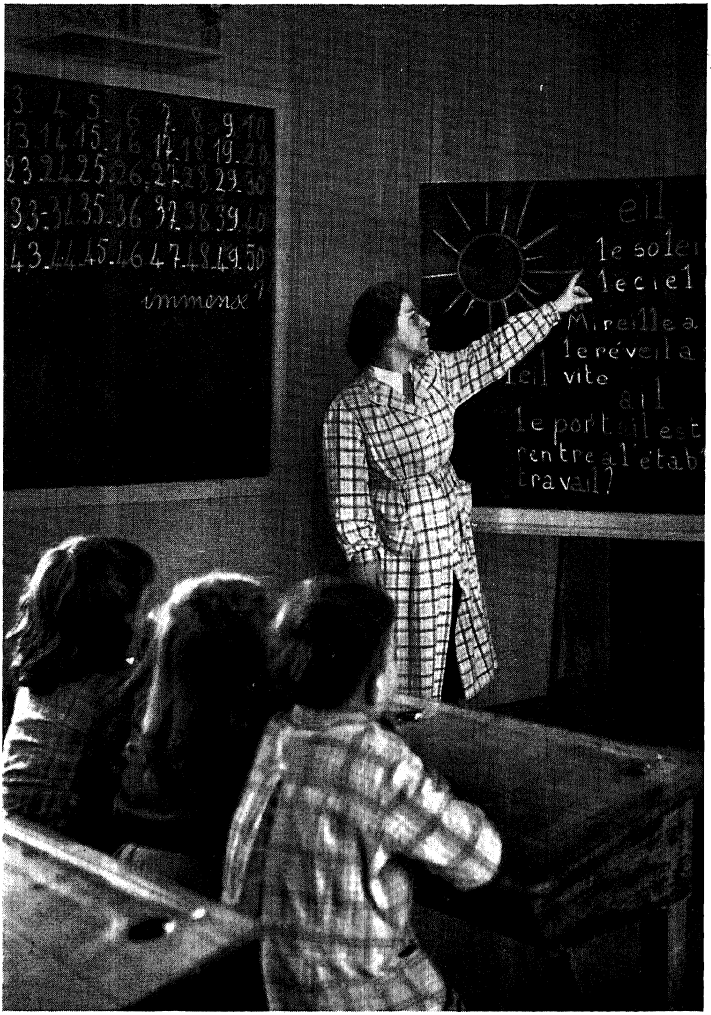
He explained some of his bewilderment as we walked on again. 'Look at my lanes', he said, making a wide gesture. 'Who would keep them in repair? Without a Mairie, where do the people go to pay their rates? Or to register births and deaths and sales of land? Supposing they want a shooting licence, or a new identity card—or a form to claim doctor's fees? And who sees to the upkeep of the communal buildings? Of course, if there isn't a Mairie you haven't got that to look after. But surely there's still the village school and the cemetery, at least? I don't see how you can possibly manage . . . Who, then, administers the village, prepares its budget each year?'

He took off his brown felt hat and scratched his thin, greying hair with a couple of fingers. 'Look', he said, pointing with his hat to some large, closely-printed posters on a notice-board. One was a list of the names and addresses of qualified nurses in the *département*, another dealt with the formalities of a new electoral register. 'You see those? Who receives them and arranges for their display? And where do people go to get information and help and advice on this, that, and the other?'

He put his hat on again with a gesture of finality. 'Ah, as far as I can see, country people in England must spend all their time running about all over the place.'

'While here', I said, 'you mean they spend all their time running to see the Mayor?'

He smiled. 'Don't let's exaggerate. In an ordinary sort of small village the Mairie is open perhaps on two afternoons a week. And, quite often, it's the village schoolteacher who does all the clerical work. She—or he—gets paid an extra salary for that, of course. In some places, especially where



The schoolteacher who, in a small village, is most likely to be a woman, works very hard, and plays a leading part in village social life.

School recreation. Silence in the classroom but high spirits in the playground.

there's only one school for several villages, the schoolteacher acts like that, as *secrétaire de mairie*, for those villages. However small the village, although it may not have its own school, as long as it's a *commune* it's bound to have a Mairie and a Mayor and a Municipal Council. The Mayor's often what we call "just a signature"—some farmer who turns up at the Mairie on Thursdays just to sign the papers and documents that the secretary has got ready. Even so, to be Mayor, you need to be rich or have plenty of spare time. At least, it'd be a lot easier for you! Look at me, for instance—my shop doesn't leave me with much spare time, especially as my wife's ill just now, neither does it make me rich—in spite of what some people think. Tomorrow I have to go to the *chef-lieu*, to a meeting of the mayors of the *canton*. The next evening there's a council meeting here; and today, being Thursday, the Mairie is open all day. True, both our schoolmistresses work at the Mairie today. And one of them is there every evening, too. But I control all the work that's done—I've been a *secrétaire de mairie* in my time, and I know all about it. My electors know that I know too—and we've a population of six hundred—and they come to me to help them out of all sorts of difficulties. Why, earlier this morning, for instance, there was that woman who'd been presented with a demand note for nineteen hundred francs tax on a house she owns. Well, it's let unfurnished for—how much, do you think? Why, eighteen hundred—a hundred less than the tax she's being asked to pay! So she comes to me, to intercede for her with the authorities. And how many other matters outside my real duties come my way! *Et encore! Et encore!*'

M. Fouquet may or may not have worked himself up,

with Gallic exuberance, to exaggerate, after all, the amount of work he did and the demands made on his time, but to walk with him through his village was to see that he was very popular; everyone he passed had a word for him, and he for them, frequently with an exchange of Christian names and the use of the intimate *tu*. He was certainly one of the large body of village and small-town Mayors who are devoted to their *commune*, who have grown up with it and risen, by popular consent, to the head of its affairs. The work he did and the responsibilities he assumed were not paid for with any real sense of proportion; the maximum salary he could receive from the municipal budget of a *commune* this size, according to law, was worth about fifteen shillings a week.

Many additional duties and responsibilities have been imposed on Mayors and Municipal Councils during the twenty years or so that M. Fouquet has served his *commune* as, successively, *garde champêtre*, *secrétaire de mairie*, municipal councillor, and now Mayor. This process had obviously been a continuous one, ever since the creation of Mayors and Municipalities in the Constituent Assembly of 1789. While the measure of self-government in English villages has considerably decreased since that period, when the vestry, the village churchwardens, and village constable were responsible between them for most of the affairs of the village, in France it has greatly increased. The reasons for this, apart from the differences in the social history of the two countries, are that communications developed more quickly in England; in France, with its greater area and more scattered rural population, it was advisable to leave a certain amount of autonomy in the hands of village councils. When

new legislation had to be carried out, there was already a local Mairie that could be used for the purpose. The cult of bureaucracy, the *maladie de la paperasse*, has become as widespread in France as in other countries during the last two decades—more so, a Frenchman would contend. Each Mairie has also become a sort of outpost of the Préfecture, a local office serving as a go-between for the inhabitants of the *commune* and the central administration of the *département*. At the same time the Mayor has become more under the control of the Préfet.

Nevertheless, a certain amount of freedom of action is still retained by the Mayor and his Council. Their main functions have, on the whole, changed very little since 1884 when the laws were passed that still determine the organization of municipalities. These laws, which are largely based on previous legislation, show by their attention to detail that they are inspired by the brilliant administrative mind of Napoleon whose Civil Code still directs and influences much in the lives of the French people; more so in the country where the basic pattern of life has changed much less than in the cities.

The laws of 1884 determine, for instance, the number of municipal councillors in each *commune;* eleven, where the population is five hundred or less; thirteen for a population between five and fifteen hundred, and so on, up to a maximum of thirty-seven councillors. No two members of the same family can serve on the same Council where the population is more than five hundred; and the eligibility for election to Councillor is laid down as scrupulously and minutely as the procedure for electing a council. 'When voting opens the two oldest and the two youngest of the

electors present, knowing how to read and write, shall fulfil the functions of assessors'. . . . 'In each *commune* there will be a voting booth for every three hundred electors on the register.' The Council is elected for six years and must meet at least four times a year, in February, May, August, and November. It elects the Mayor and one Deputy Mayor from amongst its members, although it has the power to elect more than one Deputy if it wishes. The councillors are unpaid but the Mayor and his Deputy receive a salary according to the population of the *commune;* this salary scale has of course been raised from time to time, by law.

The Mayor is far more than chairman of the Council. He is the local representative of the Government in that he is responsible, within his *commune*, for the carrying out of laws and regulations transmitted to him through the Préfet or Sous-Préfet. He is in sole charge of the administration of the *commune*. He can make by-laws—which, however, like many of his other actions, have to receive the approval of the Préfet—he nominates the municipal employees, controls the local police, keeps the register of births, marriages, and deaths, and also marries people as a Registrar does in England. In fact, marriage before a Mayor is obligatory by Civil Law. He is responsible, 'under the control of the Municipal Council and the surveillance of higher authority', for the preparation of the annual budget, the carrying out of public works, the management of public property, and a host of other matters that vary in importance with the size of the *commune*. Among his minor responsibilities are the compilation and dispatch, to various authorities, of lists of children of school age, of people who have died leaving heirs under age, of babies that have to be

vaccinated, an annual census of horses, mules, and vehicles. It is the Mayor who decides when to call meetings of the Council, although a majority of the councillors may demand a meeting.

His signature, or that of his deputy, is needed to legalize a large number of forms and documents. The total number presented for signature may be higher in a village than in a small town where there is a gendarmerie or a police-station, for the Mayor can sign in place of a police official. But he now earns ten francs for his *commune* every time he gives his signature.

The size of a Mairie and the amount of work that goes on in it naturally depends upon the importance of the *commune* and the size of the population. In a large country town —large for France, that is, having a population of between five and ten thousand—the Mairie may well be as large as the town hall in an English county borough town, and be busier with the comings and goings of the public. Its position in the town is just as prominent; usually it is a well-proportioned, classical-style building, or may even be a Renaissance-period town house that used to belong to some wealthy, noble family. The *secrétaire de mairie*, although appointed by the Mayor and paid from the municipal funds, receives a salary in accordance with a national scale. His social position and civic importance are not unlike those of a town clerk in England, though his salary is almost certainly inferior, and his duties more numerous. He is a professional man who can progress, also like the town clerk, to a more important position; and to help him in his present task he has seven or eight, or possibly ten, clerical assistants.

In a small village, such as that where the Bressons live,

the Mairie has an equal importance. To it are sent just as many official communications, notices, and demands from the Préfecture as are sent to the Mairie of the large town. Many of them will not apply to the little *commune* and no action will be needed. Nevertheless, the Mairie figures on the lists and so, with true bureaucratic zeal, the official forms are dispatched, and have to be examined. Although the Mairie of a village is a modest little building, it occupies an equally important position among the small houses and cottages. The actual amount of work done by the Mayor, however, may be proportionately far greater than that done by the Mayor of a large town; particularly if the latter is content to be 'just a signature' and the former helps at the Mairie as much as M. Fouquet did.

But usually the Mayor of a village is, as M. Fouquet intimated, one of the landowners or shopkeepers who goes along to the Mairie once or twice a week to see how the secretary is coping with affairs. He—though the Mayor can be a woman—is often expected to preside at local events and to make speeches. Such occasions are more numerous in a year than would seem possible. Among the model speeches offered to mayors by a semi-official organization which is obviously prepared to cover all conceivable functions, are those for use on the following occasions:

Presentation of a Christmas Tree to the schoolchildren.
Retirement of a schoolteacher.
Distribution of prizes.
Mothers' Day.
Anniversary of the Liberation.
Fourteenth of July Festivities.
All Saints' Day.

Unveiling of a War Memorial.
Funeral of a Municipal Councillor.
A Wedding.
Presentation of a Banner to the Firemen.
Banquet of Ex-Servicemen.
Presentation of a Medal to a Mother of a large family.
Replying to congratulations of Councillors on receiving the award of the Agricultural Medal.

A good Mayor is not only adaptable and a good mixer but also has useful contacts and influential acquaintances outside the *commune*. For this is often the best way in which a Mayor can serve his electors; the routine work and administration he can leave to his deputy and secretary. The choice of a Mayor by the Council is often guided by the possibility of having one who is *avisé*, a Mayor who is energetic, has contacts in the right places. In the battle areas of Normandy and elsewhere it is not unusual to find one village with many new buildings and a neighbouring village still showing gaping ruins. The earlier recovery of the one is often due to a large extent to the work of its Mayor. And in matters such as raising loans to enable electricity or a water supply to be brought into the village, or obtaining a government subsidy towards some recreational or social improvement, it is again an advantage for a *commune* to have a Mayor who is *avisé*. M. Fouquet, being a small shopkeeper and a man who had risen from humble beginnings, had few influential friends. But what he lacked in influence he made up for with energy, and he was always prepared to seek directly the help and advice of the Conseiller Général or even the Member of Parliament.

Normally, when in need of help to bring pressure to bear on higher authority, a village Mayor turns to his superior, the Conseiller Général—superior not in administrative power but in the position he holds and the larger area he represents. The nearest equivalent in England to a Conseiller Général is a County Councillor. He is often the Mayor of a village himself, not necessarily of the *chef-lieu de canton;* though any ordinary citizen is eligible for election. The area he represents, the *canton*, is usually a little larger than an English Rural District, but has no Council. When the interests of the *communes* that form a *canton* have something in common, or if a combined approach to some problem is expedient, then the various Mayors are likely to meet together to discuss the matter; in such an event the Conseiller Général would almost certainly be present and preside at the meeting.

It was to such a meeting that M. Fouquet was going the following day, mainly to deal with the subject of the fire brigade. His own and the adjoining *communes* all relied, in case of fire, on the prompt arrival of the fire brigade from the *chef-lieu*. So they all contributed to its expenses and upkeep, according to the means and situation of each *commune*. The fire brigade had asked for increased contributions in the coming year; a clear case for general discussion and a common decision.

At this time of the year, in December, M. Fouquet was mostly occupied with the presentation of the budget. Even while serving in his shop, where he had now taken the place of his wife for a time, he could not rid his mind of the subject. No doubt it had been well discussed with other councillors, but this afternoon the budget was to be officially

voted and the *percepteur* was to come to give his specialized knowledge and advice.

'Of course, there won't be a full Council', said M. Fouquet, stacking a few things behind his shop counter. 'Some of them can't get away from their work in the afternoon. Normally we have our meetings in the evening, after dinner. But there'll be enough of us. We have to arrange it to suit the *percepteur*, you see, because he goes round from one village to another doing this budget business, just now. He's our treasurer, and besides, a good proportion of the money we collect in taxes goes elsewhere, to the *département* —by way of the *percepteur*.'

A customer came into the shop, a little old man with a basket in one hand and two pieces of paper in the other. Each was a signed statement authorizing the man to collect the family allowances of another person; presumably the old man was going to the *chef-lieu* later on and would have several commissions to do for people. 'What can I do for thee, big'un?' asked the Mayor, automatically reaching for the pieces of paper and signing his name twice, though he glanced at the signature already on each to make sure it was known to him. 'You'll have to take them along to the Mairie and get the rubber stamp put on them. I haven't got one here, for the moment. And don't forget the ten francs.' He began to serve the old man with coffee, sugar, and wine.

The job of drawing up the budget was not so difficult as it might appear. The formation of it is regulated by law, as are most of the means of raising money. The major part of the *commune's* revenue is drawn from a tax on all business deals and purchases made within the *commune*, from fees for dog

and shooting licences, from rates on land and buildings. The details of ownership of land and buildings are contained in two large ledgers. The one dealing with the division of land, the *cadastre*, as it is called, shows every transfer made by sale or inheritance; each person owning any land has his or her page in the book, with a description of each field or portion, its size and the category of the quality of the soil—for its rateable value is assessed on both.

Although the Council can decide how the revenue shall be apportioned there are a large number of charges that, by law, must be met. There are over twenty of these different charges, though not all apply to a rural *commune* such as M. Fouquet's; the number has been increased with the passage of years, keeping pace with the additional complications of daily life, and no doubt more will be added yet. In recent years, for example, the *commune* has been charged with the expenses of burying any unidentified bodies and animals killed within its boundaries during military operations, and with the expenses of medical inspections at its primary schools; and any rationing that is enforced.

During a period of four years M. Fouquet has seen his budget total double itself every succeeding year. He pulled it from his pocket now, when the customer had left, and spread the sheets across the counter to make a last check of them. The figures on the first few sheets were in ink and without any corrections, but towards the end there were pencilled insertions crammed together and alterations that had caused other alterations to be made. But the essential had been accomplished; the totals of receipts and expenses balanced each other.

'The difficulty is, you see, to decide how much will be

needed for each item', said M. Fouquet, taking off his hat and scratching his head. 'If we vote too much for one and not enough for another we have to get the Préfet's permission before we can swap the money round.' He ran his finger slowly up and down the columns while his lips moved silently. There were sounds of someone moving about in the room overhead. 'Ah yes, five hundred francs for the sale of the hay from the road verges.' M. Fouquet began to comment. 'We nearly forgot that. The Barbey legacy, two hundred—that was worth something when she died, now it's more trouble than it's worth. Two hundred thousand for my lanes—will that be enough? There's three of them to be tarred soon. Well, if it's not enough we'll have to vote a supplementary tax, that's all; three days' work per man or their equivalent. After all, there's twenty miles of them. That reminds me—no stones have been delivered yet. Must put that on the agenda for the next meeting. Ten thousand for the telephone bill at the Mairie. H'm, let's hope more people will do their own telephoning. Twelve hundred towards the firemen's banquet; it was a good one this year. Three thousand to the Conseil de Prud'hommes, that'll just about keep them quiet. Roadmender's wages—now will that be enough . . .?

A woman customer came into the shop and M. Fouquet pushed the budget to one side. 'Have you tried this coffee?' he said, taking a packet from a shelf. 'It's twelve francs less than the other and just as good. We have it ourselves.'

A motor-cyclist stopped in the lane and came into the shop carrying a brief-case. M. Fouquet evidently recognized him, for he stopped serving the customer and drew a fountain-pen from his waistcoat pocket. The motor-cyclist

fumbled in his brief-case and pulled out some documents. 'Ah yes, the Sous-Préfecture', murmured M. Fouquet, now producing a pair of spectacles and putting them on. He glanced through the documents, signing his name in various places. 'You know where the Mairie is? Yes, of course, you've come on from there. You'll have to go back to get the rubber stamp put on. I haven't got one here, for the moment.'

He finished serving his customer and then drew the budget towards him again. 'Ah yes—salaries of employees of the *commune*. *Secrétaire de mairie*, a hundred and twenty thousand; she'll be happy enough with that. Assistant secretary, town-crier, bill-poster, and general runabout—that's all one job, seventy thousand. *Garde champêtre;* well, there isn't one, we just can't afford one. Besides, this is a law-abiding place. And the gendarmerie isn't far away. If anyone wants to know —*le garde champêtre, c'est moi*. Ah, there's the missus. Now we can go back to the Mairie and see how things are getting on.'

M. Fouquet carefully folded the budget and put it back in his pocket.We set off along the lane again; the air was damp and still, and bore the smells of recently turned earth and meals being prepared. M. Fouquet proudly pointed out the new war memorial at a lane junction. 'We're paying off the last instalment on that next year', he said.

As we entered the Mairie the two teachers looked up from their work. There were two other men waiting, one sitting in the middle of the row of chairs and the other standing by the stove. M. Fouquet sat down at the table and reached for the telephone. 'Now, what have you got for me?' he said to the two women opposite him, as he waited for his call.

He began to look through and sign a few papers that were pushed to him across the table by the younger teacher.

'Have you got your photo?' the other teacher called across the room. The man who was sitting down brought his little photo to the table. She glued it on the identity card she had been making out and passed the whole to M. Fouquet for his signature. The man shook hands all round and went out, at the same time as a small boy came in.

'I've just found this in the ditch', he said breathlessly, handing a ten-franc note to the schoolmistress. There was silence in the room; no one seemed to know what to do or say. The schoolmistress stood behind the table turning the crumpled note over in her hand. The boy looked all round him as though expectant of something, then went slowly towards the door. 'Very good, François', cried M. Fouquet, turning from the telephone. 'That's very good. You can have it for Christmas if no one claims it'. The boy grinned and ran away.

'Here, I can't sign this', suddenly exclaimed M. Fouquet. 'She—whose affair is it? Ah yes, I thought so—she hasn't filled in the values, only the numbers.'

'Well, sign it now, and she can complete it afterwards.'

'Ah no. I would if my signature were needed only to legalize it. But in this case I make myself responsible too. I've had some. No, you send it back first.' He stretched one arm along the table, rummaging among the documents and ledgers until he found a piece of scrap paper.

'You'd better send around some copies of the agenda for the next meeting', he said studying the blank piece of paper. 'Now, what is there to go on it? There's the funeral. Burial of deputy mayor', he added slowly as he wrote the words.

'And then, my lanes. Tarring of lanes.' He pushed his hat to the back of his head with his free hand and turned to face the man standing by the stove. 'It's been impossible so far to find anyone who'll sell us a load of stones. That's what I told you to come and see me about, wasn't it?' he said to the roadmender. He swivelled round to his piece of paper again, still holding the telephone near his ear. 'No stones available. What else? Ah well, I suppose we'd better do something about the *presbytère*. Every time I see the *curé* he's always grumbling. Repairs to *presbytère*. And then?' He looked up at the *secrétaire de mairie*, but evidently he had not left her with anything to suggest. He peered at the still dumb telephone and then dropped it into place, muttering something about seeing the man tomorrow anyway.

The other teacher was putting on her hat and coat. The Mayor walked across and put a couple of logs into the stove. 'Better keep it going for after lunch', he said. We went out into the pale sunshine, and began to walk back to the grocery shop. M. Fouquet half pulled the sheets of the budget from his pocket, then thrust them back again. 'I might as well keep it with me', he muttered. 'It's all ready. The session won't take long this afternoon. There's only this that'll be dealt with. All cut and dried—and the *percepteur* will want to get on to his next call. Let's have lunch.'

Behind, the older teacher was entering the school building after having locked the door of the Mairie. The grey stone, square building seemed to be squatting firmly there in the centre of the village, holding and guarding the interests of the people while they ate.

Chapter VII

THE SCHOOLTEACHER

THE MAYOR IS the undisputed Head of the village; you may dislike him, you may think he is a bad Mayor, you may disagree with his political views, but you cannot challenge his authority. He is the father of the village; the maternal duties, as it were, are divided between the *curé* and the schoolteacher, sometimes shared amicably but more often disputed.

The material dependence of both upon the *commune* is curiously similar, for their living-accommodation and their working-quarters are the responsibility of the Municipal Council. Their appointments too, it can almost be said, are effected in similar ways. The teacher is appointed by the Académie, the education authority for the *département*. The post may or may not be advertised, but the four appointments I know of personally were effected by a kind of bush telegraph—which, incidentally, is a major means of communication in the French countryside. A teacher, wanting an appointment in a certain village, usually for family reasons, keeps in close touch, and on the first indication of a vacancy there applies to the Académie for the post. In one case, such an application was the first news that the Académie had of the sudden death of the village teacher.

Apart from the appointment, the relationships between the teacher and the Municipal Council are similar to those

between the teacher in a Church of England village school and its Managers. The French teacher has to be provided with a place to live, free, by the *commune*, usually a flat or a few rooms forming part of the school building; or a lodging allowance has to be made instead, and the amount is decided by the Municipal Council. The upkeep of the school, the repairs to the building, and the heating of it—in general, the means to enable the teacher to work properly—have to be met from the budget of the *commune*.

But the village school has no connection with the *curé*. There are no Scripture lessons in the curriculum, and the *curé* is not invited to give religious talks to the pupils. The strict separation of State education from religious instruction and Church influence is a matter that recurrently causes strife and uproar in the Chamber of Deputies; at village level it is often a constant reason for an additional bond between the teacher and the Mayor, since he represents the major local political opinion.

The schoolteacher is often anti-clerical, and Radical or Left-Wing in political inclination, an attitude inculcated during early professional training. In *communes* where the majority of the councillors are of political opinions that are Republican or left of Centre—by far the greater number, according to the returns of the last municipal elections—there usually exists an anti-clerical bias. This does not necessarily mean that there is hostility towards the *curé*. He and the schoolteacher and the Mayor may get on very well together in private and be tolerant in public life. But in these villages the schoolteacher and the Mayor often consider themselves to be the main guardians of the Republican traditions.

In villages where the *secrétaire de mairie* is other than the schoolteacher the reason is often due to this politico-religious divergence, notably in regions such as Brittany and the Vendée where Catholicism is strongest and the village Mayors are more likely to support the Church. But such cases are rather the exceptions to a general pattern in French village life. Who else in a village, usually, is better suited for the task of mastering official directives and compiling returns and filling in forms? The teacher, moreover, is likely to be the only person with set hours of work, and can, therefore, be in attendance at the Mairie at pre-arranged times. The salary of a village schoolteacher is not sufficient for him or her to want to refuse the offer of this supplementary work. And many a woman teacher living alone, or with just her mother, finds that the work gives her an additional interest and brings her more into village life.

The French rural teacher has to contend with difficulties similar to those met by his English counterpart. Although the schools in twenty-five per cent of all the *communes* have fewer than thirty pupils, elsewhere the classes are often large; forty pupils of all ages in the one village classroom is not unusual. The buildings are often out-dated and the equipment insufficient. As in England, some small village schools have been closed and the children now go to the neighbouring school. But this has not taken place on the same scale as in England, partly because of the longer distances the children would have to travel. In *communes* where the school is closed a contribution is made towards the expenses of the neighbouring school. The children walk or cycle several miles in each direction every schoolday. Even when attending the school of their own *commune* the children

from farms and hamlets near its boundaries may have a considerable distance to cover, as in the *commune* where the Bressons live. There, the children who cannot get back home during the lunch period bring their food with them; the schoolmistress—she who is so bound to the village way of life that she concords with its daily routine rather than that laid down by the education authorities—she heats the children's food, makes them hot drinks in winter, and generally looks after them.

It is interesting to speculate how much rural France has influenced educational policy. The long summer holidays, for example, from mid-July to the beginning of October, cover the period when the help of children is most needed in the country. Moreover, when children are twelve years old and have passed an elementary examination they are allowed to be absent from school in order to work on farms. Compulsory education begins at six years; this also may be due to the long distances to be covered on foot by many country children.

The school day is longer than in England and more homework is given to the children; there is no long week-end break, as there are classes all day Saturday to replace the Thursday holiday. This weekly time-table is better for the children, French teachers usually maintain, because their days of application are distributed more evenly through the week than is the case with the five consecutive schooldays in England. This is no doubt true in theory but, like so many things in France, does not quite work out like that in practice. On the Thursday the children may spend half the day doing homework and, if between the ages of eight and eleven and particularly if living in the country, the other

half of the day attending Catechism classes and doing revision at home in preparation for their First Communion.

Yes, school is an earnest affair, and the village teacher works hard. Whether *secrétaire de mairie* or not, he is usually devoted to the village and plays a leading part in what little social life there is. For the most part, he lives on the spot, he—though in a small village it is more likely to be a woman—is asked to act as secretary or treasurer of any local organizations, to train the children to perform some play or *divertissement* at village fêtes and socials. Many a village teacher spends a whole working life in one place, in some obscure village and often alone, extending his or her activities far beyond the confines of the classroom and gaining the esteem of the whole community.

M. Gosselin is the headmaster of the primary school in a large, scattered village near Bayeux, in the Normandy invasion area. The village is not a *chef-lieu*, but is almost important enough to be one. M. Gosselin has a staff of three; a young mistress who teaches the infants, a master who is in charge of the boys' department, and Mme Gosselin who teaches the girls. He himself, as Directeur des Ecoles, does the administrative tasks, organizes the school programme, teaches the senior classes, and generally bobs about from one job to another with great vitality. The teacher's official quarters, adjacent to the main school building, are large enough for only one family; the junior schoolmaster and his wife live there, the young mistress lodges with friends in the village, while M. Gosselin and his wife have a small house on the outskirts. The numbers of pupils and staff have increased,

but the only addition to the buildings and facilities is a temporary structure for the infants class, on the opposite side of the road. The school was built at the same time as the Mairie, behind which it stands, towards the end of the last century. The number of children attending it slowly grew as the village became larger, but there was a sudden increase in 1944 when families from devastated villages came to shelter in this much less damaged one; a number of those families have since settled there.

M. Gosselin has always risen to the demands and needs of his village. A square, middle-aged man, he is still the same as when I first knew him, in 1944, voluble, erratic, yet full of confidence, pleased with everything he does, and having a fine zest for life. He is loth to be taken for a schoolmaster, for some peculiar reason, and likes to engage in out-of-school activities; but these usually appear as an adjunct of the classroom.

He is at home as seldom now as he used to be during the hectic summer days of 1944, even though his school was then requisitioned. He helped at the Mairie and with the A.R.P. service. He possessed one of the few remaining wireless sets—the Germans had ordered all sets to be surrendered, but he hid his in a cupboard—and three times a day he wrote out the news-bulletin, got on his bicycle, and pedalled swiftly around the village to pin copies on the various notice-boards. He would wait for a short time in front of each to watch a group of people assemble and avidly read his writing, standing behind them with his legs apart, his eyes shining with pleasure, and his mouth half-open to breathe heavily. He did not seem to regret the requisitioning of his school; most of the period, it is true, coincided with

the summer holidays. But he often looked in at the transformed classrooms, where the blackboard in a corner still bore the beginning of a lesson in his chalked handwriting and the date at the top: June the Sixth.

He had not looked like a schoolmaster then and he still does not now, as you see him in the streets of the village. He is usually pushing hard on the pedals of his bicycle or hurrying through a long conversation with someone. There he stands holding his bicycle, his old brown hat tilted away from his forehead, his brown eyes interrogating keenly, his watch-chain still dangling loosely, and his trouser-bottoms tied with string; in all these years he has not found time to buy himself a pair of trouser-clips, or else he has just mislaid them again. But his speech is a sure indication of his profession. His sentences and the manner of their delivery are those of a teacher, a French one, at least, precise, dry, clear, and loud, very loud; and are often accompanied by an emphasizing gesture of the thumb and first finger, as if underlining a lesson.

When he is called out of his classroom he steps from the school building with the air of someone who himself has just popped in to see the headmaster. He tries to appear to have no connection with the building behind him; but a stick of chalk held absentmindedly in his hand, like a wand of office, and the chalk dust on his jacket are sufficient to betray him. If his class begins to make itself heard he gives a gesture of annoyance, as though not wishing to be reminded of his vacated place. He turns, blows a whistle, and shouts 'Silence'. The noise from the classroom ceases as suddenly as an engine being switched off. He looks at his visitor with a gleam of triumph in his eyes and he nods to commend himself.

At home, in the small tidy house with a long garden, he tries to get away from the subject of teaching. But his wife, who is as energetic as he is, frizzy-haired and plump-cheeked, fiery and urgent in manner, brings schoolwork home with her; at least, he maintains that it is she alone who does so. He would like to find a change of occupation, he often says, by working in his garden. But his father, a widower, who lives with them, spends nearly all his time keeping the garden in impeccable condition, and it cannot be said that M. Gosselin makes any attempt to persuade his father to do less gardening. The drawing-room is square, neat, and formal; the excessive amount of furniture is solid and well polished. On the mantelpiece is a framed certificate of his Resistance activities during the Occupation, of which he is doubly proud because it is evidence of his activities outside the teaching profession. But the major part of the room is filled with two angular pianos that face each other; a disciplined array of photographs shows that M. Gosselin and his wife have taught many stolid, unenthusiastic young people how to play the piano. In fact, this stiff and prim room is used mainly to give private lessons on various subjects.

All restraint flees from it, however, when the Gosselins bring in friends in the evening. On these infrequent occasions the friends are usually other schoolteachers from neighbouring villages. The white wine and the tart is provided as something of an afterthought, as something to toy with during the short panting pauses in the conversation. Subjects such as post-war Germany, the foreign policy of America, French regional literature, and the Asiatic menace are argued about and disposed of and lead to something entirely irrelevant.

'For me', said M. Gosselin late one evening, including everybody with a sweep of his arms, 'for me, life is very satisfactory now. I'm happy because I've the most important thing in the world—liberty. I can say what I like, print what I like, do what I like. *Je suis libre.*' And he looked around as though seeking escape from the room.

'But look at the monopoly of the pulpit. No one is invited up there to give another point of view.'

Everyone was in agreement at last. They talked their way with relish along the beaten paths of the controversy; particularly so, because in this large village there is a good church school that draws pupils from several miles around. M. Gosselin was not incensed so much by what the *curé* said in the pulpit as by the fact that he, M. Gosselin, was not allowed to stand up in church and contradict him.

'And look at the kind of films he shows at the church hall!'

Well, no, there wasn't exactly anything *wrong* with them, but that was just what was wrong about them, if you followed.

'They're deliberately selected to press home the ideas of the Church', pursued M. Gosselin, leaning forward. 'It's the only cinema show in the village—the only one for miles around—so this censorship amounts to a dictatorship of what films everybody, not just churchgoers, shall or shall not see. But they'll be able to make their own choice soon. *I'm* going to start a cinema—give a show once a week too—in that big shed next to the school. The *curé* can't have it all his own way!'

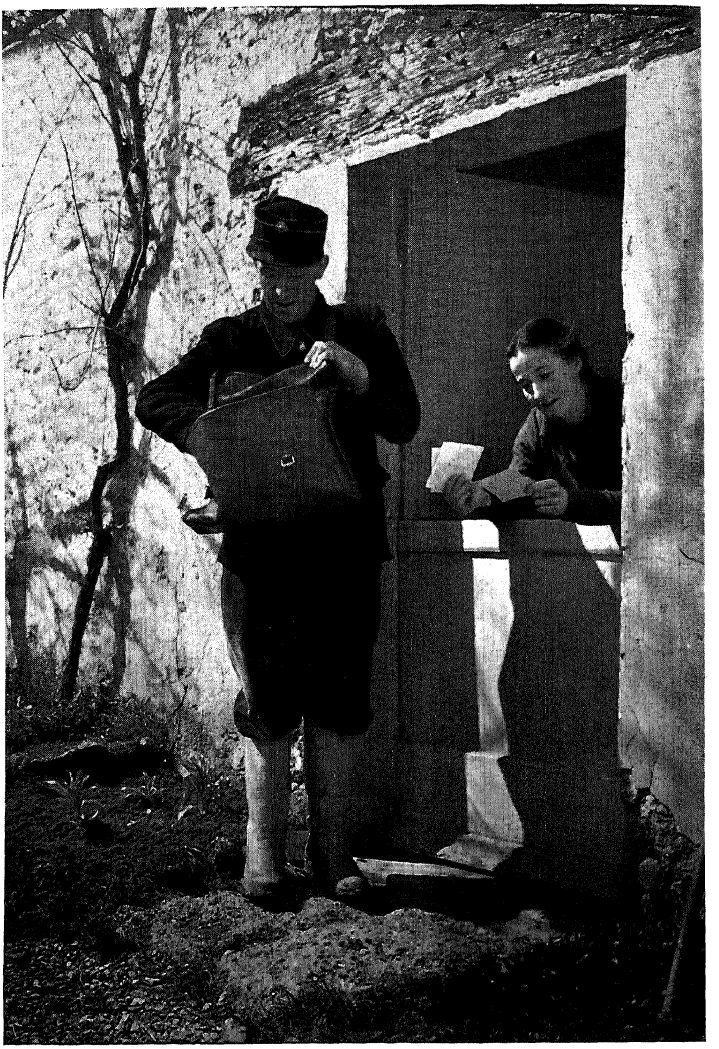
M. Gosselin suddenly stopped, perhaps alarmed by a thought that he was talking like a schoolmaster. He changed

the subject, going off at a tangent. The room had been swept clear of all decorum and restraint; there was flashing movement of arms and hands, a torrent of speech, and a verbal jostling for place. The formal furniture seemed to be frowning with disapproval from the shadowy surroundings. The gesticulation and noise around the table surged over the passive old father who sat there with arms folded, quietly forlorn like the goalkeeper of a team that has an overwhelming superiority.

M. Gosselin now has his weekly cinema show. This is another episode in his struggle against the ardent Church faction. Soon after the Liberation of the district M. Gosselin began intriguing for the removal of the Mayor, a Church supporter, who had been nominated by the Vichy Government. As chief of the local Resistance group, M. Gosselin prepared a report on the Mayor and notified the civil authorities in Bayeux. Eventually the Mayor was removed from office and at the provisional municipal elections, shortly afterwards, a majority of Left-wing councillors was returned. The Mayor then chosen was, not to M. Gosselin's surprise, the father-in-law of the junior schoolmaster and himself a retired teacher. M. Gosselin and his friends were jubilant, and great was the harmony between Mairie and school. But at the next elections, which were for the full six years of office, there was a swing to the Right. And the present Mayor of what is, after all, quite a strong Catholic community, is a farmer who has long been president of several local organizations sponsored by the Church.

On another evening of the week, at the school, M. Gosselin has an English class. 'All the children come voluntarily', he emphasizes, implying that this dissociates the

Fête Day. A vibrant 'Marseillaise' from the town band begins the proceedings.



Le bon facteur also collects and dispenses news of the district.

lesson from the normal curriculum and from his professional activity.

Here in the school where he has been teaching for twenty years M. Gosselin is obviously in his proper element; even his old brown suit matches the worn wooden desks. The classroom is long and wide and with almost bare walls; he has space in which to expand, to gesticulate without fear of knocking an obstinate piece of furniture. On the occasion when he invited me to assist at his English lesson there was also present his usual helper, Madame la Baronne, who had lived in England for many years. But neither of us was allowed to take much part in the lesson; we were supernumeraries, a kind of living proof that this was indeed an English lesson. We were permitted occasionally to talk in English to the embarrassed pupils who had finished their oral exercise. M. Gosselin was, undoubtedly, the only unembarrassed person in the classroom. His teaching methods were hardly modern, consisting as they did of making each of the dozen pupils in turn read the same phrase from an English textbook, but what the lesson lacked in efficiency it gained in verve and enthusiasm from M. Gosselin. It was a leisurely affair for the pupils but a busy one for the teacher. He was never still or silent; the piece of chalk he held but never used produced more and more smudges on his jacket.

As the pupils were shaking hands with us before leaving, M. Gosselin said, 'and now in the next room we're going to have some singing practice'. He was breathing heavily with his mouth half-open and a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. 'You must come along. All the teachers of the district have formed a choir, and we give concerts in aid of the school funds. People don't like paying extra rates, but they

don't mind coming to a concert to help us buy things we need in school.'

He bounded from one room to the next, where about a score of men and women were chatting in small groups. Mme Gosselin was there, but her husband did not go to join her. He leapt on to the platform and blew his little whistle. The chattering ceased and the teachers sat down at the small desks, dividing themselves into four groups. M. Gosselin had produced, like a conjuror, a baton and a tuning-fork. He gave a note from one, a peremptory signal for attention with the other, and swept into the music of 'Auld Lang Syne'. A good rendering, but not good enough for M. Gosselin, evidently. Again! The men are missing the rhythm just here; listen, like this. Let's try again. Better, but not perfect. Once again. M. Gosselin, sounding his tuning-fork, vigorously waving his baton, singing lustily with the tenors to encourage them, at last took the company all the way through 'Ce n'est qu'un Au Revoir, mes Frères', the French version of 'Auld Lang Syne'.

M. Gosselin leaned against the blackboard, smiling approval between efforts to recover his breath, and mopping his forehead with a large handkerchief; a happy man in love with his profession.

Chapter VIII

FÊTE DAY

A LARGE TRICOLOUR flag was gently flapping above the entrance to the Mairie. A little further along the lane a line of coloured pennants was strung from one housetop to another opposite. Outside the larger of the two cafés in the village, the 'Café de l'Espérance', there was an unaccustomed number of tables and chairs; some in the shade of one corner of the building and others round the other side in the warm June sunshine, but all of them bare and vacant so far. On a piece of common land next to the school was a cluster of fair waggons and vans, all painted a brilliant yellow. The fair people had already erected the wooden framework of their several sideshows and roundabouts, and the village children looking on were excitedly arguing about the sort of roundabouts that would soon appear.

More villagers than usual for a Sunday morning were walking along the lanes, most of them in the direction of the Mairie, or standing at their garden gates and in little groups at corners. There was a kind of sizzling anticipation all over the normally placid village, like a flat drink that has received a dash of Perrier. For today was the annual Fête of the *commune*, a day of local rejoicing in honour of Saint Barnabé, the saint to whom the village church was dedicated. Not that today was Saint Barnabas' Day; that was passed two days ago. But a little logic and circumspection is needed in

such a matter. What would be the use of holding the annual Fête on a day when nearly everyone was working hard? So the Municipal Council had decided that, as usual, the Fête should be held on the nearest Sunday. The *curé* had been of the same opinion and was going to celebrate a special Mass in honour of Saint Barnabas; besides, in the afternoon there was to be an attraction—a secret, said everyone who knew about it—in aid of the church repairs fund. For one Sunday in the year the village would perhaps have an aspect that to an English visitor would confirm all he had been led to believe about the Continental Sunday.

A lorry carrying the trumpet band of the Sapeurs-Pompiers from the *chef-lieu* hooted its way through the village and stopped outside the Mairie. M. Fouquet saw it go past his shop and hurried to change into his best suit. The morning ceremonies were due to begin at ten o'clock, according to the posters displayed here and in neighbouring villages (for if outsiders could be persuaded to come and spend money here, so much the better); it was only ten minutes after ten, so M. Fouquet knew he had time to arrive before everyone would be waiting for him. It had been a busy morning in the shop. Most people intended to have an extra-special lunch today, and there had been much demand for wines and best coffee and biscuits. But there would be few customers coming to the shop now; his wife would cope with those and then still have time to hurry along to the church for Mass. As M. Fouquet changed his clothes he kept glancing at his two speeches lying on the bed, and declaimed first a phrase from one and then a phrase from the other. But it would not do to get one speech confused with the second, and he folded them up and put them in his jacket pocket.

When he arrived at the Mairie the church clock had just struck the half-hour, and he nodded to himself with satisfaction. Judging by the scattered crowd in the lane here, everyone who was to take part in the procession had considered that ten-thirty was just about the right time to begin. There was a great deal of handshaking going on, as municipal councillors and other elders of the *commune* arrived and joined the various groups who stood chatting. Men predominated, farmers for the most part, ruddy-faced men with felt hats worn at different angles, sturdy suits that would last a life-time, heavy boots and polished leggings. They were quick to laugh, to clap someone on the back, to show off a little, this morning. The essential work of the day had been done; and, for once, the rest could wait. Besides, the haymaking was just finished and the crops promised well. Today you were *en fête*; there was a good lunch being prepared at home, and here were most of your friends and acquaintances all met together. And, with all that, this clear blue sky and blessed sun that looked settled. '*Ça promet bonne fête*!' Yes, a fine day for the Fête, and then to ripen the crops—though with a little rain as well to swell them out a bit. If only the Government would fix the price of wheat at . . . The Mayor had arrived just in time; another five minutes and they would have been talking business.

The firemen had got their instruments ready and were standing in a straggling group, some smoking cigarettes, others wiping their mouths after a quick drink in the Café de l'Espérance. The two schoolmistresses were shepherding a batch of children dressed in their best clothes, restraining them from wandering away from the school entrance. There were two gendarmes standing in the middle of the

lane holding their bicycles, trying to look as though they were here on some important business. And around this noisy, restless throng were a score or so of onlookers; villagers with friends and relatives who had come for the day, some dressed in their Sunday clothes, others who had interrupted their work in the house or garden for a few minutes, little children playing games among themselves to pass the time.

The Mayor was looking up and down the lane. What was he waiting for? Ah, a car, stopping here. And out of it stepped the Conseiller Général. *Mais, dites*, you can't say our Mayor doesn't use his opportunities! M. Fouquet went to greet the Conseiller Général and drew him into the group composed mainly of municipal councillors; hats were raised, hands shaken, the weather commented on, the conversation taken up again.

Suddenly, without any apparent order from anyone, the procession had formed and was passing under the line of coloured pennants. Whether the Mayor had given a discreet nod, or the leader of the firemen's band had followed the move of the gendarmes . . . whether the gendarmes had thought the band was about to play, or the first sounds of the church bells had startled everyone into simultaneous action . . . it was impossible to say. And it did not matter. The two gendarmes started walking up the lane, wheeling their bicycles; the band leader gave a quick sign to his men, they lifted their instruments, crashed into the opening bars of a lively march, formed ranks and stepped forward, in almost one movement, and followed the gendarmes. M. Fouquet touched the Conseiller Général on the arm and, still talking together with heads bent, they fell in behind the trumpet

band; the municipal councillors and others followed, then the party of schoolchildren flanked by their teachers, and after them came the villagers who had put on their Sunday clothes, and behind them all were other children skipping along in time to the music, and a few barking dogs.

As the procession went along the lane, past the café and the church and the baker's, people came to their windows or ran down to their garden gates. Children jumped up and down and clapped their hands, old men straightened themselves a little as the vibrant sounds of martial music stirred their weak blood, housewives exchanged comments with their neighbours and called the attention of their children to this and that. 'But they look fine in their uniform, the firemen, and how well they play too. *Ah, les braves Sapeurs-Pompiers!* And see, see the Conseiller, with our Mayor. Oh, what a lovely wreath! And there's the postman, wearing his peaked hat, too. See the boys and girls, how well-behaved they are. She looks after them very well, the schoolmistress, devoted to them she is. *Mais dévouée.* Even the baker's there, and the gravedigger, and old M. Thingummy —everybody! Ah, madame, but how much is all this fine show going to cost the *commune*, I ask you? All this fine music, and the wreath, and the drink for these good-for-nothings later on!'

More villagers were already waiting at the lane-junction where the War Memorial stood. The long procession piled up on itself like a compressed concertina and then spread around as well as it could. An opening was made to let M. Fouquet and the Conseiller come to the front. The councillor who had been carrying the wreath passed it to M. Fouquet, who stepped forward and placed it at the base of

the monument. The trumpet band blared forth a resounding 'Marseillaise', and everyone adopted an attitude of thoughtful respect. The music stopped, M. Fouquet put on his hat, and the two gendarmes with their bicycles set off towards the church, while the procession formed up again behind them. But they did not go back the way they had come; they and the procession followed the little lane that made a semi-circular sweep to approach the church from behind. After all, it was not every day that the *commune* had a chance of seeing such a brave display; better make the most of it. Besides, this was one of the by-lanes that had recently been tarred, as M. Fouquet was pointing out to the Conseiller Général.

The church bells stopped, as though exhausted by their long summoning, when the head of the procession was a few hundred yards away. The band stopped playing too; only a drummer continued to tap out the beat to which, however, few people were marching. On the wide space in front of the weather-beaten Gothic porch the procession halted and spread itself about. Mme Fouquet, a little out of breath, was waiting with other people in the shade of the porch. She and the Mayor and the Conseiller entered the church, followed by most of the procession; the others continued talking outside the porch, or walked away as though urgent business awaited them.

The Café de l'Espérance began to get busy; the owner and his daughter hurried in and out with trays and glasses and coloured bottles. It was the time of day when there was as much pleasure in sitting round the sunny side as in sheltering under the shade to sip a drink. The fair people had now got their side-shows and roundabouts ready; a burst of raucous

music came occasionally from this side of the school as one or other of the showmen tried out his amplifier. Not far away, at the side of the lane near the Post Office, a few men and youths were erecting what looked like a bus shelter. In the Mairie the young schoolmistress and several helpers were clearing the long table, unpacking glasses and bottles, and arranging chairs. There was an air of expectancy about this part of the village, a fluttering activity that increased as the church bells suddenly clanged joyously, and people began to surge forth from the porch into the bright sunshine.

In quick time now the firemen's band formed up, blared forth the first notes of a gay military tune, and set off along the lane to the Mairie, trumpets playing for all they were worth, banner flapping proudly in the breeze. The two blue-uniformed gendarmes with their bicycles were in front again, having reappeared suddenly and mysteriously. The school-children hurried along behind as well as they could, and the rest of the congregation formed a long straggling rear. The sun glinted on the trumpets and trappings of the band as it came to a halt outside the Mairie. Perspiration began to trickle down from under their helmets as the trumpeters, with zest and haste, rendered musical honours to the *commune*. M. Fouquet and the Conseiller arrived to stand outside the Mairie entrance as the last few bars were played. 'They're not exactly a smart military formation', murmured M. Fouquet to his companion, 'but they make plenty of noise all the same.' And he led the Conseiller into the Mairie for the '*vin d'honneur*'.

The long table was now covered with a white cloth, and on it were standing several rows of glistening glasses and, less numerous, tall noble bottles like senior N.C.O.s

marshalling the ranks on parade. Three or four municipal councillors constituted themselves as bottle-openers and glass-fillers. Corks popped, red and white wine flowed into glasses, the glasses were clinked together, chairs were dragged about, and the conversation quickly increased in volume. More and more people tried to get into the Mairie. There were already the whole thirteen councillors, some with their wives, others with friends; there were all the bandsmen, red-faced and still out of breath, tucking their instruments under their arms and taking off their helmets, raising their glasses or mopping their brows. There were the two gendarmes in one corner, the postman and his father in another, and a group of farmers pressing against the voting booths. A few councillors and their Mayor arrived from a neighbouring *commune* and a way was made for them, with some difficulty, to reach the table. More corks were drawn and glasses refilled.

'To the prosperity of the *commune* and the health of Saint Barnabas!' cried the Conseiller Général, just managing to free an arm and raise his glass on high.

'*Vive la Saint Barnabé*', '*A la Saint Barnabé*!'

Good old Saint Barnabas. The schoolmistress was trying to open the window; several people pushed a way out through the door with their glasses. And here came the *curé*, flapping along the lane as fast as his old legs would carry him. Today was the thirtieth time that he had celebrated Mass for the feast of Saint Barnabas in this village. Quick, a clean glass for the *curé*.

'Your health, Monsieur le Curé.'—'And yours, Monsieur le Maire.'

Et vive la Saint Barnabé! But there were no more corks, it

appeared, to be drawn. M. Fouquet felt in his pocket for a sheet of paper, glanced at it quickly, and then put on his glasses. The noise in the room quickly diminished as M. Fouquet began to read his speech. It was quite short, for he knew that everyone was now thinking of lunch, but it contained all the essentials that his listeners expected. The Conseiller was thanked for coming and so increasing the distinction of this Fête Day; the progress and improvements in the *commune* since the previous Fête Day were referred to, with an underlying recognition of the efforts of the people and their unusually devoted representatives. There was much to be done in the year to come, hinted the Mayor, but they would no doubt have the understanding help of higher authority; meanwhile, this afternoon even, the Mayor began his final peroration, the population and its guests could, by patronizing to the limit of their possibilities the special attractions provided by anonymous donors but who were known to everyone, not only benefit their village and gladden the heart of Monsieur le Curé, but could also enjoy themselves in a manner not possible for most villagers and so would long remember this exceptional Fête of St. Barnabas. And may your lunch be a good one.

M. Fouquet breathed heavily and emptied his glass. Would Monsieur le Conseiller like to say a few words? No, he did not think so. A pity, thought M. Fouquet, slipping his speech back into the pocket containing the unused one. The villagers and farmers began to drift away, flushed of face and happy, feeling vaguely that although they had good cause to be proud of their *commune* it was largely due to their intelligence in electing their present council. Outside, the shadows had shrunk right up to the walls. There were few

people remaining outside the Café de l'Espérance but the tables were splashed and stained and covered with dirty glasses. The fair, after a little desultory business, had now closed down. The lorry carrying the trumpet band clattered through the village leaving a swirl of dust to settle behind it. The retreating sound of its engine left an outdoor silence that remained undisturbed. From a tranquil sky the sun glared hotly down on the empty lanes, the houses, the closed Mairie, and a strange new wooden shelter with railway posters on it.

For two or three hours there was little movement in the village; now and again a shutter was closed as the sunshine crept along a wall, and the jovial sounds from that window became less distinct. Then, just as the first young people began to come out of their houses, a strange sight appeared in the lane beyond M. Fouquet's shop. The young people called to others and whole families came to doors and windows to watch an old-fashioned railway engine, pulling one open-sided carriage, trundle slowly through the village. The passengers in the carriage, who were dressed in gaily-coloured clothes of the late nineteenth century, smiled and waved to the onlookers. The guard standing on the step, who in spite of his large, false red nose was easily recognized as the postman, kept blowing his horn to warn traffic of the train's approach.

The onlookers cheered and waved back. Now the secret was out, and everybody—or almost everybody—could tell what they knew. '*Ah, le petit train départemental*', sighed the old people with regret in their eyes. 'Remember when it used to run along here? They were good days, they were. *Ah, la belle époque!*'

'But it's just a tractor with a wooden hood over it', said

the younger ones brutally. 'It was made by the baker's brother, the one who's got a carpenter's business in town.' 'And the schoolmistress has been making the costumes.'— 'That's her, standing up in the carriage now. She thought of it all first.' —'No, it wasn't. It was M. Fouquet. He got the railway posters.'

The *petit train* stopped at its wayside station near the Post Office; the passengers in costume got out and the train began its public service. Every quarter of an hour it left this terminus to make a tour of the village. The fare was ten francs; and the guard issued the tickets, proper tickets made on M. Fouquet's duplicating set, at the little station. The train stopped here and there in the village and people could get on or off; more off than on, for the carriage was always crammed with passengers.

Everyone entered into the fun. The crowd of children who swarmed on the train at first gradually became mixed with young people and family parties, until there were often far more adults than children. There was always a number of people awaiting their turn on the departure platform. They pretended they were seeing the others off, and waved and shouted farewell. The little train began to draw away, the guard blew his horn and leaned sideways from the step, shouting, '*Attention au départ!* Take care—the train's about to leave!' And off it rumbled on another trip, sometimes carrying one or two costumed passengers. Later in the afternoon a ticket inspector appeared on the circuit; and, every time, there was much simulated agitation and fumbling for mislaid tickets, passengers said there were far too many employees for the line to be run at a profit, and the children laughed with excitement.

Meanwhile, the fair was doing good business too and sending forth a cacophony of different records from its loudspeakers. It was a little family fair, one of the many that wander about the French countryside; yet, as with most of them, it was able to put on a circus of sorts by everyone contributing at least one act. And now there were two clowns giving a show at the entrance to the fairground, thus advertising the evening circus.

As the shadows began to spread about the village, the Café de l'Espérance became a little busy again; it was good to sit in the cool shade, sipping an apéritif and watching the groups of people walking about the village. And all the time the *petit train* continued to trundle along the lanes—'five hundred francs a time, it's taking', said villagers who had long ago worked out the sum. Even after dinner, in the gathering dusk, the little train kept plying with two lanterns dangling in front of the engine. It was no doubt contravening several by-laws and transport regulations; but as the Mayor was the only person empowered to take action, no one thought twice about the matter. Even when people came out for a stroll after dinner the indefatigable guard was still blowing his horn. '*Ne descendez pas avant l'arrêt du train!* Don't get down before the train stops!' he called with verve and practice as the train rumbled in. Perhaps he and the driver had entered so much into the spirit of the thing that they were unable to stop. Even when there were only two or three people waiting for a lift back home, the guard sounded his horn—'*Attention au départ!*'—and the driver set off again into the night.

The small circus had a rival attraction, after dinner, when a *bal populaire* gradually increased in size and noise at the

Café de l'Espérance. The tables and chairs had been left outside. In the large room a dozen or so young couples were circulating, with much movement of bodies and jerking of elbows, to music being played lustily by 'Nicolas et ses Boys'. The sounds penetrated into the Mairie where M. Fouquet was sitting at the cleared table with a few of his councillors. The empty bottles and glasses had been stacked in a crate in a corner of the room, but there was another bottle and more glasses at the end of the table where the men were gathered together.

'There's the parking fees to come in from the fair people', one of the Councillors was saying.

'Oh, that's twice nothing', exclaimed the Mayor. 'You've got to take the broad and long view. In black and white there's the wine and firemen's expenses to go down on one side, and precious little on the other. But—but—there's the little train, we'll be able to hire it out to other villages. You'll see, we shall be asked for it later on. And what it's earned today will keep the *curé* quiet for some time and, moreover, save that amount from the supplementary budget.'

'In fact, we might not need a supplementary budget this year.' 'And anyway, it was a good Fête', said another councillor. 'Everybody enjoyed themselves.'

M. Fouquet made no comment, judging that none was necessary. He reached for the bottle and filled the glasses; they were taken up and clinked one against the other.

'*Vive la Saint Barnabé!*'

Chapter IX

THE VILLAGE PRIEST

LE PRESBYTÈRE STANDS close to the village church, as the vicarage does in England, and is also one of the larger houses in the village. But rarely does it attain the proportions of one of those vast Victorian vicarages, built for a parson with a good income, a large family, and several servants, and which is now a white elephant and a constant financial burden to the unfortunate vicar living in it. A village *curé* would not mind nearly so much if his residence were of similar proportions. He does not have to pay for its upkeep; and the rent he pays, if any, is negligible. Since the separation of the Church from the State at the beginning of this century, each church and *presbytère* have been the property and responsibility of the local civil authorities.

More than one *curé*, when this subject has been raised, has spoken of it with some indignation. There was the old *curé* of B., sitting in his dim study: 'Of course, the Separation of the Church was an act of sheer plunder!' Then, after a moment of reflection, he went on in a calmer voice. 'But perhaps it wasn't a bad thing after all—considering the cost of upkeep and building repairs these days. If the civil powers at the time had known how costs were going to rise, they might have thought twice about the matter.' Perhaps there was a malicious little twinkle in his eyes, but the shadows in the room were gathering between us.

This situation would seem to place the *curé* in the power of the Mayor, or at least under constant obligation to him. But such is not the case.

'The Municipality must keep the church in good repair', went on the *curé*, 'and this house, too. There's nothing laid down in black and white; but nevertheless, the right to worship is recognized, and, therefore, the Mayor is obliged to look after my church and house so that the people have the means of worshipping if they want to. I never have any difficulty over getting things done, and neither do any of my colleagues. Only it sometimes happens in a *commune* where the councillors are mostly Communists that the *curé* always has a struggle to get necessary repairs done. And also, of course, some *communes* just cannot afford to do much.'

So the Mayor and not the *curé* has, in general, the worry that is borne by the vicar in England. On the other hand, since all Church property and income were confiscated at the Separation, the *curé's* only regular income now is a small sum from the Bishop's funds, most of which come from church collections all over the diocese. He is dependent upon the generosity of his parishioners for anything beyond the bare necessities of life; there is an annual collection, organized for the *curé* personally, usually carried out by the leading women churchgoers, who call at every possible house. This, *le denier du culte*, can be compared with the Easter collection in England, except that it takes place towards the end of the year, and that the contributions are larger.

The *curé*, then, is in a very different financial situation from his English counterpart. His social standing cannot be so clearly defined. He is often of peasant stock, the brightest son of a small farmer who wishes to be trained as a priest

and so receives, from the Church, a better education than his fellows. As a country priest he understands and can get closer to the majority of his parishioners, particularly the peasantry, than a man of middle-class birth and upbringing. On the other hand he does not take such a large part in the secular activities of his village as an English vicar often does. As he is celibate, there is no vicar's wife to give tea parties, preside at village social functions, and generally maintain the middle-class position of the vicarage. There are generally a few women parishioners who undertake much of the social work of the church and oscillate round the *curé*. But they draw attention to their own social standing rather than to that of the *presbytère*, and they have only a limited importance in the village; to the anti-clerical faction they are *'les punaises de sacristie!'*—the lice in the vestry. Even the villagers who never attend church in England respect the vicar's wife and still regard the vicarage as a middle-class bastion. But this is bordering on the question of how much latent feudalism still exists in English villages, and raises the subject of class-consciousness. Certainly the *presbytère* and the *curé*, to the non-churchgoers, have no social significance.

Yet the *curé* has undoubtedly a greater hold over a larger proportion of his parishioners, in the religious field, than a vicar. His person, representative of the Church, carries far more authority. It is no exaggeration to say that in many areas of the countryside nine out of ten children go to Catechism classes and take their First Communion. This does not mean that they remain as ardent as they grow older, but in the countryside the Roman Catholic Church has practically no competition.

The *curé*, then, has his task facilitated by the power and

practices of the Church to which he belongs; so it seems to an English mind. He no doubt has his difficulties and problems, too, that a vicar has not; and, being only human after all, he talks to you about these before anything else. There is the fact that his enforced celibacy and the lack of family life at the *presbytère* set him apart from his parishioners. 'I live a restricted existence', said another village *curé*, middle-aged and rosy-cheeked, sitting comfortably in an armchair, clad in his long black cassock and with his hands clasped over his stomach. 'Talking as man to man, there are the desires of the flesh to overcome. Another thing is that officially, in the eyes of the civil authorities, I do not exist. Religious instruction is not permitted in the State schools, so I'm completely cut off from the children. You must admit that your vicars receive some help from the schools that I do not.' He reached for one of the two apéritifs he had poured out, sipped a little of it, and then rose. 'I have to leave you for two minutes', he said, pulling out his watch. 'I must go across to the church.' He put on his biretta and went across the garden, sweeping the grass with his cassock; then the Angelus rang out.

Yes, those were no doubt handicaps to him. Yet, when he returned, exactly two minutes later, to continue our conversation and finish his apéritif, he added with satisfaction that about a million children in France receive primary education in church schools; and that, of the young people who receive a higher education, two-thirds of them attend grammar schools run by the Church. His first statement was fairly correct, but his second was exaggerated; for according to official statistics, Catholic Schools educate seventeen per cent of the children in primary schools,

forty-one per cent of those in secondary schools. He might have added, too, that in these days of high taxation it is no bad thing to be non-existent.

'I have two villages to look after', the *curé* went on, leaning back in his armchair. 'The other village has only a hundred inhabitants, but do you think I can persuade any of them to come to the church here? No, they have their own church, it's *their* church, I'm *their curé*, and I have to hold services there for them. And it's five miles away. However, my parishioners have just helped me to buy a car, so I'll be able to get round more easily.'

I wondered whether these villagers, like M. Bresson and his neighbours, had any ulterior motive in claiming the presence of the *curé*.

In those parts of France where villages are very small and scattered, in the Centre and in Lower Normandy, it is quite usual to find one *curé* in charge of three or four *communes*, or parishes. This situation is partly due, as in England, to a lack of priests; and also to the fact that it is now difficult for one *curé* to be maintained by one alone of these sparse parishes.

The portly old *curé* of B. has four scattered parishes in his charge, covering an area almost as large as a rural deanery in England. Two of his churches have neither gas nor electric lighting, so he rarely holds a service in them.

'It would cost far too much to install electric lighting', he says with understanding. 'Look how far the cable would have to come—and that has to be paid for too, you know.' Neither has he a telephone in his *presbytère*. But he is not concerned about this, in spite of the aggregate size of his parishes. '*On vient me chercher*', he explains calmly and

briefly. People fetch him or send for him, by one or other of the 'bush telegraph' systems, whenever his spiritual or nursing aid is needed. For as well as administering the Holy Sacrament to seriously-ill parishioners he also tends sick people in a practical way.

The latter function is not exceptional in the sparsely-populated countryside and the remote villages. The nearest doctor lives several miles away and charges mileage in addition to his services. It frequently happens that a sick peasant or villager will wait if at all possible until some neighbour falls ill too, before asking the doctor to call. Then the mileage fee can be divided; one must be prudent and thrifty before all else. In the meantime, aid is sought from any local person who has taken a first-aid course during conscript service, a herbalist or even a sorceress—for witchcraft has not entirely vanished from the superstitious countryside. A useful person to have in a village, too, is someone capable of giving injections. French doctors have a marked preference for this kind of treatment. There is one *curé* I know who has regular 'surgery hours'. He lives in a large village, the size of M. Fouquet's, and people also come to him from several miles' radius. On certain afternoons his housekeeper takes it for granted that everyone who comes to the door wants to be given an injection.

This semi-medical activity is occasionally mentioned in French literature. In one novel based on rural life in the South, *Le Mas des Chèvres*, by Gérard Péru, a country doctor decides to baptize newly-born babies in retaliation to the *curé*, who frequently attends sick people and prescribes his own herbal remedies.

In the small or scattered villages there is little the *curé*

can do beyond holding church services and visiting, but where the villages are more grouped he is able to organize social gatherings from time to time. If there is a church hall he certainly tries to form a branch of one or other of the Church organizations. One of the most interesting is the Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne, familiarly known as Jacisme—a term that also includes the juvenile and feminine branches of the movement. Its task is the important one of changing the mental attitude of young rural workers—the older generation is deemed to be far too set in its ways—and widening their outlook. This is attempted by persuasion and example, through correspondence courses, and programmes sent from the headquarters of the movement, and with the local help of young progressive farmers chosen by the *curé* for their moral value and Catholic faith. The *curé* stays in the background, acting mainly as chaplain to the group, and leaves the practical work and organizing to the group leaders. While strengthening Catholicism in the countryside, the movement is also doing useful, practical work with methods adapted to the problems and character of each district.

In a small country town the *curé* is able to earn something by giving private lessons, notably Latin. Whatever the kind of parish, he always has a Catechism class, for which he receives payment from most of the parents. And he collects occasional fees for conducting marriages and funerals. His parishioners feel more responsible for their priest than do those in an English parish, largely because he is dependent upon them, partly because of their religion. If not particularly generous with money they supplement their offerings with gifts in kind. The *curé* usually has a large garden

in which he keeps poultry or beehives and grows his vegetables. He has little money, but his necessities at least are provided.

The country *curé* in French literature is portrayed either as a humble man devoted to his parish or cynically as a red-nosed sham whose celibacy is a matter for comic comment. The truth lies somewhere nearer the first than the second. In most villages the *curé* is past middle age, having spent his earlier years militantly in a difficult working-class parish or in a church school or in the mission field, and now leading a peaceful, uneventful life. He has an elderly housekeeper who scolds and coddles him according to her mood, and who can cook simply but well. He rises as early as most of his peasant parishioners and says his Mass every morning in the village church just across the way. His daily devotions and meditations bring a certain routine to his day, though instead of sitting in his book-lined study on a fine day to read his breviary he paces slowly up and down the garden. He is corpulent and ruddy-faced; he has a good palate, and always looks forward to the regular invitations from two or three of his parishioners who keep good tables. In his spare time he puts a faded blue overall over his cassock and works in the garden of the *presbytère*, tending his herb patch or his bees; and he is always ready to throw aside the overall, on receiving a summons, and to hurry away on his bicycle or in his old car, bearing a box that may contain the Host or a first-aid outfit.

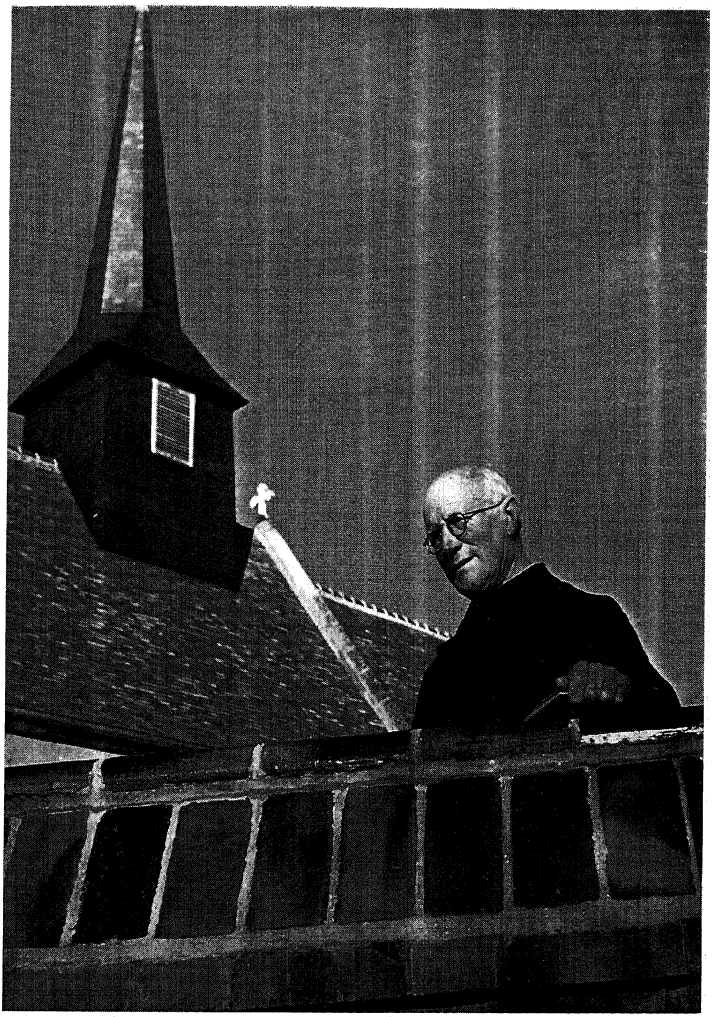
Chapter X

FIRST COMMUNION

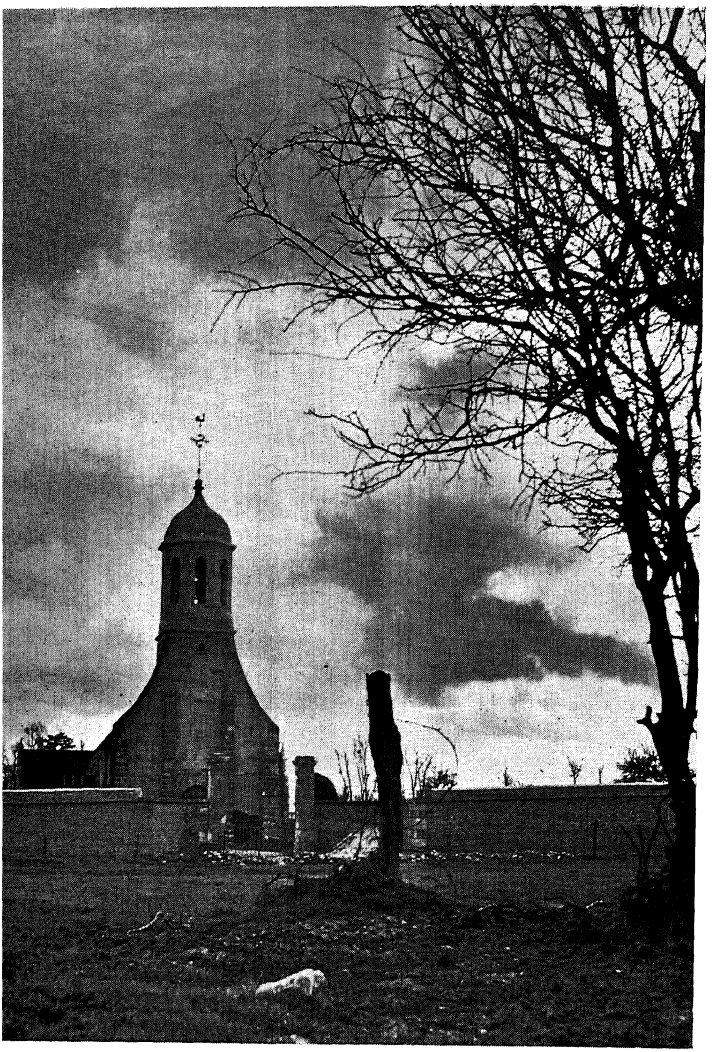
TOMORROW, ASCENSION DAY, would see the culmination of several months' preparation by the Millet family. The eldest son, Jean-Marie, who was eleven, had been attending weekly catechism classes for the past three years so that he could take his First Communion tomorrow. For the past week he had not been to school at all, in common with most children of his age, but had spent much time at the *presbytère* where the religious instruction of the communion candidates was being intensified.

The day of the First Communion is intended by the Catholic Church to be a day of rejoicing, to celebrate the child's admittance to full membership of the Church. In most families, whether or not the parents are regular churchgoers, it is a day of great importance. The manner in which it is observed varies in different families; in some it is a day of religious observation and the limited secular rejoicings are confined to close members of the family, while in others the party that follows the church ceremony is of first importance and as many friends as possible are invited.

The Millet parents took position about half-way between the two extremes. Mme Millet would have gone to church more often if not prevented by the demands of the café-hotel-restaurant business that she and her husband have in this small market town. M. Millet could not have gone less



The village curé. His enforced celibacy and lack of family life set him apart from his parishioners. But his person carries authority and power.



The village church is undisturbed by rival religious sects.

to church in any case; he is one of the numerous Frenchmen who would describe themselves as 'Catholic, non-practising'. He, as a first-class cook, a *maître-queux* who finds his greatest delight and personal satisfaction in preparing a meal for people who can appreciate it, he intended to honour his son's First Communion in a manner that seemed to him the most fitting. At the same time he was careful not to interfere with the religious aspect of the occasion which had lately been greatly impressed on his son by the priest; and which, anyway, Mme Millet was doing her best to preserve in the home.

Jean-Marie, a freckled, fair-haired boy, quiet for his age, looked pleased and affected by all the preparations and thought in connection with his important day, but gave the impression that he would be even more pleased when it was all over. All the day there had been a confused expression on his young face, as though he could not decide whether this obviously great occasion was of spiritual worth or material benefit, whether the complicated religious ceremony was not a more adult method of reviving Father Christmas. The long table in the restaurant was being gradually covered with presents given to Jean-Marie by relatives, some of whom were arriving from long distances for the next day's ceremony, and by friends of the family. The presents were of a kind associated with a twenty-first birthday in a comparable English family: a fountain-pen and propelling pencil, a wrist-watch, camera, writing-case. Jean-Marie kissed the givers on both cheeks and showed the presents to everyone in the room. Some people had brought flowers as well, white lilies chiefly, and the restaurant was already looking festive. The few customers in the café were called in for a drink and

became part of the friendly throng; some of the friends and relatives went into the café to buy each other apéritifs and became customers. Mme Millet was trying to be hostess, mother, and café-waitress all at the same time. There was an atmosphere of inconsequence about any trading or business arrangements this evening; an air of tremulous activity and partly-suppressed excitement was everywhere in the building.

The younger son, Didier, plump-faced like his father and nervously abrupt like his mother, was happy enough in catching the surplus of the attentions directed on Jean-Marie, in sharing his brother's pleasures without having his responsibilities. Just now he was waiting impatiently to be taken to the hairdresser's with his brother and his mother.

'So it's for tomorrow, the Communion?' said one of the customers, to Mme Millet. It was a conversational gambit and not a real question, since the signs were evident and there were two or three dozen other homes in the town where similar preparations were being made.

'Yes', said Mme Millet proudly, as she took off her large white apron. 'We'll be closed all day.' This in itself was a statement indicative of the exceptional importance of the next day. It seemed to remind her afresh of the innumerable things still to be done. 'Come on, Jean-Marie; Didier, where are you?' she cried in her energetic manner. 'It's time to go to the hairdresser's.'

The relatives who were going to stay the night went up to their rooms to unpack or settled down in a corner of the restaurant to talk together; the other relatives and the friends who lived in the town began to return to their homes. M. Millet had retreated to his kitchen, had firmly closed the

door, and was quietly proceeding with his secret preparations. The atmosphere became calmer and steadier.

Then Mme Millet returned with her two children from the hairdresser's, having made an appointment for her own hair to be dressed at seven o'clock the next morning. Jean-Marie looked self-consciously at one of the restaurant mirrors and patted his hair as though to satisfy himself that it really was his own; his nails had been polished too. Didier grinned mischievously. 'Leave your hair alone, Jean-Marie', said his mother sharply. 'I don't want to have to take you to the hairdresser's again. Now where are your things to take to church? It's time we were there.'

'Are you coming, Pierre?' she called hopefully to her husband, wrenching open the kitchen door. 'We have to take his rosary and candle to be blessed for tomorrow. And besides, the *curé* wants to talk to all the parents.'

'Well, you tell me what he says', came the voice of M. Millet. 'There's no point in us both going. And I'm busy.'

But he had to come out of his kitchen shortly afterwards, his sleeves rolled up and a white cloth tied round his neck, wiping his perspiring forehead with his bare forearm. The bearded missionary Father, who had taught Jean-Marie's catechism class, had called for his fee.

'*Le Père* is a good instructor', said M. Millet to the group in the restaurant, when the old missionary had left. 'He always passes all his candidates.'

The light was becoming dim; someone went to the switches. M. Millet hesitated, then passed through the outer door and began to pull down the shutters of his establishment. When the last fell into place he straightened up, this plump little man with calm, reflective eyes, and looked

along the street to where the lights were shining out from the only other hotel-restaurant in the town. There, he knew, two First Communion lunches had been ordered by two of the largest farmers of the district; one for thirty people and the other for twenty. He, himself, had been offered the larger of the two. But no regret showed in his eyes as he looked back at his shuttered windows. Perhaps he was trying to remember the last occasion when his establishment had been closed for more than a day. He and his wife opened for business seven days a week, week after week, year after year even. It was unlikely that he would close like this again until Didier took his First Communion in three years' time. Well, then, for once in a while. . . .

He went back to his kitchen and closed the door firmly behind him. In the restaurant some of the women relatives were beginning to clear part of the table and set it for a simple supper.

Next morning was clear and bright; the sun quickly warmed the cobbles and roof-tops of the strangely quiet little town. A few shops had opened, but after the early stir the town had apparently turned over and gone to sleep again. The Millet establishment, like several others that were shuttered and closed, looked as though it had no intention of opening again for a long time to come. But inside, downstairs in the dim café and the adjoining restaurant, there was increasing confusion and a jostling of bodies as everyone assembled; some forgot a hymn-book or a pair of gloves and had to return to their bedrooms, others tried to help Mme Millet, and nearly all kept saying that they would be late for church. The habits of the Millet household were too fixed to be swiftly adapted to this unprecedented occasion,

the lack of their usual customers was more upsetting than would have been the customers themselves.

Everyone had had breakfast, however, except Jean-Marie, and was dressed ready to go out. Jean-Marie looked as though the final, intense preparations were subduing him. He and his brother, happily smiling at everyone, were both dressed in new grey-flannel suits but Jean-Marie had a wide, white silk armband with a long fringe round his left arm; he was impeccably groomed and, in bearing as well as appearance, immaculate. Mme Millet, excited and flustered, brushed from her face the pink veil of her new hat. 'Oh, that's a nuisance', she exclaimed. 'Jean-Marie, have you got everything? Oh dear, where's your candle?'

Her own mother went to a dark corner of the café, and came back with an ornamental candle the size of a billiard cue. Jean-Marie took it, and everyone stood aside to give him passage to the street door.

'And haven't the Bressons arrived yet?' cried Mme Millet, looking around the group of relatives as though they were sheltering someone. 'I do hope their car hasn't broken down. And where's Pierre got to?'

M. Bresson is godfather to Jean-Marie, and he and his wife were expected to arrive from their village some fifty miles away. Just at that moment there sounded the loud blaring of a motor-horn in the street. 'There they are!' cried Mme Millet, again brushing away her pink veil and hurrying to open the front door. And there stood M. Bresson, almost filling the doorway, his felt hat pressed down over his round, ruddy face, and with his wife stooping forward a little to peer over his shoulder. 'Ah, it must be here then, the First Communion!' he cried, raising his arms and feigning surprise

as he saw Jean-Marie, grinning sheepishly and holding the long candle. There quickly followed much hand-shaking and kissing, and Mme Millet hurriedly led away Mme Bresson to tidy herself.

M. Millet appeared from the kitchen and took his old friend back to it for a coffee and cognac. M. Bresson was in high spirits, full of the smiling spring morning and the expansive air of the countryside he had passed through. His deep hearty voice rolled around the kitchen and easily penetrated into the café. He brought more than a breath of freshness into the stale atmosphere of the café; and evoked other First Communion parties likewise assembling, by car and cart along the lanes he had travelled, and then hurrying to the village church.

Now at last everyone was ready to leave. M. Millet and his friend drained their glasses of cognac and followed the family into the street. A procession was formed with surprising rapidity and agreement. Jean-Marie led the way with his candle, followed by his mother and his father's mother with Didier between; he had already succeeded in unravelling two fingers of his new white knitted gloves. Then came the other grandmother and M. Millet's father; Mme Bresson and M. Letellier, a brother-in-law of the Millets, an unmarried sister of Mme Millet, Mme Letellier and her two eldest children, closely followed by M. Millet and M. Bresson, who managed to give the impression they were trying to catch up the head of the procession, while still remaining in the rear.

In the streets leading to the assembly point, behind the *presbytère*, there were similar family processions, some with a boy at the head and others with a girl dressed in an ankle-length, white muslin dress with long veil and carrying the

inevitable long candle in one hand and new prayer-book in the other. People were standing at their doors to watch; an unusual number, dressed in their Sunday clothes, were hurrying towards the church.

The bells began to ring out loud and clear above the town; and, on this bright spring morning with a promise of summer, several faint echoes came from villages across the fields. All over the countryside now a combined summons was ringing forth. And along the by-lanes and cart-tracks there were more First Communicants being carried to village churches, some sitting between their parents in cars that bumped and hooted or in carts that jogged and jolted, and others even riding bicycles with the rest of the family strung out behind and the father struggling with the precious candle himself.

M. and Mme Millet stood together among the crowd of adults at the assembly point, keeping their eyes on Jean-Marie, looking satisfied yet a little helpless now that affairs were out of their hands. The nuns from the church school were ushering the boys and girls into two separate groups. The *curé* arrived in full regalia, attended by his acolytes and the missionary Father and followed by the choir. The First Communicants joined the singing procession, and the colourful spectacle began to move across the market square; the parents, relatives, and friends walked along on both sides of the procession, accompanying it on its short tour of the central part of the town and into the church.

The church was brilliantly lit and decorated with all the trappings and exuberance of the Catholic faith. The service was long; the religious fervour gradually mounted in the choir and the front of the nave, the smell of incense spread

to the side aisles and beyond, the scraping of chairs and the muttering of conversation increased. Two hours after entering, M. and Mme Millet stood up with all the other parents of the First Communicants and raised their right hands, at the request of the priest, to associate themselves with his blessing of the children. Soon afterwards, the priest went into the pulpit to announce to the parents that their children 'were about to be returned to them'.

'They are in a state of exultation and weak with hunger', he said in clerical tones. Then he became a practical Frenchman. 'I would remind you not to give them too much to eat for lunch. At least, see that they eat slowly. I should like you to put a brake on their appetite—*freiner l'appétit*. We don't want any accidents at vespers—which will be at four o'clock. That should give everyone time to enjoy their lunch. Vespers should not be very long. I think I can promise that the service will not last more than an hour and a half. And now—*bon appétit*.'

The wide doors were flung open and the sunshine immediately streamed quickly into the church as if it had been waiting a long time for admittance. The congregation poured slowly out and spread around the entrance like thick treacle from a jar on its side. The people stood in small groups, each with a young communicant in its centre, chatting vivaciously with a release of energy and an abandonment of restraint. Then the groups gradually moved homewards, each shepherding its proud youngster.

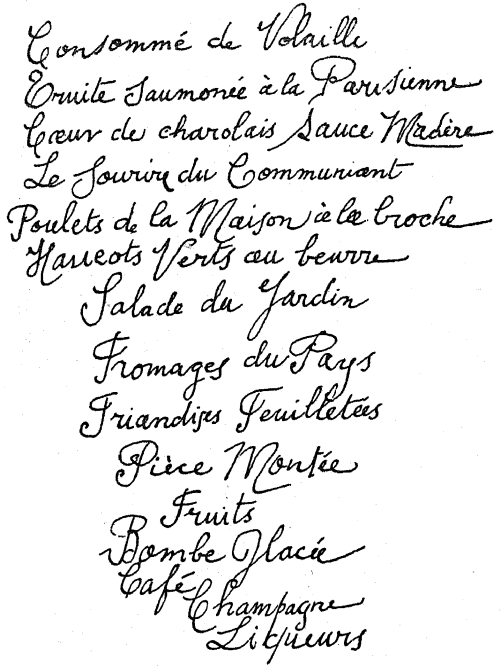
When the Millet group arrived back home M. Millet hurried to his bedroom and changed into his working clothes. He appeared again briefly before vanishing, with a swift, secretive smile, into the kitchen. The women quickly set the

table for lunch, and this was swiftly served, and soon eaten. M. Millet made another short appearance, to eat some of the cold meat, vegetables and cheese as though taking a hasty snack before attempting a really important task. Everyone, including the children, realized that there was no time to waste over lunch if everything was to be ready in time for dinner. Already some of the women were clearing the table, putting another to the end of it, and beginning to set both. The sister of Mme Millet, a village schoolteacher, installed herself at a café table with a pile of folded cards; on the front of each was printed 'Communion Solenelle' in silver lettering, and written at the top was the name of a guest. She began to copy a menu carefully, in copper-plate writing, into each card. Mme Millet put on her hat with the pink veil again and took Jean-Marie to vespers, accompanied only by her mother.

The other guests began to arrive, friends who lived in the town, and the café became noisy and lively. Bottles and glasses were fetched from behind the counter and soon accumulated on the tables. It looked as though the establishment, knowing well the generous nature of the owners, was acting as host in their absence. Mme Millet had been expected back by now; but perhaps the *curé* had lunched well or been optimistic about vespers. When she eventually returned she confirmed that vespers had started an hour later than expected. Hurriedly, she took off her hat and coat, put on a white overall, and tied it at the back with a large bow. It was an action that firmly marked the end of the religious phase of the day and properly inaugurated the secular celebration.

'*On peut se mettre à table!*' The cry was passed along, as

news that dinner was about to be served and as a warning to cease drinking apéritifs. The two dozen guests gradually moved into and along the restaurant, admiring the set table, the resplendent white stretch of tablecloth with its flowers, its shimmering glass and cutlery; at the far end of the restaurant, at right-angles to the main table, was a smaller one for Jean-Marie and the other children. In due course everyone found his or her name on one of the menus that were lying on the plates, and sat down. The menu was impressive and the careful handwriting became a little cramped towards the bottom of the card.



'Pierre says he's sorry to hear that M. Bresson is on a diet,' said Mme Millet as she brought the soup from the kitchen.

'Eh?' exclaimed M. Bresson, startled, his mind shaken to its core so that it needed the gust of laughter that swept down the table to make him feel relieved. 'Ah yes', he said, recovering himself and tapping the menu. 'But this is just what the doctor ordered.'

The large serviettes were unfurled, like flags being hoisted to the mast at the beginning of an important engagement; the women spread them across their bosoms and tucked the ends under their armpits, the men stuffed one end into their collars, to one side, so that the serviettes dangled ready for instant use and yet did not interfere with the business of eating, talking, and drinking. The bottles of Chablis and Saint Emilion were uncorked and set in circulation. The dishes, as they were brought to the top end of the table by Mme Millet, were passed to and fro and up and down, to the accompaniment of loud, cheerful conversation and large, expressive gestures. The empty dishes and used plates began to accumulate on the sideboards; they were joined by the first empty bottles and then by some of the vases of flowers, for the table was getting congested and the free flow of talk was being hindered.

Jean-Marie, sitting in the middle of the children's table, duly produced a beatific smile when 'Le Sourire du Communiant' was reached on the menu. This was a small glass of spirits for everyone to drink to the health of Jean-Marie. Perhaps it was thought that if this toast were left to the end of the repast Jean-Marie would long ago have fallen asleep and been carried to bed. Now, it was not a break in the orderly procession of the dishes, but rather a deliberate

breathing-space, a pause for digestive appreciation of what had gone before and for the palate to anticipate what was still to come.

Not until the chicken had been served and the first mouthfuls were being tasted did M. Millet appear in the restaurant. Everyone stood up in homage; these country people, the village grocer, the schoolteacher, the bent old grandparents, they all understood this sort of greatness and they clapped their appreciation. M. Millet fingered his rolled-up shirt-sleeves, smiled bashfully, and sat down opposite his wife. The pace of the repast was never more than a leisurely dignified saunter with many pauses for a drink by the way; and as even this pace began to slow down so the conversation became more animated and the gestures more expansive. M. Bresson's deep voice rolled jovially around the room above all other sounds; even Mme Letellier had forgotten her usual restraint and strict observance of formalities.

The noble cheeses, the Camembert, Livarot, Port Salut, and Roquefort, made a tour of the table. The 'Pièce Montée' was fetched by M. Millet; it was a tall cake covered with chocolate cream, shaped as a cone and surmounted by a tiny figure of a boy *en Communiant*. The 'Bombe Glacée' melted in everyone's mouth during an awed silence, while another champagne cork popped discreetly from a bottle.

It was past midnight when the eating came to an end. The children, who were almost asleep anyway, were carried off to bed. And M. Bresson began the singing, as the coffee and bottles of liqueurs were passed along the table. The crumpled serviettes were cast on the table one by one; not as colours being struck but as stained and honourable standards being laid to rest. They joined the empty and half-full bottles,

the used glasses, and the dishes with remnants of food round their edges; all these were scattered about the table in happy confusion. People looked at each other with much friendliness and contentment, as though they could not possibly imagine a better company in which to be.

It was Mme Bresson who first made a move to leave the table; after all, she and her husband had to open their shop in a few hours' time. With a clattering of chairs nearly everyone rose and followed M. Bresson into the dark street to see whether his car would start. Mme Millet's sister, the schoolteacher, hurried upstairs to prepare to leave, for it had been arranged that the Bressons would make a detour to take her back to her village.

A confusion of hand-shaking and cheek-kissing slowly disentangled itself. M. Bresson again kissed Mme Millet on both cheeks. '*Pour une Communion, c'était une Communion!*' he boomed as he got into his driving-seat.

The car started off towards the dawn that was breaking through the night sky.

Chapter XI

COUNTRY UNIFORMS

IN MANY A French village the visiting postman and the local constable are two of the best-known people, if only by virtue of daily contact, and are often thought of with affection. *Le facteur, le garde-champêtre;* two uniformed officials who appear in the background of most French books and films dealing with country life. Mention of them to any French person usually causes a grateful smile to appear; because, perhaps, in spite of the uniform their individualism bursts through.

The postman trundling his muddy, parcel-laden bicycle over his long country round, is an old friend to everyone he meets. In his dark-blue uniform, his peaked hat stuck on the side of his head and with his satchel slung over his shoulder, he is a familiar figure that is not allowed to pass without a handshake and a chat and sometimes a drink besides. He collects and dispenses news of the district; he is one of the principal participants in the 'bush telegraph' to which the rural people remain faithful. It is as though the Post Office had reinforced this ancient system as a forfeit when setting up in competition. The post he carries is almost a living thing to him. 'There's only a tax demand for old Aristide up the lane; he's got enough worries at the moment, so I might as well leave it till tomorrow.'—'What's this? A Paris store sending a catalogue to widow Chose? They don't

know what they're about—the café-keeper's daughter is a better destination for that.' He may well go out of his way to visit a farm, not having anything to deliver, because he knows that the family always has a letter ready on this day in the month.

The country postman '*tutoie*'s most of his rural customers and, especially in remote districts, shares a peasant family's anxious excitement over the opening of a letter, which is an unusual event in itself. The following extract from a feature column in a West-Country paper rings true to the French reader:

' "Still nothing for you", the postman said to me.

"But I'm not expecting any letters."

"Haven't you replied to your cousin then, who asked you if you wanted any seed-potatoes?"

"No. But that reminds me, I hadn't finished reading his letter."

"He was talking about the price of cauliflowers, you were telling me the last time."

"Postman, you've got a memory that I envy. Now here's my glasses, and if there's anything interesting in my cousin's prose you can let my friends know, as you go on your round."

"Well, what's he got to say?"

"Listen——" '

To people in isolated farmhouses *le bon facteur* is not only a main contact with the outside world but also saves them making a journey into the village. He collects letters, sells stamps, and undertakes Post Office business. In fact, such relations with the postman are advised in the official Post Office calendar: 'If you live in the country, entrust your postal

business to the postman who visits you. For a slight recompense he will save you a journey.'

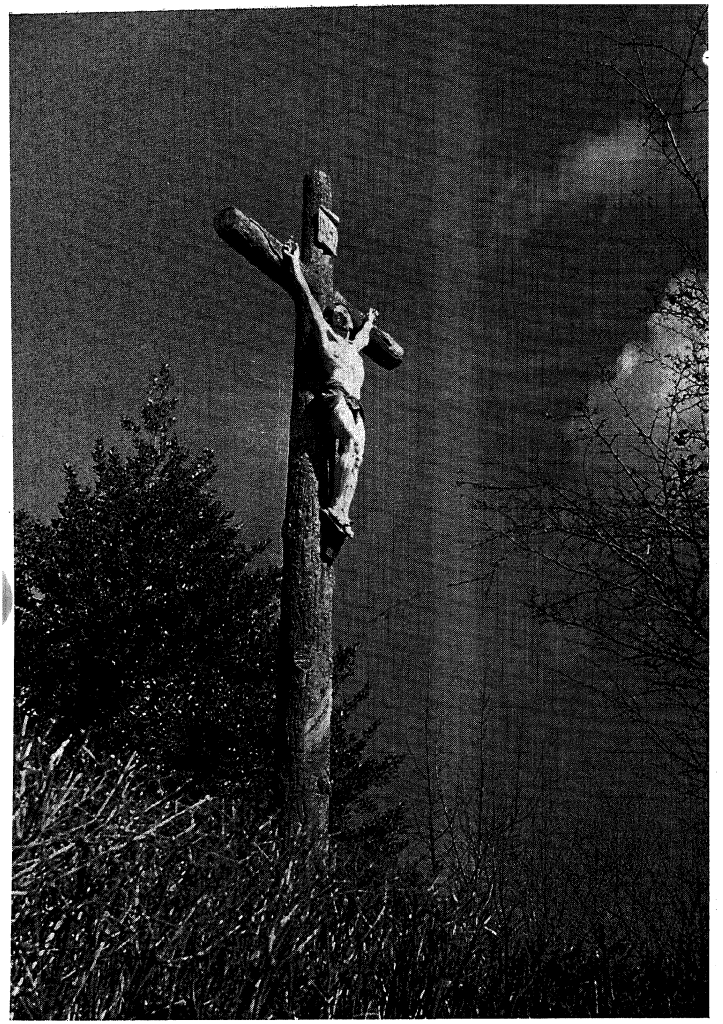
The postman sets out in the morning from the *chef-lieu* or some large village with a Post Office that distributes letters; he returns in the late afternoon having covered twenty miles or so, been offered a drink at various stages, a late breakfast at this farmhouse and a snack at another, and now with several commissions to effect before he finishes his day's work.

He is an essential figure in the slow-paced countryside and accords well with it; a lovable character to the French, who cannot imagine him mechanized and modernized.

To say that the *garde-champêtre* has a uniform is to exaggerate in many cases. He ought to have a uniform, *en principe*, and indeed does in small country towns. But in the villages he is supplied with little more than a peaked hat and a sturdy pair of boots; the rest is his own affair. He is often thought of as a comic figure, this rustic man-of-all-work. In many villages he combines his job with that of roadmender, gravedigger, or bell-ringer. He is general errand-boy to the Mairie, delivering forms and documents, fetching people whose presence is required at the Mairie, putting posters and notices on display, and acting as 'town-crier' when necessary. By fulfilling all these occupations he is indispensable to his *commune;* but his official importance lies in the fact that he is the personal representative of the Mayor for keeping law and order in the *commune*.

The position of the *garde-champêtre* is curiously similar to that of the village constable in England until the County Police Acts of 1839, although the latter was unpaid and the former receives a salary from the Municipal budget. The

The younger brother will soon be attending the catechism class—for three years, with his First Communion at the end of them.



'All over the countryside now a combined summons was ringing forth. Along the by-lanes First Communicants were being taken to village churches.'

English village constable had his staff of office, whereas the poor *garde-champêtre* has to rely on the authority of his peaked hat and his personality. But he, like his English counterpart of 150 years ago, is appointed by the village authorities (although his appointment has to be confirmed by the Préfet); he, too, is sworn in before a Justice of the Peace. Similarly, he does not form part of any larger territorial organization nor has he any power outside the area of his appointment.

The police duties with which he is mainly concerned are likewise of limited, local importance. He ensures the observance of by-laws, particularly those prohibiting dogs from straying and making a nuisance, the depositing of rubbish in the lanes, and the making of undue noise at night. If a person commits one of these or other offences the *garde-champêtre* can issue a *procès-verbal* on the spot. This is a summary method of fining the person and a cheap judicial procedure for both parties; the offender pays the amount at the Mairie, whence it is forwarded to the *percepteur*. The *garde-champêtre* is supposed to keep order in cafés and at public meetings. If a quarrel should break out between neighbours the cry might well be raised 'Run and fetch the *garde-champêtre*!' And the good man, who is perhaps digging a ditch or preparing a grave or sticking up a poster, casts aside his spade or his brush, reaches for his peaked hat if he is not already wearing it, and hurries manfully to the scene hoping that his presence—or threat of a fine—will have a calming effect.

In the event of a serious crime being committed within the *commune* the *garde-champêtre* makes haste to notify the Gendarmerie. Conversely, when a gendarme goes to a

village to pursue a line of inquiry or make a routine call he usually seeks the aid of the *garde-champêtre*, if only to keep himself informed of local rumours. In such ways is the *garde-champêtre* an outpost of a national police force, not linked to it officially yet serving as an auxiliary, a sort of special constable, at the lowest level.

The Gendarmerie provides the uniform that is seen most often in the countryside. Its members wear a dark-blue uniform in winter, khaki drill in summer, with leggings and peaked hats. It is a para-military force, the smallest unit being a *brigade* commanded by a senior N.C.O. and stationed in the *chef-lieu* of the *canton* for which it is responsible. It corresponds to a county police force in England only because it is the body that deals with law-breaking and crime in the countryside, the villages, and the small towns. Otherwise, the Gendarmerie is totally different in organization; in times of grave public disorder, such as strikes and riots, it is called upon as the Army might be in England—though not to the extent of doing the work of the strikers. Yet, in the countryside, the gendarme is the nearest equivalent to the English village policeman, the representative of law and order who is met along the lanes in much the same way, riding his bicycle round his beat.

But a closer comparison with the County Constabulary, at least with the members stationed in small country towns, is the Police Municipale. These policemen are found in towns with populations of five to twenty-five thousand. In the larger towns the police belong to the national force, the Police d'Etat. A country town of ten to fifteen thousand people has three or four municipal policemen—a *brigadier* and two or three *agents de police*—who thus correspond

more exactly to a County Borough police force in England. The *brigadier* and his men are, too, a small autonomous force; their powers do not extend beyond the boundaries of the Municipality or Borough, and they are paid from the local budget.

A smaller country town, with a population of approximately only five thousand, yet of considerable importance in French rural life, usually has just one lone *agent de police*. He, as a person, bears comparison with the English country 'bobby' of a generation ago; in a French sense he is a kind of glorified *garde-champêtre*. But here, at last, is a uniformed figure of the French countryside who is a guardian of law and order and who can properly be described by the word 'policeman'.

He wears a blue serge uniform, the open-necked jacket showing collar and tie, and a dark-blue peaked hat bearing the arms of the town. The only part of his uniform that looks smart and cared-for is the leather belt and shoulder-strap with pistol-holster attached. He, like the *garde-champêtre*, is appointed by the Mayor, and his duties are similar though naturally on a much larger scale. He is responsible for 'assuring public order, safety, and salubrity'; he can inspect weights and measures and summon people for selling food unfit for human consumption; he regulates traffic when necessary, notably on market days, and reports on accidents; and has to be on duty whenever there is a public assembly, from a funeral cortège to the Fourteenth of July torchlight procession. In the case of serious crime in his area he makes the preliminary investigations before deciding to call in the Gendarmerie or the equivalent of the C.I.D.

* * *

One policeman, or at the most two, to five thousand people, with the task of maintaining law and order in the town and the countryside within the *commune*, seems surprisingly inadequate on the face of things. A similar area in England would have a proper police station in the town, with a station-sergeant and two or three constables sharing duties. Are, then, French country people more law-abiding than the English? This is hardly likely; certainly the French have less respect for the law. Or does an *agent de police* work harder than his English counterpart? Perhaps it is that he has fewer routine duties; certainly a number of duties and inquiries carried out by the County Constabulary are, in France, left to the Gendarmerie and to special branches of the national police force. But the *agent de police*, being responsible only to the Mayor, has more freedom of action than the county constable. And, above all, he tackles his task in a different manner.

I used to wonder about this, until I had some contact with the *agent* in a small country town where I was living. He was a tall, slim, rosy-cheeked young man who was often seen dashing about the town on an ancient bicycle much too small for him, inherited from his stumpy predecessor, his long white truncheon swinging from his revolver-belt, and his peaked hat clinging to the back of his head. He used to create in my mind an impression of some inconsequential telegraph messenger; it was difficult to believe that his pistol contained anything more harmful than water. Yet the town was always peaceful and as law-abiding as a French town ever is.

He lived with his wife in a couple of rooms at the back of the Mairie, in a part of the building that also housed the *secrétaire de mairie*, the headmaster of the school, and their

families; and an adjoining room served as his office. Whenever he needed to use a telephone he had to go downstairs into the secretarial office; or along to the café-restaurant on the first corner. He usually preferred the latter, and it was here, too, that he had lunch whenever his wife was away at work.

Towards twelve-thirty on these days the tall young policeman would come into the kitchen by the back door, wrenching off his belt and jacket and peering eagerly into all the saucepans and casseroles on the range.

'Ah, it's good to get all this ironmongery off', he usually cried, tossing his truncheon on top of the rest. 'What's there to eat, to begin with, *chef? Les pommes à l'huile?* Ah, there's nothing I like better.'

He sat down at the little table in the corner of the kitchen and unrolled his serviette. Seen at close quarters, and without his uniform of authority, he did not appear so precocious. In fact, he had more than ten years of police service to his credit. He had served several years in this town, as a member of the Police d'Etat at first; and then had resigned from that force to stay on here as Police Municipale when, in 1951, a re-organization of the Police d'Etat had taken place and its uniformed members been withdrawn from towns with a population of less than 25,000. He had thus changed from a State to a Municipal employee; his prospects of promotion were greatly reduced, but as he said at the time 'I'm more or less my own boss here, and life is better here than in a city, where I'd be sent.'

In the kitchen one lunchtime the red-haired waitress, who had lived in Paris, picked up his truncheon and swung it around his head. 'You ought to have a taste of it, all you

flics!' she cried. 'Why don't you keep it for thieves and gangsters and not go knocking the workers about with it?'

'Listen—that truncheon does nothing more deadly than directing traffic on market day. And don't get me mixed up with the Paris *flics*. I don't know what goes on there and I don't care. Here, we bring as few charges as possible. The Mayor agrees—no footling charges, as little paper-work as possible. Of course, if someone breaks a by-law, or rides a bike at night without a light, it must be pointed out to him. If it happens a second time—warning. The third time, of course, it's getting serious. I'd begin to think he was having me on.' He spread his hands expressively over the table and looked at me grimly. 'Still, after all, live and let live. Especially when we all live in the same town.' He collected our plates and passed them to the washing-up hatch. 'Another ten-per-cent service charge saved', he said with his schoolboy grin.

'*Ecoute*', he went on, leaning towards me. '*Écoute*——' He always found it more natural to address the world familiarly in the second person singular. 'I was coming back home from a few days' leave last week, at night, in an old car I'd just bought. The car documents were still in the previous owner's name—I hadn't had time to get them changed. Oh, and one of the headlights didn't work. Still——' He dismissed these trifles with a wave of the hand. 'On a country road I was signalled to stop by two gendarmes. "What's it this time, *mon petit père?*" I said to one of them, a big fat chap. Ah, you should have heard him go up in the air! Address me properly, he shouts. Well, between you and me, supposing I went on like that every time someone called me "old chap" or "chum"? Ah, these gendarmes. Then when

he found what was wrong with the car he started off again. Well, I mean to say. They can't have anything better to do, these gendarmes. Of course, when I produced my police card he quietened down a bit.'

It was common knowledge that the *agent* could be found in this kitchen on certain days between the hours of twelve and two. But on only one occasion was he sent for during this sacred period. A drunken man, explained the messenger apologetically, was making a nuisance of himself at the bus-stop.

The young policeman hurriedly arrayed himself and left the kitchen with his mouth still full of food. Half an hour later he returned. 'The man was drunk all right, but he was ill too. So I sent for the doctor. After all, supposing I'd run the man in, and he'd pegged out in my little cell? I'd have been on the carpet, wouldn't I? Besides, I've only got one cell and I like to keep it free for emergencies.' He sat down at table and sent one of the children to pin a piece of paper on the door of his office. On it he had written 'Back at two-thirty.'

He used the café as a sort of supplementary office. It was here that he conducted some of his discreet interviews and kept in touch with public rumours. One day just before lunchtime he came into the café with one of the butchers of the town, about whom there had been several complaints of selling underweight. Our *agent* talked to him in a low earnest voice as they stood together at one end of the bar. 'So you see,' he ended on a higher note, 'don't give me any more provocation. Understand?' Then, dismissing the matter by patting the other on the shoulder, he pointed towards their two empty apéritif glasses. 'And it's you who's paying for the drinks!'

On market days he went round the stalls on a tour of

inspection. At least, so he would have called it; but there was nothing ponderous or studied about it. He merely strolled around shaking hands with the stallholders and a number of the shoppers, having a brief chat here and there; on some days he did a little shopping for himself, continuing his saunter holding a cheese and a couple of pork chops. But his eyes were busy all the time, and his regular visit served as a deterrent.

He was always prepared to give shopkeepers a hand to remove crates or other obstructions from the pavements, or at least to leave room for one person to pass without stepping into the roadway. Technically, he was always on duty; everyone knew him as the *agent de police* whether he was in uniform or dressed in a civilian suit. Sometimes, when out with his wife, in the evening, he dallied in a café where there was a party or a meeting until after eleven o'clock. 'Yes, eleven is the closing hour, in principle,' he would admit. 'But if people are behaving themselves, what's wrong with letting them carry on?'

He has become part of the life of the town. No torchlight procession on the eve of the Fourteenth of July would now be complete without him leading it, gangling along like an unhorsed cavalier, walking in time to the martial music of the Sapeurs-Pompiers with quick steps that are much too short for his height, and making a comic little turn every time he changes the direction of the procession.

And when I saw him, later in our acquaintance, dashing about the town on his undersized bicycle and stopping abruptly here and there to shake someone by the hand, I understood why he was granted a bonus by the Municipal Council. It was, no doubt, in recognition of the fact that rarely are any of the by-laws too flagrantly violated.

Chapter XII

SPORT AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

WHEN THE CRICKET season is well under way in England the French are following, with a more lively though not perhaps as deep an interest, the progress of the 'Tour de France', the cycle race all round the country. Nearly every day during the month of July some long stretch of main road, one hundred miles and more of it, is lined progressively by country people waiting to see the 'Tour' go past. On the day when it is due to pass through any given district there is a great trek from the villages and small towns towards the main highway. Two hours before the estimated time of its passage, as given in the newspapers and on the wireless, the lanes and secondary roads for miles around are busy with an unaccustomed amount of traffic of all kinds, bicycles and buses, horses and carts, lorries and cars. An hour or so later they have reached the main road at some point, where gendarmes are preventing any vehicle not connected with the 'Tour' from using the road. The country traffic parks just off the main road, the long lines of assorted vehicles quickly increase as the minutes pass, and the people begin to spread along the verges.

Most of them are youths and young men, but there is also a good proportion of young women and older men. The waiting period now is agreeably spent in discussing yesterday's performances in the race and hotly arguing over future

progress, in adjusting cameras, and in watching a newspaper van or advertising car tearing along the empty stretch of road. The first traffic policeman on a motor-cycle inspires several rumours of the distance the leading racers have to come. The official cars and the advertising vans accompanying the 'Tour' increase in frequency; then twenty or thirty of them pass in a mass at the speed of a racing cyclist, a long procession of wireless vans, reporters' cars, motor-cyclists, converted jeeps carrying spare wheels in racks. The people lining the road crane forward; but are kept back by two moving files of traffic policemen on motor-cycles. Suddenly some coloured figures appear over the brow of the road, and before the onlookers with cameras can get them properly in focus the whole seventy or eighty cyclists have whirred onwards, and the 'Tour' has passed by until next year.

If the onlookers are fortunate they may see, first, two or three cyclists with heads bent racing several hundred yards in advance of the main pack, trying to effect a breakaway. But usually, unless the finish of the day's lap is less than fifty miles away, all the competitors come past in a serried collection of brightly-coloured singlets and bare arms and legs, not unduly exerting themselves, some of the riders in the middle free-wheeling and chatting to each other as though they really are touring the countryside.

Nevertheless, the crowd lining the road is happy and contented. Most of them have had a glimpse of the famous 'Yellow Jersey', worn by the competitor having the best aggregate time. They have seen the spectacle that for many days to come will continue to hold the headlines in the newspapers, have its progress reported hourly over the wireless,

and be shown on the screens of all the cinemas. They are as satisfied as English people who have seen part of a Test Match. To go and see the passage of the 'Tour' is an eventful half-day in the annual round of the country people; and besides, it is a free show. The young men and youths who have come on bicycles set off to return home, racing in small groups along the lanes, inspired by their recent glimpse of famous professionals to try to emulate them.

Many of these young men belong to their local cycling club. These clubs, unlike English cycling clubs, have practically no social activities; the members do not ride together at week-ends to tour the countryside. They are purely masculine, and practically their only reason for existing is to promote this countryside sport of massed cycle-racing.

On any Sunday in summer, when touring in France, you may stumble upon a local cycle race. Though 'stumble' is hardly an exact description; if on foot or on a bicycle yourself the race is more likely to descend upon you, and if in a car you will be told by some official to stop and wait or to use another route. You may be walking or riding peacefully along a quiet lane when you suddenly hear rapidly approaching sounds of whistles and hooters. A car sweeps round a corner with its hooter blowing continuously. The man standing up in it, blasting away on a whistle, waves to you to get out of the way. 'Look out—the cycle race!' he shouts. The car is closely followed by a motor-cyclist. '*Attention aux coureurs*,' he bawls like a gale. 'Look out—the cyclists!' There are two or three houses near the next bend in the lane, and people are leaning over their garden gates. 'Look out—the cycle race!' they cry, motioning desperately. And then there is a sudden whirring of wheels and round the bend

comes a dense pack of cyclists, a whole cohort of youths wearing coloured singlets, shorts, and jockey-caps, all bent over their handlebars. They are taking up the whole width of the lane and you barely have time to leap into a field. Then they have vanished. All is quiet again, except for a faint hooting and blowing of a whistle in the distance. The people go back into their houses until the race comes round again.

That was a French cycle race. Even if you do not meet it again during the next hour or two you are likely to see evidence of its approach or passing; small crowds of people coming away from crossroads, and a pair of gendarmes here and there preventing vehicles from using certain roads. For the club organizing the race has to apply to the Préfecture for approval of the course, and when this has been obtained the competitors have a certain priority.

Such a local road-race attracts a large number of spectators, particularly from the country town where the club has its headquarters. Having seen the massed start, which takes place in, perhaps, the market square and at a time suitably arranged to enable everyone to have lunch at leisure beforehand, the spectators then begin strolling into the lanes to take up positions on the circuit of the race. As far as possible any hills in the district are included on the circuit, and if there is one just outside the town the finishing line is usually drawn near its summit. This, according to the organizers, has the advantage of preventing close finishes and arguments. It also makes a pleasant Sunday afternoon walk for the townspeople. They saunter up the long hill, straggling across the roadway, family parties with prams, old people with sticks, and young couples arm-in-arm. They all know they have

plenty of time to climb the hill; there may be another hour before the race is due to come round again.

There is a leisurely holiday atmosphere to all this, in contrast to the dashing cyclists who, somewhere, are pedalling furiously along the lanes. Near the top of the hill some enterprising café-owner has put up a *buvette*, a wayside stall already doing a good trade with its drinks. As the people reach the hill-top, with its magnificent view over the valley below, they settle down on the grass verge or in an open pasture, and wait; the children play around, the elder people lie back and close their eyes to the sun, the young couples snuggle closer together.

After a time, someone notices a moving band of colours on the road below. Up from the valley comes the sharp warning of a whistle, followed by the blowing of a hooter. The people wake from their afternoon nap, the children leave their play, and the couples their love-making. Everybody lines the roadway, bending forward to get a better view. As the cyclists pass, standing on their pedals, the spectators yell encouragement to them; and they, out of breath though they are, shout back suitable comments to any criticism they receive. The onlookers wait for a few stragglers, who may well decide to retire from the race when they reach the *buvette*, and then everyone returns to the grass verge or field until the race comes round again for the finish.

These local cyclists are amateurs who, however, sometimes win a pound or two in such a race. The prizes are given by local tradespeople and leading citizens; and the club may receive an annual subsidy of ten or twenty pounds from the town's budget. The young club members are passionately fond of their sport, and all hope to become good enough to

take part in one of the longer, higher-class road races organized by the regional newspaper or some apéritif firm. Even, perhaps, to graduate to the 'Tour de France' itself, by being invited to join the regional team.

In winter the cycle races are replaced by football matches as the main outdoor organized sport. Most large villages now have a sports field which, as cricket is unknown, becomes a pasture again in summer. There are district football leagues and village teams everywhere, provided the village is large enough, though there are fewer in the south than north of the Loire. Although football is a national sport it is not followed with the same widespread interest and intensity as in England. An increasingly popular winter sport is '*le basket*', a vigorous game more akin to American basket-ball than English netball. More and more sports clubs in country towns are getting together basket-ball teams composed of their tallest, most energetic young men. The girls' teams, where they exist, are very much a secondary concern. If you tell members of a male basket-ball team that you are surprised to see them playing what is regarded as a girls' game in England, they either feel insulted or consider it as yet another peculiarity of the English.

In spite of the increase of these sports it cannot be said that the French are really happy with team games, any more than with mechanical equipment. 'Team spirit' cannot be translated into French to give an equivalent meaning. There exists the expression '*sens collectif*', but this is usually used to deplore the lack of a collective sense. This nation of individualists takes more readily to sports and pastimes in which everyone is free to go his own way. Cycle racing and tennis are the most popular; but the tennis racquet is rarely seen in

rural life. The countryman's main sporting pastimes are the more placid, and for him more satisfying, fishing and shooting.

In most parts of the countryside during autumn and winter, in wooded areas and agricultural districts, a familiar sight is two or three men tramping or cycling along a lane with shooting guns slung over their shoulders and a dog or two trotting behind them. Men of all ages and all classes are seen. They are far more used to a gun than country dwellers in England; a *fusil de chasse* has an honourable place in many a French farmhouse and cottage. When the shooting season officially opens, in early September, the countryside almost sprouts wooden boards saying 'Chasse Gardée' or 'Chasse Réservée'; and the local papers carry numerous notices from landowners that anyone shooting over their land without permission will be prosecuted. Yet the fact that so many men are able to go shooting shows how many country-townspeople, shopkeepers, and professional men own a piece of land, and is one more indication of the extent to which the land is divided between numerous owners. This, and the greater size of the agricultural areas, are no doubt the chief reasons for the pastime being so much more widespread than in England. The smallness of the average property is overcome, often, by neighbours throwing open their land to each other and their friends. On occasion, too, they employ a communal gamekeeper, a *garde-chasse* who is sworn in before a Justice of the Peace like a *garde-champêtre;* sometimes one man fills both functions.

Having invested their money in the purchase of cartridges and a *permis de chasse*, which is really a permit to use the gun, the small party of friends sets out for the day hoping to get

some return for their outlay. This is an additional reason for the popularity of the sporting pastime. To the naturally thrifty and prudent mind of the French countryman there is something wasteful in the idea of sport for sport's sake; there is nothing but loss in playing football or, even more so, golf. But there is some point in going fishing or shooting, though you may be unfortunate enough not to catch or hit anything. A pheasant or a hare is always a possibility for the family table; a woodcock is not despised, and a badger is useful for the sale of its bristles.

It is interesting to note that if a Frenchman is deprived of his rights of citizenship, as a civil punishment, this includes the withdrawal of his permit to go shooting.

There are, then, at least as many possibilities of sporting activity open to the countryman in France as in England. But there is less social and recreational life, even for people who live in towns. Whist Drives are unknown and there is nothing to compare with the regular meetings of the Women's Institutes; the most frequent form of social recreation is a dance, which takes place in the Salle des Fêtes of the Mairie or at a large café, or, in the warm south, on an open space belonging to a café. A café itself sometimes holds weekly dances to attract the custom of the young people of the locality. Others are organized by local associations to increase their funds. Apart from these dances there is little else for the young people. They can join the sports club of the small town, but generally it has little social activity. There may be an amateur dramatics club, if a few enthusiasts have discovered each other, but this is an exception.

In the large towns and cities, in France generally, there are a great number and variety of youth clubs. It is estimated

that over one-fifth of the youth population (8-25) belongs to some youth movement, most of which are sponsored by political parties or by the Church. But the small minority of rural members can do little but follow correspondence courses, read their movement's paper, and attend an occasional rally. The scattered nature of the rural population hinders the formation of local clubs; where one does exist in a small town, drawing some of its members from villages in the *canton*, its meetings are usually infrequent.

The older people possibly belong to one or two of the local associations such as the Beekeepers' or the Pigeon Fanciers', the branch of the Ex-Servicemen's Union or the Ex-Prisoners of War. But these are not social clubs in the English sense, like a branch of the British Legion. On the rare occasions when the members meet together it is chiefly to deal with economic matters, to try to market their honey, or to support a regional agitation for higher military pensions. Once a year, however, each association has a social reunion which does compare with a club gathering in England. But it invariably takes the form of a lunch at the best restaurant in the town, a meal that begins at midday and ends at about six o'clock with songs and liqueurs; their own word of Banquet describes it better. And this introduces another possible cause of the sparseness of social recreation in the English sense. In the French mind a public gathering for social relaxation is associated with a long well-laden table. The appreciation of good cooking is something worth cultivating, is one of the important things in life; a good meal, to be eaten in pleasant, friendly company, is an event worth organizing and worth going several miles to attend. It is time well spent. You sit down at table and you stay

there. These banquets, held in simply-furnished restaurants of solid country towns, have little in common with that barbarous institution, the dinner-dance; if you feel like getting up and dancing (but with whom? there are unlikely to be more than half a dozen women present) then the meal has little to recommend it and you might as well have stayed at home and done something useful with your time.

The secretary or organizer of a club or branch association must have a far more difficult task than his English counterpart. The French are allergic to organized institutions; they dislike having to attend club meetings on regular days, at stated times, and to pay subscriptions—or any sort of levy—at prescribed periods. If a secretary calls a meeting for eight-thirty most of the members will arrive at nine-thirty, just to show their independence. People prefer to meet together for social recreation in a café, in friendly groups of three or four, at times of their own choosing. To talk and argue, over a drink that may last an hour or more, is considered as good a way as any of passing the time. The popular card game played practically everywhere is Belotte*, a complicated combination of Bezique and Piquet which, played with gusto and much declamation, helps to make a country café more animated than an English inn. Dominoes are played quite often in cafés in the north of France; and it is quite usual to find a billiard table at one end of the café, generally a half-size, pocket-less one for playing Russian billiards. A popular game in summer is a form of Bowls, played outside the café on a concrete or gravel pitch with hard balls; there are variants of this game in different regions, and the

* The rules have appeared in the author's previous book *Rue de Paris*.

name of it changes from simply *Jeu de Boules* in the north to *Pétanque* in the south.

The café, however, is now used as a social meeting-place much less than before the war. The cost of a drink has increased much more than wages or salaries. Although an hour or two spent with friends in a café costs less, in general, than in a pub, the amount represents a larger proportion of wages, particularly the wages of a rural worker.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these social and sporting activities is that, apart from the dances, they are confined to men. Not that women are deliberately barred from taking part or from forming their own sports or social clubs; but, particularly in the provinces, the woman's place is very much in the home. She has plenty to do there, too, whatever her age or position. The home is the centre of life for all the family too, in general; and the family is more of a unit than in England. And yet, paradoxically, less importance is attached to living conditions. Almost any family of a social class below that of the professional man, and particularly in rural districts, lacks comforts and services in the house which to an English mind are almost the bare essentials.

Chapter XIII

FAMILY LIFE

THE SQUARE, EIGHT-ROOMED house stood a little way back from the lane, almost hidden by a high wall with an iron door in it, which, when opened, creaked heavily and made a rusty bell clang wearily two or three times. Between the wall and the house was a small flower-garden, but behind the house was about half an acre of ground that was tidily and closely planted with fruit and vegetables. A flight of half a dozen wide steps led up to the front door; and another smaller flight, built against this side of the house, gave access to the kitchen. The former was used on ceremonial occasions and the latter served for everyday comings and goings, as could be seen by the wooden clogs of various sizes usually waiting in a row on the top step.

M. Letellier, the owner, was a medium-sized man with a weather-beaten face which could quickly alternate its expression between graveness and pleasure. He used to play football for the local team in his younger days, and still produced a curious bouncing, energetic movement whenever he had a physical task to do or played with his elder children. He had been an insurance agent until nationalization made him a Civil servant. He was incorporated into the State organization with a salary and pension rights as though his years as an agent had been spent in Government service. But he continued to hold that part of his agency not taken over by the

State, which was mainly insurance against fire and theft. The clients were farmers on the whole, and this small business was looked after by Mme Letellier, who found it encroached too much on her time only in the summer when farmers came to insure their harvests.

M. Letellier was now an inspector in the Sécurité Sociale, which meant that he spent a good proportion of his time travelling about the district to visit employers who were in arrears with their insurance contributions. But he left home just before seven in the morning to go to his office in the town. His son Georges, the eldest of his three children, left with him to go to the Catholic High School. They knew exactly how much time they must allow themselves to reach the bus-stop in the centre of the village. Three minutes to seven was the time they reckoned to leave the house; two minutes to the hour was permissible, although the bus was often late. They hurried through the creaky iron door and along the quiet lane, one as tall as the other, both carrying bulging satchels; while in the room they had just left Mme Letellier was quietly clearing away the coffee-cups and preparing another breakfast, this time for her two daughters and her mother-in-law.

It was seven o'clock; but no one had been out of bed before six-thirty. Mme Letellier had slipped on her dressing-gown and come downstairs to make the coffee while her husband and son were dressing. They had drunk a large cup and eaten a chunk of bread and butter, at the same time finishing their dressing and collecting their things together.

There was an exception to this order of rising in summer, when M. Letellier's father got up at six to work in the vegetable-garden for a couple of hours before the sun was warm.

This was his province and his pride, his contribution towards the running of the household. He disapproved of anyone else meddling in the garden, except in the flower-garden. Any member of the family, from young Liliane to grandmother, could tend the flower-beds; flowers were only a nuisance, he grumbled in his crotchety way that everyone ignored, and they took up space that could be used to better purpose.

It was, perhaps, just as well that the household of seven did not rise at the same time. The breakfast room, next to the kitchen, was rather small for all of them; and in the confusion of preparation, with the one wash-basin upstairs and the lavatory down among the cellars, Georges and his father would have had difficulty in satisfying all their needs and still leaving the house at two minutes to seven. And, incidentally, the ceremony of morning greetings was less complicated with the household routine as it was. The younger person had the duty of saying 'good-morning' first to an elder and then embracing him or her. To leave the initiative to an elder—supposing that it would be taken, which is very doubtful—is considered a grave breach of manners and a lack of respect. It was of course a matter of reflex in the Letellier family as in any other; but with three generations in the house, a general meeting together first thing in the morning would surely have led to a little hesitancy from the youngest members and a hold-up in the finely adjusted time-table of Georges in particular.

Mme Letellier next prepared breakfast for the rest of the family and, still in her dressing-gown, went upstairs to dress young Liliane. The house became really awake and alive when Liliane was brought down to the breakfast room. She either tottered about inside a waist-high contraption

that prevented her falling when she forgot how to walk, tottered round the room with much gurgling and merry cries; or she sat down on the floor and tried on all the shoes she had collected from the hall. The grandparents arrived, as though attracted by this youthful exuberance. Marie-Françoise, as her mother's household pupil when school and homework were finished, kept an eye on her young sister while hurriedly eating her breakfast.

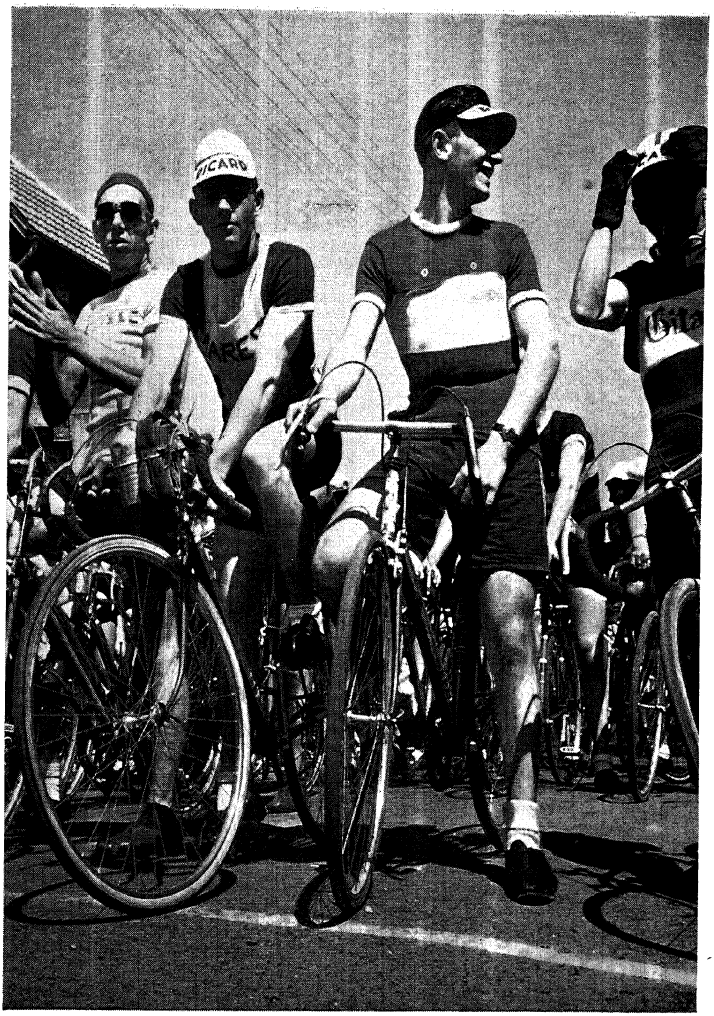
'Look, she's trying to put Daddy's rubber boots on!' —'She's fallen—no, she hasn't.'—'*Ah, le petit brigand*!' The last from Mme Letellier, rushing in from the kitchen to rescue her best pair of shoes.

Grandmother washed up the cups and saucers, and began peeling potatoes for lunch; while her husband installed himself near the window of the breakfast room, overlooking the garden, and took up some tailoring work. The old chap who, it was quite plain to see, must have been just like his grandson some sixty years ago, had been a master-tailor before he retired; now he earned a little from his craft to supplement the income from his pre-war savings whose worth had greatly diminished. Mme Letellier went to her bedroom to dress herself, after cleaning the downstairs part of the house.

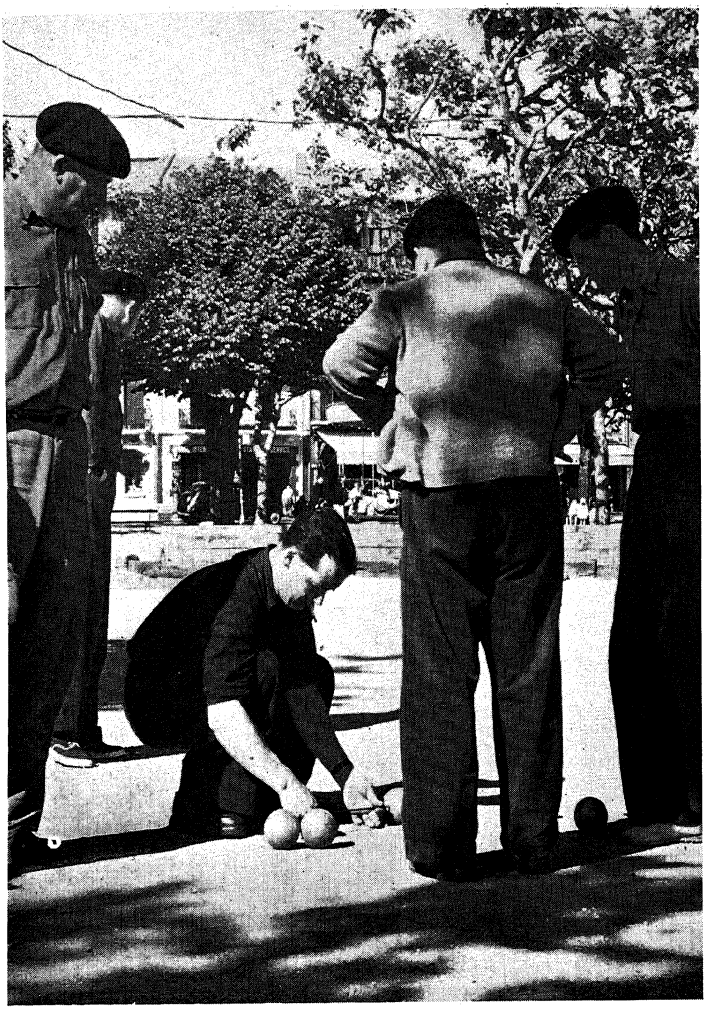
The family kept chickens, and lunch or dinner usually consisted of eggs, vegetables, and fruit from their own resources. But Mme Letellier had to go into the village every morning to buy bread and milk at least. Meat was eaten three or four times a week, but Mme Letellier never bought more than she needed for the day. When she returned home it was time to set the table for lunch that her mother-in-law had been cooking, before Marie-Françoise came back from the church school at the other end of the village.

After lunch grandfather returned to his tailoring, peering over his spectacles and muttering to himself as he plied his needle; grandmother washed up while Mme Letellier put Liliane to bed and then cleaned a bedroom or two, using the classic mop-and-cloth method. She had no vacuum-cleaner or any electric labour-saving equipment beyond an electric iron. (After all, even a vacuum-cleaner doesn't work by itself, and you can't use it at all without electricity.) There was a small gas-stove in the kitchen, but most of the cooking was done on a fuel-burning range.

Later in the afternoon there were vegetables to be collected from the garden for dinner; in season, there was fruit to be bottled or a huge bowl of strawberries to be prepared. And always mending and sewing to be done, pullovers and socks to be knitted, and clothes to be made for the family. When the two women settled down in the breakfast room grandfather thought this was the time for him to do some odd job or go out into the garden again. Marie-Françoise came in and started her homework. Liliane would wake and be brought down again, full of life and mischief as though the day were just beginning. The house became more and more active as seven o'clock approached, the time when the evening bus from town brought back Georges and his father. The two women became busy in the kitchen, Marie-Françoise tried to finish her homework in order to set the table for dinner, grandfather rested his legs in the breakfast room, and entertained or was entertained by Liliane. When Georges arrived he went into his father's study to do an hour's homework before dinner. But first he and his father greeted the family as though they had been away a week; M. Letellier bounced about inquiring from one and another



Ready for the start of a local cycle race. Perhaps one day some of the lads will be in the Tour de France.



A more leisurely pastime, for a little later in life, particularly if you live in the south, where this game is called Pétanque.

At a farm sale. Pleasurable anticipation of a bargain.

A pleasant Sunday afternoon. Most of the village turns out for the sale.

how they had passed the day, and then joined Georges in the study to do some office work.

The movement in and around the house continued until eight o'clock. It was not a bustle but an orderly, regulated activity; so natural was it that the total absence of armchairs did not seem strange. The study could have been furnished and used as a drawing-room if the Letelliers had wished; but they could see no point in keeping a room for use only on ceremonial occasions or once a week at the most. The dining-room was all that was necessary as a sitting-room, for the only sitting at leisure took place round the table for a few minutes after dinner. In winter this room was not used, all work and functions being concentrated in the room next to the kitchen to save fuel.

If the Letellier family possessed an armchair none of them would ever use it. The most they might one day decide to buy is a couple of 'bridge chairs', straight-backed chairs with arms. In one of those at least you can sit up and do something, bring it to table, retain the use of your arms and legs. Whereas in one of these modern leather armchairs, *style anglais*, you flounder helplessly and inelegantly, unable even to talk politely unless you sit on the edge of it. And if you are going to use it only to relax and rest after dinner, far better to save the money and go to bed instead. You save light and fuel in that way too. (Incidentally, there is no exact translation of the word 'relax'; women's magazines are finding it necessary to coin the verb '*relaxer*.')

The chairs in the dining-room were solid and sensible, with wide seats, just the right height to the table for a medium-sized adult like M. Letellier. When the family was gathered together at table, M. Letellier and his wife sitting in the

middle, opposite each other, the most articulate of them all was young Liliane. The grandparents, particularly when a guest or two were present, achieved the feat of seeming to be in the background though sitting each side of their son; while the two elder children, with the manners of adults, listened more than contributed to the conversation. Their parents talked about them to guests and relatives as if the children were not in the room. Their behaviour, character, progress at school, and their future were discussed and commented on with naturalness and freedom. The punishment usually imposed in this as in most middle-class families—though it seldom had to be applied to the Letellier children—was to deprive the child of dessert for a stated length of time. Perhaps this is one reason for the early interest taken by French children in food.

It was usually nine-thirty before the movement towards bed was begun by Liliane taking farewell of all the family in turn. This is not considered a late hour for a young child. The earlier she is put to bed the earlier she would wake in the morning, which would be an additional handicap to an already hectic beginning of the day; and, after all, she can hardly go to bed before dinner is ended and digested. The elder children, especially Georges, were only too willing to go to their rooms and sleep. The school programme, for both of them, was an exacting one.

The problem of education is a difficult one for many country people who wish their children to have more than an elementary education. It was not due entirely to her religious views that Mme Letellier had sent her daughter to the church school; there was no other means locally of obtaining a higher education. Georges was getting a better education

at the larger church school, where he was preparing his University Entrance; and there was also a State grammar school in the town. But the Letelliers were fortunate that their village had a good bus link with the town, so enabling Georges to make the return journey in the day. A number of their country friends and relatives, the Millets among them, had to send their elder children to a boarding-school; or, in one or two cases, the father was considering moving nearer to the town where educational facilities were better.

M. Letellier likes to point out in a professional way that 'it's useful having three children'. What he has in mind is the fact that the Family Allowances for three are more than double what is received for two children. He received for his three children a monthly sum that was nearly half the average basic working wage of the region; about nine pounds a month. He and his wife also received almost as large a sum because she was not a salary-earner, this further Family Allowance being based on the number of children. To obtain these and National Health benefits M. Letellier had to contribute six per cent. of a part of his salary the part which is the maximum amount from which contributions can be deducted and which in his case was three-quarters of his total salary; his employer, the State, paid ten per cent in addition to his six. But an employer also pays other contributions for each person he employs; the total, for National Health, Family Allowances, Holidays with Pay, Accidents at Work, Unemployment and minor matters, amounts to over forty per cent again of the salary paid to skilled workmen. Employers pass these charges on to the consumer, which adds considerably to the already high cost of living. So that, although M. Letellier drew much benefit from the system, he was, on the

other hand, much concerned by the increased cost of living.

The pleasures of the Letellier family were simple and few; they were shared pleasures, mostly in the home, and this seemed to make them the more enjoyable. In the summer there were visits from relatives; and this was when the divan beds were brought into use. There was a large one in the breakfast room, reducing the available space by a third; a similar divan was in the dining-room and in M. Letellier's study; there was another on the upstairs landing and even in the toilet room. These spare beds were evidence of the great number of Letellier relatives and of the importance attached to their visits. Sometimes in the summer Mme Letellier had fourteen people, including children, in the house. And then what combinations and permutations of sleeping and washing had to be arranged, and how drawn-out and intertwining became the morning greetings. Then what a clatter and a chatter there was in the house, what cries and laughter from the garden, and what vast amounts of vegetables and fruit were brought in and prepared. The long massive table in the dining-room, a table made for large meals and a numerous company, was then completely surrounded by a hungry throng.

But fourteen was a maximum to be avoided if possible. Usually several exchanges took place. Georges went to stay with an uncle and aunt in Brittany for the month of August, or with a cousin in Paris for a few weeks in September. Marie-Françoise had a cousin of her own age in Touraine, and they exchanged visits each year. The old couple made an annual visit to another married son who lived just outside Paris. The sisters and brothers and nephews and aunts who came to the Letellier house received visits in their turn, earlier or later, from other relatives and some from M. and

Mme Letellier themselves. All this required a great deal of correspondence, almost a central organizing office. Mme Letellier would begin a tentative correspondence in the early spring, and usually had everything satisfactorily arranged by early summer. Then, perhaps, M. Letellier had to take his holiday at a different time; or the grandparents suddenly decided, in the obstinate and seemingly unreasonable way of old people, that they would go away later than already arranged. And Mme Letellier would have to begin again, writing round urgently to save the whole delicate structure of interchange from collapse.

In a French household there is no lack of excuse for having a special meal or giving the family a treat. The feast-days are scattered liberally over the calendar, from Twelfth Night, Shrove Tuesday, to Armistice Day, Christmas, and the New Year; there is always one at hand to give you an opportunity of indulgence. As well as your birthday you can celebrate the feast-day of the saint whose name you bear; but the celebration takes place the previous evening, not on the day itself. If you go into a café and meet friends you are reminded of the morrow by, for instance, cries of '*Vive la Saint Léon!*'—and you reply by buying a round of drinks. Friends and relatives bring or send you presents, often a bunch of flowers or a flowering plant in a pot. But in the Letellier household, as in so many others these days, only the most important of the calendar feast-days were celebrated. The presents for personal saints' days were usually something useful: 'We'll give him a new pair of shoes for his Saint Georges', Mme Letellier and her husband would decide for their son; or the children would conspire together to save from their pocket-money to buy their father a tie.

For the actual celebration there was an additional course to the normal meal, and Mme Letellier would produce the fruit liqueurs she had made the previous year. The celebration was none the less a happy and exciting occasion; all gathered round the dining-table on a Sunday; for Sunday afternoon is the only time in the week when a little leisure is permitted, and all but the most important occasions are brought forward or retarded to the nearest Sunday.

Generally Sunday is far from being a day of rest. It often brings an intensification of activity, with everyone at home and the additional necessities of churchgoing. Georges cycled to a neighbouring farm to buy the week's supply of butter—Mme Letellier had obtained butter in this way during the Occupation and rationing period, and had continued the custom. Marie-Françoise got dressed in her best clothes and went to church with her mother or grandmother; whichever woman had stayed to carry on with the domestic duties then went in her turn accompanied by Georges. The two men stayed at home. M. Letellier was another 'non-practising Catholic'; he approved of his wife's religious upbringing of the children as long as he was not involved. Grandfather, whenever the subject was mentioned, would say something that began with '*ces curés-là*' and ended in a mumble.

M. Letellier went happily from one job to another, sitting in his study to deal with his little insurance business, mending a pair of shoes in the cellar workroom, and hurriedly clearing out the elementary sanitary arrangement in the end cellar. He twiddled with the wireless set in the breakfast room whenever he went in there, but neither he nor anyone else stayed to listen. The family, like most, had not developed a habit of listening-in. The time between dinner and bed was short; when

the family was gathered together two or three of them were usually talking, and there was no programme that appealed sufficiently to them. Sometimes, while waiting for lunch on Sunday, Georges and his father listened to a half-hour's humorous programme; otherwise the set was used for little more than getting the right time and the news during breakfast.

Lunch on Sunday was the one leisurely meal of the week, but afterwards the various activities were taken up again; the two children had their homework, the women their household tasks increased by the larger lunch and their absence during part of the morning. M. Letellier might cycle off to see a farmer about insuring his crops. Occasionally there was a concert in the village, given by the schoolchildren; or a play was being presented by an amateur dramatic club from a neighbouring village and Mme Letellier would take her children to see it. Or, on a fine day, M. Letellier would propose a ride in his pre-war, four-horse-power car. Either event, but particularly the latter, produced much excitement and discussion. The car could only carry four people with difficulty, so usually the grandparents stayed at home with one of the children.

The car's return would cause as much commotion as its departure. Mme Letellier and the two children pushed open the creaking iron gate; the three in the house appeared on the kitchen steps; the rusty bell seemed to have a new vigour in its short warning clang. There were smiles and kisses and embraces, as though the travellers had been away for days and all were promising not to separate again. The house seemed to recover suddenly from a brooding moroseness, to gather the family within and to listen, as to a pleasing, familiar sound, to the chatter and laughter in its midst.

Chapter XIV

THE BUTCHER AND THE BANKNOTES

BY HARD WORK and shrewdness M. Olivier, the butcher, had built up a good reputation and a considerable business; he reckoned he had nearly twelve hundred customers, including those in the nearby villages, which must be almost as many as the total customers of his two competitors in the small town. He employed one assistant and two young apprentices; his wife and daughter helped part-time with the business too, as cashier and book-keeper, but this is so much in the natural order of things that they hardly counted as part of the business. The two apprentices—one of whom was barely fifteen but already had a glint in his eye when handling a cleaver—had the tasks of skinning and preparing the carcasses, transporting them from the slaughter-house to the shop, and delivering orders to customers. They began work at six in the morning and finished at some time between eight and ten in the evening, like everyone else in the establishment. The assistant worked mainly in the shop, cutting up carcasses and serving customers. Sometimes, when he received an order he could not supply from meat in the shop, he jumped on one of the delivery bicycles and hastened to the municipal slaughter-house on the outskirts of the town. Quickly, he opened the shed where M. Olivier's freshly-killed carcasses were kept, slid one out into the open along

the rail from which it was hanging, cut off the side of meat he required, returned the carcass to the shed, and hurried back to the shop.

M. Olivier worked in the shop, to help his assistant at busy periods of the week, particularly on Saturday and Sunday mornings. He was a short but broad-shouldered, deep-chested man, with a round red face, a slightly protruding underlip as though ever prepared to sip at a glass, and keen, calculating, but friendly eyes. Dressed in a blue blouse and a long white apron with one cross-strap so that his right arm was unhindered, he worked ceaselessly for three or four hours, he and the assistant, in the open-fronted little shop that had no room for more than six or seven waiting customers. The meat he sold was more to him than just merchandise. The side of a carcass that he divided up with swift unerring hand and eye into its various categories, *filets*, *faux-filets*, *contre-filets*, was part of an animal that two or three days ago he had been prodding in a field under the watchful, estimating regard of its owner. The joint that he boned and rolled up and tied with string was then decorated with little pieces of fat on top, thus and thus, so that the one bone left and chopped off short looked like the chimney of a railway engine; and, with very little encouragement, he would advise on the best way to cook and present it.

His weekly turnover was a large one, for much money is spent on meat. A family of three living in a cottage or a small house, on which a rent of ten thousand francs a year is paid, often spend at least one thousand francs a week on meat. These figures by themselves show the relative importance of living conditions and meat. The thousand francs represents rather more than a fifth of the basic weekly wage.

So the high proportion of butchers' shops in any town is far from leading to redundancy.

The consumption of meat has risen considerably in the past ten years among the peasantry and small farmers, except in the wine-growing areas of the south, where little cattle is raised. During the German occupation there was much clandestine slaughtering, which made meat more easily available; and the peasants were profiteering from the generally chaotic food situation, so that they were able to afford to eat meat. These people who before the war rarely ate it now have it nearly every day. The thousand francs a week, say ten shillings per head, is an average figure; many families spend more. The price of meat has risen considerably too, in excess of the cost-of-living index; but instead of cutting down on consumption to the same extent, people generally choose to economize on other things. And the best and dearest joints are sold more easily by a butcher than are the poorer, much cheaper qualities.

The dearness of meat in butchers' shops is partly due to high taxes placed upon it, principally at the slaughter-houses. The French fiscal authorities are quite as shrewd as any others in imposing heavy indirect taxation on something the population insists on buying whatever the price; cigarettes, for instance, in England, and meat in France. With the difference that France, with over fifteen million head of cattle and a population of forty million, is not short of meat.

Nevertheless, a butcher has considerable competition and needs to know his trade well to do better than his rivals. To a country butcher, it is a skilled trade in which he has to fill many parts. '*Un beau métier*', M. Olivier called it.

His shop, standing in the shadow of the thirteenth-century

church, was one step higher than the narrow cobbled pavement outside. It was part of the building in which he lived, an old one-storey house with two bedrooms, a small dining-room, and a smaller kitchen; inferior to the accommodation of many a farm labourer or office clerk in England. The kitchen led directly into the shop, so that Mme Olivier or her daughter could easily slip from their kitchen duties into the cramped cash-desk that stood like a handleless sedan chair in a corner of the shop. Family life was inextricably mixed up with business affairs. When the family was at breakfast the assistant sometimes put his head round the door to ask about an order. But M. Olivier had breakfast with his wife and daughter only two or three times a week, and lunched with them even less. When he was not working in the shop he was away roaming the countryside, attending cattle-markets, visiting farms, and calling on some of his best customers; on those days he left home soon after seven, and the time of his return depended upon events and the company he met. This part of his business was not one that could be hurried or organized. It was timeless and unchanging in essence. M. Olivier used a car; but, this apart, his expeditions could be no different in character and procedure from those made by a predecessor several generations ago.

When he set off in his modern car, as other shops in the town were beginning to open, he could easily be taken for some landowner, or gentleman-farmer. He looked as prosperous as he undoubtedly was, with his fine polished leggings, well-cut corduroy breeches, shooting jacket, and leather-edged waistcoat. His office equipment was one small threepenny notebook with a few pencilled scrawls on some of the pages: *Hutuard's farm, three calves; Papa Gosset 200,000*

francs; call on Henri Thursday; café Pupin about midday. A notebook, and a thick bundle of banknotes inside his waistcoat. His other necessary equipment, a sound knowledge of cattle, of markets, and of men, coupled with a long and extensive acquaintance with the region, was carried in his head. He alone knew the ramifications of his business and the real financial arrangements of it; though even he would have great difficulty in explaining it.

As he drove through the countryside at a fairly slow speed, he looked at the fields and the cattle with an assessing eye and mentally noted certain things. This was his territory, his '*secteur*' as he called it. He knew the worth of the different pastures by the weight and quality of the cattle raised on them. He knew how the soil and the abundance of grass varies from one locality, from one field even, to another, like a wine-merchant who knows which vineyards produce a slightly better and stronger wine than their neighbours. He appreciated, too, the convenient position of certain good pastures, like the one next to a branch-line railway station and which has plenty of lush grass in the dryest of summers. In a farmyard here and there he noticed two or three animals being loaded into a van. So; there might be more for sale at market than there were last week . . . prices might drop a little, if the buyers hung back.

M. Olivier did not go direct to the town where the cattle market was being held; the cattle market was the last place he would expect to find much choice of cattle. The exception occurred when one of the large cattle fairs took place in the region, to attend which he would travel fifty to a hundred miles. At these infrequent events, held on traditional dates, farmers and dealers gathered together from a wide

area; a great deal of cattle was on show and much was bought and sold. But the regular cattle market of the district was just a part of the ordinary shopping market; it was mainly a meeting-place for farmers and cattle dealers. '*Un lieu de rendez-vous*' M. Olivier classed it.

His first stop was usually at a café-restaurant in some village, into which he stumped demanding a coffee 'good, hot, and strong' and a glass of the best cognac. Whichever direction he took he knew of one café where he could be served to his satisfaction and which, therefore, justified a slight detour. At other cafés of the district, he maintained, with a wrinkle of his snub little nose, 'the coffee wasn't strong enough, had a bad taste, and not enough sugar was served with it'. He could also talk with authority and discrimination of the restaurants within a hundred-mile radius. There were only four or five that he would lunch at if business kept him away from home; at this or that restaurant 'the food was not only very good, but the chef inquired after you and you were served as though your lunch was of importance to them too, and, moreover, the cellar had something well worth drinking in it'. M. Olivier would digress at length about his favourite restaurants when any other subject would have been considered a waste of time.

While drinking his good strong black coffee M. Olivier engaged the café-owner in conversation about the local farmers; all news and gossip was grist to him. Or he picked up the morning paper and, ignoring the front headlines, turned to the cattle-market reports. Good; average prices yesterday were a penny a pound less, live weight, than the day before. He was not always certain of the whereabouts of a farm he intended to visit; he might have received news

of a possible deal through a third person, in a busy market café—'Hey, Olivier—François! I was to tell you that Henri is thinking of selling his bullock. You know, Simon's brother-in-law'. So the café-owner was asked about Simon's brother-in-law and whether the bullock was still for sale.

Fortified by his strong coffee and cognac M. Olivier entered the lists, as it were, and started negotiations at the first farm he visited. The farmer and he examined the animal and judged its weight, there in the field, and agreed eventually on a price. '*A la traverse*'—splitting the difference between their opinions; 75 thousand from the butcher, estimating the weight and reckoning so much *le kilo vif*, and thinking of the eight to ten thousand francs he would have to pay in taxes at the slaughter-house; 80 thousand, from the farmer, disagreeing over the weight and preparing to come down to 77 thousand. And both were possibly thinking that before the war the difference they were haggling over would have bought the beast.

There was a casualness about these visits; sometimes M. Olivier found that the farmer had already left for market. 'I'll see him there then', he said to the wife, off-handedly, as though the farmer had missed an opportunity; and set off towards another farm. This was usually a farm that he called at periodically, whenever the cattle market was held in the neighbourhood; where, whether he bought anything or not, he sat down with the farmer to a snack of fat bacon or ham, a couple of fried eggs, a length of bread and butter, followed by coffee and rum. By then it was time for both men to think of going into market, 'to see what was going on'. Usually M. Olivier bought a couple of calves or a few sheep at the farm, that he collected with his van and paid for in

cash a few days later. Sometimes he bought larger quantities, for he also acted as buyer for a Paris butcher; he had these beasts slaughtered and then sent them on by lorry. These widespread connections of his were largely due to his foraging expeditions during the Occupation, when cattle had been deliberately kept away from the markets and clandestine slaughtering had been almost a patriotic duty to keep meat from the Germans. There was now little clandestine slaughtering, but the practice of buying and selling on the farm itself continued where possible. It had the additional advantage for M. Olivier, as for anyone else, of keeping his affairs from the public eye. Though even in the market his transactions, and all others concerned with cattle, were semi-secret.

M. Olivier arrived in the middle of the morning, parked his car, and strutted over to the expanse of ground where the cattle were assembled, his hands thrust down into the pockets of his breeches, his cheeks made more ruddy than ever by the wind and the cognac, but his eye still as keen and already assessing the most likely calves. There were more men than cattle around him, burly, quiet men, dressed like himself in breeches and leggings and jacket or wearing long, stained blue smocks. Nearly everyone knew everybody else. '*Bonjour, François*'—'*Ça va, Olivier?*' A handshake here, two more there, moving around all the time. '*B'jour, B'jour*'—no hurry, plenty of time. Feel the sides of this calf; if the owner comes up, stick out your underlip a little more, doubtfully, and start walking away. '*Ah, papa Gosset—bonjour.* I've got to have a word with you later on. D'you know Simon's brother-in-law, Henri? Over there, is he? Who'd it be that he's talking to?'

The men stand around in small groups or in ones and twos. Nothing seems to be happening, but suddenly one of two men standing together near a cow pulls out a fistful of notes and starts to count a considerable number, one by one, into the outstretched hand of the other. The cow has changed ownership. There is a strict convention about these deals and a scrupulous honesty is observed—between themselves, at least; whether more than a small proportion of these deals is recorded for taxation purposes is another matter. Once a verbal agreement is made over a price neither party would think of going back on it; the seller would not accept a higher bid from someone else later. The price is eventually agreed; a bang with the fist on the palm of the hand, and the deal is as good as signed and sealed. Neither would a third person push in with a bid while a deal is in progress. Indeed, he would find it difficult to do so; there is no better, more exact illustration of the term '*nez à nez*' than when two such people, each with his hands thrust into his breeches, are quietly haggling in a cattle market.

It is all peaceful and leisurely; the calves and pigs make more noise than the farmers and dealers. There is no discordant note from an interfering auctioneer. These people rely on their own sagacity; they retain their independence of action—and save themselves agents' fees. It may take longer to sell or buy an animal when, having failed to come to terms with one person, you have to start afresh with a second and perhaps a third. But if you make five thousand francs more than expected you have in addition a great satisfaction, a personal satisfaction. Time is of little importance; in fact, it is as well not to appear in a hurry to buy or to sell.

And, having bought, there is nothing to prevent you finding another buyer at a higher figure. You may already have one in view, if this is your sort of business. Some animals change hands two or three times during the morning, so that there are often more deals than cattle.

Such a scene was enjoyed by M. Olivier, both to look at and to take part in. '*Un beau métier!*' he might well have murmured. He looked with relish at the cattle as beefsteaks and veal cutlets, but he also savoured the keenness of the deals, the mental juggling with figures, and he appreciated the solid individualism of the transactions. He stood there with his legs wide apart, his hands in his pockets, his hat pulled down over his eyes and his head thrust forward a little, looking self-reliant and something like a bull himself. If he had bought a calf or two he was looking out for a van that was taking other cattle to the slaughter-house of his town. Such an opportunity was one of the marginal matters to which he was continually attentive. Then he and the late owner of the calves went towards one of the cafés nearby, to 'settle the matter over a drink'.

There were always large numbers of men having apéritifs and 'settling a matter' or conducting preliminaries. Each wide, smoky, noisy café was a communal office. The men, some of whom were little better-dressed than labourers, in twos and fours, their chairs drawn close up to the tables, were leaning across one to the other. Between them, on many tables, were huge piles of bank-notes; one, five, and ten-thousand franc notes, that had just been carefully counted out and as carefully checked, and were about to be put away. A clinking of glasses was an under-current of sound to the continual gruff loud chatter that filled the café. M.

Olivier, looking for an empty table, also swiftly noted which of the people present were known to him. He soon settled his affair, in the time necessary for him and his companion to buy each other an apéritif, and moved to the table where Papa Gosset was sitting with three others. Another round of apéritifs was ordered; the only effect by now was that everyone's mind became a little keener. While M. Olivier was counting out notes to Papa Gosset he was already listening to another proposal. Some of the men were now crossing the room from one table to another, not always appearing to do so deliberately but as though some face had reminded them of something on their way to the door. 'Hah—you wouldn't like to be obliging and accept my offer for your pigs?' 'Oh, I'd rather take them back home. Still, as it's you . . .'—'I've heard it said that you're thinking of buying a milking-machine? Now, I can put you in the way of a good second-hand one, as it happens.' — 'Ah, François! Will you be over my way tomorrow? I've got five beasts that might interest you.' This offer to M. Olivier might have been a coincidence, but it fitted in well with the next lorry-load of meat he had promised to send to Paris.

He left the café with the group of men he had been sitting amongst, and they each went their separate ways. Many others were leaving too, for twelve o'clock had just struck. There was a similar exodus from the opposite café; and a general move was made to the parked cars and horses and carts. The market stallholders were packing up, and the last of the shoppers were hurrying home.

M. Olivier sat in his car making a few entries in his little notebook before driving away. He jotted down the amounts he had paid or owed and the cattle he had bought, but made

no mention of the thousand francs he had spent on drinks. On his way back home he called on one or two of his best customers, owners of café-restaurants in a large village or in his own town. Perhaps one of them had a month's bill to pay him; and the other, so M. Olivier had heard, had been asked to provide a wedding feast and so would be needing more meat than usual. In either case there was a gradual approach to the matter, over a couple of apéritifs. (M. Olivier, wisely, never mixed his drinks.) The restaurant owner paid his bill by producing a stack of thousand-franc notes wrapped in a newspaper, and M. Olivier wrote a receipt on one of the weekly bills. To settle the matter by cheque would have embarrassed both parties. M. Olivier would have been suspicious, and the other would have known how he felt. A cheque was a piece of paper that might or might not have some value. Besides, it gave away information that notes did not. Even notes were not entirely satisfactory, as M. Olivier knew from his dealings with farmers. Most of them still believed that it was better, if possible, to keep a live cow than to exchange it for a handful of notes.

So M. Olivier eventually arrived back home, the bulge under his waistcoat usually slighter and his cheeks ruddier than when he had set out; sometimes very pleased with himself, occasionally thinking that he could have done better in one or two matters, but always believing that there was no better way of earning one's living. And two or three hours later he stood again in his shop, clad in his blue blouse and long white apron, deftly carving up half a carcass. '*Un beau métier.*'

Chapter XV

THE PEASANT AND THE MILKING-MACHINE

THE STRAIGHT MAIN road was fairly busy with traffic speeding from one town to the next. Lorries, cars, an occasional one-decker bus, nearly all of them old and rather battered; now and again a shiny American-type car flashed past, an emblem of the mid-twentieth century; more frequently a horse-drawn farm-cart creaked and rumbled along the stretch of road, a symbol of the French countryside.

A narrow lane, more holes than surface, slid away from the main road and sneaked across the pastures and well-cultivated, hedge-less fields to a distant clump of trees out of which there rose a thin church spire.

The uneven lane seemed to take a rest when it reached the shelter of the trees, to slow down with relief when once out of sight of the noisy, mechanical monsters on the main road. Here in the little village was quietness, a ruminative self-sufficiency. The lane had come two miles and at least fifty years backwards. It wandered about from one muddy entrance of a farmyard to another; it curved round the small, ancient church and the adjacent weather-beaten *presbytère*, and descended past the village school. At its lowest level, on a bend, was the primitive, communal laundry, a stone shelter by a still, green-flecked pool. Then the lane began to climb an open slope towards the one shop and café,

and so on to the next village; but first made a detour, as though by afterthought, to pass by a short row of cottages, outhouses, and large stone barns.

The approach of a stranger along the lane, half a mile from the village, suddenly set all the dogs barking. Two bent, black-clad old women talking together opposite the church hurried away and disappeared. The schoolchildren looked up from their desks as the stranger went past the windows. People working in the farmyards watched him pass and then swiftly vanished into houses or barns. The barking of the dogs became spasmodic and then they too joined the conspiracy of silence.

* * *

I turned and cycled back through the village. It would have seemed uninhabited if it were not for the children in the school building, whose bent figures I could see through the windows. But they, as well as the schoolmistress, now refused to look up at me. Yet I had a feeling that several dozen eyes watched me as I went through the village again; that everyone, including the people working in the surrounding fields, knew there was a stranger in the locality.

Fortunately, I was fairly sure that I knew where M. Masson lived; a large, uneven farmyard with massive stone barns round three sides of it and with a long, low dwelling-place, inferior to the barns, along the fourth side. The farmyard was empty of human beings, but when I had passed five minutes previously I had caught a glimpse of four people, three men and a woman, standing round the waggon that was half-filled with apples.

My acquaintance with M. Masson was two or three years old but I knew him only because he delivered butter and cream at a café-restaurant I used. I had been rather surprised when he mentioned one day that he had bought a second-hand milking-machine, and, proudly, offered to show it to me—or anyone else—if I passed near his farm at any time.

It was not often that I, or others who did not live there, went near his village. And having now come a little out of my way, I was not going to give up easily.

I stood firmly in the middle of the farmyard and shouted. 'Monsieur Masson! Monsieur Masson!' Somewhere a dog growled the only answer, and then gave a little yelp.

I shouted again. The figure of an elderly woman dressed in black appeared in the entrance of the dwelling, and then came grudgingly, slowly, into the open. When she was still several yards away from me she stopped and spoke. 'Which M. Masson do you want?' she asked suspiciously.

'Well, the one I know is married, and has got a small daughter.'

She half-turned towards the door. 'Albert', she called, and the M. Masson I knew came into view.

'Ah', he said with a smile of welcome, as he and I approached each other. 'I didn't recognize you at first.'

'It's just as well you'd said where you lived, for I doubt whether I'd ever have found anybody to tell me.'

'No', he said, without surprise. 'It's not that we're unfriendly, but we're not used to visitors in the village. But come into the house. We'll have a coffee and rum', he called to the two farmhands who had followed him.

Looking at the three men it was difficult to tell who was the farmer and who were the paid hands. All three were

dressed in old soiled clothes and none had shaved for at least two days.

We stepped from the mud of the farmyard directly into a low room that obviously served as kitchen, living-room, and dining-room. The uneven flagstoned floor was bare. A smoke-grimed buffet stood against one wall, a kitchen range occupied the opposite wall and was heating several cauldrons of water. A dog was lying on some old rags in one corner. In the middle of the room was a plain kitchen table with half a dozen chairs scattered around it. The room, the tumbledown building of which it formed a major part, proclaimed—or was meant to proclaim?—poverty and misery. Yet this was the home of a family that owns a hundred-acre farm of good pastures and ploughland; that possesses fifteen cows, a small lorry—although an ancient one—and, perhaps the most surprising of all, the milking-machine. M. Masson sold his butter direct to dairies and consumers at a price varying from five to seven shillings a pound according to the season of the year. His town customers complained of the high prices, and said among themselves that farmers like M. Masson must be making plenty of money. Here, in his house, all the appearances proclaimed that he was poor and ought to charge far more for his produce. But a Frenchman would think there was nothing paradoxical about the Masson home. This was no doubt the way the old mother had always lived—I suddenly noticed her, white-haired and with her eyes closed, sitting on a chair in a corner—and this was the way her family would continue to live until her death, and perhaps for a long time afterwards.

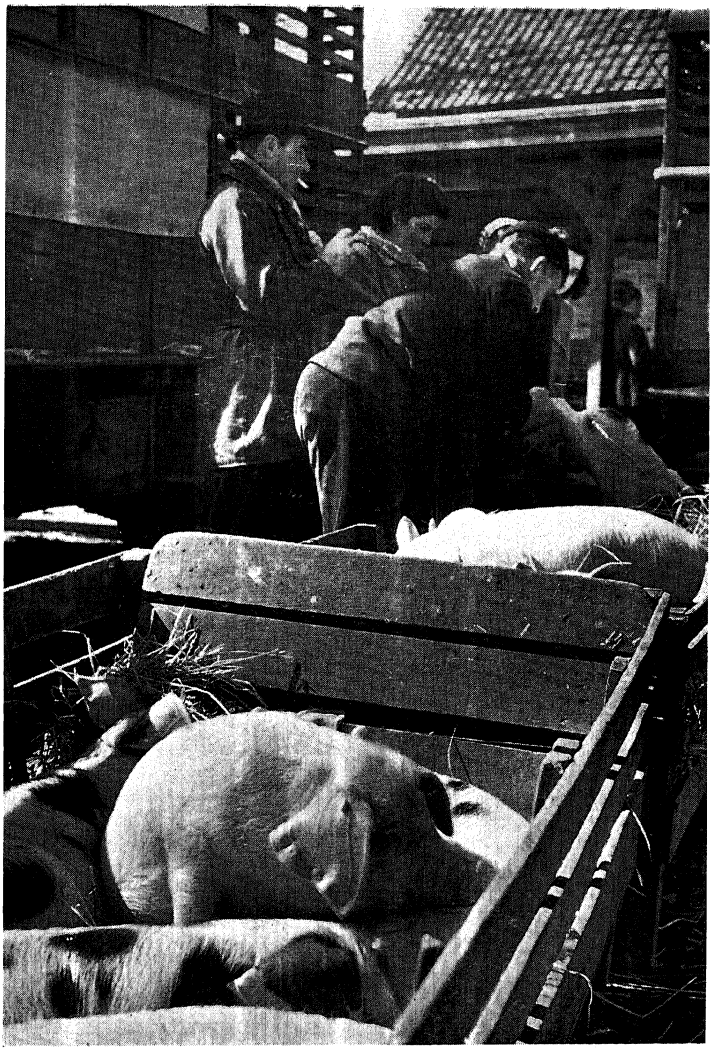
It was a family of peasants. But when M. Masson called himself a *paysan* he was far from giving the word any of the

derogatory sense implicit in 'peasant'. The *paysan* is a man of the countryside; in a social sense he is above the farm labourer, he owns or rents land and is his own master.

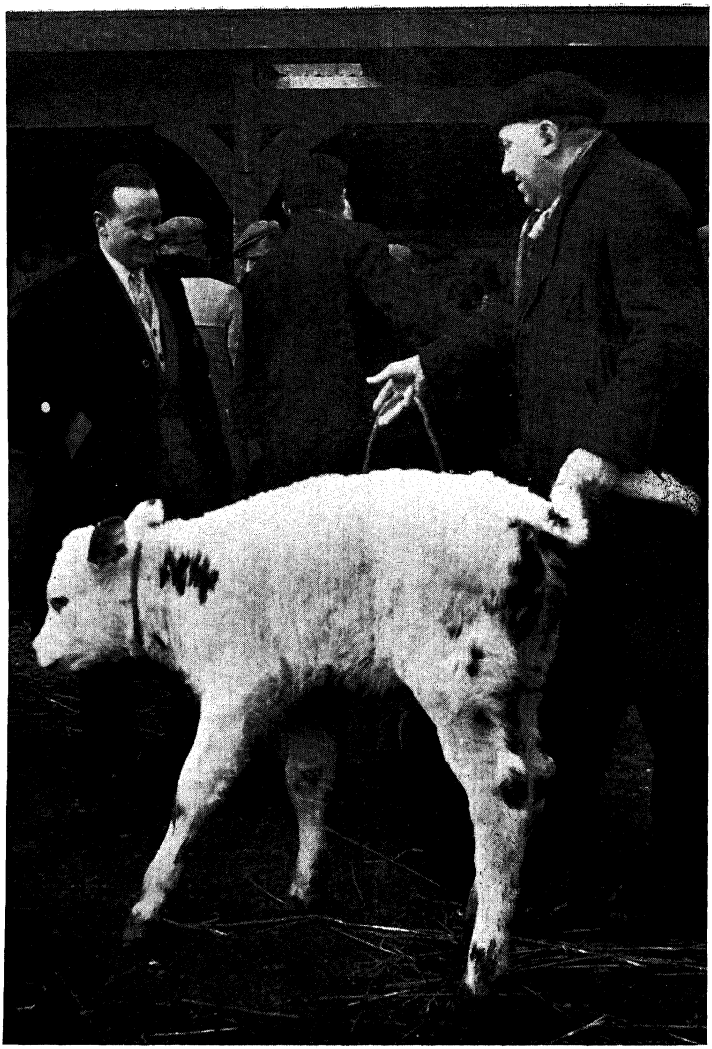
The Masson farm was about the average size of a French farm. While the number of larger farms has decreased over a period, that of the Massons' size has steadily increased. The trend has been for smaller farms to extend gradually, by purchase, dowry, and inheritance, to a size giving work and a livelihood to a family.

M. Masson thrust a few chairs towards the table. 'Sit down here', he said to me, and with a courteous gesture indicated the chair nearest to the kitchen range, which was evidently the place of honour. The old mother had silently risen and produced four chipped coffee-cups; into them she poured some weak black coffee from a pot that was standing on the range, just as one might find a pot of tea brewing in an English farmhouse at this hour of the afternoon. M. Masson fetched a bottle of rum from the buffet and filled up the cups. The old mother sat down again in her corner and appeared to fall asleep. The other woman, M. Masson's aunt, had come into the room and was standing looking down at the men seated round the table; a life-long habit of mistrust of visitors no doubt prevented her from continuing her work outside.

'Your good health', said M. Masson, clinking his coffee-cup against mine. The two farm labourers, at the other side of the table, sat motionless, staring at us with thoughtless eyes. I offered my packet of Gauloises to M. Masson and then merely made a slight gesture with it towards the two labourers, for I noticed they were both smoking already; rather, each had a smouldering stub of cigarette in the corner



In the cattle market. Only the buyer and seller know the price paid.



'But look! Consider the quality. Another 2,000 francs and it's yours!

of his mouth. Yet each stretched out a burly arm, took a cigarette, and put it carefully in an inner pocket, all without saying a word or animating his neutral expression. They drained their cups, rose from the table like two automatons, and went outside, moving with long slow strides as though each boot were held back by clinging mud.

'There, you see', said M. Masson, perhaps guessing my thoughts. 'That's the sort of workmen I have to do with. Idiots, slackers, and stick-in-the-muds, they're the only ones who'll stay and work on farms as paid hands.' There was a bite of bitterness in his voice. 'All the other villagers who need jobs, especially the younger ones, prefer to work in the town than on the land. They don't mind so much living here, but as for working here too, no.'

'Perhaps it's also because they earn more in the town?'

'Oh, not so much more. Not after they've paid their fare or the instalment on their bike, bought their food, had a drink or two—and wasted a couple of hours of their day getting to and fro, don't forget. After all, I feed my farm-hands, and lodge them, as well as paying them. I've got a third man who lives out, a couple of kilometres away—he's married and has a family, that one—well, he comes here every day when I need him. "*Un homme de journée*", as we say. But he gets all his food here, as well as his day's money. No, what attracts people to town is the idea of finishing work at a set time, or earning overtime; that, and the five- or six-day week. We, on the land, work every day, ten hours and more a day. We can't start a job and leave it half-done because six o'clock has struck. That's what the others don't like—especially the younger ones. But, you'll see, they'll lose by it. They'll become just cogs in the wheel,

tied to clocks and machinery and huge, inhuman organizations. They may go on living in the village—though I doubt it—but they'll no longer belong to the land, to us, *nous, les paysans*!'

For a moment a glimmer of pride and vitality shone in his usually dull and placid eyes. As though half-ashamed of his sudden outburst he slumped into silence, then took a good gulp of his coffee and rum.

'But, on the other hand', I said, 'you've got machines now to do the work that this village labour used to do. At least', I corrected hastily, 'there are machines to be had. You're not so dependent on labour.'

'Don't forget there's a lot of work on a farm that machines can't do and never will be able to do', he quickly replied, with some contempt. Then he changed his tone. 'I've got a milking-machine now; one that I bought second-hand.'

'Yes, you told me', I said. 'That's what I've come to see. It's getting near milking-time, isn't it?'

'Well, you can see it', he replied. 'But, of course, we don't use it every day. You see, at the moment the cows are grazing too far away to bring them in. My wife's out milking them now. Besides, they lose some of their milk if they're brought a long distance. And the bridge across the stream needs mending.'

A slight smile appeared on his unshaven face. 'Don't think the farm's as big as all that', he said. 'Like most family farms it's made up of bits and pieces, some of them separated by other people's bits and pieces.'

'Ah, the inheritance laws! What do you think of them?'

He was silent. Perhaps he had never formed an opinion

of them, these laws embodied in the *Code Napoléon* which still oblige a farmer to share his land between his family at his death. This *partage* is largely responsible for the multitude of small farms and the mixed strip pattern of so many fields in France; to it, therefore, is largely due the lack of mechanical development; and, consequently, the continued acquisitiveness, backwardness, and narrowmindedness of the small peasantry who, except perhaps in the rich pasture-lands of parts of Lower Normandy and the Charente, scrape a living almost with their bare hands, certainly with little more than medieval tools.

'Of course, in some families one can always arrange matters so that the farm isn't divided up', said M. Masson. 'But you know as well as me, some families can never agree. Besides, it's gone on for too long. Certainly, you can hope only to have one son to inherit. But then, children are wealth. *On a besoin de bras.* One needs plenty of help. Then if there's daughters, and they want to marry, there's the dowry that's asked for. Sure, the sons might marry and bring back a bit of land. But afterwards?—one of the sons has to buy the others out, if they're agreeable, or work their land for them, to keep the farm whole.' M. Masson seemed to be voicing his thoughts aloud, one chasing the other, as he stared moodily into the chipped cup. Suddenly he roused himself.

'Take me, for instance. My mother brought a bit of land and some livestock to my father when she married. But her portion is at the other end of the *commune*—where my cows are now. My father was killed in the '14-18 war. My mother and my aunt here kept the farm going until my brother and I grew up. Of course, they had to hire labour, so it was a

struggle. Fortunately my aunt never married, or we'd have lost her bit. We hadn't the money to buy it.'

There was a vague stirring from the black-clad figure still standing near the kitchen range. The white-haired mother was huddled up on her wooden chair in the corner. M. Masson appeared unaware of the presence of his relatives.

'Then I was a prisoner of war for five years. My brother isn't interested in farming. He'd be off to the town if I could afford to buy his land from him. I've been trying to pull the farm round since I got back from Germany. But look—my mother's only good for sitting by the fire, my aunt can't do anything much any longer, and the hired help I can get isn't worth half of what it costs! And if my brother died tomorrow, he who's got three grown-up children, they'd certainly want to sell their bits of land.'

He poured some more rum into the dregs of our coffee. A chicken stalked in through the open door, pecked around hopefully, and wandered away again.

I thought of the coloured survey map of the *commune*, coloured to show at a glance the dispersed aspect of any one person's land, and so looking like a portion of patchwork quilt. Some day, perhaps, officials from the Préfecture would begin the long and complicated task of re-apportioning the land, to the satisfaction of its various owners, so that each colour on the map would be grouped together or nearly so. This *remembrement*, as it is called, is steadily going forward all over France.

'Instead of waiting, why don't you do something yourself about this *remembrement* business?' I said to M. Masson, ending my train of thought. The silences between us were

becoming longer with the approach of the evening shadows into the farmyard.

'Supposing you offered to exchange your distant pasture for one that's nearer here but far away from the farmer who owns it? If you follow me? It sounds a bit complicated.'

'No, no.' M. Masson's mind was able to grasp quickly the possibilities of a proposition, even when—particularly when—presented in vague terms, if it concerned the land. But his peasant mind, suspicious and prudent, jibbed from giving an opinion of it or answer to it other than after long deliberation. This time, however, I must have surprised him. Or perhaps it was the ingenuousness of my question. He answered at once, almost with a laugh. 'What'd be the good of that? He wouldn't do anything about it!'

'But why not?'

'Because if the proposal came from me he'd be suspicious at once. *Parce que c'est moi qui propose!*'

'Well then, it'll be a good thing for the officials to set about this *remembrement*—for the thing to be done by Government authority?'

'Oh, they won't get any help from us here. The moment strangers step in—and Government officials at that—everyone will be against the plan.'

'Yet it's for the good of the village as a whole!'

'Maybe. But we prefer to look after our affairs ourselves. All the Government ever wants is to get money out of you.'

'Yet, surely, if you all had farms that were less scattered, more of a piece, you could seriously consider using mechanical equipment? Even just a tractor——'

'Oh, I haven't enough land under plough to keep a tractor at work.'

'Then why not four or five of you buy one on a co-operative basis? Or even hire one from time to time.?'

'Buy one between us? Huh, and everyone would want to use it at the same time. Who'd look after it? And if something went wrong with it, everyone would leave it to someone else to pay for the repairs. And who'd drive it anyway? As for hiring it between us, that'd be a free fight pure and simple!'

'And yet a tractor of your own would help solve your labour problem. You wouldn't be so worried about this flight from the land. You'd get more work done per hour.'

'And what'd I do with the rest of my time? I get the maximum production from my land—as do all my neighbours—as it is. I care for it, I understand it. I give it all my time.' He was bending towards the stone floor of the kitchen, his large grimy hands reaching downwards, and there was a sudden deep fervour in his voice. 'If I had a tractor I'd be able to spend half my time in the café playing dominoes. Is that what you mean?' He looked up. 'Where's the money coming from for the tractor, anyway? And even if I got one, the capital it represented would be lying idle half the time.'

'Aren't there small tractors on the market now, designed specially for the farmer with odd strips of land?'

'Yes, but——' He gave a patient smile. 'Look, let's suppose, to please you, that next week I go and buy a tractor.' His smile broadened into one of mirth at the thought. 'Good. Let's suppose that I quickly learn how to work it and that nothing goes wrong with it that I can't put right myself. Good. What guarantee have I got that I'll always get the

petrol and oil to run it? And for how long before their price goes up? With my two horses and my labour I know where I am. I can always feed them and us with the products of my land; which I, myself, control. With a tractor I put myself at the mercy of outsiders. It wasn't so long ago that petrol was rationed, you know.'

'But you'd have got your ration, being a farmer. Enough for your needs.'

'Perhaps. Say, rather, that I'd get ration tickets. After filling up lots of forms. In any case, I'd no longer be independent. What would my mother have done during the war with a tractor and no horses? And supposing there's another war—which is by no means impossible, you'll agree. No, I'd have to keep my horses. I'd still have to give up land to grow their foodstuff. Either they'd be growing fat and doing nothing for it, or else the tractor would be standing idle. And suppose something happened to me? Who'd be able to work the tractor? Everyone here knows how to care for and handle horses. But something mechanical? They'd have to call in a mechanic from the town, who might possibly come out here a week later—and then go back again to fetch a new part. If a war broke out, he'd very likely be mobilized—and then where'd we be? No, you can't trust these mechanized things. With them, you're no longer the master but the slave.'

There came a stifled grunt from a dim corner of the kitchen. The aunt had already gone out to fetch water from the pump at the other side of the farmyard.

'Still', I said, 'if you had a bigger farm, or if it was all of a piece—you might feel more disposed towards a tractor if you had enough work for that *and* your pair of horses?'

He considered the point, his head on one side. 'Ah, they cost so much', he said, half to himself. 'Everyone'd think I was doing well. Mind you', he went on, twisting round on his chair, 'I've nothing against mechanical equipment as a means of helping out at busy times. Why, I'm doing my threshing next week, and I'm hiring a threshing-machine to come here and do the job. Here, in the farmyard.'

We got up and walked across the drying mud of the farmyard. The aunt was returning slowly to the kitchen with two large pails of water, accompanied by an unruly flutter of chickens. A wispy autumnal mist was closing in from the fields, the prevalent smells of manure and wood-fires were stronger. M. Masson accompanied me to the gate, or rather to the gap in the wall where the gate had once stood.

'Ah, here come the missus and the nipper', he said, looking along the lane.

Mme Masson, plump, sturdy, with a large coloured handkerchief round her head and a pair of wellingtons on her feet, was pushing a two-wheeled wooden carrier in which stood three milk churns. Her little daughter was trotting along by the side with one hand gripping the carrier, showing that she was, already, doing what she could to help.

'I suppose there isn't a lane to the pasture', I said, 'so that you could take your van to collect the milk?'

'No. Oh, in any case, for the little we get paid for the milk, you know, it's not worth using petrol to go and fetch it.'

Mme Masson stopped for a moment to shake hands with me. 'It's "good-day" and "goodbye" is it?' she said with a smile and a breath of the open fields.

Her husband held out his hand and pulled off his beret.

'I'll let you know when I'm going to use the milking-machine', he promised. (He never did; his family probably thought he had already talked too freely about his affairs.)

I pedalled slowly along the winding narrow lane, stirring the freshly fallen leaves. The slight mist and the evening shadows were still hanging back, hesitantly, at the far end of the fields bordering the lane; through this grey veil could just be seen the large round orange that was the setting sun. In half an hour darkness would cover the land. But here and there were people using the last minutes of fading light. A woman was milking a contented cow a few yards from the lane, sitting on a three-legged stool with her long skirt splayed around it. A quarter of a mile farther on an elderly man was ploughing the last furrow of a long but narrow portion of land. He strode along the furrow at the slow lumbering pace of his two horses, gripping the handles of his plough with all his strength, his head bent towards the slithering, opening earth, an eternal figure of the French countryside, similar to a multitude of others at this same moment; and portrayed in many medieval murals in churches and abbeys. On the other side of the lane, coming from a large expanse of ploughed field, was a lurching tractor. The young, clear-faced man on the seat was looking about and whistling—whistling, perhaps, because he felt modern, was in harmony with the age he lived in. Or perhaps just because his work was finished for the day and he was taking his girl to a *bal musette* this evening.

Chapter XVI

FARM SALE

THERE WERE SEVERAL bills stuck on the farm wall and on barns along the lane, each saying the same thing:

Voluntary Sale
of
18 Good Beasts
Farming Equipment
and Household Furniture

CASH DOWN

Credit granted to those known to be solvent.

In view of the importance of the Sale
it will start at 1.30 prompt (legal time).

The grey clouds that hung over the tinted countryside threatened rain. There were ridges of thick black mud at the farm entrance, with pools of water between them that glimmered like steel. Most of the people arriving for the sale stumped solidly through the mud in their gum-boots; only the few young people who had cycled out from the town, thinking of spending an interesting afternoon, hesitated by the open gate and then picked a way round the edges of the track.

The track led through the orchard, in which the sale was to take place, to the farmhouse standing sixty or seventy yards from the lane. It was a long, low, timbered building that was distinguishable from the other farm buildings chiefly by its thatch; the barns and outhouses had comparatively recently been given slate roofs. They were spaced out irregularly along two sides of the orchard, a duck-pond filled much of the space between the farmhouse and the nearest barn, and the two ducks on it kept shaking their heads at the increasing, unaccustomed numbers of people in the orchard.

On each side of the track was a pathetic array of old, worn, antiquated farm implements and accessories, upon which a few leaves kept fluttering from the trees around. A water-waggon and a hay-rake stood opposite a one-horse plough and a mowing-machine; there were two sets of harness draped over the shafts of the water-waggon, and next to this was a mixed collection of churns, large casks, a length of rubber hose and a home-made, rickety garden seat. On the other side was a stack of empty bottles, a pile of sacks, and a couple of large cart-lamps. The only handsome and respectable exhibit was a well-sprung, high-wheeled cart which had a little brass plaque on one side giving the name of the maker.

In the large barn nearest to the gate were a few sad-looking cows, who morosely returned the stares of the people who looked in through the open door. In front of the farmhouse door was a small table and a chair, near to which several groups of people were gathered. They were mostly villagers sombrely and poorly dressed, but joyously anticipating a Sunday afternoon out of the ordinary.

It was something out of the ordinary for them, taking

place in the neighbourhood, but to the solicitor with a large country practice who was going to conduct the sale it was by no means an unusual event. The death duties are so high, in certain cases, that the inheritors can only pay them by selling the property. The percentage to be paid varies according to the degree of relationship with the deceased person. A widow with one child has but a reasonable percentage of the worth of the property to pay; if she has more than one child the percentage is less. But the ten per cent. paid by a widow or widower becomes thirty-five per cent. when the same wealth is inherited by a brother or sister, and forty per cent. in the case of an uncle or nephew. These percentages are those applied to very moderate inheritances, between one hundred and five hundred pounds. Above the latter figure death duties soon reach the maximum of fifty per cent.; which may well have applied in the case of this farm.

If the inheritors were several sons and daughters, who had comparatively little to pay in death duties, they might not have come to an agreement over the *partage*. As it was already a small farm their individual shares of the land would not have been worth working separately. Possibly they had all gone to see the solicitor; and he, after trying unsuccessfully to bring about an arrangement, had been instructed to proceed with the sale.

He, Maître Gervais, *notaire*, was a well-known figure in the district. A *notaire* is also a State official and a member of a profession that has retained some of its pre-Revolution rights; only by purchasing or succeeding to an existing practice can a *notaire* put up his own plate. One of his functions, acting as a sort of probate officer, brings him many clients in this country of scattered small properties and many

owners. The *Code Napoléon*, which still regulates minutely most public and private relationships, very often needs the expert attention of a *notaire* to apply it. In the countryside especially there are more *notaires* than there are solicitors in England, and each is known personally to a far wider range of people. Country people consult a *notaire* with less hesitation than they do a doctor.

Maître Gervais was recognized by most of the waiting crowd at the sale when he stepped out of the farmhouse door, with his clerk, soon after two o'clock. He cast an appraising eye over the groups of people. 'Ah, it looks as though it might begin', he said, and went to stand behind the table. His clerk sat down on the chair and placed a ledger and a satchel in front of him; the three dozen people gathered nearer.

Maître Gervais stood there with a slight smile on his dark face. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a slight stoop; clean-shaven, with dark-grey eyes and bushy eyebrows, he could not have been more than forty, and so was young to have a practice of his own. Usually he was seen with his hands in his pockets, doing the essentials of his work with his eyes, closely examining family valuables, studying documents and human nature. Of peasant stock himself, he was at home with his humble clients. And just now, freed from the intricacies of French law, he looked as if he too was having an afternoon out.

He clapped his hands for attention. 'The sale is being held under the normal conditions', he said softly and swiftly. 'There's no guarantee. And the purchaser pays all fees, duties, and taxes—that is, eighteen per cent. extra on his bid.'

His smile broadened, as though pleased at having disposed of formalities, and he turned to take the first lot that was handed to him through the open farmhouse door. 'What am I offered?' he said, holding up an enamel dish, two large plates, and a couple of coffee-cups without saucers. They were piled one on the other; he made no attempt to show them separately or to tap them for soundness.

'Come on, come on. Offer me something. I don't care what you bid. The main thing is for me to get an offer.'

Yes; the crowd knew. But who was going to make the offer?

'Twopence', murmured an elderly woman with a shawl over her head.

'Twopence I'm bid. Any advance on twopence? Once, twice, thrice, don't be sorry later. Sold!'

And Maître Gervais handed the two cracked plates, the badly chipped dish and coffee-cups to the old woman with the air of someone presenting a bouquet at an opening ceremony; while the clerk entered the sale in his ledger, and an appreciative murmur of amusement rose from the crowd at this traditional opening of the sale.

The lots of household chattels followed each other through the open doorway to the auctioneer and eventually direct to the hands of the highest bidder. But it was a long, drawn-out progress. The bids began at twopence and rose by pennies to the maximum of a shilling. The lots were, however, poor stuff; kitchen crockery and cutlery and vases that had been used for a lifetime. Worn things that it would have been considered a waste of time to put up at an English sale. But here every franc was of consequence; and, since it was a matter of division of inheritance, everything

had to be disposed of for some amount of money, however small.

'Tenpence I'm bid', stated the auctioneer, holding up a highly-coloured vase. 'Who says anything better? Here, it's yours for a shilling', he said to a woman standing close against the table. 'Say a shilling and it's yours——'

'Ah-ha, it's hers for a shilling', was repeated through the crowd.

'—if nobody goes any higher', added Maître Gervais. But nobody was going even as high as a shilling. 'Tenpence I'm bid. Once, twice, thrice, don't be sorry later. Sold!'

But then the bidding began to liven up a little, with the successive appearance of several objects that aroused the interest of the crowd, though progress was still prudently maintained at the steady rate of a penny. 'Everyone's behaving sensibly', people approved each other. 'They don't push up the prices unnecessarily.'

A cartridge-making machine was the first to fetch more than a shilling; a paraffin lamp aroused keen competition and drew the record bid, thus far, of just over four shillings.

'Ah, they're modern in these parts', commented the auctioneer, holding up next an electric torch. But it went for less than the paraffin lamp. A set of weights produced a new record. Then a couple of blackened cauldrons slowed down proceedings again; they were eventually bought by a man who announced that his intention was to make pig-mash in them.

'Now let's get a move on', urged the auctioneer, looking at his watch. He glanced beyond the people around him to the farmers who had been arriving and were now wandering about the orchard, examining the implements or talking

in twos and threes. '*Pressons, pressons*', urged Maître Gervais, now holding a couple of rush-seated kitchen chairs.

'Are they solid? No breaks?' someone called.

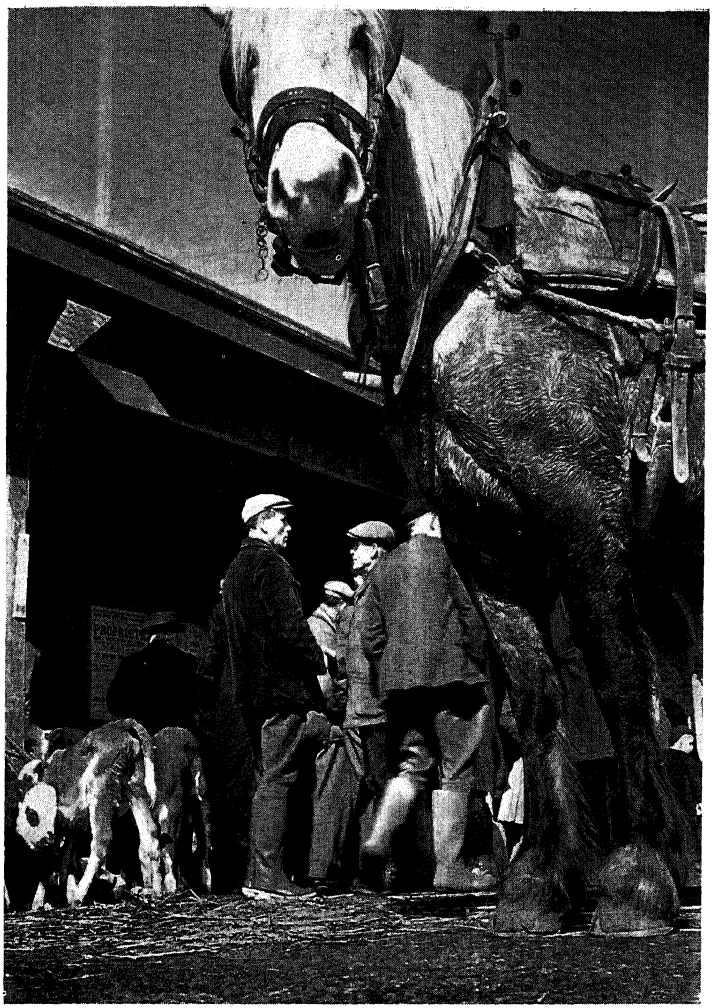
Maître Gervais examined them, gave an assurance, and his word was accepted.

'Fifty francs!'

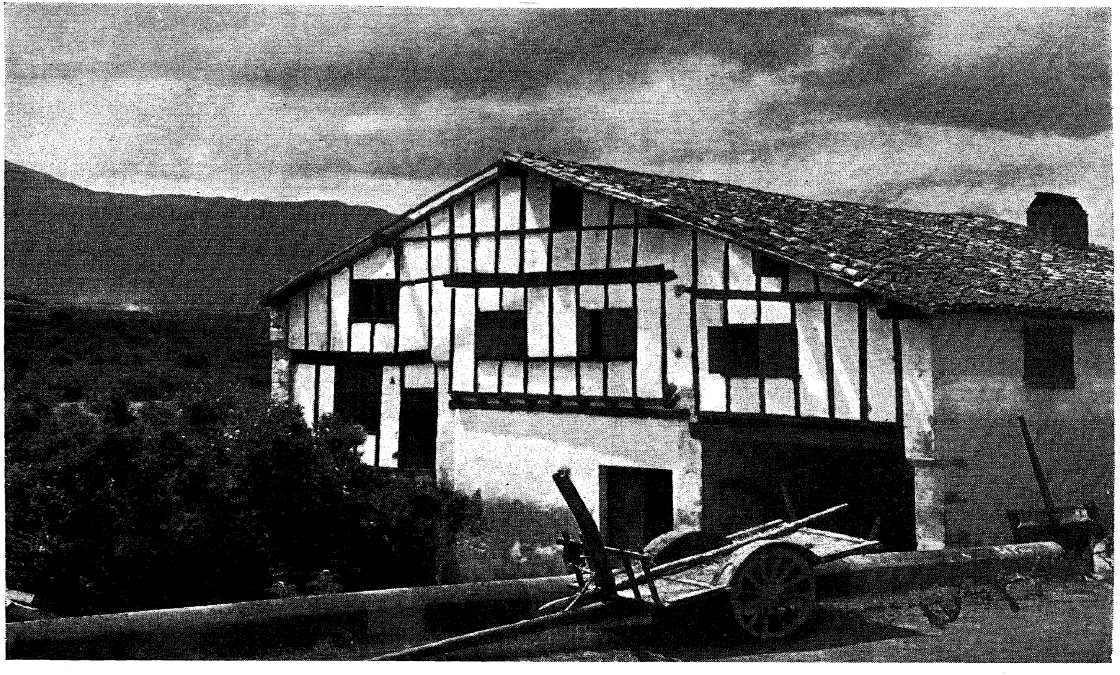
'Now don't let's waste time. Begin at two hundred, will you? That's right. Two hundred and ten, I'm bid. Any advance? *Qui dit mieux, qui dit mieux?* Two hundred and twenty. . . .'

No, the little crowd of village people was certainly not going to be bullied or cajoled into precipitate bidding, nor was it going to have its pleasant afternoon curtailed. Most people had by now spent two or three shillings and were holding between them half of the goods and chattels of the farmhouse. There was someone inside the low, dim building, a man who appeared vaguely now and again just inside the doorway, who joined in the bidding and always succeeded in buying the object he wanted. A few things were thus retrieved from the grasp of the crowd, but could not be kept from public gaze and comment; gradually all the contents of the squalid dwelling, even the smallest and most useless of them, were wrenched away and exposed to the public. The poverty of the household and the worn, soiled appearance of its meagre possessions were intimately revealed. But no one expected anything different to appear, so it did not seem to matter. These people were, after all, buying the worn and soiled possessions to take into their own homes.

Some of the farmers were gathering around the ramshackle array of old farm implements, possibly to arrange matters between themselves. One man was measuring the

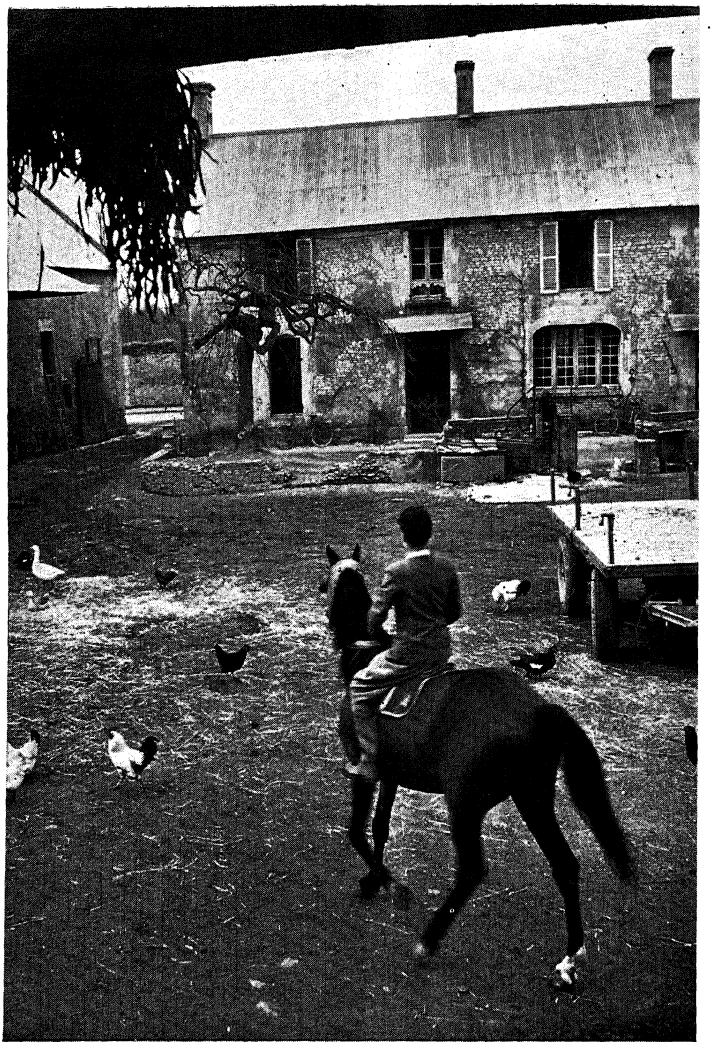


In the cattle market there may be more deals than cattle, for some animals change hands two or three times.



In the foothills of the Pyrenees. Oxen are used to draw these carts.

The manor house—a flavour of the eighteenth century, and the finer things of life.



At the farmhouse daily life is slow and has changed very little.

horse collars with a folding ruler; another was on all fours in front of the largest cask, about to put his head inside. From the direction of the farmhouse came the now brisker tones of Maître Gervais, 'Three hundred—three hundred and fifty. Ah, now we're warming up a bit. Who'll say four hundred? Three seventy-five I'm bid. *Qui dit mieux? Qui dit mieux? Une fois, deux fois, trois fois—n'ayez pas de regrets. Vendu!*'

None of the farmers appeared to have any interest in the household part of the sale. They strode up and down, their farmer's gait as easily distinguished as a sailor's, with their hands thrust into the front pockets of their breeches. All wore gum-boots, mostly yellow ones, and either tweed or corduroy jackets that had seen much service. The only variety was in their headgear, which ranged from the battered felt hat and the conventional beret to woollen knitted caps of various colours with a bobble on the top. They all had an air of well-being, but none looked well-off. They, too, seemed to be having an afternoon out. Some had brought their wives with them, and there was a pleasant atmosphere of gossiping and news exchanging around the sad collection of outworn farm equipment.

A few faces were raised to the darkening sky as some drops of rain began to fall. Maître Gervais came striding across the orchard, and the farmers gathered together. By now a strong rumour was spreading that the land had been sold privately to a neighbouring farmer. For the first time there were heard expressions of regret and even of indignation

'Yet another small farm that'll disappear! No wonder our young people can't find a small place to rent, to start with.'

'And he bought up fifty acres only a few months ago—he'll soon have one of the biggest farms in the district.'

'Ah, if the old chap were still alive he'd never have let his land go. A real *paysan*, he was. He held on to the end.'

The rain began to fall heavily, and the people took shelter in the barns. Maître Gervais and those interested clustered together in the cow-shed; but the highest bids for many of the animals did not reach the reserves placed on them. No one was surprised at this; it was far too public a procedure. Nor was Maître Gervais surprised to have higher offers made to him privately, later in the afternoon, offers that he knew how to raise a little higher before accepting them.

In between the showers and the private deals there was time to auction the farm implements, for their disposition appeared to have been made in advance. The farm, as such, was fast disappearing as the evening shadows began to spread through the orchard. Few of the crowd still remained. And Maître Gervais, rapidly concluding with his time-honoured phrase, might have been addressing some group beyond that gathered in front of him. '*Une fois, deux fois, trois fois. N'ayez pas de regrets! Vendu!*'

Chapter XVII

THE SQUIRE

M. CHOLET HAD RETIRED to his estate in Touraine, which has belonged to his family for several generations, just before the war, after thirty-five years' service in one of the Ministries. He was fond of mentioning, with an air of amused scorn, that during those thirty-five years in Paris he had served under forty-five different Ministers. He and his wife had settled down in the smiling, pleasant district, just south of the Loire, to lead the comfortable, leisurely life to which they had long looked forward.

The house, built squarely of grey stone, stood on a slight rise and was shaded by a few trees. There was a leisurely atmosphere in and around it, but with a feeling of inconsequence—or was it indifference? There did, indeed, linger still, in corners and bowers, by a shady seat near a stone statue, a flavour of Watteau and the eighteenth century; at times, on a hot summer's day, it would have been no great surprise to have seen 'L'Indifférent' come strolling through the shades. There appeared nothing unnatural about two young goats frisking and gambolling by the front door while their mother munched placidly on the unkempt lawn. Nor was there anything surprising in noticing a picture hanging upside-down on a landing and with the catalogue number still stuck on the frame.

The place was peaceful and relaxing, yet there was a

slight air of unreality about it. Recent history had much to do with this.

The Germans had arrived and parked their guns and vehicles in M. Cholet's fields; German officers had slept in his house, in his beds. Four years later the Germans had all departed, for no apparent physical reason. Yet although the war of occupation was over, there was no return of the easy days of before the war. The years passed, and still the pre-war way of life remained persistently at a distance.

Mme Cholet still went about with furrows ploughed across her forehead and a worried, puzzled look in her eyes, as if she could not realize that there would be no return to the easy, dignified life that she and her husband had begun to savour. M. Cholet, however, had acknowledged the fact, though he was not yet reconciled to it. The struggle to come to terms with himself must have been long and difficult. But a sense of humour, a discriminating, intellectual sense, had saved him from becoming embittered.

He had many worries; or it would be nearer exactness to say that he worried about many things. Such things as increasing taxation and the high cost of living, the spread of Communism and the mounting independent attitude of the working classes; the difficulty of finding good farm labourers and the new laws regulating arrangements between land-owners and *métayers;* he was concerned about his youngest daughter who was studying strenuously for entrance to Poitiers University, and he was upset by the rain that had washed the sulphate off his vines.

As he walked about his estate, going to give orders to his bailiff or taking his dogs for a walk or watching his vines being sprayed again with sulphate, as he went about he kept

nodding his head and muttering, '*Oui, ah oui*', sadly every few minutes, as if during the intervening periods he was considering whether his present difficulties were the greatest and the most numerous he had ever known.

Yet he did not look like a man burdened with many troubles. He was tall and slim and erect, with a dignified bearing and grave courteous manners. Out of doors he always wore an old grey hat pulled well forward so that he had to hold his head up, like a guardsman; he was never without a stick, or a dog at his heels; his grey suit was old but well cut, with the red emblem of the Légion d'Honneur in the buttonhole. He looked a distinguished figure; as he walked, evenly, deliberately, head well up and lips compressed, he looked as if he were far more interested in choosing a subject for another water-colour or in considering a possible acquisition to his book collection than in the daily mundane affairs of his estate.

He did not turn his worries into complaints; he stated them with a certain amount of objectivity, trying to impress you with the fact that he is but an example of how troubled a condition the country is in—'*Voilà où nous en sommes.*' In the same way, as he rolled his own cigarettes with facility he would raise one eyebrow apologetically, excusing this plebeian act which was, he implied, another deplorable result of misgovernment. He could, of course, have bought his cigarettes in packets; but he had learned to roll his own when they were scarce, and he continued to do so now. There was an obstinate trait in his character; and he was both pleased and amused by his dexterity.

When in his study he was more content with life. The walls were lined with books, from floor to ceiling, that he

had collected during his years in Paris. He specialized in books published during the lifetime of their authors—the next best thing to collecting first editions, he would point out. Here, the quiet, dry coolness that he assumed outdoors was replaced by a warm, bright interest. He would pick out and show the books he prized most, handling them with affection, or display his water-colours that he kept piled in an odd place, criticizing his own work yet prepared to look again and for a long time when told it had merit. Here he was the kind of man he would have liked always to be, surrounded by his hobbies that he wished were full-time pursuits.

Daily life in the house was a scattered, haphazard business. Mme Cholet had one servant, an old family retainer who did all the heavy household work and who needed much supervision. Every morning Mme Cholet went into the village about half a mile away—the *bourg*, as it was called here—to buy bread and any other necessities. Their estate made them almost self-sufficient; about two-thirds of it formed two farms that were let on the *métayage* system, and the remainder consisted of vineyards, a pasture, and a field or two, a wood with a small river running through it, and a large kitchen garden. Their bread, of which M. Cholet was a heavy consumer, was made from their own wheat. The village baker was also the local miller, and when Mme Cholet went to his shop for bread she took with her a long notched stick to mark up her score. The baker took a stick similar to her own from the rack of sticks behind him, and placed the two together; they fitted perfectly because they were the two halves of a stick that had been split. He made a deep notch across both sticks, and gave Mme Cholet two thick tapering loaves. This operation always made the

furrows across her forehead deepen and the lines on her face tighten, as though the cut were being made on her own skin.

M. Cholet seldom went into the village. He was opposed to the political views of the Mayor and disapproved of the *curé*, and he held a low opinion of the villagers and peasants who let themselves be influenced by these two authorities. He spent the morning at his desk dealing with correspondence or accounts, talking to one of his workmen about a matter he had just remembered, making cigarette boxes in his carpentry shed, or going to see the man who sold wine-casks. 'And to think', he would say, 'that the cost of an empty cask is equal to the price of a full one pre-war.' And shook his head sadly, muttering '*Oui, ah oui*' a few moments later.

The daughter was the only one who organized her day, to hide herself somewhere, indoors or out, to cram her memory with civil history and the *Code Napoléon*. This was during the long summer holidays, when two young grandsons stayed at the house and disturbed its tranquillity. Not only did they play noisy, boisterous games on the increasingly unkempt lawn, but the youngest, who was round and chubby like a pumpkin, talked incessantly to everybody, to himself failing an audience, and asked a stream of questions to which he supplied the answers.

The two main meals were the only daily events that were consistent. Even to these M. Cholet usually succeeded in arriving late. The presence of guests made little difference; he often appeared as everyone was finishing the first course, bringing with him a bottle or two from the cellar and holding them up as an excuse and a plea for forgiveness. He would sit down and at once mildly rebuke the youngest boy, almost automatically, for chattering at table. 'Silence, Marcel!

That's enough.' Then he poured out the wine, commented a little upon its history, and remarked that he had no bread.

His consumption of bread during a meal was considerable even for a Frenchman. He ate bread abstractedly with each course and between all the courses; his left hand kept reaching for a piece of bread that he broke into small lumps and popped into his mouth, with an astonishing regularity. He looked more cheerful and confident at meal-times, and this was due to some extent to his consumption of bread; he was very likely cheered by the thought that, with so much bread available, the Communist revolution was still some way off. For to him, as to all French people, bread was a symbol. Most of the revolutions and social upheavals have been preceded by bread-queues. The French are attached to bread by strong and secret fibres. Throughout the centuries they have learnt to respect its values—nutritive, social, political—and they have kept this respect while losing many others. Its colour and quality, availability and price are sure and permanent indications of conditions in the country. And as M. Cholet well knew, the first three at least had never been so good and favourable since pre-war days.

After lunch M. Cholet went for a walk round his estate. He was often accompanied by his wife and grandsons, and by any guests who happened to be staying with them; his wife's object appeared to be to tire out the two boys, the only way known to recover the peace and tranquillity of the house. It was not so much that the walks were long, but that M. Cholet turned aside here and there to attend to some matter, as an afterthought it seemed, and was in no hurry to continue.

In this rather remote part of France life was leisurely and little different from that of a generation before. The post

came and went once a day, and its time of arrival varied considerably. To collect the letters for the house it was necessary to walk across a couple of fields to the gate in the lane and look in the wooden box that anyone could open; this was usually the first halt on the afternoon walk. In some respects the beat of daily life was slower and the means of communication fewer than when M. Cholet was a young man. There was a narrow, grassy lane that crossed his land for no apparent reason, since it did not link up with any other lane but just kept straight on, sufficient in itself and as direct as a Roman road. It used to be a single branch line of a railway which, in those hectic and progressive days, connected the surrounding villages with the line to Tours and Poitiers. But so little use had been made of the daily train that it had ceased to run, and later the track had been removed altogether. Now there was a bus that went through the village once a day in each direction; to catch it the people had to readjust their conception of time because, of course, they kept to *l'heure ancienne*.

M. Cholet and his party wandered along the lane, after investigating the contents of the letter-box, straggling across it in a ragged line, with a dog or two trotting ahead as if to show the way, and only moving grudgingly from the middle when an occasional waggon or car insisted that they should. Marcel was already chatting away to himself and everybody, asking and answering his own questions with grave assurance and displaying a youthful *je m'en foutisme* at the general unresponsiveness. Now and again M. Cholet stopped to consider a subject for a painting; an old house with a Renaissance gateway, or one of the low, white-washed cottages, with a green grape-vine stretching sideways under the eaves

and spattered with the blue of a sulphate wash. He had painted them several times, from different positions and at different seasons, but was convinced that he had still not found the best position for his easel nor the right moment to begin.

He turned aside from the lane to look at his vines, to watch them being sprayed with copper sulphate. The hot sun was quickly drying the light-blue liquid on the green leaves; a light, warm wind carried the sound of the creaking spraying-cart, even from the other end of the field, as it was driven slowly up and down the long, straight rows of gnarled, brown vines by an old man. M. Cholet stood for many minutes looking at his vines and the work of tending them. His soft hat was drawn down well over his eyes so that his head was erect, and he was leaning, slightly, on his thin stick; he gave a little grunt of satisfaction now and again, and, at the same time, his nostrils twitched as they did when he was showing a book he was fond of or one of his pictures he particularly appreciated.

It was good to stand there in the clear white light, watching the old man doing his work with care, letting one's mind dwell on the pleasant, soothing subjects of old wine and old books. But, alas, these were difficult times. 'There never seems to be enough sun', he commented, pulling his hat even lower to shade his eyes. 'The vines are late. And what shall I do when this old chap has to give up? The gradual migration of country people to the towns is a good thing, say some experts, because there are too many people living on the land. But it's a bad thing, according to other experts, because it'll lead to a lack of balance in our economy. Which shows that experts don't always know what they're talking about. What really matters, to my mind, is the depreciation

in character, in human worth, when people leave the land to go into industry. *Oui, ah oui.* Yes, I know, it's said that the peasant lives too close to the soil, that he sees nothing beyond it. But what does the factory worker see beyond the machine that he's tied to? Better to be close to the soil than to a machine; the soil is a living thing, and what you produce from it is *yours*, it's the result of *your* work and knowledge. There's the personal satisfaction to be drawn from it that the industrial worker never has. That is what is disappearing, that is what matters—a personal satisfaction in one's work, a delight in craftsmanship.

'The experts want to mechanize our farms. What—as in America? To set a ploughman off, on a tractor, at dawn and tell him to keep right on with his furrow until dusk? An open-air factory, that's all! More depreciation of character. No, how much better for a man to have just as much land as he and his family can manage, that he can understand and care for himself, be independent and self-reliant. Besides, can machinery improve the quality of meat, make better cheese, or wine with a finer bouquet—or the cask to keep it in? Look at my old chap—you can't replace him by a machine, thank heaven. He has to cut back the vines in winter, collect up the cuttings, then draw up the earth between the rows, tie the new growths to the wires, spray the vines, harvest the grapes, and press them. It's not just soil and sun and stock that give character to a wine. But character seems to matter less and less; it's the strength of a wine that seems to count now—twelve degrees, thirteen degrees, that's how it's reckoned. Like everything else, these days; power and quantity, not quality and *finesse*. Ah, such is the world today. *Voilà où nous en sommes.*'

He continued on his way, shaking his head sadly, still ruminating; at any moment he might begin again to utter his thoughts aloud.

Invariably the return to the house was made by way of the wood and river path. It was a walk much enjoyed by all the Cholet family, especially on hot days. The river was one of changing moods every few hundred yards, now rushing fiercely and gurgling impatiently through a barrier of boulders, now flowing gently and placidly along a level, here shallow, clear, and friendly, there deep, dark, and forbidding. The thick growth of trees on either sloping bank came right down to the water's edge at many places. The people had to walk in single file along the narrow path, which was often overhung by leafy branches that stretched out to dip their ends in the river, as children lean over the side of a boat to trail their hands. The high sun managed, with difficulty, to reach the river in places, filtering through the trees and making changing patterns that shimmered and wavered on the flowing water. It was delightfully cool on a hot afternoon, and was a soothing, relaxing place, seeming far removed from the cares and troubles of the everyday world —which was, perhaps, an extra reason for the Cholets coming here so often.

There was an air of secretiveness, of remoteness and green enchantment about this rippling river in its sheltered ravine. The narrow path that curved with the river sometimes came to an abrupt end, where the bank rose too steeply or where there had been a small landfall, and then the party crossed the river on a line of stepping stones to continue along the path on the other side; sometimes it widened a little and there was space by the water's edge, between two trees, large enough for two men to sit and fish with a basket between them;

and once, the path led into a small glade where there were two rough table-tops set on tree-stumps and several plank seats built round them, so that the walkers rested, called playfully for a waiter and drinks, and wondered whether there were any fairies to do their bidding.

As the path entered M. Cholet's estate he would be greeted, sometimes, by a light girlish voice; and there, sitting in a stout tree that bent towards the river and studying her books and lecture notebooks, would be his daughter, like some naïad examining mortals through a screen of leaves. Along this length of path too, because it was more accessible and less overgrown, were always a few fishermen silently absorbed in their favourite occupation. One or two of them looked up opposingly as the Cholets passed, and seemed to be annoyed that anyone, even the owner of the fishing rights, should disturb their concentration.

Mme Cholet glared at them, one after the other, puckered her forehead, and muttered loudly, 'And they don't even come and ask permission first.' While her husband said grimly, half to himself: 'This is no time to make complaints to the people. When they fish in my river without permission —well, I must just choose a time to fish when there's fewer of them than usual.' He gave a wry little smile and, clambering up a steep path back to the fields and the house, he began again to nod to himself and to mutter '*Oui, ah oui*' at intervals.

During dinner M. Cholet became more cheerful and praised his wine; not a remarkable wine, he admitted, but a loyal one, giving a faithful return for all the care and attention. And after dinner, when the two boys had been sent to bed, everyone was well disposed to sit and talk in the library. This room, on the other side of the entrance hall, was evidently

intended for conversation. The chairs were not arranged to conform with the rest of the furniture—which looked, anyway, as if it were standing where the removal men had left it—but were gathered in a scattered circle, neither too close together nor far apart; they were comfortable but straight-backed, so that when everyone was seated it seemed natural to begin talking to each other. It was a room in which you felt at ease, a room that was constantly used so that it had a friendly, homely atmosphere.

M. Cholet usually sat a little apart, at a handsome, slender writing-desk, but rarely made any headway with his papers and correspondence. He spent much time juggling with figures for his income-tax return, doing little sums in a doodling sort of way while taking part in the conversation. He disliked paying more than the small amount of tax he considered sufficient, based upon the payments made in his grandfather's time. So he had evolved a system of compiling his income-tax return that, while mathematically correct, gave a final figure satisfactory to him. He was convinced that he was allowed to deduct the previous year's income-tax payments from his annual net income before arriving at the taxable amount.

'For instance', he explained, 'if my annual income is five hundred thousand francs and I've paid fifty thousand in tax on last year's income—why then, my real taxable income this year is four hundred and fifty thousand francs.'

The doubt cast upon this made no impression on him.

'But it's logical. I've only *had* four hundred and fifty thousand francs this year. Besides, there's a space on the form for deducting the income-tax you've paid.'

When, during the day, one of his *métayers* had proposed

killing and selling a pig he would ruminate over the matter, with much head-shaking, during the evening; it was enough to make him forget his pleasure in his system of Diminishing Returns. 'A dead pig is a loss—it's worth just so many pieces of printed paper. And who knows what they're worth? But a live pig—ah! a live pig, that's something solid. *Ça, c'est du solide.* Better buy some young ones with the money and fatten 'em up.'

Yes, in spite of his thirty-five years' residence in Paris and his cultivated tastes there was still something of the peasant about M. Cholet. In that, he was a typical Frenchman. *Ça, c'est du solide.*

But when M. Cholet had been to see one of the local craftsmen, the saddle-maker or the cabinet-maker, he appeared more cheerful in the evening. 'The man who makes my wine-casks told me today that he was taught by his father, who learnt the craft from *his* father.' And M. Cholet would spend a few moments in silent approval. 'He gets much less work to do these days, now that so many casks are factory-made. And his cost more, of course. But, as I told him, he'll always have some customers who believe in the better worth of craftsmanship. Ah yes, he said, he gets few orders for casks these days—but the few there are, let's make a good job of them!' And M. Cholet nodded; and his '*Oui, ah oui*' was firm and assertive and confident. '*Ceux qui restent, faisons-les bien!*' He found comfort in repeating the phrase of this village craftsman.

It was a good note on which to end the day. The chairs were left in position for the following evening, looking as though they were going to continue the conversation while the people slept.

Chapter XVIII

HORSES AND TRACTORS

THE ROGET HOUSEHOLD was large and complex to the stray visitor. There was old Mme Roget, a widow, and her son Henri who was now the master of the house and farm. His wife, young Mme Roget, had sent for her widowed mother when she was expecting her first baby; and her mother had stayed ever since. So that the casual visitor never quite knew to whom his first respects were due. Then there was M. Roget's nephew, who was also a M. Roget and looked almost the same age as his uncle. He too was married; and his wife, the third Mme Roget in the house, looked the senior of the real mistress. But they were used to people making mistakes in their relationship. They had long ago decided that it was too complicated a matter for a visitor to grasp, and only introduced each other on the most necessary occasions.

They were cultivated farming people who had all travelled abroad at one time or another, and who were related to several other of the leading farming families in the district. The farmhouse was old and spacious, the sort of place that, in England, might have been a manor house in the past and had now come down a little in the world. A gnarled grape-vine grew by the main entrance and was spreading across the grey stone towards the first-storey windows. The house faced the large farmyard, noisy with chickens, turkeys

An eternal sight of the French countryside. The sturdy independence of the horse means independence for the farmer.

The farmer keeps some of his horses if he buys a tractor. Either way, he reckons he is safe.

and ducks, which was enclosed by high stone barns. There were many fine old pieces of furniture in the rooms, solid, carved buffets and wardrobes, wide-seated chairs made by craftsmen of the region. The large room downstairs, in the middle of the house, that was used as living-room and dining-room by all the family, had four dressers ranged along the walls; each would have had an honourable place in an antique dealer's shop. The wooden floor was bare except for a faded, thin carpet on which stood the large round table. The open fireplace was wide and high, with an iron fireback showing the figure of Persephone with two of her Furies; on the wall at one side was a yellowing, framed print of Napoleon saying farewell to his bodyguard at Fontainebleau, and at the other side was an oil-painting of considerable merit.

There was nothing to give an impression of wealth nor even of physical comfort; but there was an atmosphere of spaciousness, a feeling of tradition, and a general attitude of ease. M. Roget, the master of the house, ran a car and bred racehorses as a profitable sideline and hobby. Yet these were difficult times for a farmer, he would tell you. He had two major complaints: the increasing cost of overheads, and the lack of good farm labourers.

By the first he meant the greater increase above the cost-of-living index of industrial prices as compared with agricultural prices. At first, you would suppose he was referring to the 1949 figures on which the present cost-of-living index is based, or at least to the immediate pre-war index. But when you heard him talking on the subject . . . 'The price of wheat is fixed by the Government at a figure that's far too low when compared with the increased cost of living. A

quintal of wheat used to be reckoned as a golden louis. Now, the worth of a *louis d'or* is far more than what I'm paid for my quintal.'

The *louis d'or* — the golden sovereign? Surely he, an educated man not yet forty, a leading member of the local Farmers' Union, who had been Mayor of his *commune* for eleven years—surely he did not still base his calculations and his values on gold? But yes; the *louis d'or* was always heard in his conversation when prices were being compared.

'What else can you take as a basis? The cost-of-living index? It's a classroom fabrication of economists, and as flimsy as their figures. The franc? The pound? Who knows what they're really worth? But the *louis d'or*—that's something solid. All right—look at industrial prices another way. In 1942 or '43 I could have bought a tractor—and a Diesel, at that—for less than the price of three horses; not racehorses, but working horses. It's true that horses were then fetching good prices because the Germans wanted them—let's be fair. And that I'd have needed a permit to buy a tractor at that price. Still, let's say that four of my horses were worth the equivalent of a tractor. How many horses d'you think I'd have to sell today to buy a tractor? Ten! What I say is—the industrialists are holding us up to ransom! The market price of a horse is still about what it was ten years ago—but the price of a tractor? And it's still increasing.'

M. Roget's farm extended a long way across the plain; it was much of a piece, a large farm of wide, hedge-less fields typical of the flat country of the Beauce or Artois, the region south of Caen and elsewhere; the sort of country that is described in the barbaric phraseology of militarists as 'cracking good tank range'. M. Roget kept a small herd of

cattle, as well as his horses, but most of the land was given over to wheat and flax.

He could deliver his wheat to his own Co-operative or to any regional grain merchant and warehouseman; the price he received was the same, that fixed by the Government. But his total harvest of wheat was controlled in the same simple fashion as for cider and wine; he had to get a permit from the nearest café doing excise business in order to transport any of his wheat. The permit cost very little; it was a tax that was hardly worth collecting. But M. Roget, like everyone else, had no illusions about it; with the heavy fine that was imposed for transporting wheat without a permit it was a method of controlling farmers. And in the spring he had to submit a statement, to the Mairie, of the total acreage he had sown for wheat.

The prices he received for his other produce were dependent only upon the age-old law of supply and demand; and this, typically, he greatly preferred. He received a Government subsidy for his flax which, he admitted, was a good one. But, he contended, this was the only appreciable help or encouragement that he received from the Ministry of Agriculture; the wheat subsidy was too small to matter.

He and his neighbours had founded a Co-operative but he admitted that it did not receive a great deal of support. 'It's a trading agency for selling our produce and buying our seed and implements. But, for one thing, some farmers think that others—those who run the Co-operative—get the greater advantage from it. That they get the best choice of seed, for instance. And then—we're an independent lot—we always have the idea at the back of our minds that we'd do better ourselves. The seed we get isn't our own choice—

so it can't possibly be the best and most suitable! It's only because the Co-operative gets things cheaper that farmers continue to belong to it.'

An independent lot, yes; stubborn, if you like; but, farmer or peasant, there are few who do not have confidence in their own judgment and capabilities.

M. Roget used machinery to a fair extent; he was one of the first in the region to buy a combine harvester, two or three years after the German occupation. Yet he believed in maintaining a balance between machines, human labour, and horses. When he expressed his ideas on this and allied subjects there was more than an echo of M. Masson in them, in spite of his wider horizons in both an educational and territorial sense.

'To keep good men on the land, people say, they must be paid higher wages and be better lodged. But all that costs money—look at our overheads already. There's the employer's contributions to the Family Allowances and National Health, for instance. We used not to have those to pay—and they're extremely heavy. Yes, I know they're not as much as an industrial employer pays; but then, the farm labourer doesn't draw as much in Family Allowances as the town workman does. And look at the high price of fertilizers! We want to try new methods, but we're held up by the egotism of the industrialists. There's no reason why their prices should have risen more than agricultural ones, as far as I can see.

'Besides, there's a minimum wage for farm labourers—which means we're obliged to pay it to men who aren't worth it. You can't abolish labour altogether on a farm. And you can't have a machine for everything. They're too dear

for one thing, even if the farm were large enough. I've got a combine harvester, but I can only use it for a few days in the year. It'll be years—years!—before it's paid its way. And the same thing would apply to other machines; if I had a potato harvester it'd only be in use three days each year. That's a luxury that's got no place in farming. Machinery is like armchairs in a house—nice to have around, but not essential; and, moreover, adding nothing to your products. Whether the wheat's cut with a scythe or a combine harvester, the amount of harvest is the same. It saves employing workmen, yes; but, with present wages, does that alone make a machine worth while—at its high cost and the price of petrol?

'I've got six horses for work on the farm, five men, and a tractor—which I use as little as possible. Like that, I can always be sure of working my land whatever happens—provided my horses aren't requisitioned by the Army, in the event of a general mobilization.'

There spoke a French farmer from the depths of an inherited fear.

'The essential thing is not to be dependent on outside help in any way. I'm master here, and I intend to remain so, if it's humanly possible.'

His opinions on the proportionate use of horses and tractors were typical of farmers of his importance. The approach to mechanization, where possible, has been and still is slow and gradual. The predominant working sound in the fields is not the thudding of an engine but the jingling of harness and the shout of encouragement to horses or, in the south, to oxen. Yet every farmer would assert that the land is mechanized, compared with the immediate post-war situation.

Farmers were left much to their own devices during the war; nearly all major developments are of quite recent date.

To replace horses by a tractor is a matter for long deliberation and much inquiry into the experience of others. The farmer is also helped by articles in farming journals. It is quoted that in the U.S.A. the addition of each tractor has led to the suppression of eight farmhorses. But French agricultural experts recall that the tractors are more powerful and the horses lighter, on the average, than in France. The general view is that a tractor should be considered the equivalent of four horses; a finer equation is that each five horse-power of a tractor replaces one horse. Calculating thus, on a farm with a hundred acres under plough, in a region where one horse is normally used for about each sixteen acres, the farmer could become mechanized by using one twenty horse-power tractor and two horses, instead of six horses.

But he is not yet convinced of the advisability of buying this tractor. His natural prudence makes him hesitate until he is sure of having enough work for the tractor to pay its way. A minimum use of it is ten hours a day on at least one hundred and fifty days of the year. Two thousand hours of work annually is considered a good return. And such a target is of course impossible to achieve on the many small family farms. This problem is being slowly met by the marketing of low horse-power tractors and hand-motors, and by Farmers' Co-operatives hiring out tractors and other machines. But the machines are usually wanted by many people at the same time; and the peasant with any money to invest prefers to buy another piece of land rather than modernize his property or methods of work.

Yet in some ways modern methods and discoveries have

been adopted with comparative rapidity; mainly those that do not require much individual outlay. Artificial insemination continues to increase; there are more than fifty centres, financed on a co-operative basis, which between them serve half a million cattle annually. There are many Co-operatives for the making of cheeses; the majority are quite small concerns, which is an additional attraction to the French. But there are a few ambitious ones that point the way to a mass production particularly suitable to the dairy farming regions.

One of the latest of these large Co-operatives, at Condé-sur-Vire in the Manche *département*, employs the most up-to-date machinery and analytical methods. Its lorries collect milk and cream from farms of the region; some of the milk is pasteurized and sent to Paris, the remainder is turned into butter and cheese. It specializes in the making of Gruyère, which needs fine-quality milk without any acidity. Gruyère is the cheese of the Jura *département*, and this is the first time it has been produced elsewhere in any quantity. Some of the directors of the Co-operative spent some time in the Jura studying methods in the cheese co-operatives there; they engaged two experts for their own concern, and installed the necessary special machinery in cellars where the cheeses mature for three to five months and receive special treatment.

Such a Co-operative obviously depends fundamentally on the skill and knowledge of the farmer who supplies the milk and cream. There is still, however, the inherent suspicion and dislike of large organizations to be overcome. Most of the suppliers are farmers of the status of M. Roget; the peasantry, in the main, still prefer to make their own butter and cheese.

M. Roget considered that the peasantry just did not realize

that they were losing ground. 'They never think of renewing their buildings nor even their homes. They just go on in the same old way—yet a good many made money during the Occupation. There's something psychological about their attitude; the average peasant is frightened of doing something that would make him stand out from his neighbours. One small farmer I know—an exception, this one—was a prisoner in Germany and saw the mechanized farms there. In fact, he worked on some of them. When he got back here he borrowed the money to buy a small tractor. And his neighbours are still waiting to see whether he goes bankrupt or whether he makes it pay.

'It's their attitude that needs changing. I shouldn't think that the average peasant farmhouse has had anything done to it for a hundred years or more. If the peasant is a tenant how can the owner afford to do anything, with rents low and repair costs high—naturally, they're set by industrialists. Without reckoning the heavy taxes to pay as well.'

He might have been repeating the words of the Minister for Reconstruction, who had said that the housing problem was a permanent and acute one, particularly in the countryside where the average age of dwellings was one hundred and seventeen years; that this was a problem due to the neglect of more than a century, and authoritative measures were necessary. 'What was the point of having the most powerful hydro-electric works, if women's household tasks were still as long and laborious as a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago?'

The living conditions of the majority of peasants no doubt have much to do with their rigid outlook and narrow horizons. The Masson home is no exception. A survey of over

a thousand small farms in eleven *communes* of the Saint Nazaire region, carried out by members of the Jacisme movement, showed that forty-four per cent. of the farmhouses contained only one room, kitchen and living-room and bedroom combined. Thirty-six per cent. had two rooms. Just over five per cent of the whole had running water, but nearly eighty per cent. had electricity. Twenty per cent. possessed water-closets, mostly primitive ones; and eight per cent. had separate washrooms.

There are many regions of France where conditions are much better. The survey was carried out in one of the more backward regions; but there are also many such regions where similar figures would be revealed. In the country as a whole there are nearly twenty-five thousand *communes*, with a population of ten millions (a quarter of the total population), which are without mains water.

In a number of ways efforts are being made to improve the lot of the peasant and to help young farm-workers, both by the Government and by public organizations.

First things come first, and so the *plan de remembrement* is being steadily extended; its prime object is not so much to achieve a semi-mechanization of the land as to make each scattered farm more of a piece, and so facilitate the working of it. This may or may not then lead to a greater use of machinery. It is a slow business; before the plan can be undertaken in any *commune* the agreement of the municipal council is necessary, and this is not always forthcoming. And will not the exchange of land have to be begun all over again in ten or twenty years' time, since the heritage laws and dowry custom still continue to cause division? Such was the opinion of M. Roget and other farmers.

Yet a brake to the disintegrating effect of the heritage laws can now be applied by one of the heirs legally taking over managership of the family farm, even against the wishes of the co-heirs. A special tribunal grants permission, provided the son pays rent on the other inherited portions of the farm pending the purchase of them. Application for this special treatment can be made by any of the sons; the relevant qualification is that he shall be 'the most capable'. The mere existence of this law sometimes makes a quarrelling family come to an arrangement of its own to keep the farm entire.

It is possible for a young farming family to obtain a Government loan when setting up on its own. There are evening classes and correspondence courses for young ambitious farm-workers, organized by Farmers' Unions and Agricultural Colleges. M. Roget was an instructor in his district, and also helped the local Jacisme group.

Although this movement is sponsored by the Church, membership is open to anyone. As well as the practical teaching of the group leaders, aided by the periodicals and handbooks of the movement, attempts are made to point out to the young peasant how he can, and why he should, improve his living conditions and methods. It is suggested, for instance, that mains-water should be laid on, not because it is more hygienic—that would make little impression on the peasant whose forebears appear to have thriven on water from a well—but because his wife would be spared many journeys a day to fetch water; and this time could be used for some more profitable task. The periodical *Jeunesses Rurales* publishes articles on labour-saving devices in the home and accounts of modern farming methods. Young

peasants are encouraged to take a critical view of their old set ways by monthly *enquêtes*, compiled at headquarters, which are similar in form to the wartime ABCA discussion briefs. Each *enquête* is arranged in three parts: observation, judgment, and action. Typical subjects are domestic organization, farm management, and social life. Judgment is passed during discussions at village meetings, and particular improvements are suggested.

Membership is loose and irregular, and the local organization is kept fluid; for the farm-workers and villagers have not the time nor the inclination to attend regular meetings. One of the more popular activities is the occasional outing to some large farm where talks and demonstrations are given by the farmer and Ministry of Agriculture specialists. A typical programme is:

Demonstration of various types of tractor.
Talk on the use of fertilizers.
Criticism of a herd of cattle, followed by a talk on artificial insemination.

The strength of the Jacisme movement lies in the fact that it draws upon the farming and rural communities for its leaders and tutors, and that a long-term view is taken. In ten years' time it is possible that, in the regions where Jacisme is most active, the present members will be taking the lead in their local Farmers' Unions. The movement was founded in the early nineteen-thirties, but its greatest development, like most matters connected with agriculture, has occurred since 1945. Its chief difficulty is to find the voluntary group leaders, who form the hard core of local membership. Lack of funds, too, is a common handicap. Nevertheless,

twenty-five thousand members and delegates attended the last national congress.

The Roget household had tap-water piped from the well, but most people in the village still fetched and carried their water. When he had been Mayor he had tried to improve the amenities of the village, but had not received sufficient support. The village was less than six miles away from a city of sixty thousand people, yet was under no influence from it. To catch a bus it was necessary to walk a mile to the main road, to the next village; a supply of bread was brought three times a week by a visiting baker.

Although M. Roget used modern equipment on the farm there was no modern device in the house except a wireless set. The daily routine of the women was carried out in much the same way as when old Mme Roget was a girl. True, there were several women to do the work; and they had the help of the wives of two farm-workers.

This was a part of the terms of service of the married farm-workers; the man worked on the farm, the wife helped in the house and milked the cows, and they were lodged and fed and received a small salary. The word for a farm employee—*valet*—has still a trace of feudalism about it too. They are little-organized, though of late years Communism has spread among them. M. Roget had discovered at one time that his *grand valet*, the foreman, had been in the habit of starting his midday meal ten minutes before the other employees. When he closed his clasp-knife it was an accepted sign that the mealtime had ended; and the others were too timid and disorganized between themselves to insist on the completion of their mealtime.

Yet a farm labourer with some initiative and readiness to

work hard can raise himself in the farming hierarchy without borrowing money. The ancient system of *métayage*, which goes back to Roman times, provides a means of promotion and opens the way to farm ownership. Under this system a landowner provides the farm and livestock, and sometimes the equipment, and the *métayer* gives his labour and knowledge; the products of the farm are divided between the two. A recent amendment to the Statut du Mêtayage has reduced the landowner's share to one-third. This well-tried co-operation between capital and labour is found chiefly in the north-west and west of France; about five per cent of all farms are worked under this arrangement. Once a *métayer* has proved his worth in farm management, built up some stock of his own and saved money, he can then hope to advance to the position of a tenant farmer. In this case the rent is paid in kind, or in cash, calculated on the average market prices of an agreed amount of farm produce; or partly in cash and partly in kind. The terms of a lease are closely regulated by law, by the Statut du Fermage, which protects the rights of the tenant to renew the lease, which must be for at least nine years, and lays down the conditions under which the landlord is entitled to give notice, notably if he has a son or daughter who wishes to take over the farm. The farm products on which the rent is based, four at most, are determined in each *département* by a commission set up by the Préfet. The Statut du Fermage and the Statut du Métayage are frequently amended by Parliament; the detailed nature of their clauses is important to about one-quarter of the farmers and their landlords.

In spite of M. Roget's typical complaints, the French farmer, whether large or small, is in a strong position in this

country, where the average family spends the larger portion of its income on food. Industrial prices have undoubtedly increased more than agricultural ones, but most people are far more affected by the latter increase. The English prefer comfort, the French food; and who shall say which is the better choice?

The production per acre is one of the highest in the world. Nearly all branches of French agriculture have fully recovered from the damage caused by the war and the Occupation; the country now exports produce that in 1945 and 1946 it was importing.

What the French farmer or peasant does with his money is best known to himself; Ministry of Finance experts reckon that the Treasury receives in income tax from agriculture at most fifteen per cent of what it should receive. Whatever the nature of his farm, he is turning to mechanical and new methods hesitantly, prudently, still much attached to the past and loth to make himself even partly dependent on that fearsome and inhuman colossus, industrialism.

M. Roget was typical of the responsible, leading farmer who owns enough land to be able to adopt new ideas and methods. He subscribed to an artificial-insemination centre, and he was studying the effect of artificial fertilizers on his land—'But what a price they are!' He had been to England, and was envious of the ways in which English farmers were helped and encouraged. 'But not the ways in which they're controlled and directed', he added with a grin. No; he alone directed his farm. 'Independence of action is the most important thing.' And he strode away to his six horses and one tractor. Either way, he reckons he is pretty safe.

Chapter XIX

THE HAPPY MEDIUM

M. ROGET THOUGHT he had found the exact balance between mechanization and husbandry. On his farm he had found the answer to a problem that is perplexing the French in town and village. How can they hold a leading place in this industrial, mechanized age, yet still preserve the old values of craftsmanship and the humanities? They are slowly searching for a happy medium; if one exists, then the French are the people most likely to find it.

There is general regret at the disappearance of the artisan, of craftsmanship. Yet they have not disappeared to the same extent as elsewhere; and a love of craftsmanship, both the practice and appreciation of it, remains. It is a very gradual, not a brutal eclipse of 'a noble and most worthy attitude to work. . . .'* In 1750 there were forty barrel and cask makers in the town of Caen; in 1850 the number was fourteen; in 1950 there were still three (*only* three, a Frenchman would say). The saddle and harness makers numbered thirty-three 200 years ago; there were still sixteen in 1924, and four in 1951. To the craftsmen who remain, industrialism is synonymous with standardization. 'To get things done

* 'Une notion même du travail s'éteint, la plus précieuse et noble peutêtre, celle qui permettait à l'homme de marquer de son empreint tout ce qui sortait de sa main et de son esprit.'—from an article in *Ouest—France*.

quickly, without regard for quality', were the words of a leather craftsman, 'that's all that matters these days.' He picked up a lady's leather handbag that he was repairing and looked at it with distaste. 'That's not fit work for a man. But to make a fine set of harness—*ah ça!*' He would have approved of M. Cholet's cask maker—'*ceux qui restent, faisons-les bien*'.

Yet the regret of these individual craftsmen is not altogether well-founded. Industrialism is spreading, but factories remain small, on the whole, and quality is still the hall-mark of their products. On the land, there is still no better quality and variety than among the cheeses and wines, the meat and the butter, of ancient, civilized France. The mechanical resources of this age are employed with great skill to construct hydro-electric barrages and handsome bridges.

'Personal satisfaction is what matters', says M. Cholet, shaking his head as he walks about his estate. 'No depreciation of character'. Yet he realizes the great advantage of machines and has just bought a low horse-power tractor. There is M. Masson, wondering what is the point of saving time until he knows what good use to make of the time saved. M. Millet has no modern refrigerator in his kitchen, but when he makes a sauce it is perfect. And the Bressons in their self-sufficient village, with their car, their telephone for use in emergency and electric stove kept in reserve, are perhaps nearest of all to finding an answer to the problem.