# The Village Rector

Honor® de Balzac

**Translated by Katharine Prescott Wormeley**

DEDICATION

To Helene.

The tiniest boat is not launched upon the sea without the protection of some living emblem or revered name, placed upon it by the mariners. In accordance with this time-honored custom, Madame, I pray you to be the protectress of this book now launched upon our literary ocean; and may the Imperial name which the Church has canonized and your devotion has doubly sanctified for me guard it from perils.

De Balzac.

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## THE VILLAGE RECTOR

# I. THE SAUVIATS

In the lower town of Limoges, at the corner of the rue de la Vieille-Poste and the rue de la Cite might have been seen, a generation ago, one of those shops which were scarcely changed from the period of the middle-ages. Large tiles seamed with a thousand cracks lay on the soil itself, which was damp in places, and would have tripped up those who failed to observe the hollows and ridges of this singular flooring. The dusty walls exhibited a curious mosaic of wood and brick, stones and iron, welded together with a solidity due to time, possibly to chance. For more than a hundred years the ceiling, formed of colossal beams, bent beneath the weight of the upper stories, though it had never given way under them. Built *en colombage*, that is to say, with a wooden frontage, the whole facade was covered with slates, so put on as to form geometrical figures,—thus preserving a naive image of the burgher habitations of the olden time.

None of the windows, cased in wood and formerly adorned with carvings, now destroyed by the action of the weather, had continued plumb; some bobbed forward, others tipped backward, while a few seemed disposed to fall apart; all had a compost of earth, brought from heaven knows where, in the nooks and crannies hollowed by the rain, in which the spring-tide brought forth fragile flowers, timid creeping plants, and sparse herbage. Moss carpeted the roof and draped its supports. The corner pillar, with its composite masonry of stone blocks mingled with brick and pebbles, was alarming to the eye by reason of its curvature; it seemed on the point of giving way under the weight of the house, the gable of which overhung it by at least half a foot. The municipal authorities and the commissioner of highways did, eventually, pull the old building down, after buying it, to enlarge the square.

The pillar we have mentioned, placed at the angle of two streets, was a treasure to the seekers for Limousin antiquities, on account of its lovely sculptured niche in which was a Virgin, mutilated during the Revolution. All visitors with archaeological proclivities found traces of the stone sockets used to hold the candelabra in which public piety lighted tapers or placed its *ex-votos* and flowers.

At the farther end of the shop, a worm-eaten wooden staircase led to the two upper floors which were in turn surmounted by an attic. The house, backing against two adjoining houses, had no depth and derived all its light from the front and side windows. Each floor had two small chambers only, lighted by single windows, one looking out on the rue de la Cite, the other on the rue de la Vieille-Poste.

In the middle-ages no artisan was better lodged. The house had evidently belonged in those times to makers of halberds and battle-axes, armorers in short, artificers whose work was not injured by exposure to the open air; for it was impossible to see clearly within, unless the iron shutters were raised from each side of the building; where were also two doors, one on either side of the corner pillar, as may be seen in many shops at the corners of streets. From the sill of each door—of fine stone worn by the tread of centuries—a low wall about three feet high began; in this wall was a groove or slot, repeated above in the beam by which the wall of each facade was supported. From time immemorial the heavy shutters had been rolled along these grooves, held there by enormous iron bars, while the

doors were closed and secured in the same manner; so that these merchants and artificers could bar themselves into their houses as into a fortress.

Examining the interior, which, during the first twenty years of this century, was encumbered with old iron and brass, tires of wheels, springs, bells, anything in short which the destruction of buildings afforded of old metals, persons interested in the relics of the old town noticed signs of the flue of a forge, shown by a long trail of soot,—a minor detail which confirmed the conjecture of archaeologists as to the original use to which the building was put. On the first floor (above the ground-floor) was one room and the kitchen; on the floor above that were two bedrooms. The garret was used to put away articles more choice and delicate than those that lay pell-mell about the shop.

This house, hired in the first instance, was subsequently bought by a man named Sauviat, a hawker or peddler who, from 1786 to 1793, travelled the country over a radius of a hundred and fifty miles around Auvergne, exchanging crockery of a common kind, plates, dishes, glasses,—in short, the necessary articles of the poorest households,—for old iron, brass, and lead, or any metal under any shape it might lurk in. The Auvergnat would give, for instance, a brown earthenware saucepan worth two sous for a pound of lead, two pounds of iron, a broken spade or hoe or a cracked kettle; and being invariably the judge of his own cause, he did the weighing.

At the close of his third year Sauviat added the hawking of tin and copper ware to that of his pottery. In 1793 he was able to buy a chateau sold as part of the National domain, which he at once pulled to pieces. The profits were such that he repeated the process at several points of the sphere in which he operated; later, these first successful essays gave him the idea of proposing something of a like nature on a larger scale to one of his compatriots who lived in Paris. Thus it happened that the “Bande Noire,” so celebrated for its devastations, had its birth in the brain of old Sauviat, the peddler, whom all Limoges afterward saw and knew for twenty-seven years in the rickety old shop among his cracked bells and rusty bars, chains and scales, his twisted leaden gutters, and metal rubbish of all kinds. We must do him the justice to say that he knew nothing of the celebrity or the extent of the association he originated; he profited by his own idea only in proportion to the capital he entrusted to the since famous firm of Bresac.

Tired of frequenting fairs and roaming the country, the Auvergnat settled at Limoges, where he married, in 1797, the daughter of a coppersmith, a widower, named Champagnac. When his father-in-law died he bought the house in which he had been carrying on his trade of old-iron dealer, after ceasing to roam the country as a peddler. Sauviat was fifty years of age when he married old Champagnac’s daughter, who was herself not less than thirty. Neither handsome nor pretty, she was nevertheless born in Auvergne, and the *patois* seemed to be the mutual attraction; also she had the sturdy frame which enables women to bear hard work. In the first three years of their married life Sauviat continued to do some peddling, and his wife accompanied him, carrying iron or lead on her back, and leading the miserable horse and cart full of crockery with which her husband plied a disguised usury. Dark-skinned, high-colored, enjoying robust health, and showing when she laughed a brilliant set of teeth, white, long, and broad as almonds, Madame Sauviat had the hips and bosom of a woman made by Nature expressly for maternity.

If this strong girl were not earlier married, the fault must be attributed to the Harpagon “no dowry” her father practised, though he never read Moliere. Sauviat was not deterred by the lack of dowry; besides, a man of fifty can’t make difficulties, not to speak of the fact that such a wife would save him the cost of a servant. He added nothing to the furniture of his bedroom where, from the day of his wedding to the day he left the house, twenty years later, there was never anything but a single four-post bed, with valance and curtains of green serge, a chest, a bureau, four chairs, a table, and a looking-glass, all collected from different localities. The chest contained in its upper section pewter plates, dishes, etc., each article dissimilar from the rest. The kitchen can be imagined from the bedroom.

Neither husband nor wife knew how to read,—a slight defect of education which did not prevent them from ciphering admirably and doing a most flourishing business. Sauviat never bought any article without the certainty of being able to sell it for one hundred per cent profit. To relieve himself of the necessity of keeping books and accounts, he bought and sold for cash only. He had, moreover, such a perfect memory that the cost of any article, were it only a farthing, remained in his mind year after year, together with its accrued interest.

Except during the time required for her household duties, Madame Sauviat was always seated in a rickety wooden chair placed against the corner pillar of the building. There she knitted and looked at the passers, watched over the old iron, sold and weighed it, and received payment if Sauviat was away making purchases. When at home the husband could be heard at daybreak pushing open his shutters; the household dog rushed out into the street; and Madame Sauviat presently came out to help her man in spreading upon the natural counter made by the low walls on either side of the corner of the house on the two streets, the multifarious collection of bells, springs, broken gunlocks, and the other rubbish of their business, which gave a poverty-stricken look to the establishment, though it usually contained as much as twenty thousand francs’ worth of lead, steel, iron, and other metals.

Never were the former peddler and his wife known to speak of their fortune; they concealed its amount as carefully as a criminal hides a crime; and for years they were suspected of shaving both gold and silver coins. When Champagnac died the Sauviats made no inventory of his property; but they rummaged, with the intelligence of rats, into every nook and corner of the old man’s house, left it as naked as a corpse, and sold the wares it contained in their own shop.

Once a year, in December, Sauviat went to Paris in one of the public conveyances. The gossips of the neighborhood concluded that in order to conceal from others the amount of his fortune, he invested it himself on these occasions. It was known later that, having been connected in his youth with one of the most celebrated dealers in metal, an Auvergnat like himself, who was living in Paris, Sauviat placed his funds with the firm of Bresac, the mainspring and spine of that famous association known by the name of the “Bande Noire,” which, as we have already said, took its rise from a suggestion made by Sauviat himself.

Sauviat was a fat little man with a weary face, endowed by Nature with a look of honesty which attracted customers and facilitated the sale of goods. His straightforward

assertions, and the perfect indifference of his tone and manner, increased this impression. In person, his naturally ruddy complexion was hardly perceptible under the black metallic dust which powdered his curly black hair and the seams of a face pitted with the small-pox. His forehead was not without dignity; in fact, it resembled the well-known brow given by all painters to Saint Peter, the man of the people, the roughest, but withal the shrewdest, of the apostles. His hands were those of an indefatigable worker,—large, thick, square, and wrinkled with deep furrows. His chest was of seemingly indestructible muscularity. He never relinquished his peddler's costume,—thick, hobnailed shoes; blue stockings knit by his wife and hidden by leather gaiters; bottle-green velveteen trousers; a checked waistcoat, from which depended the brass key of his silver watch by an iron chain which long usage had polished till it shone like steel; a jacket with short tails, also of velveteen, like that of the trousers; and around his neck a printed cotton cravat much frayed by the rubbing of his beard.

On Sundays and fete-days Sauviat wore a frock-coat of maroon cloth, so well taken care of that two new ones were all he bought in twenty years. The living of galley-slaves would be thought sumptuous in comparison with that of the Sauviats, who never ate meat except on the great festivals of the Church. Before paying out the money absolutely needed for their daily subsistence, Madame Sauviat would feel in the two pockets hidden between her gown and petticoat, and bring forth a single well-scraped coin,—a crown of six francs, or perhaps a piece of fifty-five sous,—which she would gaze at for a long time before she could bring herself to change it. As a general thing the Sauviats ate herrings, dried peas, cheese, hard eggs in salad, vegetables seasoned in the cheapest manner. Never did they lay in provisions, except perhaps a bunch of garlic or onions, which could not spoil and cost but little. The small amount of wood they burned in winter they bought of itinerant sellers day by day. By seven in winter, by nine in summer, the household was in bed, and the shop was closed and guarded by a huge dog, which got its living from the kitchens in the neighborhood. Madame Sauviat used about three francs' worth of candles in the course of the year.

The sober, toilsome life of these persons was brightened by one joy, but that was a natural joy, and for it they made their only known outlays. In May, 1802, Madame Sauviat gave birth to a daughter. She was confined all alone, and went about her household work five days later. She nursed her child in the open air, seated as usual in her chair by the corner pillar, continuing to sell old iron while the infant sucked. Her milk cost nothing, and she let her little daughter feed on it for two years, neither of them being the worse for the long nursing.

Veronique (that was the infant's name) became the handsomest child in the Lower town, and every one who saw her stopped to look at her. The neighbors then noticed for the first time a trace of feeling in the old Sauviats, of which they had supposed them devoid. While the wife cooked the dinner the husband held the little one, or rocked it to the tune of an Auvergnat song. The workmen as they passed sometimes saw him motionless gazing at Veronique asleep on her mother's knees. He softened his harsh voice when he spoke to her, and wiped his hands on his trousers before taking her up. When Veronique tried to walk, the father bent his legs and stood at a little distance holding out his arms and making little grimaces which contrasted funnily with the rigid furrows of his stern, hard face. The man of iron, brass, and lead became a being of flesh and blood and bones. If he happened

to be standing with his back against the corner pillar motionless, a cry from Veronique would agitate him and send him flying over the mounds of iron fragments to find her; for she spent her childhood playing with the wreck of ancient castles heaped in the depths of that old shop. There were other days on which she went to play in the street or with the neighboring children; but even then her mother's eye was always on her.

It is not unimportant to say here that the Sauviats were eminently religious. At the very height of the Revolution they observed both Sunday and fete-days. Twice Sauviat came near having his head cut off for hearing mass from an unsworn priest. He was put in prison, being justly accused of helping a bishop, whose life he saved, to fly the country. Fortunately the old-iron dealer, who knew the ways of bolts and bars, was able to escape; nevertheless he was condemned to death by default, and as, by the bye, he never purged himself of that contempt, he may be said to have died dead.

His wife shared his piety. The avariciousness of the household yielded to the demands of religion. The old-iron dealers gave their alms punctually at the sacrament and to all the collections in church. When the vicar of Saint-Etienne called to ask help for his poor, Sauviat or his wife fetched at once without reluctance or sour faces the sum they thought their fair share of the parish duties. The mutilated Virgin on their corner pillar never failed (after 1799) to be wreathed with holly at Easter. In the summer season she was feted with bouquets kept fresh in tumblers of blue glass; this was particularly the case after the birth of Veronique. On the days of the processions the Sauviats scrupulously hung their house with sheets covered with flowers, and contributed money to the erection and adornment of the altar, which was the pride and glory of the whole square.

Veronique Sauviat was, therefore, brought up in a Christian manner. From the time she was seven years old she was taught by a Gray sister from Auvergne to whom the Sauviats had done some kindness in former times. Both husband and wife were obliging when the matter did not affect their pockets or consume their time,—like all poor folk who are cordially ready to be serviceable to others in their own way. The Gray sister taught Veronique to read and write; she also taught her the history of the people of God, the catechism, the Old and the New Testaments, and a very little arithmetic. That was all; the worthy sister thought it enough; it was in fact too much.

At nine years of age Veronique surprised the whole neighborhood with her beauty. Every one admired her face, which promised much to the pencil of artists who are always seeking a noble ideal. She was called "the Little Virgin" and showed signs already of a fine figure and great delicacy of complexion. Her Madonna-like face—for the popular voice had well named her—was surrounded by a wealth of fair hair, which brought out the purity of her features. Whoever has seen the sublime Virgin of Titian in his great picture of the "Presentation" at Venice, will know that Veronique was in her girlhood,—the same ingenuous candor, the same seraphic astonishment in her eyes, the same simple yet noble attitude, the same majesty of childhood in her demeanor.

At eleven years of age she had the small-pox, and owed her life to the care of Soeur Marthe. During the two months that their child was in danger the Sauviats betrayed to the whole community the depth of their tenderness. Sauviat no longer went about the country to sales; he stayed in the shop, going upstairs and down to his daughter's room, sitting up with her every night in company with his wife. His silent anguish seemed so great that no

one dared to speak to him; his neighbors looked at him with compassion, but they only asked news of Veronique from Soeur Marthe. During the days when the child's danger reached a crisis, the neighbors and passers saw, for the first and only time in Sauviat's life, tears in his eyes and rolling down his hollow cheeks; he did not wipe them, but stood for hours as if stupefied, not daring to go upstairs to his daughter's room, gazing before him and seeing nothing, so oblivious of all things that any one might have robbed him.

Veronique was saved, but her beauty perished. Her face, once exquisitely colored with a tint in which brown and rose were harmoniously mingled, came out from the disease with a myriad of pits which thickened the skin, the flesh beneath it being deeply indented. Even her forehead did not escape the ravages of the scourge; it turned brown and looked as though it were hammered, like metal. Nothing can be more discordant than brick tones of the skin surrounded by golden hair; they destroy all harmony. These fissures in the tissues, capriciously hollowed, injured the purity of the profile and the delicacy of the lines of the face, especially that of the nose, the Grecian form of which was lost, and that of the chin, once as exquisitely rounded as a piece of white porcelain. The disease left nothing unharmed except the parts it was unable to reach,—the eyes and the teeth. She did not, however, lose the elegance and beauty of her shape,—neither the fulness of its lines nor the grace and suppleness of her waist. At fifteen Veronique was still a fine girl, and to the great consolation of her father and mother, a good and pious girl, busy, industrious, and domestic.

After her convalescence and after she had made her first communion, her parents gave her the two chambers on the second floor for her own particular dwelling. Sauviat, so course in his way of living for himself and his wife, now had certain perceptions of what comfort might be; a vague idea came to him of consoling his child for her great loss, which, as yet, she did not comprehend. The deprivation of that beauty which was once the pride and joy of those two beings made Veronique the more dear and precious to them. Sauviat came home one day, bearing a carpet he had chanced upon in some of his rounds, which he nailed himself on Veronique's floor. For her he saved from the sale of an old chateau the gorgeous bed of a fine lady, upholstered in red silk damask, with curtains and chairs of the same rich stuff. He furnished her two rooms with antique articles, of the true value of which he was wholly ignorant. He bought mignonette and put the pots on the ledge outside her window; and he returned from many of his trips with rose trees, or pansies, or any kind of flower which gardeners or tavern-keepers would give him.

If Veronique could have made comparisons and known the character, past habits, and ignorance of her parents she would have seen how much there was of affection in these little things; but as it was, she simply loved them from her own sweet nature and without reflection.

The girl wore the finest linen her mother could find in the shops. Madame Sauviat left her daughter at liberty to buy what materials she liked for her gowns and other garments; and the father and mother were proud of her choice, which was never extravagant. Veronique was satisfied with a blue silk gown for Sundays and fete-days, and on working-days she wore merino in winter and striped cotton dresses in summer. On Sundays she went to church with her father and mother, and took a walk after vespers along the banks of the Vienne or about the environs. On other days she stayed at home, busy in filling

worsted-work patterns, the payment for which she gave to the poor,—a life of simple, chaste, and exemplary principles and habits. She did some reading together with her tapestry, but never in any books except those lent to her by the vicar of Saint-Etienne, a priest whom Soeur Marthe had first made known to her parents.

All the rules of the Sauviat's domestic economy were suspended in favor of Veronique. Her mother delighted in giving her dainty things to eat, and cooked her food separately. The father and mother still ate their nuts and dry bread, their herrings and parched peas fricasseed in salt butter, while for Veronique nothing was thought too choice and good.

"Veronique must cost you a pretty penny," said a hatmaker who lived opposite to the Sauviats and had designs on their daughter for his son, estimating the fortune of the old-iron dealer at a hundred thousand francs.

"Yes, neighbor, yes," Pere Sauviat would say; "if she asked me for ten crowns I'd let her have them. She has all she wants; but she never asks for anything; she is as gentle as a lamb."

Veronique was, as a matter of fact, absolutely ignorant of the value of things. She had never wanted for anything; she never saw a piece of gold till the day of her marriage; she had no money of her own; her mother bought and gave her everything she needed and wished for; so that even when she wanted to give alms to a beggar, the girl felt in her mother's pocket for the coin.

"If that's so," remarked the hatmaker, "she can't cost you much."

"So you think, do you?" replied Sauviat. "You wouldn't get off under forty crowns a year, I can tell you that. Why, her room, she has at least a hundred crowns' worth of furniture in it! But when a man has but one child, he doesn't mind. The little we own will all go to her."

"The little! Why, you must be rich, pere Sauviat! It is pretty nigh forty years that you have been doing a business in which there are no losses."

"Ha! I sha'n't go to the poorhouse for want of a thousand francs or so!" replied the old-iron dealer.

From the day when Veronique lost the soft beauty which made her girlish face the admiration of all who saw it, Pere Sauviat redoubled in activity. His business became so prosperous that he now went to Paris several times a year. Every one felt that he wanted to compensate his daughter by force of money for what he called her "loss of profit." When Veronique was fifteen years old a change was made in the internal manners and customs of the household. The father and mother went upstairs in the evenings to their daughter's apartment, where Veronique would read to them, by the light of a lamp placed behind a glass globe full of water, the "Vie des Saints," the "Lettres Edifiantes," and other books lent by the vicar. Madame Sauviat knitted stockings, feeling that she thus recouped herself for the cost of oil. The neighbors could see through the window the old couple seated motionless in their armchairs, like Chinese images, listening to their daughter, and admiring her with all the powers of their contracted minds, obtuse to everything that was not business or religious faith.

# II. VERONIQUE

There are, no doubt, many young girls in the world as pure as Veronique, but none purer or more modest. Her confessions might have surprised the angels and rejoiced the Blessed Virgin.

At sixteen years of age she was fully developed, and appeared the woman she was eventually to become. She was of medium height, neither her father nor her mother being tall; but her figure was charming in its graceful suppleness, and in the serpentine curves laboriously sought by painters and sculptors,—curves which Nature herself draws so delicately with her lissom outlines, revealed to the eye of artists in spite of swathing linen and thick clothes, which mould themselves, inevitably, upon the nude. Sincere, simple, and natural, Veronique set these beauties of her form into relief by movements that were wholly free from affectation. She brought out her “full and complete effect,” if we may borrow that strong term from legal phraseology. She had the plump arms of the Auvergnat women, the red and dimpled hand of a barmaid, and her strong but well-shaped feet were in keeping with the rest of her figure.

At times there seemed to pass within her a marvellous and delightful phenomenon which promised to Love a woman concealed thus far from every eye. This phenomenon was perhaps one cause of the admiration her father and mother felt for her beauty, which they often declared to be divine,—to the great astonishment of their neighbors. The first to remark it were the priests of the cathedral and the worshippers with her at the same altar. When a strong emotion took possession of Veronique,—and the religious exaltation to which she yielded herself on receiving the communion must be counted among the strongest emotions of so pure and candid a young creature,—an inward light seemed to efface for the moment all traces of the small-pox. The pure and radiant face of her childhood reappeared in its pristine beauty. Though slightly veiled by the thickened surface disease had laid there, it shone with the mysterious brilliancy of a flower blooming beneath the water of the sea when the sun is penetrating it. Veronique was changed for a few moments; the Little Virgin reappeared and then disappeared again, like a celestial vision. The pupils of her eyes, gifted with the power of great expansion, widened until they covered the whole surface of the blue iris except for a tiny circle. Thus the metamorphose of the eye, which became as keen and vivid as that of an eagle, completed the extraordinary change in the face. Was it the storm of restrained passions; was it some power coming from the depths of the soul, which enlarged the pupils in full daylight as they sometimes in other eyes enlarge by night, darkening the azure of those celestial orbs?

However that may be, it was impossible to look indifferently at Veronique as she returned to her seat from the altar where she had united herself with God,—a moment when she appeared to all the parish in her primitive splendor. At such moments her beauty eclipsed that of the most beautiful of women. What a charm was there for the man who loved her, guarding jealously that veil of flesh which hid the woman’s soul from every eye,—a veil which the hand of love might lift for an instant and then let drop over conjugal delights! Veronique’s lips were faultlessly curved and painted in the clear vermilion of her pure warm blood. Her chin and the lower part of her face were a little

heavy, in the acceptation given by painters to that term,—a heaviness which is, according to the relentless laws of physiognomy, the indication of an almost morbid vehemence in passion. She had above her brow, which was finely modelled and almost imperious, a magnificent diadem of hair, voluminous, redundant, and now of a chestnut color.

From the age of sixteen to the day of her marriage Veronique's bearing was always thoughtful, and sometimes melancholy. Living in such deep solitude, she was forced, like other solitary persons, to examine and consider the spectacle of that which went on within her,—the progress of her thought, the variety of the images in her mind, and the scope of feelings warmed and nurtured in a life so pure.

Those who looked up from their lower level as they passed along the rue de la Cite might have seen, on all fine days, the daughter of the Sauviats sitting at her open window, sewing, embroidering, or pricking the needle through the canvas of her worsted-work, with a look that was often dreamy. Her head was vividly defined among the flowers which poetized the brown and crumbling sills of her casement windows with their leaded panes. Sometimes the reflection of the red damask window-curtains added to the effect of that head, already so highly colored; like a crimson flower she glowed in the aerial garden so carefully trained upon her window-sill.

The quaint old house possessed therefore something more quaint than itself,—the portrait of a young girl worthy of Mieris, or Van Ostade, or Terburg, or Gerard Douw, framed in one of those old, defaced, half ruined windows the brushes of the old Dutch painters loved so well. When some stranger, surprised or interested by the building, stopped before it and gazed at the second story, old Sauviat would poke his head beyond the overhanging projection, certain that he should see his daughter at her window. Then he would retreat into the shop rubbing his hands and saying to his wife in the Auvergne vernacular:—

"Hey! old woman; they're admiring your daughter!"

In 1820 an incident occurred in the simple uneventful life the girl was leading, which might have had no importance in the life of any other young woman, but which, in point of fact, did no doubt exercise over Veronique's future a terrible influence.

On one of the suppressed church fete-days, when many persons went about their daily labor, though the Sauviats scrupulously closed their shop, attended mass, and took a walk, Veronique passed, on their way to the fields, a bookseller's stall on which lay a copy of "Paul and Virginia." She had a fancy to buy it for the sake of the engraving, and her father paid a hundred sous for the fatal volume, which he put into the pocket of his coat.

"Wouldn't it be well to show that book to Monsieur le vicaire before you read it?" said her mother, to whom all printed books were a sealed mystery.

"I thought of it," answered Veronique.

The girl passed the whole night reading the story,—one of the most touching bits of writing in the French language. The picture of mutual love, half Biblical and worthy of the earlier ages of the world, ravaged her heart. A hand—was it divine or devilish?—raised the veil which, till then, had hidden nature from her. The Little Virgin still existing in the beautiful young girl thought on the morrow that her flowers had never been so beautiful;

she heard their symbolic language, she looked into the depths of the azure sky with a fixedness that was almost ecstasy, and tears without a cause rolled down her cheeks.

In the life of all women there comes a moment when they comprehend their destiny,—when their hitherto mute organization speaks peremptorily. It is not always a man, chosen by some furtive involuntary glance, who awakens their slumbering sixth sense; oftener it is some unexpected sight, the aspect of scenery, the *coup d'oeil* of religious pomp, the harmony of nature's perfumes, a rosy dawn veiled in slight mists, the winning notes of some divinest music, or indeed any unexpected motion within the soul or within the body. To this lonely girl, buried in that old house, brought up by simple, half rustic parents, who had never heard an unfit word, whose pure unsullied mind had never known the slightest evil thought,—to the angelic pupil of Soeur Marthe and the vicar of Saint-Etienne the revelation of love, the life of womanhood, came from the hand of genius through one sweet book. To any other mind the book would have offered no danger; to her it was worse in its effects than an obscene tale. Corruption is relative. There are chaste and virgin natures which a single thought corrupts, doing all the more harm because no thought of the duty of resistance has occurred.

The next day Veronique showed the book to the good priest, who approved the purchase; for what could be more childlike and innocent and pure than the history of Paul and Virginia? But the warmth of the tropics, the beauty of the scenery, the almost puerile innocence of a love that seemed so sacred had done their work on Veronique. She was led by the sweet and noble achievement of its author to the worship of the Ideal, that fatal human religion! She dreamed of a lover like Paul. Her thoughts caressed the voluptuous image of that balmy isle. Childlike, she named an island in the Vienne, below Limoges and nearly opposite to the Faubourg Saint-Martial, the Ile de France. Her mind lived there in the world of fancy all young girls construct,—a world they enrich with their own perfections. She spent long hours at her window, looking at the artisans or the mechanics who passed it, the only men whom the modest position of her parents allowed her to think of. Accustomed, of course, to the idea of eventually marrying a man of the people, she now became aware of instincts within herself which revolved from all coarseness.

In such a situation she naturally made many a romance such as young girls are fond of weaving. She clasped the idea—perhaps with the natural ardor of a noble and virgin imagination—of ennobling one of those men, and of raising him to the height where her own dreams led her. She may have made a Paul of some young man who caught her eye, merely to fasten her wild ideas on an actual being, as the mists of a damp atmosphere, touched by frost, crystallize on the branches of a tree by the wayside. She must have flung herself deep into the abysses of her dream, for though she often returned bearing on her brow, as if from vast heights, some luminous reflections, oftener she seemed to carry in her hand the flowers that grew beside a torrent she had followed down a precipice.

On the warm summer evenings she would ask her father to take her on his arm to the banks of the Vienne, where she went into ecstasies over the beauties of the sky and fields, the glories of the setting sun, or the infinite sweetness of the dewy evening. Her soul exhaled itself thenceforth in a fragrance of natural poesy. Her hair, until then simply wound about her head, she now curled and braided. Her dress showed some research. The vine which was running wild and naturally among the branches of the old elm, was

transplanted, cut and trained over a green and pretty trellis.

After the return of old Sauviat (then seventy years of age) from a trip to Paris in December, 1822, the vicar came to see him one evening, and after a few insignificant remarks he said suddenly:—

“You had better think of marrying your daughter, Sauviat. At your age you ought not to put off the accomplishment of so important a duty.”

“But is Veronique willing to be married?” asked the old man, startled.

“As you please, father,” she said, lowering her eyes.

“Yes, we’ll marry her!” cried stout Madame Sauviat, smiling.

“Why didn’t you speak to me about it before I went to Paris, mother?” said Sauviat. “I shall have to go back there.”

Jerome-Baptiste Sauviat, a man in whose eyes money seemed to constitute the whole of happiness, who knew nothing of love, and had never seen in marriage anything but the means of transmitting property to another self, had long sworn to marry Veronique to some rich bourgeois,—so long, in fact, that the idea had assumed in his brain the characteristics of a hobby. His neighbor, the hat-maker, who possessed about two thousand francs a year, had already asked, on behalf of his son, to whom he proposed to give up his hat-making establishment, the hand of a girl so well known in the neighborhood for her exemplary conduct and Christian principles. Sauviat had politely refused, without saying anything to Veronique. The day after the vicar—a very important personage in the eyes of the Sauviat household—had mentioned the necessary of marrying Veronique, whose confessor he was, the old man shaved and dressed himself as for a fete-day, and went out without saying a word to his wife or daughter; both knew very well, however, that the father was in search of a son-in-law. Old Sauviat went to Monsieur Graslin.

Monsieur Graslin, a rich banker in Limoges, had, like Sauviat himself, started from Auvergne without a penny; he came to Limoges to be a porter, found a place as an office-boy in a financial house, and there, like many other financiers, he made his way by dint of economy, and also through fortunate circumstances. Cashier at twenty-five years of age, partner ten years later, in the firm of Perret and Grossetete, he ended by finding himself the head of the house, after buying out the senior partners, both of whom retired into the country, leaving him their funds to manage in the business at a low interest.

Pierre Graslin, then forty-seven years of age, was supposed to possess about six hundred thousand francs. The estimate of his fortune had lately increased throughout the department, in consequence of his outlay in having built, in a new quarter of the town called the place d’Arbres (thus assisting to give Limoges an improved aspect), a fine house, the front of it being on a line with a public building with the facade of which it corresponded. This house had now been finished six months, but Pierre Graslin delayed furnishing it; it had cost him so much that he shrank from the further expense of living in it. His vanity had led him to transgress the wise laws by which he governed his life. He felt, with the good sense of a business man, that the interior of the house ought to correspond with the character of the outside. The furniture, silver-ware, and other needful accessories to the life he would have to lead in his new mansion would, he estimated, cost

him nearly as much as the original building. In spite, therefore, of the gossip of tongues and the charitable suppositions of his neighbors, he continued to live on in the damp, old, and dirty ground-floor apartment in the rue Montantmanigne where his fortune had been made. The public carped, but Graslin had the approval of his former partners, who praised a resolution that was somewhat uncommon.

A fortune and a position like those of Pierre Graslin naturally excited the greed of not a few in a small provincial city. During the last ten years more than one proposition of marriage had been intimated to Monsieur Graslin. But the bachelor state was so well suited to a man who was busy from morning till night, overrun with work, eager in the pursuit of money as a hunter for game, and always tired out with his day's labor, that Graslin fell into none of the traps laid for him by ambitious mothers who coveted so brilliant a position for their daughters.

Graslin, another Sauviat in an upper sphere, did not spend more than forty sous a day, and clothed himself no better than his under-clerk. Two clerks and an office-boy sufficed him to carry on his business, which was immense through the multiplicity of its details. One clerk attended to the correspondence; the other had charge of the accounts; but Pierre Graslin was himself the soul, and body too, of the whole concern. His clerks, chosen from his own relations, were safe men, intelligent and as well-trained in the work as himself. As for the office-boy, he led the life of a truck horse,—up at five in the morning at all seasons, and never getting to bed before eleven at night.

Graslin employed a charwoman by the day, an old peasant from Auvergne, who did his cooking. The brown earthenware off which he ate, and the stout coarse linen which he used, were in keeping with the character of his food. The old woman had strict orders never to spend more than three francs daily for the total expenses of the household. The office-boy was also man-of-all-work. The clerks took care of their own rooms. The tables of blackened wood, the straw chairs half unseated, the wretched beds, the counters and desks, in short, the whole furniture of house and office was not worth more than a thousand francs, including a colossal iron safe, built into the wall, before which slept the man-of-all-work with two dogs at his feet.

Graslin did not often go into society, which, however, discussed him constantly. Two or three times a year he dined with the receiver-general, with whom his business brought him into occasional intercourse. He also occasionally took a meal at the prefecture; for he had been appointed, much to his regret, a member of the Council-general of the department —"a waste of time," he remarked. Sometimes his brother bankers with whom he had dealings kept him to breakfast or dinner; and he was forced also to visit his former partners, who spent their winters in Limoges. He cared so little to keep up his relations to society that in twenty-five years Graslin had not offered so much as a glass of water to any one. When he passed along the street persons would nudge each other and say: "That's Monsieur Graslin"; meaning, "There's a man who came to Limoges without a penny and has now acquired an enormous fortune." The Auvergnat banker was a model which more than one father pointed out to his son, and wives had been known to fling him in the faces of their husbands.

We can now understand the reasons that led a man who had become the pivot of the financial machine of Limoges to repulse the various propositions of marriage which

parents never ceased to make to him. The daughters of his partners, Messrs. Perret and Grossetete, were married before Graslin was in a position to take a wife; but as each of these ladies had young daughters, the wiseheads of the community finally concluded that old Perret or old Grossetete had made an arrangement with Graslin to wait for one of his granddaughters, and thenceforth they left him alone.

Sauviat had watched the ascending career of his compatriot more attentively and seriously than any one else. He had known him from the time he first came to Limoges; but their respective positions had changed so much, at least apparently, that their friendship, now become merely superficial, was seldom freshened. Still, in his relation as compatriot, Graslin never disdained to talk with Sauviat when they chanced to meet. Both continued to keep up their early *tutoiement*, but only in their native dialect. When the receiver-general of Bourges, the youngest of the brothers Grossetete, married his daughter in 1823 to the youngest son of Comte Fontaine, Sauviat felt sure that the Grossetetes would never allow Graslin to enter their family.

After his conference with the banker, Pere Sauviat returned home joyously. He dined that night in his daughter's room, and after dinner he said to his womenkind:—

"Veronique will be Madame Graslin."

"Madame Graslin!" exclaimed Mere Sauviat, astounded.

"Is it possible?" said Veronique, to whom Graslin was personally unknown, and whose imagination regarded him very much as a Parisian grisette would regard a Rothschild.

"Yes, it is settled," said old Sauviat solemnly. "Graslin will furnish his house magnificently; he is to give our daughter a fine Parisian carriage and the best horses to be found in the Limousin; he will buy an estate worth five hundred thousand francs, and settle that and his town-house upon her. Veronique will be the first lady in Limoges, the richest in the department, and she can do what she pleases with Graslin."

Veronique's education, her religious ideas, and her boundless affection for her parents, prevented her from making a single objection; it did not even cross her mind to think that she had been disposed of without reference to her own will. On the morrow Sauviat went to Paris, and was absent for nearly a week.

Pierre Graslin was, as can readily be imagined, not much of a talker; he went straight and rapidly to deeds. A thing decided on was a thing done. In February, 1822, a strange piece of news burst like a thunderbolt on the town of Limoges. The hotel Graslin was being handsomely furnished; carriers' carts came day after day from Paris, and their contents were unpacked in the courtyard. Rumors flew about the town as to the beauty and good taste of the modern or the antique furniture as it was seen to arrive. The great firm of Odiot and Company sent down a magnificent service of plate by the mail-coach. Three carriages, a caleche, a coupe, and a cabriolet arrived, wrapped in straw with as much care as if they were jewels.

"Monsieur Graslin is going to be married!"

These words were said by every pair of lips in Limoges in the course of a single evening,—in the salons of the upper classes, in the kitchens, in the shops, in the streets, in the suburbs, and before long throughout the whole surrounding country. But to whom? No

one could answer. Limoges had a mystery.

# III. MARRIAGE

On the return of old Sauviat Graslin paid his first evening visit at half-past nine o’clock. Veronique was expecting him, dressed in her blue silk gown and muslin guimpe, over which fell a collaret made of lawn with a deep hem. Her hair was simply worn in two smooth bandeaus, gathered into a Grecian knot at the back of her head. She was seated on a tapestried chair beside her mother, who occupied a fine armchair with a carved back, covered with red velvet (evidently the relic of some old chateau), which stood beside the fireplace. A bright fire blazed on the hearth. On the chimney-piece, at either side of an antique clock, the value of which was wholly unknown to the Sauviats, six wax candles in two brass sconces twisted like vine-shoots, lighted the dark room and Veronique in all her budding prime. The old mother was wearing her best gown.

From the silent street, at that tranquil hour, through the soft shadows of the ancient stairway, Graslin appeared to the modest, artless Veronique, her mind still dwelling on the sweet ideas which Bernadin de Saint-Pierre had given her of love.

Graslin, who was short and thin, had thick black hair like the bristles of a brush, which brought into vigorous relief a face as red as that of a drunkard emeritus, and covered with suppurating pimples, either bleeding or about to burst. Without being caused by eczema or scrofula, these signs of a blood overheated by continual toil, anxiety, and the lust of business, by wakeful nights, poor food, and a sober life, seemed to partake of both these diseases. In spite of the advice of his partners, his clerks, and his physician, the banker would never compel himself to take the healthful precautions which might have prevented, or would at least modify, this malady, which was slight at first, but had greatly increased from year to year. He wanted to cure it, and would sometimes take baths or drink some prescribed potion; but, hurried along on the current of his business, he soon neglected the care of his person. Sometimes he thought of suspending work for a time, travelling about, and visiting the noted baths for such diseases; but where is the hunter after millions who is willing to stop short?

In that blazing furnace shone two gray eyes rayed with green lines starting from the pupils, and speckled with brown spots,—two implacable eyes, full of resolution, rectitude, and shrewd calculation. Graslin’s nose was short and turned up; he had a mouth with thick lips, a prominent forehead, and high cheek-bones, coarse ears with large edges discolored by the condition of his blood,—in short, he was an ancient satyr in a black satin waistcoat, brown frock-coat, and white cravat. His strong and vigorous shoulders, which began life by bearing heavy burdens, were now rather bent; and beneath this torso, unduly developed, came a pair of weak legs, rather badly affixed to the short thighs. His thin and hairy hands had the crooked fingers of those whose business it is to handle money. The habit of quick decision could be seen in the way the eyebrows rose into a point over each arch of the eye. Though the mouth was grave and pinched, its expression was that of inward kindliness; it told of an excellent nature, sunk in business, smothered possibly, though it might revive by contact with a woman.

At this apparition Veronique’s heart was violently agitated; blackness came before her eyes; she thought she cried aloud; but she really sat there mute, with fixed and staring

gaze.

“Veronique, this is Monsieur Graslin,” said old Sauviat.

Veronique rose, curtsied, dropped back into her chair, and looked at her mother, who was smiling at the millionaire, seeming, as her father did, so happy,—so happy that the poor girl found strength to hide her surprise and her violent repulsion. During the conversation which then took place something was said of Graslin’s health. The banker looked naively into the mirror, with bevelled edges in an ebony frame.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, “I am not good-looking.”

Thereupon he proceeded to explain the blotches on his face as the result of his overworked life. He related how he had constantly disobeyed his physician’s advice; and remarked that he hoped to change his appearance altogether when he had a wife to rule his household, and take better care of him than he took of himself.

“Is a man married for his face, compatriot?” said Sauviat, giving the other a hearty slap on the thigh.

Graslin’s speech went straight to those natural feelings which, more or less, fill the heart of every woman. The thought came into Veronique’s mind that her face, too, had been destroyed by a horrible disease, and her Christian modesty rebuked her first impression.

Hearing a whistle in the street, Graslin went downstairs, followed by Sauviat. They speedily returned. The office-boy had brought the first bouquet, which was a little late in coming. When the banker exhibited this mound of exotic flowers, the fragrance of which completely filled the room, and offered it to his future wife, Veronique felt a rush of conflicting emotions; she was suddenly plunged into the ideal and fantastic world of tropical nature. Never before had she seen white camelias, never had she smelt the fragrance of the Alpine cistus, the Cape jessamine, the cedronella, the volcameria, the moss-rose, or any of the divine perfumes which woo to love, and sing to the heart their hymns of fragrance. Graslin left Veronique that night in the grasp of such emotions.

From this time forth, as soon as all Limoges was sleeping, the banker would slip along the walls to the Sauviats’ house. There he would tap gently on the window-shutter; the dog did not bark; old Sauviat came down and let him in, and Graslin would then spend an hour or two with Veronique in the brown room, where Madame Sauviat always served him a true Auvergnat supper. Never did this singular lover arrive without a bouquet made of the rarest flowers from the greenhouse of his old partner, Monsieur Grossetete, the only person who as yet knew of the approaching marriage. The man-of-all-work went every evening to fetch the bunch, which Monsieur Grossetete made himself.

Graslin made about fifty such visits in two months; each time, besides the flowers, he brought with him some rich present,—rings, a watch, a gold chain, a work-box, etc. These inconceivable extravagances must be explained, and a word suffices. Veronique’s dowry, promised by her father, consisted of nearly the whole of old Sauviat’s property, namely, seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. The old man retained an income of eight thousand francs derived from the Funds, bought for him originally for sixty thousand francs in assignats by his correspondent Brezac, to whom, at the time of his imprisonment, he had confided that sum, and who kept it for him safely. These sixty thousand francs in

assignats were the half of Sauviat's fortune at the time he came so near being guillotined. Brezac was also, at the same time, the faithful repository of the rest, namely, seven hundred louis d'or (an enormous sum at that time in gold), with which old Sauviat began his business once more as soon as he recovered his liberty. In thirty years each of those louis d'or had been transformed into a bank-note for a thousand francs, by means of the income from the Funds, of Madame Sauviat's inheritance from her father, old Champagnac, and of the profits accruing from the business and the accumulated interest thereon in the hands of the Brezac firm. Brezac himself had a loyal and honest friendship for Sauviat,—such as all Auvergnats are apt to feel for one another.

So, whenever Sauviat passed the front of the Graslin mansion he had said to himself, "Veronique shall live in that fine palace." He knew very well that no girl in all the department would have seven hundred and fifty thousand francs as a marriage portion, besides the expectation of two hundred and fifty thousand more. Graslin, his chosen son-in-law, would therefore infallibly marry Veronique; and so, as we have seen, it came about.

Every evening Veronique had her fresh bunch of flowers, which on the morrow decked her little salon and was carefully concealed from the neighbors. She admired the beautiful jewels, the pearls and diamonds, the bracelets, the rubies, gifts which assuredly gratify all the daughters of Eve. She thought herself less plain when she wore them. She saw her mother happy in the marriage, and she had no other point of view from which to make comparisons. She was, moreover, totally ignorant of the duties or the purpose of marriage. She heard the solemn voice of the vicar of Saint-Etienne praising Graslin to her as a man of honor, with whom she would lead an honorable life. Thus it was that Veronique consented to receive Monsieur Graslin as her future husband.

When it happens that in a life so withdrawn from the world, so solitary as that of Veronique, a single person enters it every day, that person cannot long remain indifferent; either he is hated, and the aversion, justified by a deepening knowledge of his character, renders him intolerable, or the habit of seeing bodily defects dims the eye to them. The mind looks about for compensations; his countenance awakens curiosity; its features brighten; fleeting beauties appear in it. At last the inner, hidden beneath the outer, shows itself. Then, when the first impressions are fairly overcome, the attachment felt is all the stronger, because the soul clings to it as its own creation. That is love. And here lies the reason of those passions conceived by beautiful things for other beings apparently ugly. The outward aspect, forgotten by affection, is no longer seen in a creature whose soul is deeply valued. Besides this, beauty, so necessary to a woman, takes many strange aspects in man; and there is as much diversity of feeling among women about the beauty of men as there is among men about the beauty of women. So, after deep reflection and much debating with herself, Veronique gave her consent to the publication of the banns.

From that moment all Limoges rang with this inexplicable affair,—inexplicable because no one knew the secret of it, namely, the immensity of the dowry. Had that dowry been known Veronique could have chosen a husband where she pleased; but even so, she might have made a mistake.

Graslin was thought to be much in love. Upholsterers came from Paris to fit up the house. Nothing was talked of in Limoges but the profuse expenditures of the banker. The

value of the chandeliers was calculated; the gilding of the walls, the figures on the clocks, all were discussed; the jardinieres, the caloriferes, the objects of luxury and novelty, nothing was left unnoticed. In the garden of the hotel Graslin, above the icehouse, was an aviary, and all the inhabitants of the town were presently surprised by the sight of rare birds,—Chinese pheasants, mysterious breeds of ducks. Every one flocked to see them. Monsieur and Madame Grossetete, an old couple who were highly respected in Limoges, made several visits to the Sauviats, accompanied by Graslin. Madame Grossetete, a most excellent woman, congratulated Veronique on her happy marriage. Thus the Church, the family, society, and all material things down to the most trivial, made themselves accomplices to bring about this marriage.

In the month of April the formal invitations to the wedding were issued to all Graslin's friends and acquaintance. On a fine spring morning a caleche and a coupe, drawn by Limousin horses chosen by Monsieur Grossetete, drew up at eleven o'clock before the shop of the iron-dealer, bringing, to the great excitement of the neighborhood, the former partners of the bridegroom and the latter's two clerks. The street was lined with spectators, all anxious to see the Sauviats' daughter, on whose beautiful hair the most renowned hairdresser in Limoges had placed the bridal wreath and a costly veil of English lace. Veronique wore a gown of simple white muslin. A rather imposing assemblage of the most distinguished women in the society of the town attended the wedding in the cathedral, where the bishop, knowing the religious fervor of the Sauviats, deigned to marry Veronique himself. The bride was very generally voted plain.

She entered her new house, and went from one surprise to another. A grand dinner was to precede the ball, to which Graslin had invited nearly all Limoges. The dinner, given to the bishop, the prefect, the judge of the court, the attorney-general, the mayor, the general, and Graslin's former partners with their wives, was a triumph for the bride, who, like all other persons who are simple and natural, showed charms that were not expected in her. Neither of the bridal pair could dance; Veronique continued therefore to do the honors to her guests, and to win the esteem and good graces of nearly all the persons who were presented to her, asking Grossetete, who took an honest liking to her, for information about the company. She made no mistakes and committed no blunders. It was during this evening that the two former partners of the banker announced the amount of the dowry (immense for Limousin) given by the Sauviats to their daughter. At nine o'clock the old iron-dealer returned home and went to bed, leaving his wife to preside over the bride's retiring. It was said by everyone throughout the town that Madame Graslin was very plain, though well made.

Old Sauviat now wound up his business and sold his house in town. He bought a little country-place on the left bank of the Vienne between Limoges and Cluzeau, ten minutes' walk from the suburb of Saint-Martial, where he intended to finish his days tranquilly with his wife. The old couple had an apartment in the hotel Graslin and always dined once or twice a week with their daughter, who, as often, made their house in the country the object of her walks.

This enforced rest almost killed old Sauviat. Happily, Graslin found a means of occupying his father-in-law. In 1823 the banker was forced to take possession of a porcelain manufactory, to the proprietors of which he had advanced large sums, which

they found themselves unable to repay except by the sale of their factory, which they made to him. By the help of his business connections and by investing a large amount of property in the concern, Graslin made it one of the finest manufactories of Limoges ware in the town. Afterwards he resold it at a fine profit; meantime he placed it under the superintendence of his father-in-law, who, in spite of his seventy-two years, counted for much in the return of prosperity to the establishment, who himself renewed his youth in the employment. Graslin was then able to attend to his legitimate business of banking without anxiety as to the manufactory.

Sauviat died in 1827 from an accident. While taking account of stock he fell into a *charasse*,—a sort of crate with an open grating in which the china was packed; his leg was slightly injured, so slightly that he paid no attention to it; gangrene set in; he would not consent to amputation, and therefore died. The widow gave up about two hundred and fifty thousand francs which came to her from Sauviat's estate, reserving only a stipend of two hundred francs a month, which amply sufficed for her wants. Graslin bound himself to pay her that sum duly. She kept her little house in the country, and lived there alone without a servant and against the remonstrances of her daughter, who could not induce her to alter this determination, to which she clung with the obstinacy peculiar to old persons. Madame Sauviat came nearly every day into Limoges to see her daughter, and the latter still continued to make her mother's house, from which was a charming view of the river, the object of her walks. From the road leading to it could be seen that island long loved by Veronique and called by her the Ile de France.

In order not to complicate our history of the Graslin household with the foregoing incidents, we have thought it best to end that of the Sauviats by anticipating events, which are moreover useful as explaining the private and hidden life which Madame Graslin now led. The old mother, noticing that Graslin's miserliness, which returned upon him, might hamper her daughter, was for some time unwilling to resign the property left to her by her husband. But Veronique, unable to imagine a case in which a woman might desire the use of her own property, urged it upon her mother with reasons of great generosity, and out of gratitude to Graslin for restoring to her the liberty and freedom of a young girl. But this is anticipating.

The unusual splendor which accompanied Graslin's marriage had disturbed all his habits and constantly annoyed him. The mind of the great financier was a very small one. Veronique had had no means of judging the man with whom she was to pass her life. During his fifty-five visits he had let her see nothing but the business man, the indefatigable worker, who conceived and sustained great enterprises, and analyzed public affairs, bringing them always to the crucial test of the Bank. Fascinated by the million offered to him by Sauviat, he showed himself generous by calculation. Carried away by the interests of his marriage and by what he called his "folly," namely, the house which still goes by the name of the hotel Graslin, he did things on a large scale. Having bought horses, a caleche, and a coupe, he naturally used them to return the wedding visits and go to those dinners and balls, called the "retours de noces," which the heads of the administration and the rich families of Limoges gave to the newly married pair. Under this impulsion, which carried him entirely out of his natural sphere, Graslin sent to Paris for a man-cook and took a reception day. For a year he kept the pace of a man who possesses a fortune of sixteen hundred thousand francs, and he became of course the most noted

personage in Limoges. During this year he generously put into his wife's purse every month twenty-five gold pieces of twenty francs each.

Society concerned itself much about Veronique from the day of her marriage, for she was a boon to its curiosity, which has little to feed on in the provinces. Veronique was all the more studied because she had appeared in the social world like a phenomenon; but once there, she remained always simple and modest, in the attitude of a person who is observing habits, customs, manners, things unknown to her, and endeavoring to conform to them. Already voted ugly but well-shaped, she was now declared kindly but stupid. She was learning so many things, she had so much to hear and to see that her looks and speech did certainly give some reason for this judgment. She showed a sort of torpor which resembled lack of mind. Marriage, that hard calling, as she said, for which the Church, the Code, and her mother exhorted her to resignation and obedience, under pain of transgressing all human laws and causing irreparable evil, threw her into a dazed and dizzy condition, which amounted sometimes to a species of inward delirium.

Silent and self-contained, she listened as much to herself as she did to others. Feeling within her the most violent "difficulty of existing," to use an expression of Fontenelle's, which was constantly increasing, she became terrified at herself. Nature resisted the commands of the mind, the body denied the will. The poor creature, caught in the net, wept on the breast of that great Mother of the poor and the afflicted,—she went for comfort to the Church; her piety redoubled, she confided the assaults of the demon to her confessor; she prayed to heaven for succor. Never, at any period of her life, did she fulfil her religious duties with such fervor. The despair of not loving her husband flung her violently at the foot of the altar, where divine and consolatory voices urged her to patience. She was patient, she was gentle, and she continued to live on, hoping always for the happiness of maternity.

"Did you notice Madame Graslin this morning?" the women would say to each other. "Marriage doesn't agree with her; she is actually green."

"Yes," some of them would reply; "but would you give your daughter to a man like Graslin? No woman could marry him with impunity."

Now that Graslin was married, all the mothers who had courted him for ten years past pursued him with sarcasms.

Veronique grew visibly thinner and really ugly; her eyes looked weary, her features coarsened, her manner was shy and awkward; she acquired that air of cold and melancholy rigidity for which the ultra-pious are so often blamed. Her skin took on a grayish tone; she dragged herself languidly about during this first year of married life, ordinarily so brilliant for a young wife. She tried to divert her mind by reading, profiting by the liberty of married women to read what they please. She read the novels of Walter Scott, the poems of Lord Byron, the works of Schiller and of Goethe, and much else of modern and also ancient literature. She learned to ride a horse, and to dance and to draw. She painted water-colors and made sepia sketches, turning ardently to all those resources which women employ to bear the weariness of their solitude. She gave herself that second education which most women derive from a man, but which she derived from herself only.

The natural superiority of a free, sincere spirit, brought up, as it were in a desert and

strengthened by religion, had given her a sort of untrammelled grandeur and certain needs, to which the provincial world she lived in offered no sustenance. All books pictured Love to her, and she sought for the evidence of its existence, but nowhere could she see the passion of which she read. Love was in her heart, like seeds in the earth, awaiting the action of the sun. Her deep melancholy, caused by constant meditation on herself, brought her back by hidden by-ways to the brilliant dreams of her girlish days. Many a time she must have lived again that old romantic poem, making herself both the actor and the subject of it. Again she saw that island bathed in light, flowery, fragrant, caressing to her soul. Often her pallid eyes wandered around a salon with piercing curiosity. The men were all like Graslin. She studied them, and then she seemed to question their wives; but nothing on the faces of those women revealed an inward anguish like to hers, and she returned home sad and gloomy and distressed about herself. The authors she had read in the morning answered to the feelings in her soul; their thoughts pleased her; but at night she heard only empty words, not even presented in a lively way,—dull, empty, foolish conversations in petty local matters, or personalities of no interest to her. She was often surprised at the heat displayed in discussions which concerned no feeling or sentiment—to her the essence of existence, the soul of life.

Often she was seen with fixed eyes, mentally absorbed, thinking no doubt of the days of her youthful ignorance spent in that chamber full of harmonies now forever passed away. She felt a horrible repugnance against dropping into the gulf of pettiness in which the women among whom she lived were floundering. This repugnance, stamped on her forehead, on her lips, and ill-disguised, was taken for the insolence of a parvenue. Madame Graslin began to observe on all faces a certain coldness; she felt in all remarks an acrimony, the causes of which were unknown to her, for she had no intimate friend to enlighten or advise her. Injustice, which angers little minds, brings loftier souls to question themselves, and communicates a species of humility to them. Veronique condemned herself, endeavoring to see her own faults. She tried to be affable; they called her false. She grew more gentle still; they said she was a hypocrite, and her pious devotion helped on the calumny. She spent money, gave dinners and balls, and they taxed her with pride.

Unsuccessful in all these attempts, unjustly judged, rebuffed by the petty and tormenting pride which characterizes provincial society, where each individual is armed with pretensions and their attendant uneasiness, Madame Graslin fell back into utter solitude. She returned with eagerness to the arms of the Church. Her great soul, clothed with so weak a flesh, showed her the multiplied commandments of Catholicism as so many stones placed for protection along the precipices of life, so many props brought by charitable hands to sustain human weakness on its weary way; and she followed, with greater rigor than ever, even the smallest religious practices.

On this the liberals of the town classed Madame Graslin among the *devotes*, the ultras. To the different animosities Veronique had innocently acquired, the virulence of party feeling now added its periodical exasperation. But as this ostracism took nothing really from her, she quietly left society and lived in books which offered her such infinite resources. She meditated on what she read, she compared systems, she widened immeasurably the horizons of her intellect and the extent of her education; in this way she opened the gates of her soul to curiosity.

During this period of resolute study, in which religion supported and maintained her mind, she obtained the friendship of Monsieur Grossetete, one of those old men whose mental superiority grows rusty in provincial life, but who, when they come in contact with an eager mind, recover something of their former brilliancy. The good man took an earnest interest in Veronique, who, to reward him for the flattering warmth of heart which old men show to those they like, displayed before him, and for the first time in her life, the treasures of her soul and the acquirements of her mind, cultivated so secretly, and now full of blossom. An extract from a letter written by her about this time to Monsieur Grossetete will show the condition of the mind of a woman who was later to give signal proofs of a firm and lofty nature:—

"The flowers you sent me for the ball were charming, but they suggested harsh reflections. Those pretty creatures gathered by you, and doomed to wilt upon my bosom to adorn a fete, made me think of others that live and die unseen in the depths of your woods, their fragrance never inhaled by any one. I asked myself why I was dancing there, why I was decked with flowers, just as I ask God why he has placed me to live in this world.

"You see, my friend, all is a snare to the unhappy; the smallest matter brings the sick mind back to its woes; but the greatest evil of certain woes is the persistency which makes them a fixed idea pervading our lives. A constant sorrow ought rather to be a divine inspiration. You love flowers for themselves, whereas I love them as I love to listen to fine music. So, as I was saying, the secret of a mass of things escapes me. You, my old friend, you have a passion,—that of the horticulturist. When you return to town inspire me with that taste, so that I may rush to my greenhouse with eager feet, as you go to yours to watch the development of your plants, to bud and bloom with them, to admire what you create,—the new colors, the unexpected varieties, which expand and grow beneath your eyes by the virtue of your care.

"My greenhouse, the one I watch, is filled with suffering souls. The miseries I try to lessen sadden my heart; and when I take them upon myself, when, after finding some young woman without clothing for her babe, some old man wanting bread, I have supplied their needs, the emotions their distress and its relief have caused me do not suffice my soul. Ah, friend, I feel within me untold powers —for evil, possibly,—which nothing can lower, which the sternest commands of our religion are unable to abase! Sometimes, when I go to see my mother, walking alone among the fields, I want to cry aloud, and I do so. It seems to me that my body is a prison in which some evil genius is holding a shuddering creature while awaiting the mysterious words which are to burst its obstructive form.

"But that comparison is not a just one. In me it seems to be the body that seeks escape, if I may say so. Religion fills my soul, books and their riches occupy my mind. Why, then, do I desire some anguish which shall destroy the enervating peace of my existence?

"Oh, if some sentiment, some mania that I could cultivate, does not come into my life, I feel I shall sink at last into the gulf where all ideas are dulled, where character deteriorates, motives slacken, virtues lose their backbone, and all the forces of the soul are scattered,—a gulf in which I shall no longer be the being Nature meant me to be!

"This is what my bitter complainings mean. But do not let them hinder you from sending me those flowers. Your friendship is so soothing and so full of loving kindness that it has for the last few months almost reconciled me to myself. Yes, it makes me happy to have you cast a glance upon my soul, at once so barren and so full of bloom; and I am thankful for every gentle word you say to one who rides the phantom steed of dreams, and returns worn-out."

At the end of the third year of his married life, Graslin, observing that his wife no

longer used her horses, and finding a good market for them, sold them. He also sold the carriages, sent away the coachman, let the bishop have his man-cook, and contented himself with a woman. He no longer gave the monthly sum to his wife, telling her that he would pay all bills. He thought himself the most fortunate of husbands in meeting no opposition whatever to these proceedings from the woman who had brought him a million of francs as a dowry. Madame Graslin, brought up from childhood without ever seeing money, or being made to feel that it was an indispensable element in life, deserved no praise whatever for this apparent generosity. Graslin even noticed in a corner of the secretary all the sums he had ever given her, less the money she had bestowed in charity or spent upon her dress, the cost of which was much lessened by the profusion of her wedding trousseau.

Graslin boasted of Veronique to all Limoges as being a model wife. He next regretted the money spent on the house, and he ordered the furniture to be all packed away or covered up. His wife's bedroom, dressing-room, and boudoir were alone spared from these protective measures; which protect nothing, for furniture is injured just as much by being covered up as by being left uncovered. Graslin himself lived almost entirely on the ground-floor of the house, where he had his office, and resumed his old business habits with avidity. He thought himself an excellent husband because he went upstairs to breakfast and dined with his wife; but his unpunctuality was so great that it was not more than ten times a month that he began a meal with he; he had exacted, out of courtesy, that she should never wait for him. Veronique did, however, always remain in the room while her husband took his meals, serving him herself, that she might at least perform voluntarily some of the visible obligations of a wife.

The banker, to whom the things of marriage were very indifferent, and who had seen nothing in his wife but seven hundred and fifty thousand francs, had never once perceived Veronique's repugnance to him. Little by little he now abandoned Madame Graslin for his business. When he wished to put a bed in the room adjoining his office on the ground-floor, Veronique hastened to comply with the request. So that three years after their marriage these two ill-assorted beings returned to their original estate, each equally pleased and happy to do so. The moneyed man, possessing eighteen hundred thousand francs, returned with all the more eagerness to his old avaricious habits because he had momentarily quitted them. His two clerks and the office-boy were better lodged and rather better fed, and that was the only difference between the present and the past. His wife had a cook and maid (two indispensable servants); but except for the actual necessities of life, not a penny left his coffers for his household.

Happy in the turn which things were now taking, Veronique saw in the evident satisfaction of the banker the absolution for this separation which she would never have asked for herself. She had no conception that she was as disagreeable to Graslin as Graslin was repulsive to her. This secret divorce made her both sad and joyful. She had always looked to motherhood for an interest in life; but up to this time (1828) the couple had had no prospect of a family.

# IV. THE HISTORY OF MANY MARRIED WOMEN IN THE PROVINCES

So now, in her magnificent house and envied for her wealth by all the town, Madame Graslin recovered the solitude of her early years in her father's house, less the glow of hope and the youthful joys of ignorance. She lived among the ruins of her castles in the air, enlightened by sad experience, sustained by religious faith, occupied by the care of the poor, whom she loaded with benefits. She made clothes for the babies, gave mattresses and sheets to those who slept on straw; she went among the poor herself, followed by her maid, a girl from Auvergne whom her mother procured for her, and who attached herself body and soul to her mistress. Veronique made an honorable spy of her, sending her to discover the places where suffering could be stilled, poverty softened.

This active benevolence, carried on with strict attention to religious duties, was hidden in the deepest secrecy and directed by the various rectors in the town, with whom Veronique had a full understanding in all her charitable deeds, so as not to suffer the money so needed for unmerited misfortunes to fall into the hands of vice. It was during this period of her life that she won a friendship quite as strong and quite as precious as that of old Grossetete. She became the beloved lamb of a distinguished priest, who was persecuted for his true merits, which were wholly misunderstood, one of the two grand-vicars of the diocese, named the Abbe Dutheil.

This priest belonged to the portion of the French clergy who incline toward certain concessions, who would be glad to associate the Church with the people's interests, and so enable it to regain, through the application of true evangelical doctrine, its former influence over the masses, which it might then draw to closer relations with the monarchy. Whether it was that the Abbe Dutheil recognized the impossibility of enlightening the court of Rome and the higher clergy on this point, or that he had consented to sacrifice his own opinions to those of his superiors, it is certain that he remained within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy, being very well aware that any manifestation of his principles at the present time would deprive him of all chance of the episcopate.

This eminent priest united in himself great Christian modesty and a noble character. Without pride or ambition he remained at his post and did his duty in the midst of perils. The liberals of the town were ignorant of the motives of his conduct; they claimed him as being of their opinions and considered him a patriot,—a word which meant revolutionist in Catholic minds. Loved by his inferiors, who dared not, however, proclaim his merits, feared by his equals who kept watch upon him, he was a source of embarrassment to the bishop. His virtues and his knowledge, envied, no doubt, prevented persecution; it was impossible to complain of him, though he criticized frankly the political blunders by which both the throne and the clergy mutually compromised themselves. He often foretold results, but vainly,—like poor Cassandra, who was equally cursed before and after the disaster she predicted. Short of a revolution the Abbe Dutheil was likely to remain as he was, one of those stones hidden in the foundation wall on which the edifice rests. His utility was recognized and they left him in his place, like many other solid minds whose rise to power is the terror of mediocrities. If, like the Abbe de Lamennais, he had taken up

his pen he would doubtless, like him, have been blasted by the court of Rome.

The Abbe Dutheil was imposing in appearance. His exterior revealed the underlying of a profound nature always calm and equable on the surface. His tall figure and its thinness did not detract from the general effect of his lines, which recalled those by which the genius of Spanish painters delights to represent the great monastic meditators, and those selected at a later period by Thorwaldsen for the Apostles. The long, almost rigid folds of the face, in harmony with those of his vestment, had the charm which the middle-ages bring into relief in the mystical statues placed beside the portals of their churches. Gravity of thought, word, and accent, harmonized in this man and became him well. Seeing his dark eyes hollowed by austerities and surrounded by a brown circle; seeing, too, his forehead, yellow as some old stone, his head and hands almost fleshless, men desired to hear the voice and the instructions which issued from his lips. This purely physical grandeur which accords with moral grandeur, gave this priest a somewhat haughty and disdainful air, which was instantly counteracted to an observer by his modesty and by his speech, though it did not predispose others in his favor. In some more elevated station these advantages would have obtained that necessary ascendancy over the masses which the people willingly allow to men who are thus endowed. But superiors will not forgive their inferiors for possessing the externals of greatness, nor for displaying that majesty so prized by the ancients but so often lacking to the administrators of modern power.

By one of those strange freaks of circumstance which are never accounted for, the other vicar-general, the Abbe de Grancour, a stout little man with a rosy complexion and blue eyes, whose opinions were diametrically opposed to those of the Abbe Dutheil, liked to be in the latter’s company, although he never testified this liking enough to put himself out of the good graces of the bishop, to whom he would have sacrificed everything. The Abbe de Grancour believed in the merit of his colleague, recognized his talents, secretly accepted his doctrines, and condemned them openly; for the little priest was one of those men whom superiority attracts and intimidates,—who dislike it and yet cultivate it. “He would embrace me and condemn me,” the Abbe Dutheil said of him. The Abbe de Grancour had neither friends nor enemies; he was therefore likely to live and die a vicar-general. He said he was drawn to visit Madame Graslin by the desire of counselling so religious and benevolent a person; and the bishop approved of his doing so,—Monsieur de Grancour’s real object being to spend a few evenings with the Abbe Dutheil in Veronique’s salon.

The two priests now came pretty regularly to see Madame Graslin, and make her a sort of report about her poor and discuss the best means of succoring and improving them. But Monsieur Graslin had now begun to tighten his purse-strings, having made the discovery, in spite of the innocent deceptions of his wife and her maid, that the money he paid did not go solely for household expenses and for dress. He was angry when he found out how much money his wife’s charities cost him; he called the cook to account, inquired into all the details of the housekeeping, and showed what a grand administrator he was by practically proving that his house could be splendidly kept for three thousand francs a year. Then he put his wife on an allowance of a hundred francs a month, and boasted of his liberality in so doing. The office-boy, who liked flowers, was made to take care of the garden on Sundays. Having dismissed the gardener, Graslin used the greenhouse to store articles conveyed to him as security for loans. He let the birds in the aviary die for want of care, to avoid the cost of their food and attendance. And he even took advantage of a

winter when there was no ice, to give up his icehouse and save the expense of filling it.

By 1828 there was not a single article of luxury in the house which he had not in some way got rid of. Parsimony reigned unchecked in the hotel Graslin. The master's face, greatly improved during the three years spent with his wife (who induced him to follow his physician's advice), now became redder, more fiery, more blotched than before. Business had taken such proportions that it was necessary to promote the boy-of-all-work to the position of cashier, and to find some stout Auvergnat for the rougher service of the hotel Graslin.

Thus, four years after her marriage, this very rich woman could not dispose of a single penny by her own will. The avarice of her husband succeeded the avarice of her parents. Madame Graslin had never understood the necessity of money until the time came when her benevolence was checked.

By the beginning of the year 1828 Veronique had entirely recovered the blooming health which had given such beauty to the innocent young girl sitting at her window in the old house in the rue de la Cite; but by this time she had acquired a fine literary education, and was fully able to think and to speak. An excellent judgment gave real depth to her words. Accustomed now to the little things of life, she wore the fashions of the period with infinite grace. When she chanced about this time to visit a salon she found herself—not without a certain inward surprise—received by all with respectful esteem. These changed feelings and this welcome were due to the two vicars-general and to old Grossetete. Informed by them of her noble hidden life, and the good deeds so constantly done in their midst, the bishop and a few influential persons spoke of Madame Graslin as a flower of true piety, a violet fragrant with virtues; in consequence of which, one of those strong reactions set in, unknown to Veronique, which are none the less solid and durable because they are long in coming. This change in public opinion gave additional influence to Veronique's salon, which was now visited by all the chief persons in the society of the town, in consequence of certain circumstances we shall now relate.

Toward the close of this year the young Vicomte de Grandville was sent as deputy solicitor to the courts of Limoges. He came preceded by a reputation always given to Parisians in the provinces. A few days after his arrival, during a soiree at the prefecture, he made answer to a rather foolish question, that the most able, intelligent, and distinguished woman he had met in the town was Madame Graslin.

"Perhaps you think her the handsomest also?" said the wife of the receiver-general.

"I cannot think so in your presence, madame," he replied, "and therefore I am in doubt. Madame Graslin possesses a beauty which need inspire no jealousy, for it seldom shows itself: she is only beautiful to those she loves; you are beautiful to all the world. When Madame Graslin's soul is moved by true enthusiasm, it sheds an expression upon her face which changes it completely. Her countenance is like a landscape,—dull in winter, glorious in summer; but the world will always see it in winter. When she talks with friends on some literary or philosophical topic, or on certain religious questions which interest her, she is roused into appearing suddenly an unknown woman of marvellous beauty."

This declaration, which was caused by observing the phenomenon that formerly made Veronique so beautiful on her return from the holy table, made a great noise in Limoges,

where for a time the young deputy, to whom the place of the *procureur-general* was said to be promised, played a leading part. In all provincial towns a man who rises a trifle above others becomes, for a period more or less protracted, the object of a liking which resembles enthusiasm, and which usually deceives the object of this ephemeral worship. It is to this social caprice that we owe so many local geniuses, soon ignored and their false reputations mortified. The men whom women make the fashion in this way are oftener strangers than compatriots.

In this particular case the admirers of the Vicomte de Grandville were not mistaken; he was in truth a superior man. Madame Graslin was the only woman he found in Limoges with whom he could exchange ideas and keep up a varied conversation. A few months after his arrival, attracted by the increasing charm of Veronique's manners and conversation, he proposed to the Abbe Dutheil, and a few other of the remarkable men in Limoges, to meet in the evenings at Madame Graslin's house and play whist. At this time Madame Graslin was at home five evenings in the week to visitors, reserving two free days, as she said, for herself.

When Madame Graslin had thus gathered about her the distinguished men we have mentioned, others were not sorry to give themselves the reputation of cleverness by seeking to join the same society. Veronique also received three or four of the distinguished officers of the garrison and staff; but the freedom of mind displayed by her guests, and the tacit discretion enjoined by the manners of the best society, made her extremely cautious as to the admission of those who now vied with each other to obtain her invitations.

The other women in this provincial society were not without jealousy in seeing Madame Graslin surrounded by the most agreeable and distinguished men in the town; but by this time Veronique's social power was all the stronger because it was exclusive; she accepted the intimacy of four or five women only, and these were strangers in Limoges who had come from Paris with their husbands, and who held in horror the petty gossip of provincial life. If any one outside of this little clique of superior persons came in to make a visit, the conversation immediately changed, and the habitues of the house talked commonplace.

The hotel Graslin thus became an oasis where intelligent minds found relaxation and relief from the dulness of provincial life; where persons connected with the government could express themselves freely on politics without fear of having their words taken down and repeated; where all could satirize that which provoked satire, and where each individual abandoned his professional trammels and yielded himself up to his natural self.

So, after being the most obscure young girl in all Limoges, considered ugly, dull, and vacant, Madame Graslin, at the beginning of the year 1828, was regarded as one of the leading personages in the town, and the most noted woman in society. No one went to see her in the mornings, for all knew her habits of benevolence and the regularity of her religious observances. She always went to early mass so as not to delay her husband's breakfast, for which, however, there was no fixed hour, though she never failed to be present and to serve it herself. Graslin had trained his wife to this little ceremony. He continued to praise her on all occasions; he thought her perfect; she never asked him for anything; he could pile up louis upon louis, and spread his investments over a wide field of enterprise through his relations with the Brezacs; he sailed with a fair wind and well freighted over the ocean of commerce,—his intense business interest keeping him in the

still, though half-intoxicated, frenzy of gamblers watching events on the green table of speculation.

During this happy period, and until the beginning of the year 1829, Madame Graslin attained, in the eyes of her friends, to a degree of beauty that was really extraordinary, the reasons of which they were unable to explain. The blue of the iris expanded like a flower, diminishing the dark circle of the pupil, and seeming to float in a liquid and languishing light that was full of love. Her forehead, illumined by thoughts and memories of happiness, was seen to whiten like the zenith before the dawn, and its lines were purified by an inward fire. Her face lost those heated brown tones which betoken a disturbance of the liver,—that malady of vigorous constitutions, or of persons whose soul is distressed and whose affections are thwarted. Her temples became adorably fresh and pure; gleams of the celestial face of a Raffaelle showed themselves now and then in hers,—a face hitherto obscured by the malady of grief, as the canvas of the great master is encrusted by time. Her hands seemed whiter; her shoulders took on an exquisite fulness; her graceful, animated movements gave to her supple figure its utmost charm.

The Limoges women accused her of being in love with Monsieur de Grandville, who certainly paid her assiduous attention, to which Veronique opposed all the barriers of a conscientious resistance. The viscount professed for her one of those respectful attachments which did not blind the habitual visitors of her salon. The priests and men of sense saw plainly that this affection, which was love on the part of the young man, did not go beyond the permissible line in Madame Graslin. Weary at last of a resistance based on religious principle, the Vicomte de Grandville consoled himself (to the knowledge of his intimates) with other and easier friendships; which did not, however, lessen his constant admiration and worship of the beautiful Madame Graslin,—such was the term by which she was designated in 1829.

The most clear-sighted among those who surrounded her attributed the change which rendered Veronique increasingly charming to her friends to the secret delight which all women, even the most religious, feel when they see themselves courted; and to the satisfaction of living at last in a circle congenial to her mind, where the pleasure of exchanging ideas and the happiness of being surrounded by intelligent and well-informed men and true friends, whose attachment deepened day by day, had dispersed forever the weary dulness of her life.

Perhaps, however, closer, more perceptive or sceptical observers were needed than those who frequented the hotel Graslin, to detect the barbaric grandeur, the plebeian force of the People which lay deep-hidden in her soul. If sometimes her friends surprised her in a torpor of meditation either gloomy or merely pensive, they knew she bore upon her heart the miseries of others, and had doubtless that morning been initiated in some fresh sorrow, or had penetrated to some haunt where vices terrify the soul with their candor.

The viscount, now promoted to be *procureur-general*, would occasionally blame her for certain unintelligent acts of charity by which, as he knew from his secret police-reports, she had given encouragement to criminal schemes.

“If you ever want money for any of your paupers, let me be a sharer in your good deeds,” said old Grossetete, taking Veronique’s hand.

“Ah!” she replied with a sigh, “it is impossible to make everybody rich.”

At the beginning of this year an event occurred which was destined to change the whole interior life of this woman and to transform the splendid expression of her countenance into something far more interesting in the eyes of painters.

Becoming uneasy about his health, Graslin, to his wife’s despair, no longer desired to live on the ground-floor. He returned to the conjugal chamber and allowed himself to be nursed. The news soon spread throughout Limoges that Madame Graslin was pregnant. Her sadness, mingled with joy, struck the minds of her friends, who then for the first time perceived that in spite of her virtues she had been happy in the fact of living separate from her husband. Perhaps she had hoped for some better fate ever since the time when, as it was known, the attorney-general had declined to marry the richest heiress in the place, in order to keep his loyalty to her.

From this suggestion there grew up in the minds of the profound politicians who played their whist at the hotel Graslin a belief that the viscount and the young wife had based certain hopes on the ill-health of the banker which were now frustrated. The great agitations which marked this period of Veronique’s life, the anxieties which a first childbirth causes in every woman, and which, it is said, threatens special danger when she is past her first youth, made her friends more attentive than ever to her; they vied with each other in showing her those little kindnesses which proved how warm and solid their affection really was.

# V. TASCHERON

It was in this year that Limoges witnessed a terrible event and the singular drama of the Tascheron trial, in which the young Vicomte de Grandville displayed the talents which afterwards made him *procureur-general*.

An old man living in a lonely house in the suburb of Saint-Etienne was murdered. A large fruit-garden lay between the road and the house, which was also separated from the adjoining fields by a pleasure-garden, at the farther end of which were several old and disused greenhouses. In front of the house a rapid slope to the river bank gave a view of the Vienne. The courtyard, which also sloped downward, ended at a little wall, from which small columns rose at equal distances united by a railing, more, however, for ornament than protection, for the bars of the railing were of painted wood.

The old man, named Pingret, noted for his avarice, lived with a single woman-servant, a country-girl who did all the work of the house. He himself took care of his espaliers, trimmed his trees, gathered his fruit, and sent it to Limoges for sale, together with early vegetables, in the raising of which he excelled.

The niece of this old man, and his sole heiress, married to a gentleman of small means living in Limoges, a Madame des Vanneaulx, had again and again urged her uncle to hire a man to protect the house, pointing out to him that he would thus obtain the profits of certain uncultivated ground where he now grew nothing but clover. But the old man steadily refused. More than once a discussion on the subject had cut into the whist-playing of Limoges. A few shrewd heads declared that the old miser buried his gold in that clover-field.

“If I were Madame des Vanneaulx,” said a wit, “I shouldn’t torment my uncle about it; if somebody murders him, why, let him be murdered! I should inherit the money.”

Madame des Vanneaulx, however, wanted to keep her uncle, after the manner of the managers of the Italian Opera, who entreat their popular tenor to wrap up his throat, and give him their cloak if he happens to have forgotten his own. She had sent old Pingret a fine English mastiff, which Jeanne Malassis, the servant-woman brought back the next day saying:—

“Your uncle doesn’t want another mouth to feed.”

The result proved how well-founded were the niece’s fears. Pingret was murdered on a dark night, in the middle of his clover-field, where he may have been adding a few coins to a buried pot of gold. The servant-woman, awakened by the struggle, had the courage to go to the assistance of the old miser, and the murderer was under the necessity of killing her to suppress her testimony. This necessity, which frequently causes murderers to increase the number of their victims, is an evil produced by the fear of the death penalty.

This double murder was attended by curious circumstances which told as much for the prosecution as for the defence. After the neighbors had missed seeing the little old Pingret and his maid for a whole morning and had gazed at his house through the wooden railings as they passed it, and seen that, contrary to custom, the doors and windows were still

closed, an excitement began in the Faubourg Saint-Etienne which presently reached the rue de la Cloche, where Madame des Vanneaulx resided.

The niece was always in expectation of some such catastrophe, and she at once notified the officers of the law, who went to the house and broke in the gate. They soon discovered in a clover patch four holes, and near two of these holes lay the fragments of earthenware pots, which had doubtless been full of gold the night before. In the other two holes, scarcely covered up, were the bodies of old Pingret and Jeanne Malassis, who had been buried with their clothes on. The poor girl had run to her master's assistance in her night-gown, with bare feet.

While the *procureur-du-roi*, the commissary of police, and the examining magistrate were gathering all particulars for the basis of their action, the luckless des Vanneaulx picked up the broken pots and calculated from their capacity the sum lost. The magistrates admitted the correctness of their calculations and entered the sum stolen on their records as, in all probability, a thousand gold coins to each pot. But were these coins forty-eight or forty, twenty-four or twenty francs in value? All expectant heirs in Limoges sympathized with the des Vanneaulx. The Limousin imagination was greatly stirred by the spectacle of the broken pots. As for old Pingret, who often sold vegetables himself in the market, lived on bread and onions, never spent more than three hundred francs a year, obliged and disobliged no one, and had never done one atom of good in the suburb of Saint-Etienne where he lived, his death did not excite the slightest regret. Poor Jeanne Malassis' heroism, which the old miser, had she saved him, would certainly not have rewarded, was thought rash; the number of souls who admired it was small in comparison with those who said: "For my part, I should have stayed in my bed."

The police found neither pen nor ink wherewith to write their report in the bare, dilapidated, cold, and dismal house. Observing persons and the heir might then have noticed a curious inconsistency which may be seen in certain misers. The dread the little old man had of the slightest outlay showed itself in the non-repaired roof which opened its sides to the light and the rain and snow; in the cracks of the walls; in the rotten doors ready to fall at the slightest shock; in the windows, where the broken glass was replaced by paper not even oiled. All the windows were without curtains, the fireplaces without mirrors or andirons; the hearth was garnished with one log of wood and a few little sticks almost caked with the soot which had fallen down the chimney. There were two rickety chairs, two thin couches, a few cracked pots and mended plates, a one-armed armchair, a dilapidated bed, the curtains of which time had embroidered with a bold hand, a worm-eaten secretary where the miser kept his seeds, a pile of linen thickened by many darns, and a heap of ragged garments, which existed only by the will of their master; he being dead they dropped into shreds, powder, chemical dissolution, in fact I know not into what form of utter ruin, as soon as the heir or the officers of the law laid rough hands upon them; they disappeared as if afraid of being publicly sold.

The population at Limoges was much concerned for these worthy des Vanneaulx, who had two children; and yet, no sooner did the law lay hands upon the reputed doer of the crime than the guilty personage absorbed attention, became a hero, and the des Vanneaulx were relegated into a corner of the picture.

Toward the end of March Madame Graslin began to feel some of those pains which

precede a first confinement and cannot be concealed. The inquiry as to the murder was then going on, but the murderer had not as yet been arrested.

Veronique now received her friends in her bedroom, where they played whist. For several days past Madame Graslin had not left the house, and she seemed to be tormented by several of those caprices attributed to women in her condition. Her mother came to see her almost every day, and the two women remained for hours in consultation.

It was nine o'clock, and the card tables were still without players, for every one was talking of the murder. Monsieur de Grandville entered the room.

"We have arrested the murderer of old Pingret," he said, joyfully.

"Who is it?" was asked on all sides.

"A porcelain workman; a man whose character has always been excellent, and who was in a fair way to make his fortune. He worked in your husband's old factory," added Monsieur de Grandville, turning to Madame Graslin.

"What is his name?" asked Veronique, in a weak voice.

"Jean-Francois Tascheron."

"Unhappy man!" she answered. "Yes, I have often seen him; my poor father recommended him to my care as some one to be looked after."

"He left the factory before Sauviat's death," said her mother, "and went to that of Messrs. Philippart, who offered him higher wages— But my daughter is scarcely well enough for this exciting conversation," she added, calling attention to Madame Graslin, whose face was as white as her sheets.

After that evening Mere Sauviat gave up her own home, and came, in spite of her sixty-six years, to stay with her daughter and nurse her through her confinement. She never left the room; Madame Graslin's friends found the old woman always at the bed's head busy with her eternal knitting,—brooding over Veronique as she did when the girl had the small-pox, answering questions for her and often refusing to admit visitors. The maternal and filial love of mother and daughter was so well known in Limoges that these actions of Madame Sauviat caused no comment.

A few days later, when the viscount, thinking to amuse the invalid, began to relate details which the whole town were eagerly demanding about Jean-Francois Tascheron, Madame Sauviat again stopped him hastily, declaring that he would give her daughter bad dreams. Veronique, however, looking fixedly at Monsieur de Grandville, asked him to finish what he was saying. Thus her friends, and she herself, were the first to know the results of the preliminary inquiry, which would soon be made public. The following is a brief epitome of the facts on which the indictment found against the prisoner was based.

Jean-Francois Tascheron was the son of a small farmer burdened with a family, who lived in the village of Montegnac.

Twenty years before this crime, which was famous throughout the Limousin, the canton of Montegnac was known for its evil ways. The saying was proverbial in Limoges that out of one hundred criminals in the department fifty belonged to the arrondissement of

Montegnac. Since 1816, however, two years after a priest named Bonnet was sent there as rector, it had lost its bad reputation, and the inhabitants no longer sent their heavy contingent to the assizes. This change was widely attributed to the influence acquired by the rector, Monsieur Bonnet, over a community which had lately been a hotbed for evil-minded persons whose actions dishonored the whole region. The crime of Jean-Francois Tascheron brought back upon Montegnac its former ill-savor.

By a curious trick of chance, the Taschérons were almost the only family in this village community who had retained through its evil period the old rigid morals and religious habits which are noticed by the observers of to-day to be rapidly disappearing throughout the country districts. This family had therefore formed a point of reliance to the rector, who naturally bore it on his heart. The Taschérons, remarkable for their uprightness, their union, their love of work, had never given other than good examples to Jean-Francois. Induced by the praiseworthy ambition of earning his living by a trade, the lad had left his native village, to the regret of his parents and friends, who greatly loved him, and had come to Limoges. During his two years' apprenticeship in a porcelain factory, his conduct was worthy of all praise; no apparent ill-conduct had led up to the horrible crime which was now to end his life. On the contrary, Jean-Francois Tascheron had given the time which other workmen were in the habit of spending in wine-shops and debauchery to study and self-improvement.

The most searching and minute inquiry on the part of the provincial authorities (who have plenty of time on their hands) failed to throw any light on the secrets of the young man's life. When the mistress of the humble lodging-house in which he lived was questioned she said she had never had a lodger whose moral conduct was as blameless. He was naturally amiable and gentle, and sometimes gay. About a year before the commission of the crime, his habits changed: he slept away from home several times a month and often for consecutive nights; but where she did not know, though she thought, from the state of his shoes when he returned, that he must have been into the country. She noticed that although he appeared to have left the town, he never wore his heavy boots, but always a pair of light shoes. He shaved before starting, and put on clean linen. Hearing this, the police turned their attention to houses of ill-fame and questionable resorts; but Jean-Francois Tascheron was found to be wholly unknown among them. The authorities then made a search through the working-girl and *grisette* class; but none of these women had had relations with the accused.

A crime without a motive is unheard of, especially in a young man whose desire for education and whose laudable ambition gave him higher ideas and a superior judgment to that of other workmen. The police and the examining justice, finding themselves balked in the above directions, attributed the murder to a passion for gambling; but after the most searching inquiries it was proved that Tascheron never played cards.

At first Jean-Francois entrenched himself in a system of flat denials, which, of course, in presence of a jury, would fall before proof; they seemed to show the collusion of some person either well versed in law or gifted with an intelligent mind. The following are the chief proofs the prosecution were prepared to present, and they are, as is frequently the case in trials for murder, both important and trifling; to wit:—

The absence of Tascheron during the night of the crime, and his refusal to say where he

was, for the accused did not offer to set up an alibi; a fragment of his blouse, torn off by the servant-woman in the struggle, found close by on a tree to which the wind had carried it; his presence that evening near Pingret's house, which was noticed by passers and by persons living in the neighborhood, though it might not have been remembered unless for the crime; a false key made by Tascheron which fitted the door opening to the fields; this key was found carefully buried two feet below one of the miser's holes, where Monsieur des Vanneaulx, digging deep to make sure there was not another layer of treasure-pots, chanced to find it; the police, after many researches, found the different persons who had furnished Tascheron with the iron, loaned him the vice, and given him the file, with which the key was presumably made.

The key was the first real clue. It put the police on the track of Tascheron, whom they arrested on the frontiers of the department, in a wood where he was awaiting the passage of a diligence. An hour later he would have started for America.

Besides all this, and in spite of the care with which certain footmarks in the ploughed field and on the mud of the road had been effaced and covered up, the searchers had found in several places the imprint of shoes, which they carefully measured and described, and which were afterwards found to correspond with the soles of Tascheron's shoes taken from his lodgings. This fatal proof confirmed the statement of the landlady. The authorities now attributed the crime to some foreign influence, and not to the man's personal intention; they believed he had accomplices, basing this idea on the impossibility of one man carrying away the buried money; for however strong he might be, no man could carry twenty-five thousand francs in gold to any distance. If each pot contained, as it was supposed to have done, about that sum, this would have required four trips to and from the clover-patch. Now, a singular circumstance went far to prove the hour at which the crime was committed. In the terror Jeanne Malassis must have felt on hearing her master's cries, she knocked over, as she rose, the table at her bedside, on which lay her watch, the only present the miser had given her in five years. The mainspring was broken by the shock, and the hands had stopped at two in the morning. By the middle of March (the date of the murder) daylight dawns between five and six o'clock. To whatever distance the gold had been carried, Tascheron could not possibly, under any apparent hypothesis, have transported it alone.

The care with which some of the footsteps were effaced, while others, to which Tascheron's shoes fitted, remained, certainly pointed to some mysterious assistant. Forced into hypotheses, the authorities once more attributed the crime to a desperate passion; not finding any trace of the object of such a passion in the lower classes, they began to look higher. Perhaps some bourgeoise, sure of the discretion of a man who had the face and bearing of a hero, had been drawn into a romance the outcome of which was crime.

This supposition was to some extent justified by the facts of the murder. The old man had been killed by blows with a spade; evidently, therefore, the murder was sudden, unpremeditated, fortuitous. The lovers might have planned the robbery, but not the murder. The lover and the miser, Tascheron and Pingret, each under the influence of his master passion, must have met by the buried hoards, both drawn thither by the gleaming of gold on the utter darkness of that fatal night.

In order to obtain, if possible, some light on this latter supposition, the authorities

arrested and kept in solitary confinement a sister of Jean-Francois, to whom he was much attached, hoping to obtain through her some clue to the mystery of her brother's private life. Denise Tascheron took refuge in total denial of any knowledge whatever, which gave rise to a suspicion that she did know something of the causes of the crime, although in fact she knew nothing.

The accused himself showed points of character that were rare amongst the peasantry. He baffled the cleverest police-spies employed against him, without knowing their real character. To the leading minds of the magistracy his guilt seemed caused by the influence of passion, and not by necessity or greed, as in the case of ordinary murderers, who usually pass through stages of crime and punishment before they commit the supreme deed. Active and careful search was made in following up this idea; but the uniform discretion of the prisoner gave no clue whatever to his prosecutors. The plausible theory of his attachment to a woman of the upper classes having once been admitted, Jean-Francois was subjected to the most insidious examination upon it; but his caution triumphed over all the moral tortures the examining judge applied to him. When, making a final effort, that official told him that the person for whom he had committed the crime was discovered and arrested, his face did not change, and he replied ironically:—

"I should very much like to see him."

When the public were informed of these circumstances, many persons adopted the suspicions of the magistrates, which seemed to be confirmed by Tascheron's savage obstinacy in giving no account of himself. Increased interest was felt in a young man who was now a problem. It is easy to see how these elements kept public curiosity on the *qui vive*, and with what eager interest the trial would be followed. But in spite of every effort on the part of the police, the prosecution stopped short on the threshold of hypothesis; it did not venture to go farther into the mystery where all was obscurity and danger. In certain judicial cases half-certainties are not sufficient for the judges to proceed upon. Nevertheless the case was ordered for trial, in hopes that the truth would come to the surface when the case was brought into court, an ordeal under which many criminals contradict themselves.

Monsieur Graslin was one of the jury; so that either through her husband or through Monsieur de Grandville, the public prosecutor, Veronique knew all the details of the criminal trial which, for a fortnight, kept the department, and we may say all France, in a state of excitement. The attitude maintained by the accused seemed to justify the theory of the prosecution. More than once when the court opened, his eyes turned upon the brilliant assemblage of women who came to find emotions in a real drama, as though he sought for some one. Each time that the man's glance, clear, but impenetrable, swept along those elegant ranks, a movement was perceptible, a sort of shock, as though each woman feared she might appear his accomplice under the inquisitorial eyes of judge and prosecutor.

The hitherto useless efforts of the prosecution were now made public, also the precautions taken by the criminal to ensure the success of his crime. It was shown that Jean-Francois Tascheron had obtained a passport for North America some months before the crime was committed. Thus the plan of leaving France was fully formed; the object of his passion must therefore be a married woman; for he would have no reason to flee the country with a young girl. Possibly the crime had this one object in view, namely, to

obtain sufficient means to support this unknown woman in comfort.

The prosecution had found no passport issued to a woman for North America. In case she had obtained one in Paris, the registers of that city were searched, also those of the towns contingent to Limoges, but without result. All the shrewdest minds in the community followed the case with deep attention. While the more virtuous dames of the department attributed the wearing of pumps on a muddy road (an inexplicable circumstance in the ordinary lives of such shoes) to the necessity of noiselessly watching old Pingret, the men pointed out that pumps were very useful in silently passing through a house—up stairways and along corridors—without discovery.

So Jean-Francois Tascheron and his mistress (by this time she was young, beautiful, romantic, for every one made a portrait of her) had evidently intended to escape with only one passport, to which they would forge the additional words, “and wife.” The card tables were deserted at night in the various social salons, and malicious tongues discussed what women were known in March, 1829, to have gone to Paris, and what others could be making, openly or secretly, preparations for a journey. Limoges might be said to be enjoying its Fualdes trial, with an unknown and mysterious Madame Manson for an additional excitement. Never was any provincial town so stirred to its depths as Limoges after each day’s session. Nothing was talked of but the trial, all the incidents of which increased the interest felt for the accused, whose able answers, learnedly taken up, turned and twisted and commented upon, gave rise to ample discussions. When one of the jurors asked Tascheron why he had taken a passport for America, the man replied that he had intended to establish a porcelain manufactory in that country. Thus, without committing himself to any line of defence, he covered his accomplice, leaving it to be supposed that the crime was committed, if at all, to obtain funds for this business venture.

In the midst of such excitement it was impossible for Veronique’s friends to refrain from discussing in her presence the progress of the case and the reticence of the criminal. Her health was extremely feeble; but the doctor having advised her going out into the fresh air, she had on one occasion taken her mother’s arm and walked as far as Madame Sauviat’s house in the country, where she rested. On her return she endeavored to keep about until her husband came to his dinner, which she always served him herself. On this occasion Graslin, being detained in the court-room, did not come in till eight o’clock. She went into the dining-room as usual, and was present at a discussion which took place among a number of her friends who had assembled there.

“If my poor father were still living,” she remarked to them, “we should know more about the matter; possibly this man might never have become a criminal. I think you have all taken a singular idea about the matter. You insist that love is at the bottom of the crime, and I agree with you there; but why do you think this unknown person is a married woman? He may have loved some young girl whose father and mother would not let her marry him.”

“A young girl could, sooner or later, have married him legitimately,” replied Monsieur de Grandville. “Tascheron has no lack of patience; he had time to make sufficient means to support her while awaiting the time when all girls are at liberty to marry against the wishes of their parents; he need not have committed a crime to obtain her.”

“I did not know that a girl could marry in that way,” said Madame Graslin; “but how is it that in a town like this, where all things are known, and where everybody sees everything that happens to his neighbor, not the slightest clue to this woman has been obtained? In order to love, persons must see each other and consequently be seen. What do you really think, you magistrates?” she added, plunging a fixed look into the eyes of the *procureur-general*.

“We think that the woman belongs to the bourgeois or the commercial class.”

“I don’t agree with you,” said Madame Graslin. “A woman of that class does not have elevated sentiments.”

This reply drew all eyes on Veronique, and the whole company waited for an explanation of so paradoxical a speech.

“During the hours I lie awake at night I have not been able to keep my mind from dwelling on this mysterious affair,” she said slowly, “and I think I have fathomed Tascheron’s motive. I believe the person he loves is a young girl, because a married woman has interests, if not feelings, which partly fill her heart and prevent her from yielding so completely to a great passion as to leave her home. There is such a thing as a love proceeding from passion which is half maternal, and to me it is evident that this man was loved by a woman who wished to be his prop, his Providence. She must have put into her passion something of the genius that inspires the work of artists and poets, the creative force which exists in woman under another form; for it is her mission to create men, not things. Our works are our children; our children are the pictures, books, and statues of our lives. Are we not artists in their earliest education? I say that this unknown woman, if she is not a young girl, has never been a mother but is filled with the maternal instinct; she has loved this man to form him, to develop him. It needs a feminine element in you men of law to detect these shades of motive, which too often escape you. If I had been your deputy,” she said, looking straight at the *procureur-general*, “I should have found the guilty woman, if indeed there is any guilt about it. I agree with the Abbe Dutheil that these lovers meant to fly to America with the money of old Pingret. The theft led to the murder by the fatal logic which the punishment of death inspires. And so,” she added with an appealing look at Monsieur de Grandville, “I think it would be merciful in you to abandon the theory of premeditation, for in so doing you would save the man’s life. He is evidently a fine man in spite of his crime; he might, perhaps, repair that crime by a great repentance if you gave him time. The works of repentance ought to count for something in the judgment of the law. In these days is there nothing better for a human being to do than to give his life, or build, as in former times, a cathedral of Milan, to expiate his crimes?”

“Your ideas are noble, madame,” said Monsieur de Grandville, “but, premeditation apart, Tascheron would still be liable to the penalty of death on account of the other serious and proved circumstances attending the crime,—such as forcible entrance and burglary at night.”

“Then you think that he will certainly be found guilty?” she said, lowering her eyelids.

“I am certain of it,” he said; “the prosecution has a strong case.”

A slight tremor rustled Madame Graslin’s dress.

“I feel cold,” she said. Taking her mother’s arm she went to bed.

“She seemed quite herself this evening,” said her friends.

The next day Veronique was much worse and kept her bed. When her physician expressed surprise at her condition she said, smiling:—

“I told you that that walk would do me no good.”

Ever since the opening of the trial Tascheron’s demeanor had been equally devoid of hypocrisy or bravado. Veronique’s physician, intending to divert his patient’s mind, tried to explain this demeanor, which the man’s defenders were making the most of. The prisoner was misled, said the doctor, by the talents of his lawyer, and was sure of acquittal; at times his face expressed a hope that was greater than that of merely escaping death. The antecedents of the man (who was only twenty-three years old) were so at variance with the crime now charged to him that his legal defenders claimed his present bearing to be a proof of innocence; besides, the overwhelming circumstantial proofs of the theory of the prosecution were made to appear so weak by his advocate that the man was buoyed up by the lawyer’s arguments. To save his client’s life the lawyer made the most of the evident want of premeditation; hypothetically he admitted the premeditation of the robbery but not of the murders, which were evidently (no matter who was the guilty party) the result of two unexpected struggles. Success, the doctor said, was really as doubtful for one side as for the other.

After this visit of her physician Veronique received that of the *procureur-general*, who was in the habit of coming in every morning on his way to the court-room.

“I have read the arguments of yesterday,” she said to him, “and to-day, as I suppose, the evidence for the defence begins. I am so interested in that man that I should like to have him saved. Couldn’t you for once in your life forego a triumph? Let his lawyer beat you. Come, make me a present of the man’s life, and perhaps you shall have mine some day. The able presentation of the defence by Tascheron’s lawyer really raises a strong doubt, and—”

“Why, you are quite agitated,” said the viscount somewhat surprised.

“Do you know why?” she answered. “My husband has just remarked a most horrible coincidence, which is really enough in the present state of my nerves, to cause my death. If you condemn this man to death it will be on the very day when I shall give birth to my child.”

“But I can’t change the laws,” said the lawyer.

“Ah! you don’t know how to love,” she retorted, closing her eyes; then she turned her head on the pillow and made him an imperative sign to leave the room.

Monsieur Graslin pleaded strongly but in vain with his fellow-jurymen for acquittal, giving a reason which some of them adopted; a reason suggested by his wife:—

“If we do not condemn this man to death, but allow him to live, the des Vanneaulx will in the end recover their property.”

This weighty argument made a division of the jury, into five for condemnation against

seven for acquittal, which necessitated an appeal to the court; but the judge sided with the minority. According to the legal system of that day this action led to a verdict of guilty. When sentence was passed upon him Tascheron flew into a fury which was natural enough in a man full of life and strength, but which the court and jury and lawyers and spectators had rarely witnessed in persons who were thought to be unjustly condemned.

# VI. DISCUSSIONS AND CHRISTIAN SOLICITUDES

In spite of the verdict, the drama of this crime did not seem over so far as the community was concerned. So complicated a case gave rise, as usually happens under such circumstances, to two sets of diametrically opposite opinions as to the guilt of the hero, whom some declared to be an innocent and ill-used victim, and others the worst of criminals.

The liberals held for Tascheron's innocence, less from conviction than for the satisfaction of opposing the government.

"What an outrage," they said, "to condemn a man because his footprint is the size of another man's footprint; or because he will not tell you where he spent the night, as if all young men would not rather die than compromise a woman. They prove he borrowed tools and bought iron, but have they proved he made that key? They find a bit of blue linen hanging to the branch of a tree, possibly put there by old Pingret himself to scare the crows, though it happens to match a tear in Tascheron's blouse. Is a man's life to depend on such things as these? Jean-Francois denies everything, and the prosecution has not produced a single witness who saw the crime or anything relating to it."

They talked over, enlarged upon, and paraphrased the arguments of the defence. "Old Pingret! what was he?—a cracked money box!" said the strong-minded. A few of the more determined progressists, denying the sacred laws of property, which the Saint-Simonians were already attacking under their abstract theories of political economy, went further.

"Pere Pingret," they said, "was the real author of the crime. By hoarding his gold that man robbed the nation. What enterprises might have been made fruitful by his useless money! He had barred the way of industry, and was justly punished."

They pitied the poor murdered servant-woman, but Denise, Tascheron's sister, who resisted the wiles of lawyers and did not give a single answer at the trial without long consideration of what she ought to say, excited the deepest interest. She became in their minds a figure to be compared (though in another sense) with Jeannie Deans, whose piety, grace, modesty and beauty she possessed.

Francois Tascheron continued, therefore, to excite the curiosity of not only all the town but all the department, and a few romantic women openly testified their admiration for him.

"If there is really in all this a love for some woman high above him," they said, "then he is surely no ordinary man, and you will see that he will die well."

The question, "Will he speak out,—will he not speak?" gave rise to many a bet.

Since the burst of rage with which Tascheron received his sentence, and which was so violent that it might have been fatal to persons about him in the court-room if the gendarmes had not been there to master him, the condemned man threatened all who came near him with the fury of a wild beast; so that the jailers were obliged to put him into a straight-jacket, as much to protect his life as their own from the effects of his anger.

Prevented by that controlling power from doing violence, Tascheron gave vent to his despair by convulsive jerks which horrified his guardians, and by words and looks which the middle-ages would have attributed to demoniacal possession. He was so young that many women thought pitifully of a life so full of passion about to be cut off forever. “The Last Day of a Condemned Man,” that mournful elegy, that useless plea against the penalty of death (the mainstay of society!), which had lately been published, as if expressly to meet this case, was the topic of all conversations.

But, above all, in the mind of every one, stood that invisible unknown woman, her feet in blood, raised aloft by the trial as it were on a pedestal,—torn, no doubt, by horrible inward anguish and condemned to absolute silence within her home. Who was this Medea whom the public well-nigh admired,—the woman with that impenetrable brow, that white breast covering a heart of steel? Perhaps she was the sister or the cousin or the daughter or the wife of this one or of that one among them! Alarm seemed to creep into the bosom of families. As Napoleon finely said, it is especially in the domain of the imagination that the power of the Unknown is immeasurable.

As for the hundred thousand francs stolen from Monsieur and Madame des Vanneaulx no efforts of the police could find them; and the obstinate silence of the criminal gave no clue. Monsieur de Grandville tried the common means of holding out hopes of commutation of the sentence in case of confession; but when he went to see the prisoner and suggest it the latter received him with such furious cries and epileptic contortions, such rage at being powerless to take him by the throat, that he could do nothing.

The law could only look to the influence of the Church at the last moment. The des Vanneaulx had frequently consulted with the Abbe Pascal, chaplain of the prison. This priest was not without the faculty of making prisoners listen to him, and he religiously braved Tascheron’s violence, trying to get in a few words amid the storms of that powerful nature in convulsion. But this struggle of spiritual fatherhood against the hurricane of unchained passions, overcame the poor abbe completely.

“The man has had his paradise here below,” said the old man, in his gentle voice.

Little Madame des Vanneaulx consulted her friends as to whether she ought to try a visit herself to the criminal. Monsieur des Vanneaulx talked of offering terms. In his anxiety to recover the money he actually went to Monsieur de Grandville and asked for the pardon of his uncle’s murderer if the latter would make restitution of the hundred thousand francs. The *procureur-general* replied that the majesty of the crown did not stoop to such compromises.

The des Vanneaulx then had recourse to the lawyer who had defended Tascheron, and to him they offered ten per cent of whatever sum he could recover. This lawyer was the only person before whom Tascheron was not violent. The heirs authorized him to offer the prisoner an additional ten per cent to be paid to his family. In spite of all these inducements and his own eloquence, the lawyer could obtain nothing whatever from his client. The des Vanneaulx were furious; they anathematized the unhappy man.

“He is not only a murderer, but he has no sense of decency,” cried Madame des Vanneaulx (ignorant of Fualdes’ famous complaint), when she received word of the failure of the Abbe Pascal’s efforts, and was told there was no hope of a reversal of the sentence

by the court of appeals.

“What good will our money do him in the place he is going to?” said her husband. “Murder can be conceived of, but useless theft is inconceivable. What days we live in, to be sure! To think that people in good society actually take an interest in such a wretch!”

“He has no honor,” said Madame des Vanneaulx.

“But perhaps the restitution would compromise the woman he loves,” said an old maid.

“We would keep his secret,” returned Monsieur des Vanneaulx.

“Then you would be compounding a felony,” remarked a lawyer.

“Oh, the villain!” was Monsieur des Vanneaulx’s usual conclusion.

One of Madame Graslin’s female friends related to her with much amusement these discussions of the des Vanneaulx. This lady, who was very intelligent, and one of those persons who form ideals and desire that all things should attain perfection, regretted the violence and savage temper of the condemned; she would rather he had been cold and calm and dignified, she said.

“Do you not see,” replied Veronique, “that he is thus avoiding their temptations and foiling their efforts? He is making himself a wild beast for a purpose.”

“At any rate,” said the lady, “he is not a well-bred man; he is only a workman.”

“If he had been a well-bred man,” said Madame Graslin, “he would soon have sacrificed that unknown woman.”

These events, discussed and turned and twisted in every salon, every household, commented on in a score of ways, stripped bare by the cleverest tongues in the community, gave, of course, a cruel interest to the execution of the criminal, whose appeal was rejected after two months’ delay by the upper court. What would probably be his demeanor in his last moments? Would he speak out? Would he contradict himself? How would the bets be decided? Who would go to see him executed, and who would not go, and how could it be done? The position of the localities, which in Limoges spares a criminal the anguish of a long distance to the scaffold, lessens the number of spectators. The law courts which adjoin the prison stand at the corner of the rue du Palais and the rue du Pont-Herisson. The rue du Palais is continued in a straight line by the short rue de Monte-a-Regret, which leads to the place des Arenes, where the executions take place, and which probably owes its name to that circumstances. There is therefore but little distance to go, few houses to pass, and few windows to look from. No person in good society would be willing to mingle in the crowd which would fill the streets.

But the expected execution was, to the great astonishment of the whole town, put off from day to day for the following reason:—

The repentance and resignation of great criminals on their way to death is one of the triumphs which the Church reserves for itself,—a triumph which seldom misses its effect on the popular mind. Repentance is so strong a proof of the power of religious ideas—taken apart from all Christian interest, though that, of course, is the chief object of the Church—that the clergy are always distressed by a failure on such occasions. In July,

1829, such a failure was aggravated by the spirit of party which envenomed every detail in the life of the body politic. The liberal party rejoiced in the expectation that the priest-party (a term invented by Montlosier, a royalist who went over to the constitutionals, and was dragged by them far beyond his wishes),—that the priests would fail on so public an occasion before the eyes of the people. Parties *en masse* commit infamous actions which would cover a single man with shame and opprobrium; therefore when one man alone stands in his guilt before the eyes of the masses, he becomes a Robespierre, a Jeffries, a Laubardemont, a species of expiatory altar on which all secret guilts hang their *ex-votos*.

The authorities, sympathizing with the Church, delayed the execution, partly in the hope of gaining some conclusive information for themselves, and partly to allow religion an opportunity to prevail.

Nevertheless, their power was not unlimited, and the sentence must sooner or later be carried out. The same liberals who, out of mere opposition, had declared Tascheron innocent, and who had done their best to break down the verdict, now clamored because the sentence was not executed. When the opposition is consistent it invariably falls into such unreasonableness, because its object is not to have right on its own side, but to harass the authorities and put them in the wrong.

Accordingly, about the beginning of August, the government officials felt their hand forced by that clamor, so often stupid, called “public opinion.” The day for the execution was named. In this extremity the Abbe Dutheil took upon himself to propose to the bishop a last resource, the adoption of which caused the introduction into this judicial drama of a remarkable personage, who serves as a bond between all the figures brought upon the scene of it, and who, by ways familiar to Providence, was destined to lead Madame Graslin along a path where her virtues were to shine with greater brilliancy as a noble benefactress and an angelic Christian woman.

The episcopal palace at Limoges stands on a hill which slopes to the banks of the Vienne; and its gardens, supported by strong walls topped with a balustrade, descend to the river by terrace after terrace, according to the natural lay of the land. The rise of this hill is such that the suburb of Saint-Etienne on the opposite bank seems to lie at the foot of the lower terrace. From there, according to the direction in which a person walks, the Vienne can be seen either in a long stretch or directly across it, in the midst of a fertile panorama. On the west, after the river leaves the embankment of the episcopal gardens, it turns toward the town in a graceful curve which winds around the suburb of Saint-Martial. At a short distance beyond that suburb is a pretty country house called Le Cluseau, the walls of which can be seen from the lower terrace of the bishop’s palace, appearing, by an effect of distance, to blend with the steeples of the suburb. Opposite to Le Cluseau is the sloping island, covered with poplar and other trees, which Veronique in her girlish youth had named the Ile de France. To the east the distance is closed by an ampitheatre of hills.

The magic charm of the site and the rich simplicity of the building make this episcopal palace one of the most interesting objects in a town where the other edifices do not shine, either through choice of material or architecture.

Long familiarized with the aspects which commend these gardens to all lovers of the picturesque, the Abbe Dutheil, who had induced the Abbe de Grancour to accompany him,

descended from terrace to terrace, paying no attention to the ruddy colors, the orange tones, the violet tints, which the setting sun was casting on the old walls and balustrades of the gardens, on the river beneath them, and, in the distance, on the houses of the town. He was in search of the bishop, who was sitting on the lower terrace under a grape-vine arbor, where he often came to take his dessert and enjoy the charm of a tranquil evening. The poplars on the island seemed at this moment to divide the waters with the lengthening shadow of their yellowing heads, to which the sun was lending the appearance of a golden foliage. The setting rays, diversely reflected on masses of different greens, produced a magnificent harmony of melancholy tones. At the farther end of the valley a sheet of sparkling water ruffled by the breeze brought out the brown stretch of roofs in the suburb of Saint-Etienne. The steeples and roofs of Saint-Martial, bathed in light, showed through the tracery of the grape-vine arbor. The soft murmur of the provincial town, half hidden by the bend of the river, the sweetness of the balmy air, all contributed to plunge the prelate into the condition of quietude prescribed by medical writers on digestion; seemingly his eyes were resting mechanically on the right bank of the river, just where the long shadows of the island poplars touched it on the side toward Saint-Etienne, near the field where the twofold murder of old Pingret and his servant had been committed. But when his momentary felicity was interrupted by the arrival of the two grand vicars, and the difficulties they brought to him to solve, it was seen his eyes were filled with impenetrable thoughts. The two priests attributed this abstraction to the fact of being bored, whereas, on the contrary, the prelate was absorbed in seeing in the sands of the Vienne the solution of the enigma then so anxiously sought for by the officers of justice, the des Vanneaulx, and the community at large.

“Monsieur,” said the Abbe de Grancour, approaching the bishop, “it is all useless; we shall certainly have the distress of seeing that unhappy Tascheron die an unbeliever. He vociferates the most horrible imprecations against religion; he insults that poor Abbe Pascal; he spits upon the crucifix; and means to die denying all, even hell.”

“He will shock the populace on the scaffold,” said the Abbe Dutheil. “The great scandal and horror his conduct will excite may hide our defeat and powerlessness. In fact, as I have just been saying to Monsieur de Grancour, this very spectacle may drive other sinners into the arms of the Church.”

Troubled by these words, the bishop laid down upon a rustic wooden table the bunch of grapes at which he was picking, and wiped his fingers as he made a sign to the two grand vicars to be seated.

“The Abbe Pascal did not take a wise course,” he said.

“He is actually ill in his bed from the effects of his last scene with the man,” said the Abbe de Grancour. “If it were not for that we might get him to explain more clearly the difficulties that have defeated all the various efforts monseigneur ordered him to make.”

“The condemned man sings obscene songs at the highest pitch of his voice as soon as he sees any one of us, so as to drown out every word we try to say to him,” said a young priest who was sitting beside the bishop.

This young man, who was gifted with a charming personality, had his right arm resting on the table, while his white hand dropped negligently on the bunches of grapes, seeking

the ripest, with the ease and assurance of an habitual guest or favorite. He was both to the prelate, being the younger brother of Baron Eugene de Rastignac, to whom ties of family and also of affection had long bound the Bishop of Limoges. Aware of the want of fortune which devoted this young man to the Church, the bishop took him as his private secretary to give him time to wait for eventual preferment. The Abbe Gabriel bore a name which would lead him sooner or later to the highest dignities of the Church.

“Did you go to see him, my son?” asked the bishop.

“Yes, Monseigneur. As soon as I entered his cell the wretched man hurled the most disgusting epithets at you and at me. He behaved in such a manner that it was impossible for any priest to remain in his presence. Might I give Monseigneur a word of advice?”

“Let us listen to the words of wisdom which God Almighty sometimes puts into the mouths of children,” said the bishop, smiling.

“Well, you know he made Balaam’s ass speak out,” said the young abbe quickly.

“But according to some commentators she did not know what she was saying,” replied the bishop, laughing.

The two grand vicars smiled. In the first place, the joke came from Monseigneur; next, it bore gently on the young abbe, of whom the dignitaries and other ambitious priests grouped around the bishop were somewhat jealous.

“My advice would be,” resumed the young man, “to ask Monsieur de Grandville to reprieve the man for the present. When Tascheron knows that he owes an extension of his life to our intercession, he may pretend to listen to us, and if he listens—”

“He will persist in his present conduct, finding that it has won him that advantage,” said the bishop, interrupting his favorite. “Messieurs,” he said, after a moment’s silence, “does the whole town know of these details?”

“There is not a household in which they are not talked over,” said the Abbe de Grancour. “The state in which our good Abbe Pascal was put by his last efforts is the present topic of conversation throughout the town.”

“When is Tascheron to be executed?” asked the bishop.

“To-morrow, which is market-day;” replied Monsieur de Grancour.

“Messieurs,” exclaimed the bishop, “religion must not be overset in this way. The more public attention is attracted to the matter, the more I am determined to obtain a notable triumph. The Church is now in presence of a great difficulty. We are called upon to do miracles in this manufacturing town, where the spirit of sedition against religious and monarchical principles has such deep root, where the system of inquiry born of protestantism (which in these days calls itself liberalism, prepared at any moment to take another name) extends into everything. Go at once to Monsieur de Grandville; he is wholly on our side, and say to him from me that we beg for a few days’ reprieve. I will go myself and see that unhappy man.”

“You, Monseigneur!” said the Abbe de Rastignac. “If you should fail, wouldn’t that complicate matters? You ought not to go unless you are certain of success.”

“If Monseigneur will permit me to express my opinion,” said the Abbe Dutheil, “I think I can suggest a means which may bring victory to religion in this sad case.”

The prelate answered with a sign of assent, so coldly given as to show how little credit he gave to his vicar-general.

“If any one can influence that rebellious soul and bring it back to God,” continued the Abbe Dutheil, “it is the rector of the village in which he was born, Monsieur Bonnet.”

“One of your proteges,” remarked the bishop.

“Monseigneur, Monsieur Bonnet is one of those men who protect themselves, both by their active virtues and their gospel work.”

This simple and modest reply was received in a silence which would have embarrassed any other man than the Abbe Dutheil. The three priests chose to see in it one of those hidden and unanswerable sarcasms which are characteristic of ecclesiastics, who contrive to express what they want to say while observing the strictest decorum. In this case there was nothing of the kind. The Abbe Dutheil never thought of himself and had no double meaning.

“I have heard of Saint Aristides for some time,” said the bishop, smiling. “If I have left his light under a bushel I may have been unjust or prejudiced. Your liberals are always crying up Monsieur Bonnet as though he belonged to their party. I should like to judge for myself of this rural apostle. Go at once, messieurs, to Monsieur de Grandville, and ask for the reprieve; I will await his answer before sending our dear Abbe Gabriel to Montegnac to fetch the saintly man. We will give his Blessedness a chance to do miracles.”

As he listened to these words of the prelate the Abbe Dutheil reddened; but he would not allow himself to take notice of the incivilities of the speech. The two grand vicars bowed in silence and withdrew, leaving the prelate alone with his secretary.

“The secrets of the confession we are so anxious to obtain from the unhappy man himself are no doubt buried there,” said the bishop to his young abbe, pointing to the shadow of the poplars where it fell on a lonely house between the island and Saint-Etienne.

“I have always thought so,” replied Gabriel. “I am not a judge and I will not be an informer; but if I were a magistrate I should have known the name of that woman who trembles at every sound, at every word, while forced to keep her features calm and serene under pain of going to the scaffold with her lover. She has nothing to fear, however. I have seen the man; he will carry the secret of that passionate love to the grave with him.”

“Ah! you sly fellow!” said the bishop, twisting the ear of his secretary as he motioned to the space between the island and the suburb of Saint-Etienne which the last gleams of the setting sun were illuminating, and on which the young abbe’s eyes were fixed. “That is the place where justice should have searched; don’t you think so?”

“I went to see the criminal to try the effect of my suspicions upon him,” replied the young man. “I could not speak them out, for fear of compromising the woman for whose sake he dies.”

“Yes,” said the bishop, “we will hold our tongues; we are not the servants of human

justice. One head is enough. Besides, sooner or later, the secret will be given to the Church.”

The perspicacity which the habit of meditation gives to priests is far superior to that of lawyers or the police. By dint of contemplating from those terraces the scene of the crime, the prelate and his secretary had ended by perceiving circumstances unseen by others, in spite of all the investigations before and during the trial of the case.

Monsieur de Grandville was playing whist at Madame Graslin’s house; it was necessary to await his return; the bishop did not therefore receive his answer till nearly midnight. The Abbe Gabriel, to whom the prelate lent his carriage, started at two in the morning for Montegnac. This region, which begins about twenty-five miles from the town, is situated in that part of the Limousin which lies at the base of the mountains of the Correze and follows the line of the Creuze. The young abbe left Limoges all heaving with expectation of the spectacle on the morrow, and still unaware that it would not take place.

# VII. MONTEGNAC

Priests and religious devotees have a tendency in the matter of payments to keep strictly to the letter of the law. Is this from poverty, or from the selfishness to which their isolation condemns them, thus encouraging the natural inclination of all men to avarice; or is it from a conscientious parsimony which saves all it can for deeds of charity? Each nature will give a different answer to this question. The difficulty of putting the hand into the pocket, sometimes concealed by a gracious kindliness, oftener unreservedly exhibited, is more particularly noticeable in travelling. Gabriel de Rastignac, the prettiest youth who had served before the altar for many a long day, gave only a thirty-sous *pour-boire* to the postilion. Consequently he travelled slowly. Postilions drive bishops and other clergy with the utmost care when they merely double the legal wage, and they run no risk of damaging the episcopal carriage for any such sum, fearing, they might say, to get themselves into trouble. The Abbe Gabriel, who was travelling alone for the first time, said, at each relay, in his dulcet voice:—

“Pray go faster, postilion.”

“We ply the whip,” replied an old postilion, “according to how the traveller plies his finger and thumb.”

The young abbe flung himself back into a corner of the carriage unable to comprehend that answer. To occupy the time he began to study the country through which he was passing, making several mental excursions on foot among the hills through which the road winds between Bordeaux and Lyon.

About fifteen miles from Limoges the landscape, losing the graceful flow of the Vienne through the undulating meadows of the Limousin, which in certain places remind one of Switzerland, especially about Saint-Leonard, takes on a harsh and melancholy aspect. Here we come upon vast tracts of uncultivated land, sandy plains without herbage, hemmed in on the horizon by the summits of the Correze. These mountains have neither the abrupt rise of the Alpine ranges nor their splendid ridges; neither the warm gorges and desolate peaks of the Appenines, nor the picturesque grandeur of the Pyrenees. Their undulating slopes, due to the action of water, prove the subsidence of some great natural catastrophe in which the floods retired slowly. This characteristic, common to most of the earth convulsions in France, has perhaps contributed, together with the climate, to the epitaph of *douce* bestowed by all Europe on our sunny France.

Though this abrupt transition from the smiling landscapes of the Limousin to the sterner aspects of La Marche and Auvergne may offer to the thinker and the poet, as he passes them on his way, an image of the Infinite, that terror of certain minds; though it incites to revelry the woman of the world, bored as she travels luxuriously in her carriage,—to the inhabitants of this region Nature is cruel, savage, and without resources. The soil of these great gray plains is thankless. The vicinity of a capital town could alone reproduce the miracle worked in Brie during the last two centuries. Here, however, not only is a town lacking, but also the great residences which sometimes give life to these hopeless deserts, where civilization languishes, where the agriculturist sees only barrenness, and the

traveller finds not a single inn, nor that which, perchance, he is there to seek,—the picturesque.

Great minds, however, do not dislike these barren wastes, necessary shadows in Nature's vast picture. Quite recently Fenimore Cooper has magnificently developed with his melancholy genius the poesy of such solitudes, in his "Prairie." These regions, unknown to botanists, covered by mineral refuse, round pebbles, and a sterile soil, cast defiance to civilization. France should adopt the only solution to these difficulties, as the British have done in Scotland, where patient, heroic agriculture has changed the arid wastes into fertile farms. Left in their savage and primitive state these uncultivated social and natural wastes give birth to discouragement, laziness, weakness resulting from poor food, and crime when needs become importunate.

These few words present the past history of Montegnac. What could be done in that great tract of barren land, neglected by the government, abandoned by the nobility, useless to industry,—what but war against society which disregarded its duty? Consequently, the inhabitants of Montegnac lived to a recent period, as the Highlands of Scotland lived in former times, by murder and rapine. From the mere aspect of this region a thinking man would understand how, twenty years earlier, the inhabitants were at war with society. The great upland plain, flanked on one side by the valley of the Vienne, on the other by the charming valleys of La Marche, then by Auvergne, and bounded by the mountains of the Correze, is like (agriculture apart) the plateau of La Beauce, which separates the basin of the Loire from that of the Seine, also like those of Touraine and Berry, and many other of the great upland plains which are cut like facets on the surface of France and are numerous enough to claim the attention of the wisest administrators. It is amazing that while complaint is made of the influx of population to the social centres, the government does not employ the natural remedy of redeeming a region where, as statistics show, there are many million acres of waste land, certain parts of which, especially in Berry, have a soil from seven to eight feet deep.

Many of these plains which might be covered by villages and made splendidly productive belong to obstinate communes, the authorities of which refuse to sell to those who would develop them, merely to keep the right to pasture cows upon them! On all these useless, unproductive lands is written the word "Incapacity." All soils have some special fertility of their own. Arms and wills are ready; the thing lacking is a sense of duty combined with talent on the part of the government. In France, up to the present time, these upland plains have been sacrificed to the valleys; the government has chosen to give all its help to those regions of country which can take care of themselves.

Most of these luckless uplands are without water, the first essential for production. The mists which ought to fertilize the gray, dead soil by discharging oxygen upon it, sweep across it rapidly, driven by the wind, for want of trees which might arrest them and so obtain their nourishment. Merely to plant trees in such a region would be carrying a gospel to it. Separated from the nearest town or city by a distance as insurmountable to poor folk as though a desert lay between them, with no means of reaching a market for their products (if they produced anything), close to an unexplored forest which supplied them with wood and the uncertain livelihood of poaching, the inhabitants often suffered from hunger during the winters. The soil not being suitable for wheat, and the unfortunate

peasantry having neither cattle of any kind nor farming implements, they lived for the most part on chestnuts.

Any one who has studied zoological productions in a museum, or become personally aware of the indescribable depression caused by the brown tones of all European products, will understand how the constant sight of these gray, arid plains must have affected the moral nature of the inhabitants, through the desolate sense of utter barrenness which they present to the eye. There, in those dismal regions, is neither coolness nor brightness, nor shade nor contrast,—none of all those ideas and spectacles of Nature which awaken and rejoice the heart; even a stunted apple-tree would be hailed as a friend.

A country road, recently made, runs through the centre of this great plain, and meets the high-road. Upon it, at a distance of some fifteen miles from the high-road, stands Montegnac, at the foot of a hill, as its name designates, the chief town of a canton or district in the Haute-Vienne. The hill is part of Montegnac, which thus unites a mountainous scenery with that of the plains. This district is a miniature Scotland, with its lowlands and highlands. Behind the hill, at the foot of which lies the village, rises, at a distance of about three miles, the first peak of the Correze mountains. The space between is covered by the great forest of Montegnac, which clothes the hill, extends over the valley, and along the slopes of the mountain (though these are bare in some places), continuing as far as the highway to Aubusson, where it diminishes to a point near a steep embankment on that road. This embankment commands a ravine through which the post-road between Bordeaux and Lyon passes. Travellers, either afoot or in carriages, were often stopped in the depths of this dangerous gorge by highwaymen, whose deeds of violence went unpunished, for the site favored them; they could instantly disappear, by ways known to them alone, into the inaccessible parts of the forest.

Such a region was naturally out of reach of law. No one now travelled through it. Without circulation, neither commerce, industry, exchange of ideas, nor any of the means to wealth, can exist; the material triumphs of civilization are always the result of the application of primitive ideas. Thought is invariably the point of departure and the goal of all social existence. The history of Montegnac is a proof of that axiom of social science. When at last the administration was able to concern itself with the needs and the material prosperity of this region of country, it cut down this strip of forest, and stationed a detachment of gendarmerie near the ravine, which escorted the mail-coaches between the two relays; but, to the shame of the gendarmerie be it said, it was the gospel, and not the sword, the rector Monsieur Bonnet, and not Corporal Chervin, who won a civil victory by changing the morals of a population. This priest, filled with Christian tenderness for the poor, hapless region, attempted to regenerate it, and succeeded in the attempt.

After travelling for about an hour over these plains, alternately stony and dusty, where the partridges flocked in tranquil coveys, their wings whirring with a dull, heavy sound as the carriage came toward them, the Abbe Gabriel, like all other travellers on the same road, saw with satisfaction the roofs of Montegnac in the distance. At the entrance of the village was one of those curious post-relays which are seen only in the remote parts of France. Its sign was an oak board on which some pretentious postilion had carved the words, *Pauste o chevos*, blackening the letters with ink, and then nailing the board by its four corners above the door of a wretched stable in which there were no horses. The door,

which was nearly always open, had a plank laid on the soil for its threshold, to protect the stable floor, which was lower than the road, from inundation when it rained. The discouraged traveller could see within worn-out, mildewed, and mended harnesses, certain to break at a plunge of the horses. The horses themselves were hard at work in the fields, or anywhere but in the stable. If by any chance they happen to be in their stalls, they are eating; if they have finished eating, the postilion has gone to see his aunt or his cousin, or is getting in the hay, or else he is asleep; no one can say where he is; the traveller has to wait till he is found, and he never comes till he has finished what he is about. When he does come he loses an immense amount of time looking for his jacket and his whip, or putting the collars on his horses. Near by, at the door of the post-house, a worthy woman is fuming even more than the traveller, in order to prevent the latter from complaining loudly. This is sure to be the wife of the post-master, whose husband is away in the fields.

The bishop’s secretary left his carriage before a post-house of this kind, the walls of which resembled a geographical map, while the thatched roof, blooming like a flower-garden, seemed to be giving way beneath the weight of stone-crop. After begging the post-mistress to have everything in readiness for his departure in an hour’s time, the abbe asked the way to the parsonage. The good woman showed him a lane which led to the church, telling him the rectory was close beside it.

While the young abbe followed this lane, which was full of stones and closed on either side by hedges, the post-mistress questioned the postilion. Since starting from Limoges each postilion had informed his successor of the conjectures of the Limoges postilion as to the mission of the bishop’s messenger. While the inhabitants of the town were getting out of bed and talking of the coming execution, a rumor spread among the country people that the bishop had obtained the pardon of the innocent man; and much was said about the mistakes to which human justice was liable. If Jean-Francois was executed later, it was certain that he was regarded in the country regions as a martyr.

After taking a few steps along the lane, reddened by the autumn leaves, and black with mulberries and damsons, the Abbe Gabriel turned round with the instinctive impulse which leads us all to make acquaintance with a region which we see for the first time,—a sort of instinctive physical curiosity shared by dogs and horses.

The position of Montegnac was explained to him as his eyes rested on various little streams flowing down the hillsides and on a little river, along the bank of which runs the country road which connects the chief town of the arrondissement with the prefecture. Like all the villages of this upland plain, Montegnac is built of earth baked in the sun and moulded into square blocks. After a fire a house looks as if it had been built of brick. The roofs are of thatch. Poverty is everywhere visible.

Before the village lay several fields of potatoes, radishes, and rye, redeemed from the barren plain. On the slope of the hill were irrigated meadows where the inhabitants raised horses, the famous Limousin breed, which is said to be a legacy of the Arabs when they descended by the Pyrenees into France and were cut to pieces by the battle-axes of the Franks under Charles Martel. The heights are barren. A hot, baked, reddish soil shows a region where chestnuts flourish. The springs, carefully applied to irrigation, water the meadows only, nourishing the sweet, crisp grass, so fine and choice, which produces this race of delicate and high-strung horses,—not over-strong to bear fatigue, but showy,

excellent for the country of their birth, though subject to changes if transplanted. A few mulberry trees lately imported showed an intention of cultivating silk-worms.

Like most of the villages in this world Montegnac had but one street, through which the high road passed. Nevertheless there was an upper and a lower Montegnac, reached by lanes going up or going down from the main street. A line of houses standing along the brow of the hill presented the cheerful sight of terraced gardens, which were entered by flights of steps from the main street. Some had their steps of earth, others of pebbles; here and there old women were sitting on them, knitting or watching children, and keeping up a conversation from the upper to the lower town across the usually peaceful street of the little village; thus rumors spread easily and rapidly in Montegnac. All the gardens, which were full of fruit-trees, cabbages, onions, and other vegetables, had bee-hives along their terraces.

Another line of houses, running down from the main street to the river, the course of which was outlined by thriving little fields of hemp and the sorts of fruit trees which like moisture, lay parallel with the upper town; some of the houses, that of the post-house, for instance, were in a hollow, and were well-situated for certain kinds of work, such as weaving. Nearly all of them were shared by walnut-trees, the tree *par excellence* of strong soils.

On this side of the main street at the end farthest from the great plain was a dwelling-house, very much larger and better cared for than those in other parts of the village; around it were other houses equally well kept. This little hamlet, separated from the village by its gardens, was already called Les Tascherons, a name it keeps to the present day.

The village itself mounted to very little, but thirty or more outlying farms belonged to it. In the valley, leading down to the river, irrigating channels like those of La Marche and Berry indicated the flow of water around the village by the green fringe of verdure about them; Montegnac seemed tossed in their midst like a vessel at sea. When a house, an estate, a village, a region, passes from the wretched condition to a prosperous one, without becoming either rich or splendid, life seems so easy, so natural to living beings, that the spectator may not at once suspect the enormous labor, infinite in petty detail, grand in persistency like the toil buried in a foundation wall, in short, the forgotten labor on which the whole structure rests.

Consequently the scene that lay before him told nothing extraordinary to the young Abbe Gabriel as his eye took in the charming landscape. He knew nothing of the state of the region before the arrival of the rector, Monsieur Bonnet. The young man now went on a few steps and again saw, several hundred feet above the gardens of the upper village, the church and the parsonage, which he had already seen from a distance confusedly mingled with the imposing ruins clothed with creepers of the old castle of Montegnac, one of the residences of the Navarreins family in the twelfth century.

The parsonage, a house originally built no doubt for the bailiff or game-keeper, was noticeable for a long raised terrace planted with lindens from which a fine view extended over the country. The steps leading to this terrace and the walls which supported it showed their great age by the ravages of time. The flat moss which clings to stones had laid its

dragon-green carpet on each surface. The numerous families of the pellitories, the chamomiles, the mesembryanthemums, pushed their varied and abundant tufts through the loop-holes in the walls, cracked and fissured in spite of their thickness. Botany had lavished there its most elegant drapery of ferns of all kinds, snap-dragons with their violet mouths and golden pistils, the blue anchusa, the brown lichens, so that the old worn stones seemed mere accessories peeping out at intervals from this fresh growth. Along the terrace a box hedge, cut into geometric figures, enclosed a pleasure garden surrounding the parsonage, above which the rock rose like a white wall surmounted by slender trees that drooped and swayed above it like plumes.

The ruins of the castle looked down upon the house and church. The house, built of pebbles and mortar, had but one story surmounted by an enormous sloping roof with gable ends, in which were attics, no doubt empty, considering the dilapidation of their windows. The ground-floor had two rooms parted by a corridor, at the farther end of which was a wooden staircase leading to the second floor, which also had two rooms. A little kitchen was at the back of the building in a yard, where were the stable and coach-house, both unused, deserted, and worthless. The kitchen garden lay between the church and the house; a ruined gallery led from the parsonage to the sacristy.

When the young abbe saw the four windows with their leaded panes, the brown and mossy walls, the door in common pine slit like a bundle of matches, far from being attracted by the adorable naivete of these details, the grace of the vegetations which draped the roof and the dilapidated wooden frames of the windows, the wealth of the clambering plants escaping from every cranny, and the clasping tendrils of the grape-vine which looked into every window as if to bring smiling ideas to those within, he congratulated himself heartily on being a bishop in perspective instead of a village rector.

This house, apparently always open, seemed to belong to everybody. The Abbe Gabriel entered a room communicating with the kitchen, which was poorly furnished with an oak table on four stout legs, a tapestried armchair, a number of chairs all of wood, and an old chest by way of buffet. No one was in the kitchen except a cat which revealed the presence of a woman about the house. The other room served as a salon. Casting a glance about it the young priest noticed armchairs in natural wood covered with tapestry; the woodwork and the rafters of the ceiling were of chestnut which had turned as black as ebony. A tall clock in a green case painted with flowers, a table with a faded green cloth, several chairs, two candlesticks on the chimney-piece, between which was an Infant Jesus in wax under a glass case, completed the furniture of the room. The chimney-piece of wood with common mouldings was filled by a fire-board covered by a painting representing the Good Shepherd with a lamb over his shoulder, which was probably the gift of some young girl, —the mayor’s daughter, or the judge’s daughter,—in return for the pastor’s care of her education.

The forlorn condition of the house was distressing to behold; the walls, once whitewashed, were now discolored, and stained to a man’s height by constant friction. The staircase with its heavy baluster and wooden steps, though very clean, looked as if it might easily give way under the feet. On the other side of the house, opposite to the entrance door, another door opening upon the kitchen garden enabled the Abbe de Rastignac to judge of the narrowness of that garden, which was closed at the back by a wall cut in the

white and friable stone side of the mountain, against which espaliers were fastened, covered with grape-vines and fruit-trees so ill taken care of that their leaves were discolored with blight.

The abbe returned upon his steps and walked along the paths of the first garden, from which he could see, in the distance beyond the village, the magnificent stretch of valley, a true oasis at the edge of the vast plains, which now, veiled by the light mists of morning, lay along the horizon like a tranquil ocean. Behind him could be seen, on one side, for a foil, the dark masses of the bronze-green forest; on the other, the church and the ruins of the castle perched on the rock and vividly detached upon the blue of the ether. The Abbe Gabriel, his feet creaking on the gravelly paths cut in stars and rounds and lozenges, looked down upon the village, where some of the inhabitants were already gazing up at him, and then at the fresh, cool valley, with its tangled paths, its river bordered with willows in delightful contrast to the endless plain, and he was suddenly seized with sensations which changed the nature of his thoughts; he admired the sweet tranquillity of the place; he felt the influence of that pure air; he was conscious of the peace inspired by the revelation of a life brought back to Biblical simplicity; he saw, confusedly, the beauties of this old parsonage, which he now re-entered to examine its details with greater interest.

A little girl, employed, no doubt, to watch the house, though she was picking and eating fruit in the garden, heard the steps of a man with creaking shoes on the great square flags of the ground-floor rooms. She ran in to see who it was. Confused at being caught by a priest with a fruit in one hand and another in her mouth, she made no answer to the questions of the handsome young abbe. She had never imagined such an abbe,—dapper and spruce as hands could make him, in dazzling linen and fine black cloth without spot or wrinkle.

“Monsieur Bonnet?” she said at last. “Monsieur Bonnet is saying mass, and Mademoiselle Ursule is at church.”

The Abbe Gabriel did not notice a covered way from the house to the church; he went back to the road which led to the front portal, a species of porch with a sloping roof that faced the village. It was reached by a series of disjointed stone steps, at the side of which lay a ravine washed out by the mountain torrents and covered with noble elms planted by Sully the Protestant. This church, one of the poorest in France where there are so many poor churches, was like one of those enormous barns with projecting doors covered by roofs supported on brick or wooden pillars. Built, like the parsonage, of cobblestones and mortar, flanked by a face of solid rock, and roofed by the commonest round tiles, this church was decorated on the outside with the richest creations of sculpture, rich in light and shade and lavishly massed and colored by Nature, who understands such art as well as any Michael Angelo. Ivy clasped the walls with its nervous tendrils, showing stems amid its foliage like the veins in a lay figure. This mantle, flung by Time to cover the wounds he made, was starred by autumn flowers drooping from the crevices, which also gave shelter to numerous singing birds. The rose-window above the projecting porch was adorned with blue campanula, like the first page of an illuminated missal. The side which communicated with the parsonage, toward the north, was not less decorated; the wall was gray and red with moss and lichen; but the other side and the apse, around which lay the cemetery, was covered with a wealth of varied blooms. A few trees, among others an

almond-tree—one of the emblems of hope—had taken root in the broken wall; two enormous pines standing close against the apsis served as lightning-rods. The cemetery, enclosed by a low, half-ruined wall, had for ornament an iron cross, mounted on a pedestal and hung with box, blessed at Easter,—one of those affecting Christian thoughts forgotten in cities. The village rector is the only priest who, in these days, thinks to go among his dead and say to them each Easter morn, “Thou shalt live again!” Here and there a few rotten wooden crosses stood up from the grassy mounds.

The interior of the church harmonized perfectly with the poetic tangle of the humble exterior, the luxury and art of which was bestowed by Time, for once in a way charitable. Within, the eye first went to the roof, lined with chestnut, to which age had given the richest tints of the oldest woods of Europe. This roof was supported at equal distances by strong shafts resting on transversal beams. The four white-washed walls had no ornament whatever. Poverty had made the parish iconoclastic, whether it would or not. The church, paved and furnished with benches, was lighted by four arched windows with leaded panes. The altar, shaped like a tomb, was adorned by a large crucifix placed above a tabernacle in walnut with a few gilt mouldings, kept clean and shining, eight candlesticks economically made of wood painted white, and two china vases filled with artificial flowers such as the drudge of a money-changer would have despised, but with which God was satisfied.

The sanctuary lamp was a night-wick placed in an old holy-water basin of plated copper hanging by silken cords, the spoil of some demolished chateau. The baptismal fonts were of wood; so were the pulpit and a sort of cage provided for the church-wardens, the patricians of the village. An altar to the Virgin presented to public admiration two colored lithographs in small gilt frames. The altar was painted white, adorned with artificial flowers in gilded wooden vases, and covered by a cloth edged with shabby and discolored lace.

At the farther end of the church a long window entirely covered by a red calico curtain produced a magical effect. This crimson mantle cast a rosy tint upon the whitewashed walls; a thought divine seemed to glow upon the altar and clasp the poor nave as if to warm it. The passage which led to the sacristy exhibited on one of its walls the patron saint of the village, a large Saint John the Baptist with his sheep, carved in wood and horribly painted.

But in spite of all this poverty the church was not without some tender harmonies delightful to choice souls, and set in charming relief by their own colors. The rich dark tones of the wood relieved the white of the walls and blended with the triumphal crimson cast on the chancel. This trinity of color was a reminder of the grand Catholic doctrine.

If surprise was the first emotion roused by this pitiful house of the Lord, surprise was followed speedily by admiration mingled with pity. Did it not truly express the poverty of that poor region? Was it not in harmony with the naive simplicity of the parsonage? The building was perfectly clean and well-kept. The fragrance of country virtues exhaled within it; nothing showed neglect or abandonment. Though rustic and poor and simple, prayer dwelt there; those precincts had a soul,—a soul which was felt, though we might not fully explain to our own souls how we felt it.

# VIII. THE RECTOR OF MONTEGNAC

The Abbe Gabriel glided softly through the church so as not to disturb the devotions of two groups of persons on the benches near the high altar, which was separated from the nave at the place where the lamp was hung by a rather common balustrade, also of chestnut wood, and covered with a cloth intended for the communion. On either side of the nave a score of peasants, men and women, absorbed in fervent prayer, paid no attention to the stranger when he passed up the narrow passage between the two rows of seats.

When the young abbe stood beneath the lamp, whence he could see the two little transepts which formed a cross, one of which led to the sacristy, the other to the cemetery, he noticed on the cemetery side a family clothed in black kneeling on the pavement, the transepts having no benches. The young priest knelt down on the step of the balustrade which separated the choir from the nave and began to pray, casting oblique glances at a scene which was soon explained to him. The gospel had been read. The rector, having removed his chasuble, came down from the altar and stood before the railing; the young abbe, who foresaw this movement, leaned back against the wall, so that Monsieur Bonnet did not see him. Ten o'clock was striking.

"Brethren," said the rector, in a voice of emotion, "at this very moment a child of this parish is paying his debt to human justice by enduring its last penalty, while we are offering the sacrifice of the mass for the peace of his soul. Let us unite in prayer to God, imploring Him not to turn His face from that child in these his last moments, and to grant to his repentance the pardon in heaven which is denied to him here below. The sin of this unhappy man, one of those on whom we most relied for good examples, can only be explained by his disregard of religious principles."

Here the rector was interrupted by sobs from the kneeling group in mourning garments, whom the Abbe Gabriel recognized, by this show of affection, as the Tascheron family, although he did not know them. First among them was an old couple (septuagenarians) standing by the wall, their faces seamed with deep-cut, rigid wrinkles, and bronzed like a Florentine medal. These persons, stoically erect like statues, in their old darned clothes, were doubtless the grandfather and the grandmother of the criminal. Their glazed and reddened eyes seemed to weep blood, their arms trembled so that the sticks on which they leaned tapped lightly on the pavement. Next, the father and the mother, their faces in their handkerchiefs, sobbed aloud. Around these four heads of the family knelt the two married sisters accompanied by their husbands, and three sons, stupefied with grief. Five little children on their knees, the oldest not seven years old, unable, no doubt, to understand what was happening, gazed and listened with the torpid curiosity that characterizes the peasantry, and is really the observation of physical things pushed to its highest limit. Lastly, the poor unmarried sister, imprisoned in the interests of justice, now released, a martyr to fraternal affection, Denise Tascheron, was listening to the priest's words with a look that was partly bewildered and partly incredulous. For her, her brother could not die. She well represented that one of the Three Marys who did not believe in the death of Christ, though she was present at the last agony. Pale, with dry eyes, like all those who

have gone without sleep, her fresh complexion was already faded, less by toil and field labor than by grief; nevertheless, she had many of the beauties of a country maiden,—a plump, full figure, finely shaped arms, rounded cheeks, and clear, pure eyes, lighted at this instant with flashes of despair. Below the throat, a firm, fair skin, not tanned by the sun, betrayed the presence of a white and rosy flesh where the form was hidden.

The married daughters wept; their husbands, patient farmers, were grave and serious. The three brothers, profoundly sad, did not raise their eyes from the ground. In the midst of this dreadful picture of dumb despair and desolation, Denise and her mother alone showed symptoms of revolt.

The other inhabitants of the village united in the affliction of this respectable family with a sincere and Christian pity which gave the same expression to the faces of all,—an expression amounting to horror when the rector's words announced that the knife was then falling on the neck of a young man whom they all knew well from his very birth, and whom they had doubtless thought incapable of crime.

The sobs which interrupted the short and simple allocution which the pastor made to his flock overcame him so much that he stopped and said no more, except to invite all present to fervent prayer.

Though this scene was not of a nature to surprise a priest, Gabriel de Rastignac was too young not to be profoundly touched by it. As yet he had never exercised the priestly virtues; he knew himself called to other functions; he was not forced to enter the social breaches where the heart bleeds at the sight of woes: his mission was that of the higher clergy, who maintain the spirit of devotion, represent the highest intellect of the Church, and on eminent occasions display the priestly virtues on a larger stage,—like the illustrious bishops of Marseille and Meaux, and the archbishops of Arles and Cambrai.

This little assemblage of country people weeping and praying for him who, as they supposed, was then being executed on a public square, among a crowd of persons come from all parts to swell the shame of such a death,—this feeble counterpoise of prayer and pity, opposed to the ferocious curiosity and just maledictions of a multitude, was enough to move any soul, especially when seen in that poor church. The Abbe Gabriel was tempted to go up to the Taschérons and say,—

"Your son and brother is reprieved."

But he did not like to disturb the mass; and, moreover, he knew that a reprieve was only a delay of execution. Instead of following the service, he was irresistibly drawn to a study of the pastor from whom the clergy in Limoges expected the conversion of the criminal.

Judging by the parsonage, Gabriel de Rastignac had made himself a portrait of Monsieur Bonnet as a stout, short man with a strong and red face, framed for toil, half a peasant, and tanned by the sun. So far from that, the young abbe met his equal. Slight and delicate in appearance, Monsieur Bonnet's face struck the eyes at once as the typical face of passion given to the Apostles. It was almost triangular, beginning with a broad brow furrowed by wrinkles, and carried down from the temples to the chin in two sharp lines which defined his hollow cheeks. In this face, sallowed by tones as yellow as those of a church taper, shone two blue eyes that were luminous with faith, burning with eager hope. It was divided into two equal parts by a long nose, thin and straight, with well-cut nostrils,

beneath which spoke, even when closed and voiceless, a large mouth, with strongly marked lips, from which issued, whenever he spoke aloud, one of those voices which go straight to the heart. The chestnut hair, which was thin and fine, and lay flat upon the head, showed a poor constitution maintained by a frugal diet. WILL made the power of this man.

Such were his personal distinctions. His short hands might have indicated in another man a tendency to coarse pleasures, and perhaps he had, like Socrates, conquered his temptations. His thinness was ungraceful, his shoulders were too prominent, his knees knocked together. The body, too much developed for the extremities, gave him the look of a hump-backed man without a hump. In short, his appearance was not pleasing. None but those to whom the miracles of thought, faith, art are known could adore that flaming gaze of the martyr, that pallor of constancy, that voice of love,—distinctive characteristics of this village rector.

This man, worthy of the primitive Church, which exists no longer except in the pictures of the sixteenth century and in the pages of Martyrology, was stamped with the die of the human greatness which most nearly approaches the divine greatness through Conviction, —that indefinable something which embellishes the commonest form, gilds with glowing tints the faces of men vowed to any worship, no matter what, and brings into the face of a woman glorified by a noble love a sort of light. CONVICTION is human will attaining to its highest reach. At once both cause and effect, it impresses the coldest natures; it is a species of mute eloquence which holds the masses.

Coming down from the altar the rector caught the eye of the Abbe Gabriel and recognized him; so that when the bishop’s secretary reached the sacristy Ursule, to whom her master had already given orders, was waiting for him with a request that he would follow her.

“Monsieur,” said Ursule, a woman of canonical age, conducting the Abbe de Rastignac by the gallery through the garden, “Monsieur Bonnet told me to ask if you had breakfasted. You must have left Limoges very early to get here by ten o’clock. I will soon have breakfast ready for you. Monsieur l’abbe will not find a table like that of Monseigneur the bishop in this poor village, but we will do the best we can. Monsieur Bonnet will soon be in; he has gone to comfort those poor people, the Tascherons. Their son has met with a terrible end to-day.”

“But,” said the Abbe Gabriel, when he could get in a word, “where is the house of those worthy persons? I must take Monsieur Bonnet at once to Limoges by order of the bishop. That unfortunate man will not be executed to-day; Monseigneur has obtained a reprieve for him.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Ursule, whose tongue itched to spread the news about the village, “monsieur has plenty of time to carry them that comfort while I get breakfast ready. The Tascherons’ house is beyond the village; follow the path below that terrace and it will take you there.”

As soon as Ursule lost sight of the abbe she went down into the village to disseminate the news, and also to buy the things needed for the breakfast.

The rector had been informed, while in church, of a desperate resolution taken by the

Tascherons as soon as they heard that Jean-Francois's appeal was rejected and that he had to die. These worthy souls intended to leave the country, and their worldly goods were to be sold that very morning. Delays and formalities unexpected by them had hitherto postponed the sale. They had been forced to remain in their home until the execution, and drink each day the cup of shame. This determination had not been made public until the evening before the day appointed for the execution. The Tascherons had expected to leave before that fatal day; but the proposed purchaser of their property was a stranger in those parts, and was prevented from clinching the bargain by a delay in obtaining the money. Thus the hapless family were forced to bear their trouble to its end. The feeling which prompted this expatriation was so violent in these simple souls, little accustomed to compromise with their consciences, that the grandfather and grandmother, the father and the mother, the daughters and their husbands and the sons, in short, all who bore and had borne the name of Tascheron or were closely allied to it made ready to leave the country.

This emigration grieved the whole community. The mayor entreated the rector to do his best to retain these worthy people. According to the new Code the father was not responsible for the son, and the crime of the father was no disgrace to the children. Together with other emancipations which have weakened paternal power, this system has led to the triumph of individualism, which is now permeating the whole of modern society. He who thinks on the things of the future sees the spirit of family destroyed, where the makers of the new Code have introduced freedom of will and equality. The Family must always be the basis of society. Necessarily temporary, incessantly divided, recomposed to dissolve again, without ties between the future and the past, it cannot fulfil that mission; the Family of the olden time no longer exists in France. Those who have proceeded to demolish the ancient edifice have been logical in dividing equally the family property, in diminishing the authority of the father, in suppressing great responsibilities; but is the reconstructed social state as solid, with its young laws still untried, as it was under a monarchy, in spite of the old abuses? In losing the solidarity of families, society has lost that fundamental force which Montesquieu discovered and named HONOR. It has isolated interests in order to subjugate them; it has sundered all to enfeeble all. Society reigns over units, over single figures agglomerated like grains of corn in a heap. Can the general interests of all take the place of Family? Time alone can answer that question.

Nevertheless, the old law still exists; its roots have struck so deep that you will find it still living, as we find perennials in polar regions. Remote places are still to be found in the provinces where what are now called prejudices exist, where the family suffers in the crime of a child or a father.

This sentiment made the place uninhabitable any longer to the Tascherons. Their deep religious feeling took them to church that morning; for how could they let the mass be offered to God asking Him to inspire their son with repentance that alone could restore to him life eternal, and not share in it? Besides, they wished to bid farewell to the village altar. But their minds were made up and their plans already carried out. When the rector who followed them from church reached the principal house he found their bags and bundles ready for the journey. The purchaser of the property was there with the money. The notary had drawn up the papers. In the yard behind the house was a carriole ready harnessed to carry away the older couple with the money, and the mother of Jean-Francois. The remainder of the family were to go on foot by night.

At the moment when the young abbe entered the low room in which the family were assembled the rector of Montegnac had exhausted all the resources of his eloquence. The old pair, now insensible to the violence of grief, were crouching in a corner on their bags and looking round on their old hereditary home, its furniture, and the new purchaser, and then upon each other as if to say:—

“Did we ever think this thing could happen?”

These old people, who had long resigned their authority to their son, the father of the criminal, were, like kings on their abdication, reduced to the passive role of subjects and children. Tascheron, the father, was standing up; he listened to the pastor, and replied to him in a low voice and by monosyllables. This man, who was about forty-eight years of age, had the noble face which Titian has given to so many of his Apostles,—a countenance full of faith, of grave and reflective integrity, a stern profile, a nose cut in a straight and projecting line, blue eyes, a noble brow, regular features, black, crisp, wiry hair, planted on his head with that symmetry which gives a charm to these brown faces, bronzed by toil in the open air. It was easy to see that the rector’s appeals were powerless against that inflexible will.

Denise was leaning against the bread-box, looking at the notary, who was using that receptacle as a writing-table, seated before it in the grandmother’s armchair. The purchaser was sitting on a stool beside him. The married sisters were laying a cloth upon the table, and serving the last meal the family were to take in its own house before expatriating itself to other lands and other skies. The sons were half-seated on the green serge bed. The mother, busy beside the fire, was beating an omelet. The grandchildren crowded the doorway, before which stood the incoming family of the purchaser.

The old smoky room with its blackened rafters, through the window of which was visible a well-kept garden planted by the two old people, seemed in harmony with the pent-up anguish which could be read on all their faces in diverse expressions. The meal was chiefly prepared for the notary, the purchaser, the menkind, and the children. The father and mother, Denise and her sisters, were too unhappy to eat. There was a lofty, stern resignation in the accomplishment of these last duties of rustic hospitality. The Taschерons, men of the olden time, ended their days in that house as they had begun them, by doing its honors. This scene, without pretension, though full of solemnity, met the eyes of the bishop’s secretary when he approached the village rector to fulfil the prelate’s errand.

“The son of these good people still lives,” said Gabriel.

At these words, heard by all in the deep silence, the two old people rose to their feet as if the last trump had sounded. The mother dropped her pan upon the fire; Denise gave a cry of joy; all the others stood by in petrified astonishment.

“Jean-Francois is pardoned!” cried the whole village, now rushing toward the house, having heard the news from Ursule. “Monseigneur the bishop—”

“I knew he was innocent!” cried the mother.

“Will it hinder the purchase?” said the purchaser to the notary, who answered with a satisfying gesture.

The Abbe Gabriel was now the centre of all eyes; his sadness raised a suspicion of mistake. To avoid correcting it himself, he left the house, followed by the rector, and said to the crowd outside that the execution was only postponed for some days. The uproar subsided instantly into dreadful silence. When the Abbe Gabriel and the rector returned, the expression on the faces of the family was full of anguish; the silence of the crowd was understood.

“My friends, Jean-Francois is not pardoned,” said the young abbe, seeing that the blow had fallen; “but the state of his soul has so distressed Monseigneur that he has obtained a delay in order to save your son in eternity.”

“But he lives!” cried Denise.

The young abbe took the rector aside to explain to him the injurious situation in which the impenitence of his parishioner placed religion, and the duty the bishop imposed upon him.

“Monseigneur exacts my death,” replied the rector. “I have already refused the entreaties of the family to visit their unhappy son. Such a conference and the sight of his death would shatter me like glass. Every man must work as he can. The weakness of my organs, or rather, the too great excitability of my nervous organization, prevents me from exercising these functions of our ministry. I have remained a simple rector expressly to be useful to my kind in a sphere in which I can really accomplish my Christian duty. I have carefully considered how far I could satisfy this virtuous family and do my pastoral duty to this poor son; but the very idea of mounting the scaffold with him, the mere thought of assisting in those fatal preparations, sends a shudder as of death through my veins. It would not be asked of a mother; and remember, monsieur, he was born in the bosom of my poor church.”

“So,” said the Abbe Gabriel, “you refuse to obey Monseigneur?”

“Monseigneur is ignorant of the state of my health; he does not know that in a constitution like mine nature refuses—” said Monsieur Bonnet, looking at the younger priest.

“There are times when we ought, like Belzunce at Marseille, to risk certain death,” replied the Abbe Gabriel, interrupting him.

At this moment the rector felt a hand pulling at his cassock; he heard sobs, and turning round he saw the whole family kneeling before him. Young and old, small and great, all were stretching their supplicating hands to him. One sole cry rose from their lips as he turned his face upon them:—

“Save his soul, at least!”

The old grandmother it was who had pulled his cassock and was wetting it with her tears.

“I shall obey, monsieur.”

That said, the rector was forced to sit down, for his legs trembled under him. The young secretary explained the frenzied state of the criminal’s mind.

“Do you think,” he said, as he ended his account, “that the sight of his young sister would shake his determination?”

“Yes, I do,” replied the rector. “Denise, you must go with us.”

“And I, too,” said the mother.

“No!” cried the father; “that child no longer exists for us, and you know it. None of us shall see him.”

“Do not oppose what may be for his salvation,” said the young abbe. “You will be responsible for his soul if you refuse us the means of softening it. His death may possibly do more injury than his life has done.”

“She may go,” said the father; “it shall be her punishment for opposing all the discipline I ever wished to give her son.”

The Abbe Gabriel and Monsieur Bonnet returned to the parsonage, where Denise and her mother were requested to come in time to start for Limoges with the two ecclesiastics.

As the younger man walked along the path which followed the outskirts of upper Montegnac he was able to examine the village priest so warmly commended by the vicar-general less superficially than he did in church. He felt at once inclined in his favor, by the simple manners, the voice full of magic power, and the words in harmony with the voice of the village rector. The latter had only visited the bishop’s palace once since the prelate had taken Gabriel de Rastignac as secretary. He had hardly seen this favorite, destined for the episcopate, though he knew how great his influence was. Nevertheless, he behaved with a dignified courtesy that plainly showed the sovereign independence which the Church bestows on rectors in their parishes. But the feelings of the young abbe, far from animating his face, gave it a stern expression; it was more than cold, it was icy. A man capable of changing the moral condition of a whole population must surely possess some powers of observation, and be more or less of a physiognomist; and even if the rector had no other science than that of goodness, he had just given proof of rare sensibility. He was therefore struck by the coldness with which the bishop’s secretary met his courteous advances. Compelled to attribute this manner to some secret annoyance, the rector sought in his own mind to discover if he had wounded his guest, or in what way his conduct could seem blameworthy in the eyes of his superiors.

An awkward silence ensued, which the Abbe de Rastignac broke by a speech that was full of aristocratic assumption.

“You have a very poor church, monsieur,” he said.

“It is too small,” replied Monsieur Bonnet. “On the great fete-days the old men bring benches to the porch, and the young men stand outside in a circle; but the silence is so great that all can hear my voice.”

Gabriel was silent for some moments.

“If the inhabitants are so religious how can you let the building remain in such a state of nudity?” he said at last.

“Alas, monsieur, I have not the courage to spend the money which is needed for the

poor on decorating the church,—the poor are the church. I assure I should not be ashamed of my church if Monseigneur should visit it on the Fete-Dieu. The poor return on that day what they have received. Did you notice the nails which are placed at certain distances on the walls? They are used to hold a sort of trellis of iron wire on which the women fasten bouquets; the church is fairly clothed with flowers, and they keep fresh all day. My poor church, which you think so bare, is decked like a bride; it is filled with fragrance; even the floor is strewn with leaves, in the midst of which they make a path of scattered roses for the passage of the holy sacrament. That's a day on which I do not fear comparison with the pomps of Saint-Peter at Rome; the Holy Father has his gold, and I my flowers,—to each his own miracle. Ah! monsieur, the village of Montegnac is poor, but it is Catholic. In former times the inhabitants robbed travellers; now travellers may leave a sack full of money where they please and they will find it in my house."

"That result is to your glory," said Gabriel.

"It is not a question of myself," replied the rector, coloring at this labored compliment, "but of God's word, of the blessed bread—"

"Brown bread," remarked the abbe, smiling.

"White bread only suits the stomachs of the rich," replied the rector, modestly.

The young abbe took the hands of the older priest and pressed them cordially.

"Forgive me, monsieur," he said, suddenly making amends with a look in his beautiful blue eyes which went to the depths of the rector's soul. "Monseigneur told me to test your patience and your modesty, but I can't go any further; I see already how much injustice the praises of the liberals have done you."

Breakfast was ready; fresh eggs, butter, honey, fruits, cream, and coffee were served by Ursule in the midst of flowers, on a white cloth laid upon the antique table in that old dining-room. The window which looked upon the terrace was open; clematis, with its white stars relieved in the centre by the yellow bunch of their crisped stamens, clasped the railing. A jasmine ran up one side, nasturtiums clambered over the other. Above, the reddening foliage of a vine made a rich border that no sculptor could have rendered, so exquisite was the tracery of its lace-work against the light.

"Life is here reduced, you see, to its simplest expression," said the rector, smiling, though his face did not lose the look which the sadness of his heart conveyed to it. "If we had known of your arrival (but who could have foreseen your errand?) Ursule would have had some mountain trout for you; there's a brook in the forest where they are excellent. I forget, however, that this is August and the Gabou is dry. My head is confused with all these troubles."

"Then you like your life here?" said the young abbe.

"Yes, monsieur; if God wills, I shall die rector of Montegnac. I could have wished that my example were followed by certain distinguished men who have thought they did better things in becoming philanthropists. But modern philanthropy is an evil to society; the principles of the Catholic religion can alone cure the diseases which permeate social bodies. Instead of describing those diseases and extending their ravages by complaining elegies, they should put their hand to the work and enter the Lord's vineyard as simple

laborers. My task is far from being accomplished here, monsieur. It is not enough to reform the people, whom I found in a frightful condition of impiety and wickedness; I wish to die in the midst of a generation of true believers."

"You have only done your duty, monsieur," said the young man, still coldly, for his heart was stirred with envy.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the rector, modestly, giving his companion a glance which seemed to say: Is this a further test? "I pray that all may do their duty throughout the kingdom."

This remark, full of deep meaning, was still further emphasized by a tone of utterance, which proved that in 1829 this priest, as grand in thought as he was noble in humility of conduct, and who subordinated his thoughts to those of his superiors, saw clearly into the destinies of both church and monarchy.

When the two afflicted women came the young abbe, very impatient to get back to Limoges, left the parsonage to see if the horses were harnessed. A few moments later he returned to say that all was ready. All four then started under the eyes of the whole population of Montegnac, which was gathered in the roadway before the post-house. The mother and sister kept silence. The two priests, seeing rocks ahead in many subjects, could neither talk indifferently nor allow themselves to be cheerful. While seeking for some neutral subject the carriage crossed the plain, the aspect of which dreary region seemed to influence the duration of their melancholy silence.

"How came you to adopt the ecclesiastical profession?" asked the Abbe Gabriel, suddenly, with an impulsive curiosity which seized him as soon as the carriage turned into the high-road.

"I did not look upon the priesthood as a profession," replied the rector, simply. "I cannot understand how a man can become a priest for any other reason than the undefinable power of vocation. I know that many men have served in the Lord's vineyard who have previously worn out their hearts in the service of passion; some have loved hopelessly, others have had their love betrayed; men have lost the flower of their lives in burying a precious wife or an adored mistress; some have been disgusted with social life at a period when uncertainty hovers over everything, even over feelings, and doubt mocks tender certainties by calling them beliefs; others abandon politics at a period when power seems to be an expiation and when the governed regard obedience as fatality. Many leave a society without banners; where opposing forces only unite to overthrow good. I do not think that any man would give himself to God from a covetous motive. Some men have looked upon the priesthood as a means of regenerating our country; but, according to my poor lights, a priest-patriot is a meaningless thing. The priest can only belong to God. I did not wish to offer our Father—who nevertheless accepts all—the wreck of my heart and the fragments of my will; I gave myself to him whole. In one of those touching theories of pagan religion, the victim sacrificed to the false gods goes to the altar decked with flowers. The significance of that custom has always deeply touched me. A sacrifice is nothing without grace. My life is simple and without the very slightest romance. My father, who has made his own way in the world, is a stern, inflexible man; he treats his wife and his children as he treats himself. I have never seen a smile upon his lips. His iron

hand, his stern face, his gloomy, rough activity, oppressed us all—wife, children, clerks and servants—under an almost savage despotism. I could—I speak for myself only—I could have accommodated myself to this life if the power thus exercised had had an equal repression; but, captious and vacillating, he treated us all with intolerable alternations. We were always ignorant whether we were doing right or whether he considered us to blame; and the horrible expectancy which results from that is torture in domestic life. A street life seems better than a home under such circumstances. Had I been alone in the house I would have borne all from my father without murmuring; but my heart was torn by the bitter, unceasing anguish of my dear mother, whom I ardently loved and whose tears put me sometimes into a fury in which I nearly lost my reason. My school days, when boys are usually so full of misery and hard work, were to me a golden period. I dreaded holidays. My mother herself preferred to come and see me. When I had finished my philosophical course and was forced to return home and become my father's clerk, I could not endure it more than a few months; my mind, bewildered by the fever of adolescence, threatened to give way. On a sad autumn evening as I was walking alone with my mother along the Boulevard Bourdon, then one of the most melancholy parts of Paris, I poured my heart into hers, and I told her that I saw no possible life before me except in the Church. My tastes, my ideas, all that I most loved would be continually thwarted so long as my father lived. Under the cassock of a priest he would be forced to respect me, and I might thus on certain occasions become the protector of my family. My mother wept much. Just at this period my eldest brother (since a general and killed at Leipzig) had entered the army as a private soldier, driven from his home for the same reasons that made me wish to be a priest. I showed my mother that her best means of protection would be to marry my sister, as soon as she was old enough, to some man of strong character, and to look for help to this new family. Under pretence of avoiding the conscription without costing my father a penny to buy me off, I entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice at the age of nineteen. Within those celebrated old buildings I found a peace and happiness that were troubled only by the thought of my mother and my sister's sufferings. Their domestic misery, no doubt, went on increasing; for whenever they saw me they sought to strengthen my resolution. Perhaps I had been initiated into the secrets of charity, such as our great Saint Paul defines it, by my own trials. At any rate, I longed to stanch the wounds of the poor in some forgotten corner of the earth, and to prove by my example, if God would deign to bless my efforts, that the Catholic religion, judged by its actions for humanity, is the only true, the only beneficent and noble civilizing force. During the last days of my diaconate, grace, no doubt, enlightened me. I have fully forgiven my father, regarding him as the instrument of my destiny. My mother, though I wrote her a long and tender letter, explaining all things and proving to her that the finger of God was guiding me, my poor mother wept many tears as she saw my hair cut off by the scissors of the Church. She knew herself how many pleasures I renounced, but she did not know the secret glories to which I aspired. Women are so tender! After I once belonged to God I felt a boundless peace; I felt no needs, no vanities, none of those cares which trouble men so much. I knew that Providence would take care of me as a thing of its own. I entered a world from which all fear is banished; where the future is certain; where all things are divine, even the silence. This quietude is one of the benefactions of grace. My mother could not conceive that a man could espouse a church. Nevertheless, seeing me happy, with a cloudless brow, she grew happier herself. After I was ordained I came to the Limousin to visit one of my paternal relations, who

chanced to speak to me of the then condition of Montegnac. A thought darted into my mind with the vividness of lightning, and I said to myself inwardly: ‘Here is thy vineyard!’ I came here, and you see, monsieur, that my history is very simple and uneventful.”

At this instant Limoges came into sight, bathed in the last rays of the setting sun. When the women saw it they could not restrain their tears; they wept aloud.

# IX. DENISE

The young man whom these two different loves were now on their way to comfort, who excited so much artless curiosity, so much spurious sympathy and true solicitude, was lying on his prison pallet in one of the condemned cells. A spy watched beside the door to catch, if possible, any words that might escape him, either in sleep or in one of his violent furies; so anxious were the officers of justice to exhaust all human means of discovering Jean-Francois Tascheron's accomplice and recover the sums stolen.

The des Vanneaulx had promised a reward to the police, and the police kept constant watch on the obstinate silence of the prisoner. When the man on duty looked through a loophole made for the purpose he saw the convict always in the same position, bound in the straight-jacket, his head secured by a leather thong ever since he had attempted to tear the stuff of the jacket with his teeth.

Jean-Francois gazed steadily at the ceiling with a fixed and despairing eye, a burning eye, as if reddened by the terrible thoughts behind it. He was a living image of the antique Prometheus; the memory of some lost happiness gnawed at his heart. When the solicitor-general himself went to see him that magistrate could not help testifying his surprise at a character so obstinately persistent. No sooner did any one enter his cell than Jean-Francois flew into a frenzy which exceeded the limits known to physicians for such attacks. The moment he heard the key turn in the lock or the bolts of the barred door slide, a light foam whitened his lips.

Jean-Francois Tascheron, then twenty-five years of age, was small but well-made. His wiry, crinkled hair, growing low on his forehead, indicated energy. His eyes, of a clear and luminous yellow, were too near the root of the nose,—a defect which gave him some resemblance to birds of prey. The face was round, of the warm brown coloring which marks the inhabitants of middle France. One feature of his physiognomy confirmed an assertion of Lavater as to persons who are destined to commit murder; his front teeth lapped each other. Nevertheless his face bore all the characteristics of integrity and a sweet and artless moral nature; there was nothing surprising in the fact that a woman had loved him passionately. His fresh mouth with its dazzling teeth was charming, but the vermilion of the lips was of the red-lead tint which indicates repressed ferocity, and, in many human beings, a free abandonment to pleasure. His demeanor showed none of the low habits of a workman. In the eyes of the women who were present at the trial it seemed evident that one of their sex had softened those muscles used to toil, had ennobled the countenance of the rustic, and given grace to his person. Women can always detect the traces of love in a man, just as men can see in a woman whether, as the saying is, love has passed that way.

Toward evening of the day we are now relating Jean-Francois heard the sliding of bolts and the noise of the key in the lock. He turned his head violently and gave vent to the horrible growl with which his frenzies began; but he trembled all over when the beloved heads of his sister and his mother stood out against the fading light, and behind them the face of the rector of Montegnac.

"The wretches! is this why they keep me alive?" he said, closing his eyes.

Denise, who had lately been confined in a prison, was distrustful of everything; the spy had no doubt hidden himself merely to return in a few moments. The girl flung herself on her brother, bent her tearful face to his and whispered:—

“They may be listening to us.”

“Otherwise they would not have let you come here,” he replied in a loud voice. “I have long asked the favor that none of my family should be admitted here.”

“Oh! how they have bound him!” cried the mother. “My poor child! my poor boy!” and she fell on her knees beside the pallet, hiding her head in the cassock of the priest, who was standing by her.

“If Jean will promise me to be quiet,” said the rector, “and not attempt to injure himself, and to behave properly while we are with him, I will ask to have him unbound; but the least violation of his promise will reflect on me.”

“I do so want to move as I please, dear Monsieur Bonnet,” said the criminal, his eyes moistening with tears, “that I give you my word to do as you wish.”

The rector went out, and returned with the jailer, and the jacket was taken off.

“You won’t kill me to-night, will you?” said the turnkey.

Jean made no answer.

“Poor brother!” said Denise, opening a basket which had just passed through a rigorous examination. “Here are some of the things you like; I dare say they don’t feed you for the love of God.”

She showed him some fruit, gathered as soon as the rector had told her she could go to the jail, and a *galette* his mother had immediately baked for him. This attention, which reminded him of his boyhood, the voice and gestures of his sister, the presence of his mother and the rector, brought on a reaction and he burst into tears.

“Ah! Denise,” he said, “I have not had a good meal for six months. I eat only when driven to it by hunger.”

The mother and sister went out and then returned; with the natural housekeeping spirit of such women, who want to give their men material comfort, they soon had a supper for their poor child. In this the officials helped them; for an order had been given to do all that could with safety be done for the condemned man. The des Vanneaulx had contributed, with melancholy hope, toward the comfort of the man from whom they still expected to recover their inheritance. Thus poor Jean-Francois had a last glimpse of family joys, if joys they could be called under such circumstances.

“Is my appeal rejected?” he said to Monsieur Bonnet.

“Yes, my child; nothing is left for you to do but to make a Christian end. This life is nothing in comparison to that which awaits you; you must think now of your eternal happiness. You can pay your debt to man with your life, but God is not content with such a little thing as that.”

“Give up my life! Ah! you do not know all that I am leaving.”

Denise looked at her brother as if to warn him that even in matters of religion he must be cautious.

“Let us say no more about it,” he resumed, eating the fruit with an avidity which told of his inward fire. “When am I—”

“No, no! say nothing of that before me!” said the mother.

“But I should be easier in mind if I knew,” he said, in a low voice to the rector.

“Always the same nature,” exclaimed Monsieur Bonnet. Then he bent down to the prisoner’s ear and whispered, “If you will reconcile yourself this night with God so that your repentance will enable me to absolve you, it will be to-morrow. We have already gained much in calming you,” he said, aloud.

Hearing these last words, Jean’s lips turned pale, his eyes rolled up in a violent spasm, and an angry shudder passed through his frame.

“Am I calm?” he asked himself. Happily his eyes encountered the tearful face of Denise, and he recovered his self-control. “So be it,” he said to the rector; “there is no one but you to whom I would listen; they have known how to conquer me.”

And he flung himself on his mother’s breast.

“My son,” said the mother, weeping, “listen to Monsieur Bonnet; he risks his life, the dear rector, in going to you to—” she hesitated, and then said, “to the gate of eternal life.”

Then she kissed Jean’s head and held it to her breast for some moments.

“Will he, indeed, go with me?” asked Jean, looking at the rector, who bowed his head in assent. “Well, yes, I will listen to him; I will do all he asks of me.”

“You promise it?” said Denise. “The saving of your soul is what we seek. Besides, you would not have all Limoges and the village say that a Tascheron knows not how to die a noble death? And then, too, think that all you lose here you will regain in heaven, where pardoned souls will meet again.”

This superhuman effort parched the throat of the heroic girl. She was silent after this, like her mother, but she had triumphed. The criminal, furious at seeing his happiness torn from him by the law, now quivered at the sublime Catholic truth so simply expressed by his sister. All women, even young peasant-women like Denise, know how to touch these delicate chords; for does not every woman seek to make love eternal? Denise had touched two chords, each most sensitive. Awakened pride called on the other virtues chilled by misery and hardened by despair. Jean took his sister’s hand and kissed it, and laid it on his heart in a deeply significant manner; he applied it both gently and forcibly.

“Yes,” he said, “I must renounce all; this is the last beating of my heart, its last thought. Keep them, Denise.”

And he gave her one of those glances by which a man in crucial moments tries to put his soul into the soul of another human being.

This thought, this word, was, in truth, a last testament, an unspoken legacy, to be as faithfully transmitted as it was trustfully given. It was so fully understood by mother, sister, and priest, that they all with one accord turned their faces from each other, to hide

their tears and keep the secret of their thoughts in their own breasts. Those few words were the dying agony of a passion, the farewell of a soul to the glorious things of earth, in accordance with true Catholic renunciation. The rector, comprehending the majesty of all great human things, even criminal things, judged of this mysterious passion by the enormity of the sin. He raised his eyes to heaven as if to invoke the mercy of God. Thence come the consolations, the infinite tendernesses of the Catholic religion,—so humane, so gentle with the hand that descends to man, showing him the law of higher spheres; so awful, so divine, with that other hand held out to lead him into heaven.

Denise had now significantly shown the rector the spot by which to strike that rock and make the waters of repentance flow. But suddenly, as though the memories evoked were dragging him backwards, Jean-Francois gave the harrowing cry of the hyena when the hunters overtake it.

“No, no!” he cried, falling on his knees, “I will live! Mother, give me your clothes; I can escape! Mercy, mercy! Go see the king; tell him—”

He stopped, gave a horrible roar, and clung convulsively to the rector’s cassock.

“Go,” said Monsieur Bonnet, in a low voice, to the agitated women.

Jean heard the words; he raised his head, gazed at his mother and sister, then he stopped and kissed their feet.

“Let us say farewell now; do not come back; leave me alone with Monsieur Bonnet. You need not be uneasy about me any longer,” he said, pressing his mother and his sister to him with a strength in which he seemed to put all his life.

“How is it we do not die of this?” said Denise to her mother as they passed through the wicket.

It was nearly eight o’clock when this parting took place. At the gate of the prison the two women met the Abbe de Rastignac, who asked them news of the prisoner.

“He will no doubt be reconciled with God,” said Denise. “If repentance has not yet begun, he is very near it.”

The bishop was soon after informed that the clergy would triumph on this occasion, and that the criminal would go to the scaffold with the most edifying religious sentiments. The prelate, with whom was the attorney-general, expressed a wish to see the rector. Monsieur Bonnet did not reach the palace before midnight. The Abbe Gabriel, who made many trips between the palace and the jail, judged it necessary to fetch the rector in the episcopal coach; for the poor priest was in a state of exhaustion which almost deprived him of the use of his legs. The effect of his day, the prospect of the morrow, the sight of the secret struggle he had witnessed, and the full repentance which had at last overtaken his stubborn lamb when the great reckoning of eternity was brought home to him,—all these things had combined to break down Monsieur Bonnet, whose nervous, electrical nature entered into the sufferings of others as though they were his own. Souls that resemble that noble soul espouse so ardently the impressions, miseries, passions, sufferings of those in whom they are interested, that they actually feel them, and in a horrible manner, too; for they are able to measure their extent,—a knowledge which escapes others who are blinded by selfishness of heart or the paroxysm of grief. It is here that a priest like Monsieur Bonnet

becomes an artist who feels, rather than an artist who judges.

When the rector entered the bishop's salon and found there the two grand-vicars, the Abbe de Rastignac, Monsieur de Grandville, and the *procureur-general*, he felt convinced that something more was expected of him.

"Monsieur," said the bishop, "have you obtained any facts which you can, without violating your duty, confide to the officers of the law for their guidance?"

"Monseigneur, in order to give absolution to that poor, wandering child, I waited not only till his repentance was as sincere and as complete as the Church could wish, but I have also exacted from him the restitution of the money."

"This restitution," said the *procureur-general*, "brings me here to-night; it will, of course, be made in such a way as to throw light on the mysterious parts of this affair. The criminal certainly had accomplices."

"The interests of human justice," said the rector, "are not those for which I act. I am ignorant of how the restitution will be made, but I know it will take place. In sending for me to minister to my parishioner, Monseigneur placed me under the conditions which give to rectors in their parishes the same powers which Monseigneur exercises in his diocese, —barring, of course, all questions of discipline and ecclesiastical obedience."

"That is true," said the bishop. "But the question here is how to obtain from the condemned man voluntary information which may enlighten justice."

"My mission is to win souls to God," said Monsieur Bonnet.

Monsieur de Grancour shrugged his shoulders slightly, but his colleague, the Abbe Dutheil nodded his head in sign of approval.

"Tascheron is no doubt endeavoring to shield some one, whom the restitution will no doubt bring to light," said the *procureur-general*.

"Monsieur," replied the rector, "I know absolutely nothing which would either confute or justify your suspicion. Besides, the secrets of confession are inviolable."

"Will the restitution really take place?" asked the man of law.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the man of God.

"That is enough for me," said the *procureur-general*, who relied on the police to obtain the required information; as if passions and personal interests were not tenfold more astute than the police.

The next day, this being market-day, Jean-Francois Tascheron was led to execution in a manner to satisfy both the pious and the political spirits of the town. Exemplary in behavior, pious and humble, he kissed the crucifix, which Monsieur Bonnet held to his lips with a trembling hand. The unhappy man was watched and examined; his glance was particularly spied upon; would his eyes rove in search of some one in the crowd or in a house? His discretion did, as a matter of fact, hold firm to the last. He died as a Christian should, repentant and absolved.

The poor rector was carried away unconscious from the foot of the scaffold, though he did not even see the fatal knife.

During the following night, on the high-road fifteen miles from Limoges, Denise, though nearly exhausted by fatigue and grief, begged her father to let her go again to Limoges and take with her Louis-Marie Tascheron, one of her brothers.

“What more have you to do in that town?” asked her father, frowning.

“Father,” she said, “not only must we pay the lawyer who defended him, but we must also restore the money which he has hidden.”

“You are right,” said the honest man, pulling out a leathern pouch he carried with him.

“No, no,” said Denise, “he is no longer your son. It is not for those who cursed him, but for those who loved him, to reward the lawyer.”

“We will wait for you at Havre,” said the father.

Denise and her brother returned to Limoges before daylight. When the police heard, later, of this return they were never able to discover where the brother and sister had hidden themselves.

Denise and Louis went to the upper town cautiously, about four o’clock that afternoon, gliding along in the shadow of the houses. The poor girl dared not raise her eyes, fearing to meet the glances of those who had seen her brother’s execution. After calling on Monsieur Bonnet, who in spite of his weakness, consented to serve as father and guardian to Denise in the matter, they all went to the lawyer’s house in the rue de la Comedie.

“Good-morning, my poor children,” said the lawyer, bowing to Monsieur Bonnet; “how can I be of service to you? Perhaps you would like me to claim your brother’s body and send it to you?”

“No, monsieur,” replied Denise, weeping at an idea which had never yet occurred to her. “I come to pay his debt to you—so far, at least, as money can pay an eternal debt.”

“Pray sit down,” said the lawyer; noticing that Denise and the rector were still standing.

Denise turned away to take from her corset two notes of five hundred francs each, which were fastened by a pin to her chemise; then she sat down and offered them to her brother’s defender. The rector gave the lawyer a flashing look which was instantly moistened by a tear.

“Keep the money for yourself, my poor girl,” said the lawyer. “The rich do not pay so generously for a lost cause.”

“Monsieur,” said Denise, “I cannot obey you.”

“Then the money is not yours?” said the lawyer.

“You are mistaken,” she replied, looking at Monsieur Bonnet as if to know whether God would be angry at the lie.

The rector kept his eyes lowered.

“Well, then,” said the lawyer, taking one note of five hundred francs and offering the other to the rector, “I will share it with the poor. Now, Denise, change this one, which is really mine,” he went on, giving her the note, “for your velvet ribbon and your gold cross. I will hang the cross above my mantel to remind me of the best and purest young girl’s

heart I have ever known in my whole experience as a lawyer."

"I will give it to you without selling it," cried Denise, taking off her *jeannette* and offering it to him.

"Monsieur," said the rector, "I accept the five hundred francs to pay for the exhumation of the poor lad's body and its transportation to Montegnac. God has no doubt pardoned him, and Jean will rise with my flock on that last day when the righteous and the repentant will be called together to the right hand of the Father."

"So be it," replied the lawyer.

He took Denise by the hand and drew her toward him to kiss her forehead; but the action had another motive.

"My child," he whispered, "no one in Montegnac has five-hundred-franc notes; they are rare even at Limoges, where they are only taken at a discount. This money has been given to you; you will not tell me by whom, and I don't ask you; but listen to me: if you have anything more to do in this town relating to your poor brother, take care! You and Monsieur Bonnet and your brother Louis will be followed by police-spies. Your family is known to have left Montegnac, and as soon as you are seen here you will be watched and surrounded before you are aware of it."

"Alas!" she said. "I have nothing more to do here."

"She is cautious," thought the lawyer, as he parted from her. "However, she is warned; and I hope she will get safely off."

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During this last week in September, when the weather was as warm as in summer, the bishop gave a dinner to the authorities of the place. Among the guests were the *procureur-du-roi* and the attorney-general. Some lively discussions prolonged the party till a late hour. The company played whist and backgammon, a favorite game with the clergy. Toward eleven o'clock the *procureur-du-roi* walked out upon the upper terrace. From the spot where he stood he saw a light on that island to which, on a certain evening, the attention of the bishop and the Abbe Gabriel had been drawn,—Veronique's "Ile de France,"—and the gleam recalled to the *procureur's* mind the unexplained mysteries of the Tascheron crime. Then, reflecting that there could be no legitimate reason for a fire on that lonely island in the river at that time of night, an idea, which had already struck the bishop and the secretary, darted into his mind with the suddenness and brilliancy of the flame itself which was shining in the distance.

"We have all been fools!" he cried; "but this will give us the accomplices."

He returned to the salon, sought out Monsieur de Grandville, said a few words in his ear, after which they both took leave. But the Abbe de Rastignac accompanied them politely to the door; he watched them as they departed, saw them go to the terrace, noticed the fire on the island, and thought to himself, "She is lost!"

The emissaries of the law got there too late. Denise and Louis, whom Jean had taught to dive, were actually on the bank of the river at a spot named to them by Jean, but Louis Tascheron had already dived four times, bringing up each time a bundle containing twenty thousand francs' worth of gold. The first sum was wrapped in a foulard handkerchief

knotted by the four corners. This handkerchief, from which the water was instantly wrung, was thrown into a great fire of drift wood already lighted. Denise did not leave the fire until she saw every particle of the handkerchief consumed. The second sum was wrapped in a shawl, the third in a cambric handkerchief; these wrappings were instantly burned like the foulard.

Just as Denise was throwing the wrapping of the fourth and last package into the fire the gendarmes, accompanied by the commissary of police, seized that incriminating article, which Denise let them take without manifesting the least emotion. It was a handkerchief, on which, in spite of its soaking in the river, traces of blood could still be seen. When questioned as to what she was doing there, Denise said she was taking the stolen gold from the river according to her brother's instructions. The commissary asked her why she was burning certain articles; she said she was obeying her brother's last directions. When asked what those articles were she boldly answered, without attempting to deceive: "A foulard, a shawl, a cambric handkerchief, and the handkerchief now captured." The latter had belonged to her brother.

This discovery and its attendant circumstances made a great stir in Limoges. The shawl, more especially, confirmed the belief that Tascheron had committed this crime in the interests of some love affair.

"He protects that woman after his death," said one lady, hearing of these last discoveries, rendered harmless by the criminal's precautions.

"There may be some husband in Limoges who will miss his foulard," said the *procureur-du-roi*, with a laugh, "but he will not dare speak of it."

"These matters of dress are really so compromising," said old Madame Perret, "that I shall make a search through my wardrobe this very evening."

"Whose pretty little footmarks could he have taken such pains to efface while he left his own?" said Monsieur de Grandville.

"Pooh! I dare say she was an ugly woman," said the *procureur-du-roi*.

"She has paid dearly for her sin," observed the Abbe de Grancour.

"Do you know what this affair shows?" cried Monsieur de Grandville. "It shows what women have lost by the Revolution, which has levelled all social ranks. Passions of this kind are no longer met with except in men who still feel an enormous distance between themselves and their mistresses."

"You saddle love with many vanities," remarked the Abbe Dutheil.

"What does Madame Graslin think?" asked the prefect.

"What do you expect her to think?" said Monsieur de Grandville. "Her child was born, as she predicted to me, on the morning of the execution; she has not seen any one since then, for she is dangerously ill."

A scene took place in another salon in Limoges which was almost comical. The friends of the des Vanneaulx came to congratulate them on the recovery of their property.

"Yes, but they ought to have pardoned that poor man," said Madame des Vanneaulx.

“Love, and not greed, made him steal the money; he was neither vicious nor wicked.”

“He was full of consideration for us,” said Monsieur des Vanneaulx; “and if I knew where his family had gone I would do something for them. They are very worthy people, those Taschérons.”

# X. THIRD PHASE OF VERONIQUE'S LIFE

When Madame Graslin recovered from the long illness that followed the birth of her child, which was not till the close of 1829, an illness which forced her to keep her bed and remain in absolute retirement, she heard her husband talking of an important piece of business he was anxious to concede. The ducal house of Navarreins had offered for sale the forest of Montegnac and the uncultivated lands around it.

Graslin had never yet executed the clause in his marriage contract with his wife which obliged him to invest his wife's fortune in lands; up to this time he had preferred to employ the money in his bank, where he had fully doubled it. He now began to speak of this investment. Hearing him discuss it Veronique appeared to remember the name of Montegnac, and asked her husband to fulfil his engagement about her property by purchasing these lands. Monsieur Graslin then proposed to see the rector, Monsieur Bonnet, and inquire of him about the estate, which the Duc de Navarreins was desirous of selling because he foresaw the struggle which the Prince de Polignac was forcing on between liberalism and the house of Bourbon, and he augured ill of it; in fact, the duke was one of the boldest opposers of the *coup-d'Etat*.

The duke had sent his agent to Limoges to negotiate the matter; telling him to accept any good sum of money, for he remembered the Revolution of 1789 too well not to profit by the lessons it had taught the aristocracy. This agent had now been a month laying siege to Graslin, the shrewdest and wariest business head in the Limousin,—the only man, he was told by practical persons, who was able to purchase so large a property and pay for it on the spot. The Abbe Dutheil wrote a line to Monsieur Bonnet, who came to Limoges at once, and was taken to the hotel Graslin.

Veronique determined to ask the rector to dinner; but the banker would not let him go up to his wife's apartment until he had talked to him in his office for over an hour and obtained such information as fully satisfied him, and made him resolve to buy the forest and domains of Montegnac at once for the sum of five hundred thousand francs. He acquiesced readily in his wife's wish that this purchase and all others connected with it should be in fulfilment of the clause of the marriage contract relative to the investment of her dowry. Graslin was all the more ready to do so because this act of justice cost him nothing, he having doubled the original sum.

At this time, when Graslin was negotiating the purchase, the Navarreins domains comprised the forest of Montegnac which contained about thirty thousand acres of unused land, the ruins of the castle, the gardens, park, and about five thousand acres of uncultivated land on the plain beyond Montegnac. Graslin immediately bought other lands in order to make himself master of the first peak in the chain of the Correzan mountains on which the vast forest of Montegnac ended. Since the imposition of taxes the Duc de Navarreins had never received more than fifteen thousand francs per annum from this manor, once among the richest tenures of the kingdom, the lands of which had escaped the sale of "public domain" ordered by the Convention, on account probably of their barrenness and the known difficulty of reclaiming them.

When the rector went at last to Madame Graslin's apartment, and saw the woman noted for her piety and for her intellect of whom he had heard speak, he could not restrain a gesture of amazement. Veronique had now reached the third phase of her life, that in which she was to rise into grandeur by the exercise of the highest virtues,—a phase in which she became another woman. To the Little Virgin of Titian, hidden at eleven years of age beneath a spotted mantle of small-pox, had succeeded a beautiful woman, noble and passionate; and from that woman, now wrung by inward sorrows, came forth a saint.

Her skin bore the yellow tinge which colors the austere faces of abbesses who have been famous for their macerations. The attenuated temples were almost golden. The lips had paled, the red of an opened pomegranate was no longer on them, their color had changed to the pale pink of a Bengal rose. At the corners of the eyes, close to the nose, sorrows had made two shining tracks like mother-of-pearl, where tears had flowed; tears which effaced the marks of small-pox and glazed the skin. Curiosity was invincibly attracted to that pearly spot, where the blue threads of the little veins throbbed precipitately, as though they were swelled by an influx of blood brought there, as it were, to feed the tears. The circle round the eyes was now a dark-brown that was almost black above the eyelids, which were horribly wrinkled. The cheeks were hollow; in their folds lay the sign of solemn thoughts. The chin, which in youth was full and round, the flesh covering the muscles, was now shrunken, to the injury of its expression, which told of an implacable religious severity exercised by this woman upon herself.

At twenty-nine years of age Veronique's hair was scanty and already whitening. Her thinness was alarming. In spite of her doctor's advice she insisted on suckling her son. The doctor triumphed in the result; and as he watched the changes he had foretold in Veronique's appearance, he often said:—

"See the effects of childbirth on a woman! She adores that child; I have often noticed that mothers are fondest of the children who cost them most."

Veronique's faded eyes were all that retained even a memory of her youth. The dark blue of the iris still cast its passionate fires, to which the woman's life seemed to have retreated, deserting the cold, impassible face, and glowing with an expression of devotion when the welfare of a fellow-being was concerned.

Thus the surprise, the dread of the rector ceased by degrees as he went on explaining to Madame Graslin all the good that a large owner of property could do at Montegnac provided he lived there. Veronique's beauty came back to her for a moment as her eyes glowed with the light of an unhoped-for future.

"I will live there," she said. "It shall be my work. I will ask Monsieur Graslin for money, and I will gladly share in your religious enterprise. Montegnac shall be fertilized; we will find some means to water those arid plains. Like Moses, you have struck a rock from which the waters will gush."

The rector of Montegnac, when questioned by his friends in Limoges about Madame Graslin, spoke of her as a saint.

The day after the purchase was concluded Monsieur Graslin sent an architect to Montegnac. The banker intended to restore the chateau, gardens, terrace, and park, and also to connect the castle grounds with the forest by a plantation. He set himself to make

these improvements with vainglorious activity.

A few months later Madame Graslin met with a great misfortune. In August, 1830, Graslin, overtaken by the commercial and banking disasters of that period, became involved by no fault of his own. He could not endure the thought of bankruptcy, nor that of losing a fortune of three millions acquired by forty years of incessant toil. The moral malady which resulted from this anguish of mind aggravated the inflammatory disease always ready to break forth in his blood. He took to his bed. Since her confinement Veronique's regard for her husband had developed, and had overthrown all the hopes of her admirer, Monsieur de Grandville. She strove to save her husband's life by unremitting care, with no result but that of prolonging for a few months the poor man's tortures; but the respite was very useful to Grossetete, who, foreseeing the end of his former clerk and partner, obtained from him all the information necessary for the prompt liquidation of the assets.

Graslin died in April, 1831, and the widow's grief yielded only to Christian resignation. Veronique's first words, when the condition of Monsieur Graslin's affairs were made known to her, were that she abandoned her own fortune to pay the creditors; but it was found that Graslin's own property was more than sufficient. Two months later, the liquidation, of which Grossetete took charge, left to Madame Graslin the estate of Montegnac and six hundred thousand francs, her whole personal fortune. The son's name remained untainted, for Graslin had injured no one's property, not even that of his wife. Francis Graslin, the son, received about one hundred thousand francs.

Monsieur de Grandville, to whom Veronique's grandeur of soul and noble qualities were well known, made her an offer of marriage; but, to the surprise of all Limoges, Madame Graslin declined, under pretext that the Church discouraged second marriages. Grossetete, a man of strong common-sense and sure grasp of a situation, advised Veronique to invest her property and what remained of Monsieur Graslin's in the Funds; and he made the investment himself in one of the government securities which offered special advantages at that time, namely, the Three-per-cents, which were then quoted at fifty. The child Francis received, therefore, six thousand francs a year, and his mother forty thousand. Veronique's fortune was still the largest in the department.

When these affairs were all settled, Madame Graslin announced her intention of leaving Limoges and taking up her residence at Montegnac, to be near Monsieur Bonnet. She sent for the rector to consult about the enterprise he was so anxious to carry on at Montegnac, in which she desired to take part. But he endeavored unselfishly to dissuade her, telling her that her place was in the world and in society.

"I was born of the people and I wish to return to the people," she replied. On which the rector, full of love for his village, said no more against Madame Graslin's apparent vocation; and the less because she had actually put it out of her power to continue in Limoges, having sold the hotel Graslin to Grossetete, who, to cover a sum that was due to him, took it at its proper valuation.

The day of her departure, toward the end of August, 1831, Madame Graslin's numerous friends accompanied her some distance out of the town. A few went as far as the first relay. Veronique was in an open carriage with her mother. The Abbe Dutheil (just

appointed to a bishopric) occupied the front seat of the carriage with old Grossetete. As they passed through the place d'Aine, Veronique showed signs of a sudden shock; her face contracted so that the play of the muscles could be seen; she clasped her infant to her breast with a convulsive motion, which old Madame Sauviat concealed by instantly taking the child, for she seemed to be on the watch for her daughter's agitation. Chance willed that Madame Graslin should pass through the square in which stood the house she had formerly occupied with her father and mother in her girlish days; she grasped her mother's hand while great tears fell from her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

After leaving Limoges she turned and looked back, seeming to feel an emotion of happiness which was noticed by all her friends. When Monsieur de Grandville, then a young man of twenty-five, whom she declined to take as a husband, kissed her hand with an earnest expression of regret, the new bishop noticed the strange manner in which the black pupil of Veronique's eyes suddenly spread over the blue of the iris, reducing it to a narrow circle. The eye betrayed unmistakably some violent inward emotion.

"I shall never see him again," she whispered to her mother, who received this confidence without betraying the slightest feeling in her old face.

Madame Graslin was at that instant under the observation of Grossetete, who was directly in front of her; but, in spite of his shrewdness, the old banker did not detect the hatred which Veronique felt for the magistrate, whom she nevertheless received at her house. But churchmen have far more perception than other men, and Monsieur Dutheil suddenly startled Veronique with a priestly glance.

"Do you regret nothing in Limoges?" he asked her.

"Nothing, now that you are leaving it; and monsieur," she added, smiling at Grossetete, who was bidding her adieu, "will seldom be there."

The bishop accompanied Madame Graslin as far as Montegnac.

"I ought to walk this road in sackcloth and ashes," she said in her mother's ear as they went on foot up the steep slope of Saint-Leonard.

The old woman put her finger on her lips and glanced at the bishop, who was looking at the child with terrible attention. This gesture, and the luminous look in the prelate's eyes, sent a shudder through Veronique's body. At the aspect of the vast plains stretching their gray expanse before Montegnac the fire died out of her eyes, and an infinite sadness overcame her. Presently she saw the village rector coming to meet her, and together they returned to the carriage.

"There is your domain, madame," said Monsieur Bonnet, extending his hand toward the barren plain.

A few moments more, and the village of Montegnac, with its hill, on which the newly erected buildings struck the eye, came in sight, gilded by the setting sun, and full of the poesy born of the contrast between the beautiful spot and the surrounding barrenness, in which it lay like an oasis in the desert. Madame Graslin's eyes filled suddenly with tears. The rector called her attention to a broad white line like a gash on the mountain side.

"See what my parishioners have done to testify their gratitude to the lady of the manor,"

he said, pointing to the line, which was really a road; “we can now drive up to the chateau. This piece of road has been made by them without costing you a penny, and two months hence we shall plant it with trees. Monseigneur will understand what trouble and care and devotion were needed to accomplish such a change.”

“Is it possible they have done that?” said the bishop.

“Without accepting any payment for their work, Monseigneur. The poorest put their hands into it, knowing that it would bring a mother among them.”

At the foot of the hill the travellers saw the whole population of the neighborhood, who were lighting fire-boxes and discharging a few guns; then two of the prettiest of the village girls, dressed in white, came forward to offer Madame Graslin flowers and fruit.

“To be thus received in this village!” she exclaimed, grasping the rector’s hand as if she stood on the brink of a precipice.

The crowd accompanied the carriage to the iron gates of the avenue. From there Madame Graslin could see her chateau, of which as yet she had only caught glimpses, and she was thunderstruck at the magnificence of the building. Stone is rare in those parts, the granite of the mountains being difficult to quarry. The architect employed by Graslin to restore the house had used brick as the chief substance of this vast construction. This was rendered less costly by the fact that the forest of Montegnac furnished all the necessary wood and clay for its fabrication. The framework of wood and the stone for the foundations also came from the forest; otherwise the cost of the restorations would have been ruinous. The chief expenses had been those of transportation, labor, and salaries. Thus the money laid out was kept in the village, and greatly benefited it.

At first sight, and from a distance, the chateau presents an enormous red mass, threaded by black lines produced by the pointing, and edged with gray; for the window and door casings, the entablatures, corner stones, and courses between the stories, are of granite, cut in facets like a diamond. The courtyard, which forms a sloping oval like that of the Chateau de Versailles, is surrounded by brick walls divided into panels by projecting buttresses. At the foot of these walls are groups of rare shrubs, remarkable for the varied color of their greens. Two fine iron gates placed opposite to each other lead on one side to a terrace which overlooks Montegnac, on the other to the offices and a farm-house.

The grand entrance-gate, to which the road just constructed led, is flanked by two pretty lodges in the style of the sixteenth century. The facade on the courtyard looking east has three towers,—one in the centre, separated from the two others by the main building of the house. The facade on the gardens, which is absolutely the same as the others, looks westward. The towers have but one window on the facade; the main building has three on either side of the middle tower. The latter, which is square like a *campanile*, the corners being vermiculated, is noticeable for the elegance of a few carvings sparsely distributed. Art is timid in the provinces, and though, since 1829, ornamentation has made some progress at the instigation of certain writers, landowners were at that period afraid of expenses which the lack of competition and skilled workmen rendered serious.

The corner towers, which have three stories with a single window in each, looking to the side, are covered with very high-pitched roofs surrounded by granite balustrades, and on each pyramidal slope of these roofs crowned at the top with the sharp ridge of a

platform surrounded with a wrought iron railing, is another window carved like the rest. On each floor the corbels of the doors and windows are adorned with carvings copied from those of the Genoese mansions. The corner tower with three windows to the south looks down on Montegnac; the other, to the north, faces the forest. From the garden front the eye takes in that part of Montegnac which is still called Les Tascherons, and follows the high-road leading through the village to the chief town of the department. The facade on the courtyard has a view of the vast plains semicircled by the mountains of the Correze, on the side toward Montegnac, but ending in the far distance on a low horizon. The main building has only one floor above the ground-floor, covered with a mansarde roof in the olden style. The towers at each end are three stories in height. The middle tower has a stunted dome something like that on the Pavillon de l'Horloge of the palace of the Tuileries, and in it is a single room forming a belvedere and containing the clock. As a matter of economy the roofs had all been made of gutter-tiles, the enormous weight of which was easily supported by the stout beams and uprights of the framework cut in the forest.

Before his death Graslin had laid out the road which the peasantry had just built out of gratitude; for these restorations (which Graslin called his folly) had distributed several hundred thousand francs among the people; in consequence of which Montegnac had considerably increased. Graslin had also begun, before his death, behind the offices on the slope of the hill leading down to the plain, a number of farm buildings, proving his intention to draw some profit from the hitherto uncultivated soil of the plains. Six journeyman-gardeners, who were lodged in the offices, were now at work under orders of a head gardener, planting and completing certain works which Monsieur Bonnet had considered indispensable.

The ground-floor apartments of the chateau, intended only for reception-rooms, had been sumptuously furnished; the upper floor was rather bare, Monsieur Graslin having stopped for a time the work of furnishing it.

"Ah, Monseigneur!" said Madame Graslin to the bishop, after going the rounds of the house, "I who expected to live in a cottage! Poor Monsieur Graslin was extravagant indeed!"

"And you," said the bishop, adding after a pause, as he noticed the shudder than ran through her frame at his first words, "you will be extravagant in charity?"

She took the arm of her mother, who was leading Francis by the hand, and went to the long terrace at the foot of which are the church and the parsonage, and from which the houses of the village can be seen in tiers. The rector carried off Monseigneur Dutheil to show him the different sides of the landscape. Before long the two priests came round to the farther end of the terrace, where they found Madame Graslin and her mother motionless as statues. The old woman was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief, and her daughter stood with both hands stretched beyond the balustrade as though she were pointing to the church below.

"What is the matter, madame?" said the rector to Madame Sauviat.

"Nothing," replied Madame Graslin, turning round and advancing a few steps to meet the priests; "I did not know that I should have the cemetery under my eyes."

“You can put it elsewhere; the law gives you that right.”

“The law!” she exclaimed with almost a cry.

Again the bishop looked fixedly at Veronique. Disturbed by the dark glance with which the priest had penetrated the veil of flesh that covered her soul, dragging thence a secret hidden in the grave of that cemetery, she said to him suddenly:—

“Well, *yes*!”

The priest laid his hand over his eyes and was silent for a moment as if stunned.

“Help my daughter,” cried the old mother; “she is fainting.”

“The air is so keen, it overcomes me,” said Madame Graslin, as she fell unconscious into the arms of the two priests, who carried her into one of the lower rooms of the chateau.

When she recovered consciousness she saw the priests on their knees praying for her.

“May the angel you visited you never leave you!” said the bishop, blessing her. “Farewell, my daughter.”

Overcome by those words Madame Graslin burst into tears.

“Tears will save her!” cried her mother.

“In this world and in the next,” said the bishop, turning round as he left the room.

The room to which they had carried Madame Graslin was on the first floor above the ground-floor of the corner tower, from which the church and cemetery and southern side of Montegnac could be seen. She determined to remain there, and did so, more or less uncomfortably, with Aline her maid and little Francis. Madame Sauviat, naturally, took another room near hers.

It was several days before Madame Graslin recovered from the violent emotion which overcame her on that first evening, and her mother induced her to stay in bed at least during the mornings. At night, Veronique would come out and sit on a bench of the terrace from which her eyes could rest on the church and cemetery. In spite of Madame Sauviat’s mute but persistent opposition, Madame Graslin formed an almost monomaniacal habit of sitting in the same place, where she seemed to give way to the blackest melancholy.

“Madame will die,” said Aline to the old mother.

Appealed to by Madame Sauviat, the rector, who had wished not to seem intrusive, came henceforth very frequently to visit Madame Graslin; he needed only to be warned that her soul was sick. This true pastor took care to pay his visits at the hour when Veronique came out to sit at the corner of the terrace with her child, both in deep mourning.

# XI. THE RECTOR AT WORK

It was now the beginning of October, and Nature was growing dull and sad. Monsieur Bonnet, perceiving in Veronique from the moment of her arrival at Montegnac the existence of an inward wound, thought it wisest to wait for the voluntary and complete confidence of a woman who would sooner or later become his penitent.

One evening Madame Graslin looked at the rector with eyes almost glazed with that fatal indecision often observable in persons who are cherishing the thought of death. From that moment Monsieur Bonnet hesitated no longer; he set before him the duty of arresting the progress of this cruel moral malady.

At first there was a brief struggle of empty words between the priest and Veronique, in which they both sought to veil their real thoughts. In spite of the cold, Veronique was sitting on the granite bench holding Francis on her knee. Madame Sauviat was standing at the corner of the terrace, purposely so placed as to hide the cemetery. Aline was waiting to take the child away.

“I had supposed, madame,” said the rector, who was now paying his seventh visit, “that you were only melancholy; but I see,” sinking his voice to a whisper, “that your soul is in despair. That feeling is neither Christian nor Catholic.”

“But,” she replied, looking to heaven with piercing eyes and letting a bitter smile flicker on her lips, “what other feeling does the Church leave to a lost soul unless it be despair?”

As he heard these words the rector realized the vast extent of the ravages in her soul.

“Ah!” he said, “you are making this terrace your hell, when it ought to be your Calvary from which to rise to heaven.”

“I have no pride left to place me on such a pedestal,” she answered, in a tone which revealed the self-contempt that lay within her.

Here the priest, by one of those inspirations which are both natural and frequent in noble souls, the man of God lifted the child in his arms and kissed its forehead, saying, in a fatherly voice, “Poor little one!” Then he gave it himself to the nurse, who carried it away.

Madame Sauviat looked at her daughter, and saw the efficacy of the rector’s words; for Veronique’s eyes, long dry, were moist with tears. The old woman made a sign to the priest and disappeared.

“Let us walk,” said the rector to Veronique leading her along the terrace to the other end, from which Les Tascherons could be seen. “You belong to me; I must render account to God for your sick soul.”

“Give me time to recover from my depression,” she said to him.

“Your depression comes from injurious meditation,” he replied, quickly.

“Yes,” she said, with the simplicity of a grief which has reached the point of making no attempt at concealment.

“I see plainly that you have fallen into the gulf of apathy,” he cried. “If there is a degree of physical suffering at which all sense of modesty expires, there is also a degree of moral suffering in which all vigor of soul is lost; I know that.”

She was surprised to hear that subtle observation and to find such tender pity from this village rector; but, as we have seen already, the exquisite delicacy which no passion had ever touched gave him the true maternal spirit for his flock. This *mens devinior*, this apostolic tenderness, places the priest above all other men and makes him, in a sense, divine. Madame Graslin had not as yet had enough experience of Monsieur Bonnet to know this beauty hidden in his soul like a spring, from which flowed grace and purity and true life.

“Ah! monsieur,” she cried, giving herself wholly up to him by a gesture, a look, such as the dying give.

“I understand you,” he said. “What is to be done? What will you become?”

They walked in silence the whole length of the balustrade, facing toward the plain. The solemn moment seemed propitious to the bearer of good tidings, the gospel messenger, and he took it.

“Suppose yourself now in the presence of God,” he said, in a low voice, mysteriously; “what would you say to Him?”

Madame Graslin stopped as though struck by a thunderbolt; she shuddered; then she said simply, in tones that brought tears to the rector’s eyes:—

“I should say, as Jesus Christ said: ‘Father, why hast thou forsaken me?’”

“Ah! Magdalen, that is the saying I expected of you,” cried Monsieur Bonnet, who could not help admiring her. “You see you are forced to appeal to God’s justice; you invoke it! Listen to me, madame. Religion is, by anticipation, divine justice. The Church claims for herself the right to judge the actions of the soul. Human justice is a feeble image of divine justice; it is but a pale imitation of it applied to the needs of society.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You are not the judge of your own case, you are dependent upon God,” said the priest; “you have neither the right to condemn yourself nor the right to absolve yourself. God, my child, is a great reverser of judgments.”

“Ah!” she exclaimed.

“He *sees* the origin of things, where we see only the things themselves.”

Veronique stopped again, struck by these ideas, that were new to her.

“To you,” said the brave priest, “to you whose soul is a great one, I owe other words than those I ought to give to my humble parishioners. You, whose mind and spirit are so cultivated, you can rise to the sense divine of the Catholic religion, expressed by images and words to the poor and childlike. Listen to me attentively, for what I am about to say concerns you; no matter how extensive is the point of view at which I place myself for a moment, the case is yours. *Law*, invented to protect society, is based on equality. Society, which is nothing but an assemblage of acts, is based on inequality. There is therefore lack

of harmony between act and law. Ought society to march on favored or repressed by law? In other words, ought law to be in opposition to the interior social movement for the maintenance of society, or should it be based on that movement in order to guide it? All legislators have contented themselves with analyzing acts, indicating those that seemed to them blamable or criminal, and attaching punishments to such or rewards to others. That is human law; it has neither the means to prevent sin, nor the means to prevent the return to sinfulness of those it punishes. Philanthropy is a sublime error; it tortures the body uselessly, it produces no balm to heal the soul. Philanthropy gives birth to projects, emits ideas, confides the execution of them to man, to silence, to labor, to rules, to things mute and powerless. Religion is above these imperfections, for it extends man's life beyond this world. Regarding us all as degraded from our high estate, religion has opened to us an inexhaustible treasure of indulgence. We are all more or less advanced toward our complete regeneration; no one is sinless; the Church expects wrong-doing, even crime. Where society sees a criminal to be expelled from its bosom, the Church sees a soul to save. More, far more than that! Inspired by God, whom she studies and contemplates, the Church admits the inequalities of strength, she allows for the disproportion of burdens. If she finds us unequal in heart, in body, in mind, in aptitude, and value, she makes us all equal by repentance. Hence equality is no longer a vain word, for we can be, we are, all equal through feeling. From the formless fetichism of savages to the graceful inventions of Greece, or the profound and metaphysical doctrines of Egypt and India, whether taught in cheerful or in terrifying worship, there is a conviction in the soul of man—that of his fall, that of his sin—from which comes everywhere the idea of sacrifice and redemption. The death of the Redeemer of the human race is an image of what we have to do for ourselves, —redeem our faults, redeem our errors, redeem our crimes! All is redeemable; Catholicism itself is in that word; hence its adorable sacraments, which help the triumph of grace and sustain the sinner. To weep, to moan like Magdalen in the desert, is but the beginning; the end is Action. Monasteries wept and prayed; they prayed and civilized; they were the active agents of our divine religion. They built, planted, cultivated Europe; all the while saving the treasures of learning, knowledge, human justice, politics, and art. We shall ever recognize in Europe the places where those radiant centres once were. Nearly all our modern towns are the children of monasteries. If you believe that God will judge you, the Church tells you by my voice that sin can be redeemed by works of repentance. The mighty hand of God weighs both the evil done and the value of benefits accomplished. Be yourself like those monasteries; work here the same miracles. Your prayers must be labors. From your labors must come the good of those above whom you are placed by fortune, by superiority of mind; even this natural position of your dwelling is the image of your social situation."

As he said the last words, the priest and Madame Graslin turned to walk back toward the plains, and the rector pointed both to the village at the foot of the hill, and to the chateau commanding the whole landscape. It was then half-past four o'clock; a glow of yellow sunlight enveloped the balustrade and the gardens, illuminated the chateau, sparkled on the gilded railings of the roof, lighted the long plain cut in two by the high-road,—a sad, gray ribbon, not bordered there by the fringe of trees which waved above it elsewhere on either side.

When Veronique and Monsieur Bonnet had passed the main body of the chateau, they

could see—beyond the courtyard, the stables, and the offices—the great forest of Montegnac, along which the yellow glow was gliding like a soft caress. Though this last gleam of the setting sun touched the tree-tops only, it enabled the eye to see distinctly the caprices of that marvellous tapestry which nature makes of a forest in autumn. The oaks were a mass of Florentine bronze, the walnuts and the chestnuts displayed their blue-green tones, the early trees were putting on their golden foliage, and all these varied colors were shaded with the gray of barren spots. The trunks of trees already stripped of leafage showed their light-gray colonnades; the russet, tawny, grayish colors, artistically blended by the pale reflections of an October sun, harmonized with the vast uncultivated plain, green as stagnant water.

A thought came into the rector's mind as he looked at this fine spectacle, mute in other ways,—for not a tree rustled, not a bird chirped, death was on the plain, silence in the forest; here and there a little smoke from the village chimneys, that was all. The chateau seemed as gloomy as its mistress. By some strange law all things about a dwelling imitate the one who rules there; the owner's spirit hovers over it. Madame Graslin—her mind grasped by the rector's words, her soul struck by conviction, her heart affected in its tenderest emotions by the angelic quality of that pure voice—stopped short. The rector raised his arm and pointed to the forest. Veronique looked there.

"Do you not think it has a vague resemblance to social life?" he said. "To each its destiny. How many inequalities in that mass of trees! Those placed the highest lack earth and moisture; they die first."

"Some there are whom the shears of the woman gathering fagots cut short in their prime," she said bitterly.

"Do not fall back into those thoughts," said the rector sternly, though with indulgence still. "The misfortune of this forest is that it has never been cut. Do you see the phenomenon these masses present?"

Veronique, to whose mind the singularities of the forest nature suggested little, looked obediently at the forest and then let her eyes drop gently back upon the rector.

"You do not notice," he said, perceiving from that look her total ignorance, "the lines where the trees of all species still hold their greenness?"

"Ah! true," she said. "I see them now. Why is it?"

"In that," replied the rector, "lies the future of Montegnac, and your own fortune, an immense fortune, as I once explained to Monsieur Graslin. You see the furrows of those three dells, the mountain streams of which flow into the torrent of the Gabou. That torrent separates the forest of Montegnac from the district which on this side adjoins ours. In September and October it goes dry, but in November it is full of water, the volume of which would be greatly increased by a partial clearing of the forest, so as to send all the lesser streams to join it. As it is, its waters do no good; but if one or two dams were made between the two hills on either side of it, as they have done at Riquet, and at Saint-Ferreol —where they have made immense reservoirs to feed the Languedoc canal—this barren plain could be fertilized by judicious irrigation through trenches and culverts managed by watergates; sending the water when needed over these lands, and diverting it at other times to our little river. You could plant fine poplars along these water-courses and raise the

finest cattle on such pasturage as you would then obtain. What is grass, but sun and water? There is quite soil enough on the plains to hold the roots; the streams will furnish dew and moisture; the poplars will hold and feed upon the mists, returning their elements to the herbage; these are the secrets of the fine vegetation of valleys. If you undertook this work you would soon see life and joy and movement where silence now reigns, where the eye is saddened by barren fruitlessness. Would not that be a noble prayer to God? Such work would be a better occupation of your leisure than the indulgence of melancholy thoughts."

Veronique pressed the rector's hand, answering with four brief words, but they were grand ones:—

"It shall be done."

"You conceive the possibility of this great work," he went on; "but you cannot execute it. Neither you nor I have the necessary knowledge to accomplish an idea which might have come to all, but the execution of which presents immense difficulties; for simple as it may seem, the matter requires the most accurate science with all its resources. Seek, therefore, at once for the proper human instruments who will enable you within the next dozen years to get an income of six or seven thousand louis out of the six thousand acres you irrigate and fertilize. Such an enterprise will make Montegnac at some future day the most prosperous district in the department. The forest, as yet, yields you no return, but sooner or later commerce will come here in search of its fine woods—those treasures amassed by time; the only ones the production of which cannot be hastened or improved upon by man. The State may some day provide a way of transport from this forest, for many of the trees would make fine masts for the navy; but it will wait until the increasing population of Montegnac makes a demand upon its protection; for the State is like fortune, it comes only to the rich. This estate, well managed, will become, in the course of time, one of the finest in France; it will be the pride of your grandson, who may then find the chateau paltry, comparing it with its revenues."

"Here," said Veronique, "is a future for my life."

"A beneficent work such as that will redeem wrongdoing," said the rector.

Seeing that she understood him, he attempted to strike another blow on this woman's intellect, judging rightly that in her the intellect led the heart, whereas in other women the heart is their road to intelligence.

"Do you know," he said after a pause, "the error in which you are living?"

She looked at him timidly.

"Your repentance is as yet only a sense of defeat endured,—which is horrible, for it is nothing else than the despair of Satan; such, perhaps, was the repentance of mankind before the coming of Jesus Christ. But our repentance, the repentance of Christians, is the horror of a soul struck down on an evil path, to whom, by this very shock, God has revealed Himself. You are like the pagan Orestes; make yourself another Paul."

"Your words have changed me utterly," she cried. "Now—oh! now I want to live."

"The spirit conquers," thought the modest rector, as he joyfully took his leave. He had cast nourishment before a soul hunted into secret despair by giving to its repentance the

form of a good and noble action.

# XII. THE SOUL OF FORESTS

Veronique wrote to Monsieur Grossetete on the morrow. A few days later she received from Limoges three saddle-horses sent by her old friend. Monsieur Bonnet found at Veronique's request, a young man, son of the postmaster, who was delighted to serve Veronique and earn good wages. This young fellow, small but active, with a round face, black eyes and hair, and named Maurice Champion, pleased Veronique very much and was immediately inducted into his office, which was that of taking care of the horses and accompanying his mistress on her excursions.

The head-forester of Montegnac was a former cavalry-sergeant in the Royal guard, born at Limoges, whom the Duc de Navarreins had sent to his estate at Montegnac to study its capabilities and value, in order that he might derive some profit from it. Jerome Colorat found nothing but waste land utterly barren, woods unavailable for want of transportation, a ruined chateau, and enormous outlays required to restore the house and gardens. Alarmed, above all, by the beds of torrents strewn with granite rocks which seamed the forest, this honest but unintelligent agent was the real cause of the sale of the property.

"Colorat," said Madame Graslin to her forester, for whom she had sent, "I shall probably ride out every morning, beginning with to-morrow. You know all the different parts of the land that belonged originally to this estate and those which Monsieur Graslin added to it: I wish you to go with me and point them out; for I intend to visit every part of the property myself."

The family within the chateau saw with joy the change that now appeared in Veronique's behavior. Without being told to do so, Aline got out her mistress's riding-habit and put it in good order for use. The next day Madame Sauviat felt unspeakable relief when her daughter left her room dressed to ride out.

Guided by the forester and Champion, who found their way by recollection, for the paths were scarcely marked on these unfrequented mountains, Madame Graslin started on the first day for the summits, intending to explore those only, so as to understand the watershed and familiarize herself with the lay of the ravines, the natural path of the torrents when they tore down the slopes. She wished to measure the task before her,—to study the land and the water-ways, and find for herself the essential points of the enterprise which the rector had suggested to her. She followed Colorat, who rode in advance; Champion was a few steps behind her.

So long as they were making their way through parts that were dense with trees, going up and down undulations of ground lying near to each other and very characteristic of the mountains of France, Veronique was lost in contemplation of the marvels of the forest. First came the venerable centennial trees, which amazed her till she grew accustomed to them; next, the full-grown younger trees reaching to their natural height; then, in some more open spot, a solitary pine-tree of enormous height; or—but this was rare—one of those flowing shrubs, dwarf elsewhere, but here attaining to gigantic development, and often as old as the soil itself. She saw, with a sensation quite unspeakable, a cloud rolling along the face of the bare rocks. She noticed the white furrows made down the mountain

sides by the melting snows, which looked at a distance like scars and gashes. Passing through a gorge stripped of vegetation, she nevertheless admired, in the cleft flanks of the rocky slope, aged chestnuts as erect as the Alpine fir-trees.

The rapidity with which she advanced left her no time to take in all the varied scene, the vast moving sands, the quagmires boasting a few scattered trees, fallen granite boulders, overhanging rocks, shaded valleys, broad open spaces with moss and heather still in bloom (though some was dried), utter solitudes overgrown with juniper and caper-bushes; sometimes uplands with short grass, small spaces enriched by an oozing spring,—in short, much sadness, many splendors, things sweet, things strong, and all the singular aspects of mountainous Nature in the heart of France.

As she watched these many pictures, varied in form but all inspired with the same thought, the awful sadness of this Nature, so wild, so ruined, abandoned, fruitless, barren, filled her soul and answered to her secret feelings. And when, through an opening among the trees, she caught a glimpse of the plain below her, when she crossed some arid ravine over gravel and stones, where a few stunted bushes alone could grow, the spirit of this austere Nature came to her, suggesting observations new to her mind, derived from the many significations of this varied scene.

There is no spot in a forest which does not have its significance; not a glade, not a thicket but has its analogy with the labyrinth of human thought. Who is there among those whose minds are cultivated or whose hearts are wounded who can walk alone in a forest and the forest not speak to him? Insensibly a voice lifts itself, consoling or terrible, but oftener consoling than terrifying. If we seek the causes of the sensation—grave, simple, sweet, mysterious—that grasps us there, perhaps we shall find it in the sublime and artless spectacle of all these creations obeying their destiny and immutably submissive. Sooner or later the overwhelming sense of the permanence of Nature fills our hearts and stirs them deeply, and we end by being conscious of God. So it was with Veronique; in the silence of those summits, from the odor of the woods, the serenity of the air, she gathered—as she said that evening to Monsieur Bonnet—the certainty of God’s mercy. She saw the possibility of an order of deeds higher than any to which her aspirations had ever reached. She felt a sort of happiness within her; it was long, indeed since she had known such a sense of peace. Did she owe that feeling to the resemblance she found between that barren landscape and the arid, exhausted regions of her soul? Had she seen those troubles of nature with a sort of joy, thinking that Nature was punished though it had not sinned? At any rate, she was powerfully affected; Colorat and Champion, following her at a little distance, thought her transfigured.

At a certain sport Veronique was struck with the stern harsh aspect of the steep and rocky beds of the dried-up torrents. She found herself longing to hear the sound of water splashing through those scorched ravines.

“The need to love!” she murmured.

Ashamed of the words, which seemed to come to her like a voice, she pushed her horse boldly toward the first peak of the Correze, where, in spite of the forester’s advice, she insisted on going. Telling her attendants to wait for her she went on alone to the summit, which is called the Roche-Vive, and stayed there for some time, studying the surrounding

country. After hearing the secret voice of the many creations asking to live she now received within her the touch, the inspiration, which determined her to put into her work that wonderful perseverance displayed by Nature, of which she had herself already given many proofs.

She fastened her horse to a tree and seated herself on a large rock, letting her eyes rove over the broad expanse of barren plain, where Nature seemed a step-mother,—feeling in her heart the same stirrings of maternal love with which at times she gazed upon her infant. Prepared by this train of emotion, these half involuntary meditations (which, to use her own fine expression, winnowed her heart), to receive the sublime instruction offered by the scene before her, she awoke from her lethargy.

“I understood then,” she said afterwards to the rector, “that our souls must be ploughed and cultivated like the soil itself.”

The vast expanse before her was lighted by a pale November sun. Already a few gray clouds chased by a chilly wind were hurrying from the west. It was then three o’clock. Veronique had taken more than four hours to reach the summit, but, like all others who are harrowed by an inward misery, she paid no heed to external circumstances. At this moment her being was actually growing and magnifying with the sublime impetus of Nature itself.

“Do not stay here any longer, madame,” said a man, whose voice made her quiver, “or you will soon be unable to return; you are six miles from any dwelling, and the forest is impassable at night. But that is not your greatest danger. Before long the cold on this summit will become intense; the reason of this is unknown, but it has caused the death of many persons.”

Madame Graslin saw before her a man’s face, almost black with sunburn, in which shone eyes that were like two tongues of flame. On either side of this face hung a mass of brown hair, and below it was a fan-shaped beard. The man was raising respectfully one of those enormous broad-brimmed hats which are worn by the peasantry of central France, and in so doing displayed a bald but splendid forehead such as we sometimes see in wayside beggars. Veronique did not feel the slightest fear; the situation was one in which all the lesser considerations that make a woman timid had ceased.

“Why are you here?” she asked.

“My home is near by,” he answered.

“What can you do in such a desert?” she said.

“I live.”

“But how? what means of living are there?”

“I earn a little something by watching that part of the forest,” he answered, pointing to the other side of the summit from the one that overlooked Montegnac. Madame Graslin then saw the muzzle of a gun and also a game-bag. If she had had any fears this would have put an end to them.

“Then you are a keeper?” she said.

“No, madame; in order to be a keeper we must take a certain oath; and to take an oath we must have civic rights.”

“Who are you, then?”

“I am Farrabesche,” he said, with deep humility, lowering his eyes to the ground.

Madame Graslin, to whom the name told nothing, looked at the man and noticed in his face, the expression of which was now very gentle, the signs of underlying ferocity; irregular teeth gave to the mouth, the lips blood-red, an ironical expression full of evil audacity; the dark and prominent cheek-bones had something animal about them. The man was of middle height, with strong shoulders, a thick-set neck, and the large hairy hands of violent men capable of using their strength in a brutal manner. His last words pointed to some mystery, to which his bearing, the expression of his countenance, and his whole person, gave a sinister meaning.

“You must be in my service, then?” said Veronique in a gentle voice.

“Have I the honor of speaking to Madame Graslin?” asked Farrabesche.

“Yes, my friend,” she answered.

Farrabesche instantly disappeared, with the rapidity of a wild animal, after casting a glance at his mistress that was full of fear.

# XIII. FARRABESCHE

Veronique hastened to mount her horse and rejoin the servants, who were beginning to be uneasy about her; for the strange unhealthiness of the Roche-Vive was well known throughout the neighborhood. Colorat begged his mistress to go down into the little valley which led to the plain. It would be dangerous, he said, to return by the hills, or by the tangled paths they had followed in the morning, where, even with his knowledge of the country, they were likely to be lost in the dusk.

Once on the plain Veronique rode slowly.

“Who is this Farrabesche whom you employ?” she asked her forester.

“Has madame met him?” cried Colorat.

“Yes, but he ran away from me.”

“Poor man! perhaps he does not know how kind madame is.”

“But what has he done?”

“Ah! madame, Farrabesche is a murderer,” replied Champion, simply.

“Then they pardoned him!” said Veronique, in a trembling voice.

“No, madame,” replied Colorat, “Farrabesche was tried and condemned to ten years at the galleys; he served half his time, and then he was released on parole and came here in 1827. He owes his life to the rector, who persuaded him to give himself up to justice. He had been condemned to death by default, and sooner or later he must have been taken and executed. Monsieur Bonnet went to find him in the woods, all alone, at the risk of being killed. No one knows what he said to Farrabesche. They were alone together two days; on the third day the rector brought Farrabesche to Tulle, where he gave himself up. Monsieur Bonnet went to see a good lawyer and begged him to do his best for the man. Farrabesche escaped with ten years in irons. The rector went to visit him in prison, and that dangerous fellow, who used to be the terror of the whole country, became as gentle as a girl; he even let them take him to the galleys without a struggle. On his return he settled here by the rector’s advice; no one says a word against him; he goes to mass every Sunday and all the feast-days. Though his place is among us he slips in beside the wall and sits alone. He goes to the altar sometimes and prays, but when he takes the holy sacrament he always kneels apart.”

“And you say that man killed another man?”

“One!” exclaimed Colorat; “he killed several! But he is a good man all the same.”

“Is that possible?” exclaimed Veronique, letting the bridle fall on the neck of her horse.

“Well, you see, madame,” said the forester, who asked no better than to tell the tale, “Farrabesche may have had good reason for what he did. He was the last of the Farrabesches,—an old family of the Correze, don’t you know! His elder brother, Captain Farrabesche, died ten years earlier in Italy, at Montenotte, a captain when he was only twenty-two years old. Wasn’t that ill-luck? and such a lad, too! knew how to read and

write, and bid fair to be a general. The family grieved terribly, and good reason, too. As for me, I heard all about his death, for I was serving at that time under L'AUTRE. Oh! he made a fine death, did Captain Farrabesche; he saved the army and the Little Corporal. I was then in the division of General Steingel, a German,—that is, an Alsacian,—a famous good general but rather short-sighted, and that was the reason why he was killed soon after Captain Farrabesche. The younger brother—that's this one—was only six years old when he heard of his brother's death. The second brother served too; but only as a private soldier; he died a sergeant in the first regiment of the Guard, at the battle of Austerlitz, where, d'ye see, madame, they manoeuvred just as quietly as they might in the Carrousel. I was there! oh! I had the luck of it! went through it all without a scratch! Now this Farrabesche of ours, though he's a brave fellow, took it into his head he wouldn't go to the wars; in fact, the army wasn't a healthy place for one of his family. So when the conscription caught him in 1811 he ran away,—a refractory, that's what they called them. And then it was he went and joined a party of *chauffeurs*, or maybe he was forced to; at any rate he *chauffed*! Nobody but the rector knows what he really did with those brigands—all due respect to them! Many a fight he had with the gendarmes and the soldiers too; I'm told he was in seven regular battles—"

"They say he killed two soldiers and three gendarmes," put in Champion.

"Who knows how many?—he never told," went on Colorat. "At last, madame, they caught nearly all his comrades, but they never could catch him; hang him! he was so young and active, and knew the country so well, he always escaped. The *chauffeurs* he consorted with kept themselves mostly in the neighborhood of Brives and Tulle; sometimes they came down this way, because Farrabesche knew such good hiding-places about here. In 1814 the conscription took no further notice of him, because it was abolished; but for all that, he was obliged to live in the woods in 1815; because, don't you see? as he hadn't enough to live on, he helped to stop a mail-coach over there, down that gorge; and then it was they condemned him. But, as I told you just now, the rector persuaded him to give himself up. It wasn't easy to convict him, for nobody dared testify against him; and his lawyer and Monsieur Bonnet worked so hard they got him sentenced for ten years only; which was pretty good luck after being a *chauffeur*—for he did *chauffe*."

"Will you tell me what *chauffeur* means?"

"If you wish it, madame, I will tell you what they did, as far as I know about it from others, for I never was *chauffed* myself. It wasn't a good thing to do, but necessity knows no law. Well, this is how it was: seven or eight would go to some farmer or land-owner who was thought to have money; the farmer would build a good fire and give them a supper, lasting half through the night, and then, when the feast was over, if the master of the house wouldn't give them the sum demanded, they just fastened his feet to the spit, and didn't unfasten them till they got it. That's how it was. They always went masked. Among all their expeditions they sometimes made unlucky ones. Hang it, there'll always be obstinate, miserly old fellows in the world! One of them, a farmer, old Cochegrue, so mean he'd shave an egg, held out; he let them roast his feet. Well, he died of it. The wife of Monsieur David, near Brives, died of terror at merely seeing those fellows tie her husband's feet. She died saying to David: 'Give them all you have.' He wouldn't, and so

she just pointed out the hiding-place. The *chauffeurs* (that's why they call them *chauffeurs*,—warmers) were the terror of the whole country for over five years. But you must get it well into your head,—oh, excuse me, madame, but you must know that more than one young man of good family belonged to them, though somehow they were never the ones to be caught."

Madame Graslin listened without interrupting or replying. There was silence for a few moments, and then little Champion, jealous of the right to amuse his mistress, wanted to tell her what he knew of the late galley-slave.

"Madame ought to know more about Farrabesche; he hasn't his equal at running, or at riding a horse. He can kill an ox with a blow of his fist; nobody can shoot like him; he can carry seven hundred feet as straight as a die,—there! One day they surprised him with three of his comrades; two were wounded, one was killed,—good! Farrabesche was all but taken. Bah! he just sprang on the horse of one of the gendarmes behind the man, pricked the horse with his knife, made it run with all its might, and so disappeared, holding the gendarme tight round the body. But he held him so tight that after a time he threw the body on the ground and rode away alone on the horse and master of the horse; and he had the cheek to go and sell it not thirty miles from Limoges! After that affair he hid himself for three months and was never seen. The authorities offered a hundred golden louis to whoever would deliver him up."

"Another time," added Colorat, "when the prefect of Tulle offered a hundred louis for him, he made one of his own cousins, Giriex of Vizay, earn them. His cousin denounced him, and appeared to deliver him up. Oh, yes, he delivered him sure enough! The gendarmes were delighted, and took him to Tulle; there they put him in the prison of Lubersac, from which he escaped that very night, profiting by a hole already begun by one of his accomplices who had been executed. All these adventures gave Farrabesche a fine reputation. The *chauffeurs* had lots of outside friends; people really loved them. They were not skinflints like those of to-day; they spent their money royally, those fellows! Just fancy, madame, one evening Farrabesche was chased by gendarmes; well, he escaped them by staying twenty minutes under water in the pond of a farm-yard. He breathed air through a straw which he kept above the surface of the pool, which was half muck. But, goodness! what was that little disagreeableness to a man who spends his nights in the tree-tops, where the sparrows can hardly hold themselves, watching the soldiers going to and fro in search of him below? Farrabesche was one of the half-dozen *chauffeurs* whom the officers of justice could never lay hands on. But as he belonged to the region and was brought up with them, and had, as they said, only fled the conscription, all the women were on his side,—and that's a great deal, you know."

"Is it really certain that Farrabesche did kill several persons?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Yes, certain," replied Colorat; "it is even said that it was he who killed the traveller by the mail-coach in 1812; but the courier and the postilion, the only witnesses who could have identified him, were dead before he was tried."

"Tried for the robbery?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Yes, they took everything; amongst it twenty-five thousand francs belonging to the government."

Madame Graslin rode silently after that for two or three miles. The sun had now set, the moon was lighting the gray plain, which looked like an open sea. Champion and Colorat began to wonder at Madame Graslin, whose silence seemed strange to them, and they were greatly astonished to see the shining track of tears upon her cheeks; her eyes were red and full of tears, which were falling drop by drop as she rode along.

“Oh, madame,” said Colorat, “don’t pity him! The lad has had his day. He had pretty girls in love with him; and now, though to be sure he is closely watched by the police, he is protected by the respect and good-will of the rector; for he has really repented. His conduct at the galleys was exemplary. Everybody knows he is as honest as the most honest man among us. Only he is proud; he doesn’t choose to expose himself to rebuff; so he lives quietly by himself and does good in his own way. He has made a nursery of about ten acres for you on the other side of the Roche-Vive; he plants in the forests wherever he thinks there’s a chance of making a tree grow; he trims the tree and cuts out the dead wood, and ties it up into bundles for the poor. All the poor people know they can get their wood from him all cut and ready to burn; so they go and ask him for it, instead of taking it themselves and injuring your forest. He is another kind of *chauffeur* now, and warms his poor neighbors to their comfort and not to their harm. Oh, Farrabesche loves your forest! He takes care of it as if it were his own property.”

“And he lives—all alone?” exclaimed Madame Graslin, adding the two last words hastily.

“Excuse me, not quite alone, madame; he takes care of a boy about fifteen years old,” said Maurice Champion.

“Yes, that’s so,” said Colorat; “La Curieux gave birth to the child some little time before Farrabesche was condemned.”

“Is it his child?” asked Madame Graslin.

“People think so.”

“Why didn’t he marry her?”

“How could he? They would certainly have arrested him. As it was, when La Curieux heard he was sentenced to the galleys the poor girl left this part of the country.”

“Was she a pretty girl?”

“Oh!” said Maurice, “my mother says she was very like another girl who has also left Montegnac for something the same reason,—Denise Tascheron.”

“She loved him?” said Madame Graslin.

“Ha, yes! because he *chauffed*; women do like things that are out of the way. However, nothing ever did surprise the community more than that love affair. Catherine Curieux lived as virtuous a life as a holy virgin; she passed for a pearl of purity in her village of Vizay, which is really a small town in the Correze on the line between the two departments. Her father and mother are farmers to the Messieurs Brezac. Catherine Curieux was about seventeen when Farrabesche was sent to the galleys. The Farrabesches were an old family from the same region, who settled in the commune of Montegnac; they hired their farm from the village. The father and mother Farrabesche are dead, but

Catherine's three sisters are married, one in Aubusson, another in Limoges, and a third in Saint-Leonard."

"Do you think Farrabesche knows where Catherine Curieux is?" asked Madame Graslin.

"If he did know he'd break his parole. Oh! he'd go to her. As soon as he came back from the galleys he got Monsieur Bonnet to ask for the little boy whom the grandfather and grandmother were taking care of; and Monsieur Bonnet obtained the child."

"Does no one know what became of the mother?"

"No one," said Colorat. "The girl felt that she was ruined; she was afraid to stay in her own village. She went to Paris. What is she doing there? Well, that's the question; but you might as well hunt for a marble among the stones on that plain as look for her there."

They were now riding up the ascent to the chateau as Colorat pointed to the plain below. Madame Sauviat, evidently uneasy, Aline and the other servants were waiting at the gate, not knowing what to think of this long absence.

"My dear," said Madame Sauviat, helping her daughter to dismount, "you must be very tired."

"No, mother," replied Madame Graslin, in so changed a voice that Madame Sauviat looked closely at her and then saw the mark of tears.

Madame Graslin went to her own rooms with Aline, who took her orders for all that concerned her personal life. She now shut herself up and would not even admit her mother; when Madame Sauviat asked to enter, Aline stopped her, saying, "Madame has gone to sleep."

The next day Veronique rode out attended by Maurice only. In order to reach the Roche-Vive as quickly as possible she took the road by which she had returned the night before. As they rode up the gorge which lies between the mountain peak and the last hill of the forest (for, seen from the plain, the Roche-Vive looks isolated) Veronique requested Maurice to show her the house in which Farrabesche lived and then to hold the horses and wait for her; she wished to go alone. Maurice took her to a path which led down on the other side of the Roche-Vive and showed her the thatched roof of a dwelling half buried in the mountain, below which lay the nursery grounds. It was then about mid-day. A light smoke issued from the chimney. Veronique reached the cottage in a few moments, but she did not make her presence known at once. She stood a few moments lost in thoughts known only to herself as she gazed on the modest dwelling which stood in the middle of a garden enclosed with a hedge of thorns.

Beyond the lower end of the garden lay several cares of meadow land surrounded by an evergreen hedge; the eye looked down on the flattened tops of fruit trees, apple, pear, and plum trees scattered here and there among these fields. Above the house, toward the crest of the mountain where the soil became sandy, rose the yellow crowns of a splendid grove of chestnuts. Opening the railed gate made of half-rotten boards which enclosed the premises, Madame Graslin saw a stable, a small poultry-yard and all the picturesque and living accessories of poor homes, which have so much of rural poesy about them. Who could see without emotion the linen fluttering on the hedges, the bunches of onions

hanging from the eaves, the iron saucepans drying in the sun, the wooden bench overhung with honeysuckle, the stone-crop clinging to the thatch, as it does on the roofs of nearly all the cottages in France, revealing a humble life that is almost vegetative?

It was impossible for Veronique to come upon her keeper without his receiving due notice; two fine hunting dogs began to bark as soon as the rustling of her habit was heard on the dried leaves. She took the end of it over her arm and advanced toward the house. Farrabesche and his boy, who were sitting on a wooden bench outside the door, rose and uncovered their heads, standing in a respectful attitude, but without the least appearance of servility.

“I have heard,” said Veronique, looking attentively at the boy, “that you take much care of my interests; I wished to see your house and the nurseries, and ask you a few questions relating to the improvements I intend to make.”

“I am at madame’s orders,” replied Farrabesche.

Veronique admired the boy, who had a charming face of a perfect oval, rather sunburned and brown but very regular in features, the forehead finely modelled, orange-colored eyes of extreme vivacity, black hair cut straight across the brow and allowed to hang down on either side of the face. Taller than most boys of his age, the little fellow was nearly five feet high. His trousers, like his shirt, were of coarse gray linen, his waistcoat, of rough blue cloth with horn buttons much worn and a jacket of the cloth so oddly called Maurienne velvet, with which the Savoyards like to clothe themselves, stout hob-nailed shoes, and no stockings. This costume was exactly like that of his father, except that Farrabesche had on his head the broad-brimmed felt hat of the peasantry, while the boy had only a brown woollen cap.

Though intelligent and animated, the child’s face was instinct with the gravity peculiar to all human beings of any age who live in solitude; he seemed to put himself in harmony with the life and the silence of the woods. Both Farrabesche and his son were specially developed on their physical side, possessing many of the characteristics of savages,—piercing sight, constant observation, absolute self-control, a keen ear, wonderful agility, and an intelligent manner of speaking. At the first glance the boy gave his father Madame Graslin recognized one of those unbounded affections in which instinct blends with thought, and a most active happiness strengthens both the will of the instinct and the reasoning of thought.

“This must be the child I have heard of,” said Veronique, motioning to the boy.

“Yes, madame.”

“Have you made no attempt to find his mother?” asked Veronique, making a sign to Farrabesche to follow her a little distance.

“Madame may not be aware that I am not allowed to go beyond the district in which I reside.”

“Have you never received any news of her?”

“At the expiration of my term,” he answered, “I received from the Commissioner a thousand francs, sent to him quarterly for me in little sums which police regulations did

not allow me to receive till the day I left the galleys. I think that Catherine alone would have thought of me, as it was not Monsieur Bonnet who sent this money; therefore I have kept it safely for Benjamin."

"And Catherine's parents?"

"They have never inquired for her since she left. Besides they did enough in taking charge of the little one."

"Well, Farrabesche," said Veronique, returning toward the house. "I will make it my business to know if Catherine still lives; and if so, what is her present mode of life."

"Oh! madame, whatever that may be," said the man gently, "it would be happiness for me if I could have her for my wife. It is for her to object, not me. Our marriage would legitimatize this poor boy, who as yet knows nothing of his position."

The look the father threw upon the lad explained the life of these two beings, abandoned, or voluntarily isolated; they were all in all to each other, like two compatriots adrift upon a desert.

"Then you love Catherine?" said Veronique.

"Even if I did not love her, madame," he replied, "she is to me, in my situation, the only woman there is in the world."

Madame Graslin turned hurriedly and walked away under the chestnut trees, as if attacked by some sharp pain; the keeper, thinking she was moved by a sudden caprice, did not venture to follow her.

# XIV. THE TORRENT OF THE GABOU

Veronique remained for some minutes under the chestnut trees, apparently looking at the landscape. Thence she could see that portion of the forest which clothes the side of the valley down which flows the torrent of the Gabou, now dry, a mass of stones, looking like a huge ditch cut between the wooded mountains of Montegnac and another chain of parallel hills beyond,—the latter being much steeper and without vegetation, except for heath and juniper and a few sparse trees toward their summit.

These hills, desolate of aspect, belong to the neighboring domain and are in the department of the Correze. A country road, following the undulations of the valley, serves to mark the line between the arrondissement of Montegnac and the two estates. This barren slope supports, like a wall, a fine piece of woodland which stretches away in the distance from its rocky summit. Its barrenness forms a complete contrast to the other slope, on which is the cottage of Farrabesche. On the one side, harsh, disfigured angularities, on the other, graceful forms and curving outlines; there, the cold, dumb stillness of unfruitful earth held up by horizontal blocks of stone and naked rock, here, trees of various greens, now stripped for the most part of foliage, but showing their fine straight many-colored trunks on every slope and terrace of the land; their interlacing branches swaying to the breeze. A few more persistent trees, oaks, elms, beeches, and chestnuts, still retained their yellow, bronzed, or crimsoned foliage.

Toward Montegnac, where the valley widened immensely, the two slopes form a horse-shoe; and from the spot where Veronique now stood leaning against a tree she could see the descending valleys lying like the gradations of an ampitheatre, the tree-tops rising from each tier like persons in the audience. This fine landscape was then on the other side of her park, though it afterwards formed part of it. On the side toward the cottage near which she stood the valley narrows more and more until it becomes a gorge, about a hundred feet wide.

The beauty of this view, over which Madame Graslin’s eyes now roved mechanically, recalled her presently to herself. She returned to the cottage where the father and son were standing, silently awaiting her and not seeking to explain her singular absence.

She examined the house, which was built with more care than its thatched roof seemed to warrant. It had, no doubt, been abandoned ever since the Navarreins ceased to care for this domain. No more hunts, no more game-keepers. Though the house had been built for over a hundred years, the walls were still good, notwithstanding the ivy and other sorts of climbing-plants which clung to them. When Farrabesche obtained permission to live there he tiled the room on the lower floor and put in furniture. Veronique saw, as she entered, two beds, a large walnut wardrobe, a bread-box, dresser, table, three chairs, and on the dresser a few brown earthenware dishes and other utensils necessary to life. Above the fireplace were two guns and two gamebags. A number of little things evidently made by the father for the child touched Veronique’s heart—the model of a man-of-war, of a sloop, a carved wooden cup, a wooden box of exquisite workmanship, a coffer inlaid in diaper pattern, a crucifix, and a splendid rosary. The chaplet was made of plum-stones, on each of which was carved a head of marvellous delicacy,—of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, the

Madonna, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne, the two Magdalens, etc.

“I do that to amuse the little one in the long winter evenings,” he said, as if excusing himself.

The front of the house was covered with jessamine and roses, trained to the wall and wreathing the windows of the upper floor, where Farrabesche stored his provisions. He bought little except bread, salt, sugar, and a few such articles, for he kept chickens, ducks, and two pigs. Neither he nor the boy drank wine.

“All that I have heard of you and all that I now see,” said Madame Graslin at last, “make me feel an interest in your welfare which will not, I hope, be a barren one.”

“I recognize Monsieur Bonnet’s kindness in what you say,” cried Farrabesche, in a tone of feeling.

“You are mistaken; the rector has not yet spoken of you to me; chance—or God—has done it.”

“Yes, madame, God! God alone can do miracles for a miserable man like me.”

“If you have been a miserable man,” said Madame Graslin, lowering her voice that the child might not hear her (an act of womanly delicacy which touched his heart), “your repentance, your conduct, and the rector’s esteem have now fitted you to become a happier man. I have given orders to finish the building of the large farmhouse which Monsieur Graslin intended to establish near the chateau. I shall make you my farmer, and you will have an opportunity to use all your faculties, and also to employ your son. The *procureur-general* in Limoges shall be informed about you, and the humiliating police-inspection you are now subjected to shall be removed. I promise you.”

At these words Farrabesche fell on his knees, as if struck down by the realization of a hope he had long considered vain. He kissed the hem of Madame Graslin’s habit, then her feet. Seeing the tears in his father’s eyes, the boy wept too, without knowing why.

“Rise, Farrabesche,” said Madame Graslin, “you do not know how natural it is that I should do for you what I have promised. You planted those fine trees, did you not?” she went on, pointing to the groups of Northern pine, firs, and larches at the foot of the dry and rocky hill directly opposite.

“Yes, madame.”

“Is the earth better there?”

“The water in washing down among the rocks brings a certain amount of soil, which it deposits. I have profited by this; for the whole of the level of the valley belongs to you,—the road is your boundary.”

“Is there much water at the bottom of that long valley?”

“Oh, madame,” cried Farrabesche, “before long, when the rains begin, you will hear the torrent roar even at the chateau; but even that is nothing to what happens in spring when the snows melt. The water then rushes down from all parts of the forest behind Montegnac, from those great slopes which are back of the hills on which you have your park. All the water of these mountains pours into this valley and makes a deluge. Luckily

for you, the trees hold the earth; otherwise the land would slide into the valley."

"Where are the springs?" asked Madame Graslin, giving her full attention to what he said.

Farrabesche pointed to a narrow gorge which seemed to end the valley just below his house. "They are mostly on a clay plateau lying between the Limousin and the Correze; they are mere green pools during the summer, and lose themselves in the soil. No one lives in that unhealthy region. The cattle will not eat the grass or reeds that grow near the brackish water. That vast tract, which has more than three thousand acres in it, is an open common for three districts; but, like the plains of Montegnac, no use can be made of it. This side on your property, as I showed you, there is a little earth among the stones, but over there is nothing but sandy rock."

"Send your boy for the horses; I will ride over and see it for myself."

Benjamin departed, after Madame Graslin had shown him the direction in which he would find Maurice and the horses.

"You who know, so they tell me, every peculiarity of the country thoroughly," continued Madame Graslin, "explain to me how it is that the streams of my forest which are on the side of the mountain toward Montegnac, and ought therefore to send their waters down there, do not do so, neither in regular water-courses nor in sudden torrents after rains and the melting of the snows."

"Ah, madame," said Farrabesche, "the rector, who thinks all the time about the welfare of Montegnac, has guessed the reason, but he can't find any proof of it. Since your arrival, he has made me trace the path of the water from point to point through each ravine and valley. I was returning yesterday, when I had the honor of meeting you, from the base of the Roche-Vive, where I carefully examined the lay of the land. Hearing the horses' feet, I came up to see who was there. Monsieur Bonnet is not only a saint, madame; he is a man of great knowledge. 'Farrabesche,' he said to me (I was then working on the road the village has just built to the chateau, and the rector came to me and pointed to that chain of hills from Montegnac to Roche-Vive),—'Farrabesche,' he said, 'there must be some reason why that water-shed does not send any of its water to the plain; Nature must have made some sluiceway which carries it elsewhere.' Well, madame, that idea is so simple you would suppose any child might have thought it; yet no one since Montegnac existed, neither the great lords, nor their bailiffs, nor their foresters, nor the poor, nor the rich, none of those who saw that plain barren for want of water, ever asked themselves why the streams which now feed the Gabou do not come there. The three districts above, which have constantly been afflicted with fevers in consequence of stagnant water, never looked for the remedy; I myself, who live in the wilds, never dreamed of it; it needed a man of God."

The tears filled his eyes as he said the word.

"All that men of genius discover," said Madame Graslin, "seems so simple that every one thinks they might have discovered it themselves. But," she added, as if to herself, "genius has this fine thing about it,—it resembles all the world, but no one resembles it."

"I understood Monsieur Bonnet at once," continued Farrabesche; "it did not take him

many words to tell me what I had to do. Madame, this fact I tell you of is all the more singular because there are, toward the plain, great rents and fissures in the mountain, gorges and ravines down which the water flows; but, strange to say, these clefts and ravines and gorges all send their streams into a little valley which is several feet below the level of your plain. To-day I have discovered the reason of this phenomenon: from the Roche-Vive to Montegnac, at the foot of the mountains, runs a shelf or barricade of rock, varying in height from twenty to thirty feet; there is not a break in it from end to end; and it is formed of a species of rock which Monsieur Bonnet calls schist. The soil above it, which is of course softer than rock, has been hollowed out by the action of the water, which is turned at right angles by the barricade of rock, and thus flows naturally into the Gabou. The trees and underbrush of the forest conceal this formation and the hollowing out of the soil. But after following the course of the water, as I have done by the traces left of its passage, it is easy to convince any one of the fact. The Gabou thus receives the water-shed of both mountains,—that which ought to go down the mountain face on which your park and garden are to the plain, and that which comes down the rocky slopes before us. According to Monsieur Bonnet the present state of things will crease when the water-shed toward the plain gains a natural outlet, and is dammed toward the Gabou by the earth and rocks which the mountain torrents bring down with them. It will take a hundred years to do that, however; and besides, it isn't desirable. If your soil will not take up more water than the great common you are now going to see, Montegnac would be full of stagnant pools, breeding fever in the community."

"I suppose that the places Monsieur Bonnet showed me the other day where the foliage of the trees is still green mark the present conduits by which the water falls into the Gabou?"

"Yes, madame. Between Roche-Vive and Montegnac there are three distinct mountains with three hollows between them, down which the waters, stopped by the schist barrier, turn off into the Gabou. The belt of trees still green at the foot of the hill above the barrier, which looks, at a distance, like a part of the plain, is really the water-sluice the rector supposed, very justly, that Nature had made for herself."

"Well, what has been to the injury of Montegnac shall soon be its prosperity," said Madame Graslin, in a tone of deep intention. "And inasmuch as you have been the first instrument employed on the work, you shall share in it; you shall find me faithful, industrious workmen; lack of money can always be made up by devotion and good work."

Benjamin and Maurice came up as Veronique ended these words; she mounted her horse and signed to Farrabesche to mount the other.

"Guide me," she said, "to the place where the waters spread out in pools over that waste land."

"There is all the more reason why madame should go there," said Farrabesche, "because the late Monsieur Graslin, under the rector's advice, bought three hundred acres at the opening of that gorge, on which the waters have left sediment enough to make good soil over quite a piece of ground. Madame will also see the opposite side of the Roche-Vive, where there are fine woods, among which Monsieur Graslin would no doubt have put a farm had he lived; there's an excellent place for one, where the spring which rises just by

my house loses itself below."

Farrabesche rode first to show the way, taking Veronique through a path which led to the spot where the two slopes drew closely together and then flew apart, one to the east the other to the west, as if repulsed by a shock. This narrow passage, filled with large rocks and coarse, tall grasses, was only about sixty feet in width.

The Roche-Vive, cut perpendicularly on this side looked like a wall of granite in which there was no foothold; but above this inflexible wall was a crown of trees, the roots of which hung down it, mostly pines clinging to the rock with their forked feet like birds on a bough.

The opposite hill, hollowed by time, had a frowning front, sandy, rocky, and yellow; here were shallow caverns, dips without depth; the soft and pulverizing rock had ochre tones. A few plants with prickly leaves above, and burdocks, reeds, and aquatic growths below, were indication enough of the northern exposure and the poverty of the soil. The bed of the torrent was of stone, quite hard, but yellow. Evidently the two chains, though parallel and ripped asunder by one of the great catastrophes which have changed the face of the globe, were, either from some inexplicable caprice or for some unknown reason, the discovery of which awaited genius, composed of elements that were wholly dissimilar. The contrast of their two natures showed more clearly here than elsewhere.

Veronique now saw before her an immense dry plateau, without any vegetation, chalky (this explained the absorption of the water) and strewn with pools of stagnant water and rocky places stripped of soil. To the right were the mountains of the Correze; to left the Roche-Vive barred the view covered with its noble trees; on its further slope was a meadow of some two hundred acres, the verdure of which contrasted with the hideous aspect of the desolate plateau.

"My son and I cut that ditch you see down there marked by the tall grasses," said Farrabesche; "it joins the one which bounds your forest. On this side the estate is bounded by a desert, for the nearest village is three miles distant."

Veronique turned rapidly to the dismal plain, followed by her guide. She leaped her horse across the ditch and rode at full gallop across the drear expanse, seeming to take a savage pleasure in contemplating that vast image of desolation. Farrabesche was right. No power, no will could put to any use whatever that soil which resounded under the horses' feet as though it were hollow. This effect was produced by the natural porousness of the clay; but there were fissures also through which the water flowed away, no doubt to some distant source.

"There are many souls like this," thought Veronique, stopping her horse after she had ridden at full speed for fifteen or twenty minutes. She remained motionless and thoughtful in the midst of this desert, where there was neither animal nor insect life and where the birds never flew. The plain of Montegnac was at least pebbly or sandy; on it were places where a few inches of soil did give a foothold for the roots of certain plains; but here the ungrateful chalk, neither stone nor earth, repelled even the eye, which was forced to turn for relief to the blue of the ether.

After examining the bounds of her forest and the meadows purchased by her husband, Veronique returned toward the outlet of the Gabou, but slowly. She then saw Farrabesche

gazing into a sort of ditch which looked like one a speculator might have dug into this desolate corner of the earth expecting Nature to give up some hidden treasure.

“What is the matter?” asked Veronique, noticing on that manly face an expression of deep sadness.

“Madame, I owe my life to that ditch; or rather, to speak more correctly, I owe to it time for repentance, time to redeem my sins in the eyes of men.”

This method of explaining life so affected Madame Graslin that she stopped her horse on the brink of the ditch.

“I was hiding there, madame. The ground is so resonant that when my ear was against it I could hear the horses of the gendarmerie, or even the footsteps of the soldiers, which are always peculiar. That gave me time to escape up the Gabou to a place where I had a horse, and I always managed to put several miles between myself and my pursuers. Catherine used to bring me food during the night; if she did not find me I always found the bread and wine in a hole covered with a rock.”

This recollection of his wandering and criminal life, which might have injured Farrabesche with some persons, met with the most indulgent pity from Madame Graslin. She rode hastily on toward the Gabou, followed by her guide. While she measured with her eye this opening, through which could be seen the long valley, so smiling on one side, so ruined on the other, and at its lower end, a league away, the terraced hill-sides back of Montegnac, Farrabesche said:—

“There’ll be a famous rush of water in a few days.”

“And next year, on this day, not a drop shall flow there. Both sides belong to me, and I will build a dam solid enough and high enough to stop the freshet. Instead of a valley yielding nothing, I will have a lake twenty, thirty, forty feet deep over an extent of three or four miles,—an immense reservoir, which shall supply the flow of irrigation with which I will fertilize the plain of Montegnac.”

“Ah, madame! the rector was right, when he said to us as we finished our road, ‘You are working for a mother.’ May God shed his blessing on such an undertaking.”

“Say nothing about it, Farrabesche,” said Madame Graslin. “The idea was Monsieur Bonnet’s.”

They returned to the cottage, where Veronique picked up Maurice, with whom she rode hastily back to the chateau. When Madame Sauviat and Aline saw her they were struck with the change in her countenance; the hope of doing good in the region she now owned gave her already an appearance of happiness. She wrote at once to Monsieur Grossetete, begging him to ask Monsieur de Grandville for the complete release of the returned convict, on whose conduct she gave him assurances which were confirmed by a certificate from the mayor of Montegnac and by a letter from Monsieur Bonnet. To this request she added information about Catherine Curieux, begging Grossetete to interest the *procureur-general* in the good work she wished to do, and persuade him to write to the prefecture of police in Paris to recover traces of the girl. The circumstance of Catherine’s having sent money to Farrabesche at the galleys ought to be clew enough to furnish information. Veronique was determined to know why it was that the young woman had not returned to

her child and to Farrabesche, now that he was free. She also told her old friend of her discovery about the torrent of the Gabou, and urged him to select an able engineer, such as she had already asked him to procure for her.

The next day was Sunday, and for the first time since her installation at Montegnac Veronique felt able to hear mass in church; she accordingly went there and took possession of the bench that belonged to her in the chapel of the Virgin. Seeing how denuded the poor church was, she resolved to devote a certain sum yearly to the needs of the building and the decoration of the altars. She listened to the sweet, impressive, angelic voice of the rector, whose sermon, though couched in simple language suited to the rustic intellects before him, was sublime in character. Sublimity comes from the heart, intellect has little to do with it; religion is a quenchless source of this sublimity which has no dross; for Catholicism entering and changing all hearts, is itself all heart. Monsieur Bonnet took his text from the epistle for the day, which signified that, sooner or later, God accomplishes all promises, assisting His faithful ones, encouraging the righteous. He made plain to every mind the great things which might be accomplished by wealth judiciously used for the good of others,—explaining that the duties of the poor to the rich were as widely extended as those of the rich to the poor, and that the aid and assistance given should be mutual.

Farrabesche had made known to a few of those who treated him in a friendly manner (the result of the Christian charity which Monsieur Bonnet had put in practice among his parishioners) the benevolent acts Madame Graslin had done for him. Her conduct in this matter had been talked over by all the little groups of persons assembled round the church door before the service, as is the custom in country places. Nothing could have been better calculated to win the friendship and good-will of these eminently susceptible minds; so that when Veronique left the church after service she found nearly all the inhabitants of the parish formed in two hedges through which she was expected to pass. One and all they bowed respectfully in profound silence. She was deeply touched by this reception, without knowing the actual cause of it. Seeing Farrabesche humbly stationed among the last, she stopped and said to him:—

“You are a good hunter; do not forget to supply me with game.”

A few days later Veronique went to walk with the rector through the part of the forest that was nearest the chateau, wishing to descend with him the terraced slopes she had seen from the house of Farrabesche. In doing this she obtained complete certainty as to the nature of the upper affluents of the Gabou. The rector saw for himself that the streams which watered certain parts of upper Montegnac came from the mountains of the Correze. This chain of hills joined the barren slopes we have already described, parallel with the chain of the Roche-Vive.

On returning from this walk the rector was joyful as a child; he foresaw, with the naivete of a poet, the prosperity of his dear village—for a poet is a man, is he not? who realizes hopes before they ripen. Monsieur Bonnet garnered his hay as he stood overlooking that barren plain from Madame Graslin’s upper terrace.

# XV. STORY OF A GALLEY-SLAVE

The next day Farrabesche and his son came to the chateau with game. The keeper also brought, for Francis, a cocoanut cup, elaborately carved, a genuine work of art, representing a battle. Madame Graslin was walking at the time on the terrace, in the direction which overlooked Les Tascherons. She sat down on a bench, took the cup in her hand and looked earnestly at the deft piece of work. A few tears came into her eyes.

“You must have suffered very much,” she said to Farrabesche, after a few moments’ silence.

“How could I help it, madame?” he replied; “for I was there without the hope of escape, which supports the life of most convicts.”

“An awful life!” she said in a tone of horror, inviting Farrabesche by word and gesture to say more.

Farrabesche took the convulsive trembling and other signs of emotion he saw in Madame Graslin for the powerful interest of compassionate curiosity in himself.

Just then Madame Sauviat appeared, coming down a path as if she meant to join them; but Veronique drew out her handkerchief and made a negative sign; saying, with an asperity she had never before shown to the old woman:—

“Leave me, leave me, mother.”

“Madame,” said Farrabesche, “for ten years I wore there (holding out his leg) a chain fastened to a great iron ring which bound me to another man. During my time I had to live thus with three different convicts. I slept on a wooden bench; I had to work extraordinarily hard to earn a little mattress called a *serpentin*. Each dormitory contains eight hundred men. Each bed, called a *tolard*, holds twenty-four men, chained in couples. Every night the chain of each couple is passed round another great chain which is called the *filet de ramas*. This chain holds all the couples by the feet, and runs along the bottom of the *tolard*. It took me over two years to get accustomed to that iron clanking, which called out incessantly, ‘Thou art a galley-slave!’ If I slept an instant some vile companion moved or quarrelled, reminding me of where I was. There is a terrible apprenticeship to make before a man can learn how to sleep. I myself could not sleep until I had come to the end of my strength and to utter exhaustion. When at last sleep came I had the nights in which to forget. Oh! to *forget*, madame, that was something! Once there, a man must learn to satisfy his needs, even in the smallest things, according to the ways laid down by pitiless regulations. Imagine, madame, the effect such a life produced on a lad like me, who had lived in the woods with the birds and the squirrels! If I had not already lived for six months within prison-walls, I should, in spite of Monsieur Bonnet’s grand words—for he, I can truly say, is the father of my soul—I should, ah! I must have flung myself into the sea at the mere sight of my companions. Out-doors I still could live; but in the building, whether to sleep or to eat,—to eat out of buckets, and each bucket filled for three couples,—it was life no longer, it was death; the atrocious faces and language of my companions were always insufferable to me. Happily, from five o’clock in summer, and from half-past

seven o’clock in winter we went, in spite of heat or cold and wind or rain, on ‘fatigue,’ that is, hard-labor. Thus half this life was spent in the open air; and the air was sweet after the close dormitory packed with eight hundred convicts. And that air, too, is sea-air! We could enjoy the breezes, we could be friends with the sun, we could watch the clouds as they passed above us, we could hope and pray for fine weather! As for me, I took an interest in my work—”

Farrabesche stopped; two heavy tears were rolling down his mistress’s face.

“Oh! madame, I have only told you the best side of that life,” he continued, taking the expression of her face as meant for him. “The terrible precautions taken by the government, the constant spying of the keepers, the blacksmith’s inspection of the chains every day, night and morning, the coarse food, the hideous garments which humiliate a man at all hours, the comfortless sleep, the horrible rattling of eight hundred chains in that resounding hall, the prospect of being shot or blown to pieces by cannon if ten of those villains took a fancy to revolt, all those dreadful things are nothing,—nothing, I tell you; that is the bright side only. There’s another side, madame, and a decent man, a bourgeois, would die of horror in a week. A convict is forced to live with another man; obliged to endure the company of five other men at every meal, twenty-three in his bed at night, and to hear their language! The great society of galley-slaves, madame, has its secret laws; disobey them and you are tortured; obey them, and you become a torturer. You must be either victim or executioner. If they would kill you at once it would at least be the cure of life. But no, they are wiser than that in doing evil. It is impossible to hold out against the hatred of these men; their power is absolute over any prisoner who displeases them, and they can make his life a torment far worse than death. The man who repents and endeavors to behave well is their common enemy; above all, they suspect him of informing; and an informer is put to death, often on mere suspicion. Every hall and community of eight hundred convicts has its tribunal, in which are judged the crimes committed against that society. Not to obey the usages is criminal, and a man is liable to punishment. For instance, every man must co-operate in escapes; every convict has his time assigned him to escape, and all his fellow-convicts must protect and aid him. To reveal what a comrade is doing with a view to escape is criminal. I will not speak to you of the horrible customs and morals of the galleys. No man belongs to himself; the government, in order to neutralize the attempts at revolt or escape, takes pains to chain two contrary natures and interests together; and this makes the torture of the coupling unendurable; men are linked together who hate or distrust each other.”

“How was it with you?” asked Madame Graslin.

“Ah! there,” replied Farrabesche, “I had luck; I never drew a lot to kill a convict; I never had to vote the death of any one of them; I never was punished; no man took a dislike to me; and I got on well with the three different men I was chained to; they all feared me but liked me. One reason was, my name was known and famous at the galleys before I got there. A *chauffeur*! they thought me one of those brigands. I have seen *chauffing*,” continued Farrabesche after a pause, in a low voice, “but I never either did it myself, or took any of the money obtained by it. I was a refractory, I evaded the conscription, that was all. I helped my comrades, I kept watch; I was sentinel and brought up the rear-guard; but I never shed any man’s blood except in self-defence. Ah! I told all

to Monsieur Bonnet and my lawyer, and the judges knew well enough that I was no murderer. But, all the same, I am a great criminal; nothing that I ever did was morally right. However, before I got there, as I was saying, two of my comrades told of me as a man able to do great things. At the galleys, madame, nothing is so valuable as that reputation, not even money. In that republic of misery murder is a passport to tranquillity. I did nothing to destroy that opinion of me. I was sad, resigned, and they mistook the appearance of it. My gloomy manner, my silence, passed for ferocity. All that world, convicts, keepers, young and old, respected me. I was treated as first in my hall. No one interfered with my sleep; I was never suspected of informing; I behaved honorably according to their ideas; I never refused to do service; I never testified the slightest repugnance; I howled with the wolves outside, I prayed to God within. My last companion in chains was a soldier, twenty-two years of age, who had committed a theft and deserted in consequence of it. We were chained together for four years, and we were friends; wherever I may be I am certain to meet him when his time is up. This poor devil, whose name is Guepin, is not a scoundrel, he is merely heedless; his punishment may reform him. If my comrades had discovered that religion led me to submit to my trials,—that I meant, when my time was up, to live humbly in a corner, letting no one know where I was, intending to forget their horrible community and never to cross the path of any of them,—they would probably have driven me mad."

"Then," said Madame Graslin, "if a poor young man, a tender soul, carried away by passion, having committed a murder, was spared from death and sent to the galleys—"

"Oh! madame," said Farrabesche, interrupting her, "there is no sparing in that. The sentence may be commuted to twenty years at the galleys, but for a decent young man, that is awful! I could not speak to you of the life that awaits him there; a thousand times better die. Yes, to die upon the scaffold is happiness in comparison."

"I dared not think it," murmured Madame Graslin.

She had turned as white as wax. To hide her face she laid her forehead on the balustrade, and kept it there several minutes. Farrabesche did not know whether he ought to go or remain.

Madame Graslin raised her head at last, looked at Farrabesche with an almost majestic air, and said, to his amazement, in a voice that stirred his heart:—

"Thank you, my friend. But," she added, after a pause, "where did you find courage to live and suffer?"

"Ah! madame, Monsieur Bonnet put a treasure within my soul! and for that I love him better than all else on earth."

"Better than Catherine?" said Madame Graslin, smiling with a sort of bitterness.

"Almost as well, madame."

"How did he do it?"

"Madame, the words and the voice of that man conquered me. Catherine brought him to that hole in the ground I showed you on the common; he had come fearlessly alone. He was, he said, the new rector of Montegnac; I was his parishioner, he loved me; he knew I

was only misguided, not lost; he did not intend to betray me, but to save me; in short, he said many such things that stirred my soul to its depths. That man, madame, commands you to do right with as much force as those who tell you to do wrong. It was he who told me, poor dear man, that Catherine was a mother, and that I was dooming two beings to shame and desertion. 'Well,' I said to him, 'they are like me; I have no future.' He answered that I had a future, two bad futures, before me—one in another world, one in this world—if I persisted in not changing my way of life. In this world, I should die on the scaffold. If I were captured my defence would be impossible. On the contrary, if I took advantage of the leniency of the new government toward all crimes traceable to the conscription, if I delivered myself up, he believed he could save my life; he would engage a good lawyer, who would get me off with ten years at the galleys. Then Monsieur Bonnet talked to me of the other life. Catherine wept like the Magdalen—See, madame," said Farrabesche, holding out his right arm, "her face was in that hand, and I felt it wet with tears. She implored me to live. Monsieur Bonnet promised to secure me, when I had served my sentence, a peaceful life here with my child, and to protect me against affront. He catechised me as he would a little child. After three such visits at night he made me as supple as a glove. Would you like to know how, madame?"

Farrabesche and Madame Graslin looked at each other, not explaining to themselves their mutual curiosity.

"Well," resumed the poor liberated convict, "when he left me the first time, and Catherine had gone with him to show the way, I was left alone. I then felt within my soul a freshness, a calmness, a sweetness, I had never known since childhood. It was like the happiness my poor Catherine had given me. The love of this dear man had come to *seek me*; that, and his thought for me, for my future, stirred my soul to its depths; it changed me. A light broke forth in my being. As long as he was there, speaking to me, I resisted. That's not surprising; he was a priest, and we bandits don't eat of their bread. But when I no longer heard his footsteps nor Catherine's, oh! I was—as he told me two days later—enlightened by divine grace. God gave me thenceforth strength to bear all,—prison, sentence, irons, parting; even the life of the galleys. I believed in his word as I do in the Gospel; I looked upon my sufferings as a debt I was bound to pay. When I seemed to suffer too much, I looked across ten years and saw my home in the woods, my little Benjamin, my Catherine. He kept his word, that good Monsieur Bonnet. But one thing was lacking. When at last I was released, Catherine was not at the gate of the galleys; she was not on the common. No doubt she has died of grief. That is why I am always sad. Now, thanks to you, I shall have useful work to do; I can employ both body and soul,—and my boy, too, for whom I live."

"I begin to understand how it is that the rector has changed the character of this whole community," said Madame Graslin.

"Nothing can resist him," said Farrabesche.

"Yes, yes, I know it!" replied Veronique, hastily, making a gesture of farewell to her keeper.

Farrabesche withdrew. Veronique remained alone on the terrace for a good part of the day, walking up and down in spite of a fine rain which fell till evening. When her face was

thus convulsed, neither her mother nor Aline dared to interrupt her. She did not notice in the dusk that her mother was talking in the salon to Monsieur Bonnet; the old woman, anxious to put an end to this fresh attack of dreadful depression, sent little Francis to fetch her. The child took his mother's hand and led her in. When she saw the rector she gave a start of surprise in which there seemed to be some fear. Monsieur Bonnet took her back to the terrace, saying:—

"Well, madame, what were you talking about with Farrabesche?"

In order not to speak falsely, Veronique evaded a reply; she questioned Monsieur Bonnet.

"That man was your first victory here, was he not?" she said.

"Yes," he answered; "his conversion would, I thought, give me all Montegnac—and I was not mistaken."

Veronique pressed Monsieur Bonnet's hand and said, with tears in her voice, "I am your penitent from this day forth, monsieur; I shall go to-morrow to the confessional."

Her last words showed a great internal effort, a terrible victory won over herself. The rector brought her back to the house without saying another word. After that he remained till dinner-time, talking about the proposed improvements at Montegnac.

"Agriculture is a question of time," he said; "the little that I know of it makes me understand what a gain it would be to get some good out of the winter. The rains are now beginning, and the mountains will soon be covered with snow; your operations cannot then be begun. Had you not better hasten Monsieur Grossetete?"

Insensibly, Monsieur Bonnet, who at first did all the talking, led Madame Graslin to join in the conversation and so distract her thoughts; in fact, he left her almost recovered from the emotions of the day. Madame Sauviat, however, thought her daughter too violently agitated to be left alone, and she spent the night in her room.

# XVI. CONCERNS ONE OF THE BLUNDERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The following day an express, sent from Limoges by Monsieur Grossetete to Madame Graslin, brought her the following letter:—

To Madame Graslin:

My dear Child,—It was difficult to find horses, but I hope you are satisfied with those I sent you. If you want work or draft horses, you must look elsewhere. In any case, however, I advise you to do your tilling and transportation with oxen. All the countries where agriculture is carried on with horses lose capital when the horse is past work; whereas cattle always return a profit to those who use them.

I approve in every way of your enterprise, my child; you will thus employ the passionate activity of your soul, which was turning against yourself and thus injuring you.

Your second request, namely, for a man capable of understanding and seconding your projects, requires me to find you a *rara avis* such as we seldom raise in the provinces, where, if we do raise them, we never keep them. The education of that high product is too slow and too risky a speculation for country folks.

Besides, men of intellect alarm us; we call them “originals.” The men belonging to the scientific category from which you will have to obtain your co-operator do not flourish here, and I was on the point of writing to you that I despaired of fulfilling your commission. You want a poet, a man of ideas,—in short, what we should here call a fool, and all our fools go to Paris. I have spoken of your plans to the young men employed in land surveying, to contractors on the canals, and makers of the embankments, and none of them see any “advantage” in what you propose.

But suddenly, as good luck would have it, chance has thrown in my way the very man you want; a young man to whom I believe I render a service in naming him to you. You will see by his letter, herewith enclosed, that deeds of beneficence ought not to be done hap-hazard. Nothing needs more reflection than a good action. We never know whether that which seems best at one moment may not prove an evil later. The exercise of beneficence, as I have lived to discover, is to usurp the role of Destiny.

As she read that sentence Madame Graslin let fall the letter and was thoughtful for several minutes.

“My God!” she said at last, “when wilt thou cease to strike me down on all sides?”

Then she took up the letter and continued reading it:

Gerard seems to me to have a cool head and an ardent heart; that’s the sort of man you want. Paris is just now a hotbed of new doctrines; I should be delighted to have the lad removed from the traps which ambitious minds are setting for the generous youth of France. While I do not altogether approve of the narrow and stupefying life of the provinces, neither do I like the passionate life of Paris, with its ardor of reformation, which is driving youth into so many unknown ways. You alone know my opinions; to my mind the moral world revolves upon its own axis, like the material world. My poor protege demands (as you will see from his letter) things impossible. No power can resist ambitions so violent, so imperious, so absolute, as those of to-day. I am in favor of low levels and slowness in political change; I dislike these social overturns to which ambitious minds subject us.

To you I confide these principles of a monarchical and prejudiced

old man, because you are discreet. Here I hold my tongue in the midst of worthy people, who the more they fail the more they believe in progress; but I suffer deeply at the irreparable evils already inflicted on our dear country.

I have replied to the enclosed letter, telling my young man that a worthy task awaits him. He will go to see you, and though his letter will enable you to judge of him, you had better study him still further before committing yourself,—though you women understand many things from the mere look of a man. However, all the men whom you employ, even the most insignificant, ought to be thoroughly satisfactory to you. If you don’t like him don’t take him; but if he suits you, my dear child, I beg you to cure him of his ill-disguised ambition. Make him take to a peaceful, happy, rural life, where true beneficence is perpetually exercised; where the capacities of great and strong souls find continual exercise, and they themselves discover daily fresh sources of admiration in the works of Nature, and in real ameliorations, real progress, an occupation worthy of any man.

I am not oblivious of the fact that great ideas give birth to great actions; but as those ideas are necessarily few and far between, I think it may be said that usually things are more useful than ideas. He who fertilizes a corner of the earth, who brings to perfection a fruit-tree, who makes a turf on a thankless soil, is far more useful in his generation than he who seeks new theories for humanity. How, I ask you, has Newton’s science changed the condition of the country districts? Oh! my dear, I have always loved you; but to-day I, who fully understand what you are about to attempt, I adore you.

No one at Limoges forgets you; we all admire your grand resolution to benefit Montegnac. Be a little grateful to us for having soul enough to admire a noble action, and do not forget that the first of your admirers is also your first friend.

F. Grossetete.

The enclosed letter was as follows:—

To Monsieur Grossetete:

Monsieur,—You have been to me a father when you might have been only a mere protector, and therefore I venture to make you a rather sad confidence. It is to you alone, you who have made me what I am, that I can tell my troubles.

I am afflicted with a terrible malady, a cruel moral malady. In my soul are feelings and in my mind convictions which make me utterly unfit for what the State and society demand of me. This may seem to you ingratitude; it is only the statement of a condition. When I was twelve years old you, my generous god-father, saw in me, the son of a mere workman, an aptitude for the exact sciences and a precocious desire to rise in life. You favored my impulse toward better things when my natural fate was to stay a carpenter like my father, who, poor man, did not live long enough to enjoy my advancement. Indeed, monsieur, you did a good thing, and there is never a day that I do not bless you for it. It may be that I am now to blame; but whether I am right or wrong it is very certain that I suffer. In making my complaint to you I feel that I take you as my judge like God Himself. Will you listen to my story and grant me your indulgence?

Between sixteen and eighteen years of age I gave myself to the study of the exact sciences with an ardor, you remember, that made me ill. My future depended on my admission to the Ecole Polytechnique. At that time my studies overworked my brain, and I came near dying; I studied night and day; I did more than the nature of my organs permitted. I wanted to pass such satisfying examinations that my place in the Ecole would be not only secure, but sufficiently advanced to release me from the cost of my support, which I did not want you to pay any longer.

I triumphed! I tremble to-day as I think of the frightful conscription (if I may so call it) of brains delivered over yearly to the State by family ambition. By insisting on these severe studies at the moment when a youth attains his various forms of growth, the authorities produce secret evils and kill by midnight study many precious faculties which later would have developed both strength and grandeur. The laws of nature are relentless; they do not yield in any particular to the enterprises or the wishes of society. In the moral order as in the natural order all abuses must be paid for; fruits forced in a hot-house are produced at the tree’s expense and often at the sacrifice of the goodness of its product. La Quintinie killed the orange-trees to give Louis XIV. a bunch of flowers every day at all seasons. So it is with intellects. The strain upon adolescent brains discounts their future.

That which is chiefly wanting to our epoch is legislative genius. Europe has had no true legislators since Jesus Christ, who, not having given to the world a political code, left his work incomplete. Before establishing great schools of specialists and regulating the method of recruiting for them, where were the great thinkers who could bear in mind the relation of such institutions to human powers, balancing advantages and injuries, and studying the past for the laws of the future? What inquiry has been made as to the condition of exceptional men, who, by some fatal chance, knew human sciences before their time? Has the rarity of such cases been reckoned—the result examined? Has any enquiry been made as to the means by which such men were enabled to endure the perpetual strain of thought? How many, like Pascal, died prematurely, worn-out by knowledge? Have statistics been gathered as to the age at which those men who lived the longest began their studies? Who has ever known, does any one know now, the interior construction of brains which have been able to sustain a premature burden of human knowledge? Who suspects that this question belongs, above all, to the physiology of man?

For my part, I now believe the true general law is to remain a long time in the vegetative condition of adolescence; and that those exceptions where strength of organs is produced during adolescence result usually in the shortening of life. Thus the man of genius who is able to bear up under the precocious exercise of his faculties is an exception to an exception.

If I am right, if what I say accords with social facts and medical observations, then the system practised in France in her technical schools is a fatal impairment and mutilation (in the style of La Quintinie) practised upon the noblest flower of youth in each generation.

But it is better to continue my history, and add my doubts as the facts develop themselves.

When I entered the Ecole Polytechnique, I worked harder than ever and with even more ardor, in order to leave it as triumphantly as I had entered it. From nineteen to twenty-one I developed every aptitude and strengthened every faculty by constant practice. Those two years were the crown and completion of the first three, during which I had only prepared myself to do well. Therefore my pride was great when I won the right to choose the career that pleased me most,—either military or naval engineering, artillery, or staff duty, or the civil engineering of mining, and *ponts et chaussees*.[*] By your advice, I chose the latter.

[*] Department of the government including everything connected with the making and repairing of roads, bridges, canals, etc.

But where I triumphed how many others fail! Do you know that from year to year the State increases the scientific requirements of the Ecole? the studies are more severe, more exacting yearly. The preparatory studies which tried me so much were nothing to the intense work of the school itself, which has for its object to put the whole of physical science, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, and all their nomenclatures into the minds of young men of nineteen to twenty-one years of age. The State, which seems in France to wish to substitute itself in many ways for the paternal authority, has neither bowels of compassion nor fatherhood; it makes its experiments *in anima vili*. Never does it inquire into the horrible statistics of the suffering it causes. Does it know the number of brain fevers among its pupils during the last thirty-six years; or the despair and the moral destruction which decimate its youth? I am pointing out to you this painful side of the State education, for it is one of the anterior contingents of the actual result.

You know that scholars whose conceptions are slow, or who are temporarily disabled from excess of mental work, are allowed to remain at the Ecole three years instead of two; they then become the object of suspicions little favorable to their capacity. This often compels young men, who might later show superior capacity, to leave the school without being employed, simply because they could not meet the final examination with the full scientific knowledge required. They are called “dried fruits”; Napoleon made sub-lieutenants of them. To-day the “dried fruits” constitute an enormous loss of capital to families and of time to individuals.

However, as I say, I triumphed. At twenty-one years of age I knew the mathematical sciences up to the point to which so many men of genius have brought them, and I was impatient to distinguish myself by carrying them further. This desire is so natural that almost every pupil leaving the Ecole fixes his eyes on that moral sun called Fame. The first thought of all is to become another Newton, or Laplace, or Vauban. Such are the efforts that France demands of the young men who leave her celebrated school.

Now let us see the fate of these men culled with so much care from each generation. At one-and-twenty we dream of life, and expect marvels of it. I entered the Ecole des Ponts et Chaussees; I was a pupil-engineer. I studied the science of construction, and how ardently! I am sure you remember that. I left the school in 1827, being then twenty-four years of age, still only a candidate as engineer, and the government paid me one hundred and fifty francs a month; the commonest book-keeper in Paris earns that by the time he is eighteen, giving little more than four hours a day to his work.

By a most unusual piece of luck, perhaps because of the distinction my devoted studies won for me, I was made, in 1828, when I was twenty-five years old, engineer-in-ordinary. I was sent, as you know, to a sub-prefecture, with a salary of

twenty-five hundred francs. The question of money is nothing. Certainly my fate has been more brilliant than the son of a carpenter might expect; but where will you find a grocer’s boy, who, if thrown into a shop at sixteen, will not in ten years be on the high-road to an independent property?

I learned then to what these terrible efforts of mental power, these gigantic exertions demanded by the State were to lead. The State now employed me to count and measure pavements and heaps of stones on the roadways; I had to keep in order, repair, and sometimes construct culverts, one-arched bridges, regulate drift-ways, clean and sometimes open ditches, lay out bounds, and answer questions about the planting and felling of trees. Such are the principal and sometimes the only occupations of ordinary engineers, together with a little levelling which the government obliges us to do ourselves, though any of our chain-bearers with their limited experience can do it better than we with all our science.

There are nearly four hundred engineers-in-ordinary and pupil engineers; and as there are not more than a hundred or so of engineers-in-chief, only a limited number of the sub-engineers can hope to rise. Besides, above the grade of engineer-in-chief, there is no absorbent class; for we cannot count as a means of absorption the ten or fifteen places of inspector-generals or divisionaries,—posts that are almost as useless in our corps as colonels are in the artillery, where the battery is the essential thing. The engineer-in-ordinary, like the captain of artillery, knows the whole science. He ought not to have any one over him except an administrative head to whom no more than eighty-six engineers should report,—for one engineer, with two assistants is enough for a department.

The present hierarchy in these bodies results in the subordination of active energetic capacities to the worn-out capacities of old men, who, thinking they know best, alter or nullify the plans submitted by their subordinates,—perhaps with the sole aim of making their existence felt; for that seems to me the only influence exercised over the public works of France by the Council-general of the *Ponts et Chaussees*.

Suppose, however, that I become, between thirty and forty years of age, an engineer of the first-class and an engineer-in-chief before I am fifty. Alas! I see my future; it is written before my eyes. Here is a forecast of it:—

My present engineer-in-chief is sixty years old; he issued with honors, as I did, from the famous Ecole; he has turned gray doing in two departments what I am doing now, and he has become the most ordinary man it is possible to imagine; he has fallen from the height to which he had really risen; far worse, he is no longer on the level of scientific knowledge; science has progressed, he has stayed where he was. The man who came forth ready for life at twenty-two years of age, with every sign of superiority, has nothing left to-day but the reputation of it. In the beginning, with his mind specially turned to the exact sciences and mathematics by his education, he neglected everything that was not his specialty; and you can hardly imagine his present dulness in all other branches of human knowledge. I hardly dare confide even to you the secrets of his incapacity sheltered by the fact that he was educated at the Ecole Polytechnique. With that label attached to him and on the faith of that prestige, no one dreams of doubting his ability. To you alone do I dare reveal the fact that the dulling of all his talents has led him to spend a million on a single matter which ought not to have cost the administration more than two hundred thousand francs. I wished to protest, and was about to inform the prefect; but an engineer I know very well reminded me of one of our comrades who was hated by the administration for doing that very thing. “How would you like,” he said to me, “when you get to be engineer-in-chief to have your errors dragged forth by your subordinate? Before long your engineer-in-chief will be made a divisional inspector. As soon as any one of us commits a serious blunder, as he has done, the administration (which can’t allow itself to appear in the wrong) will quietly retire him from active duty by making him inspector.”

That’s how the reward of merit devolves on incapacity. All France knew of the disaster which happened in the heart of Paris to the first suspension bridge built by an engineer, a member of the Academy of Sciences; a melancholy collapse caused by blunders such as none of the ancient engineers—the man who cut the canal at Briare in Henri IV.’s time, or the monk who built the Pont Royal —would have made; but our administration consoled its engineer for his blunder by making him a member of the Council-general.

Are the technical schools vast manufactories of incapables? That subject requires careful investigation. If I am right they need reforming, at any rate in their method of proceeding,—for I am not, of course, doubting the utility of such schools. Only, when we look back into the past we see that France in former days never wanted for the great talents necessary to the State; but now she prefers to hatch out talent geometrically, after the theory of Monge. Did Vauban ever go to any other Ecole than that great school we call vocation? Who was Riquet’s tutor? When great geniuses arise above the social mass, impelled by vocation, they are nearly always rounded into completeness; the man is then not merely a specialist, he has the gift of universality. Do you think that an engineer from the Ecole Polytechnique could ever create one of those miracles of architecture such as Leonardo da Vinci knew how to build,—mechanician, architect, painter, inventor of hydraulics, indefatigable constructor of canals that he was?

Trained from their earliest years to the baldness of axiom and formula, the youths who leave the Ecole have lost the sense of elegance and ornament; a column seems to them useless; they return to the point where art begins, and cling to the useful.

But all this is nothing in comparison to the real malady which is undermining me. I feel an awful transformation going on within me; I am conscious that my powers and my faculties, formerly unnaturally taxed, are giving way. I am letting the prosaic influence of my life get hold of me. I who, by the very nature of my efforts, looked to do some great thing, I am face to face with none but petty ones; I measure stones, I inspect roads, I have not enough to really occupy me for two hours in my day. I see my colleagues marry, and fall into a situation contrary to the spirit of modern society. I wanted to be useful to my country. Is my ambition an unreasonable one? The country asked me to put forth all my powers; it told me to become a representative of science; yet here I am with folded arms in the depths of the provinces. I am not even allowed to leave the locality in which I am penned, to exercise my faculties in planning useful enterprises. A hidden but very real disfavor is the certain reward of any one of us who yields to an inspiration and goes beyond the special service laid down for him.

No, the favor a superior man has to hope for in that case is that his talent and his presumption may not be noticed, and that his project may be buried in the archives of the administration. What think you will be the reward of Vicat, the one among us who has brought about the only real progress in the practical science of construction? The Council-general of the *Ponts et Chaussees*, composed in part of men worn-out by long and sometimes honorable service, but whose only remaining force is for negation, and who set aside everything they no longer comprehend, is the extinguisher used to snuff out the projects of audacious spirits. This Council seems to have been created to paralyze the arm of that glorious youth of France, which asks only to work and to be useful to its country.

Monstrous things are done in Paris. The future of a province depends on the mere signature of men who (through intrigues I have no time to explain to you) often stop the execution of useful and much-needed work; in fact, the best plans are often those which offer most to the cupidity of commercial companies or speculators.

Another five years and I shall no longer be myself; my ambition will be quenched, my desire to use the faculties my country ordered me to exercise gone forever; the faculties themselves are rusting out in the miserable corner of the world in which I vegetate. Taking my chances at their best, the future seems to me a poor thing. I have just taken advantage of a furlough to come to

Paris; I mean to change my profession and find some other way to put my energy, my knowledge, and my activity to use. I shall send in my resignation and go to some other country, where men of my special capacity are wanted.

If I find I cannot do this, then I shall throw myself into the struggle of the new doctrines, which certainly seem calculated to produce great changes in the present social order by judiciously guiding the working-classes. What are we now but workers without work, tools on the shelves of a shop? We are trained and organized as if to move the world, and nothing is given us to do. I feel within me some great thing, which is decreasing daily, and will soon vanish; I tell you so with mathematical frankness. Before making the change I want your advice; I look upon myself as your child, and I will never take any important step without consulting you, for your experience is equal to your kindness.

I know very well that the State, after obtaining a class of trained men, cannot undertake for them alone great public works; there are not three hundred bridges needed a year in all France; the State can no more build great buildings for the fame of its engineers than it can declare war merely to win battles and bring to the front great generals; but, then, as men of genius have never failed to present themselves when the occasion called for them, springing from the crowd like Vauban, can there be any greater proof of the uselessness of the present institution? Can’t they see that when they have stimulated a man of talent by all those preparations he will make a fierce struggle before he allows himself to become a nonentity? Is this good policy on the part of the State? On the contrary, is not the State lighting the fire of ardent ambitions, which must find fuel somewhere.

Among the six hundred young men whom they put forth every year there are exceptions,—men who resist what may be called their demonetization. I know some myself, and if I could tell you their struggles with men and things when armed with useful projects and conceptions which might bring life and prosperity to the half-dead provinces where the State has sent them, you would feel that a man of power, a man of talent, a man whose nature is a miracle, is a hundredfold more unfortunate and more to be pitied than the man whose lower nature lets him submit to the shrinkage of his faculties.

I have made up my mind, therefore, that I would rather direct some commercial or industrial enterprise, and live on small means while trying to solve some of the great problems still unknown to industry and to society, than remain at my present post.

You will tell me, perhaps, that nothing hinders me from employing the leisure that I certainly have in using my intellectual powers and seeking in the stillness of this commonplace life the solution of some problem useful to humanity. Ah! monsieur, don’t you know the influence of the provinces,—the relaxing effect of a life just busy enough to waste time on futile labor, and not enough to use the rich resources our education has given us? Don’t think me, my dear protector, eaten up by the desire to make a fortune, nor even by an insensate desire for fame. I am too much of a calculator not to know the nothingness of glory. Neither do I want to marry; seeing the fate now before me, I think my existence a melancholy gift to offer any woman. As for money, though I regard it as one of the most powerful means given to social man to act with, it is, after all, but a means.

I place my whole desire and happiness on the hope of being useful to my country. My greatest pleasure would be to work in some situation suited to my faculties. If in your region, or in the circle of your acquaintances, you should hear of any enterprise that needed the capacities you know me to possess, think of me; I will wait six months for your answer before taking any step.

What I have written here, dear sir and friend, others think. I have seen many of my classmates or older graduates caught like me in the toils of some specialty,—geographical engineers, captain-professors, captains of engineers, who will remain captains all their lives, and now bitterly regret they did not enter active service with the army. Reflecting on these miserable results, I

ask myself the following questions, and I would like your opinion on them, assuring you that they are the fruit of long meditation, clarified in the fires of suffering:—

What is the real object of the State? Does it truly seek to obtain fine capacities? The system now pursued directly defeats that end; it has crated the most thorough mediocrities that any government hostile to superiority could desire. Does it wish to give a career to its choice minds? As a matter of fact, it affords them the meanest opportunities; there is not a man who has issued from the Ecoles who does not bitterly regret, when he gets to be fifty or sixty years of age, that he ever fell into the trap set for him by the promises of the State. Does it seek to obtain men of genius? What man of genius, what great talent have the schools produced since 1790? If it had not been for Napoleon would Cachin, the man of genius to whom France owes Cherbourg, have existed? Imperial despotism brought him forward; the constitutional regime would have smothered him. How many men from the Ecoles are to be found in the Academy of Sciences? Possibly two or three. The man of genius develops always outside of the technical schools. In the sciences which those schools teach genius obeys only its own laws; it will not develop except under conditions which man cannot control; neither the State nor the science of mankind, anthropology, understands them. Riquet, Perronet, Leonardo da Vinci, Cachin, Palladio, Brunelleschi, Michel-Angelo, Bramante, Vauban, Vicat, derive their genius from causes unobserved and preparatory, which we call chance,—the pet word of fools. Never, with or without schools, are mighty workmen such as these wanting to their epoch.

Now comes the question, Does the State gain through these institutions the better doing of its works of public utility, or the cheaper doing of them? As for that, I answer that private enterprises of a like kind get on very well without the help of our engineers; and next, the government works are the most extravagant in the world, and the additional cost of the vast administrative staff of the *Ponts et Chaussees* is immense. In all other countries, in Germany, England, Italy, where institutions like ours do not exist, works of this character are better done and far less costly than in France. Those three nations are remarkable for new and useful inventions in this line. I know it is the fashion to say, in speaking of our Ecoles, that all Europe envies them; but for the last fifteen years Europe, which closely observes us, has not established others like them. England, that clever calculator, has better schools among her working population, from which come practical men who show their genius the moment they rise from practice to theory. Stephenson and MacAdam did not come from schools like ours.

But what is the good of talking? When a few young and able engineers, full of ardor, solve, at the outset of their career, the problem of maintaining the roads of France, which need some hundred millions spent upon them every quarter of a century (and which are now in a pitiable state), they gain nothing by making known in reports and memoranda their intelligent knowledge; it is immediately engulfed in the archives of the general Direction,—that Parisian centre where everything enters and nothing issues; where old men are jealous of young ones, and all the posts of management are used to shelve old officers or men who have blundered.

This is why, with a body of scientific men spread all over the face of France and constituting a part of the administration,—a body which ought to enlighten every region on the subject of its resources,—this is why we are still discussing the practicability of railroads while other countries are making theirs. If ever France was to show the excellence of her institution of technical schools, it should have been in this magnificent phase of public works, which is destined to change the face of States and nations, to double human life, and modify the laws of space and time. Belgium, the United States of America, England, none of whom have an Ecole Polytechnique, will be honeycombed with railroads when French engineers are still surveying ours, and selfish interests, hidden behind all projects, are hindering their execution.

Thus I say that as for the State, it derives no benefit from its

technical schools; as for the individual pupil of those schools, his earnings are poor, his ambition crushed, and his life a cruel deception. Most assuredly the powers he has displayed between sixteen and twenty-six years of age would, if he had been cast upon his own resources, have brought him more fame and more wealth than the government in whom he trusted will ever give him. As a commercial man, a learned man, a military man, this choice intellect would have worked in a vast centre where his precious faculties and his ardent ambition would not be idiotically and prematurely repressed.

Where, then, is progress? Man and State are both kept backward by this system. Does not the experience of a whole generation demand a reform in the practical working of these institutions? The duty of culling from all France during each generation the choice minds destined to become the learned and the scientific of the nation is a sacred office, the priests of which, the arbiters of so many fates, should be trained by special study. Mathematical knowledge is perhaps less necessary to them than physiological knowledge. And do you not think that they need a little of that second-sight which is the witchcraft of great men? As it is, the examiners are former professors, honorable men grown old in harness, who limit their work to selecting the best themes. They are unable to do what is really demanded of them; and yet their functions are the noblest in the State and demand extraordinary men.

Do not think, dear sir and friend, that I blame only the Ecole itself; no, I blame the system by which it is recruited. This system is the *concours*, competition,—a modern invention, essentially bad; bad not only in science, but wherever it is employed, in arts, in all selections of men, of projects, of things. If it is a reproach to our great Ecoles that they have not produced men superior to other educational establishments, it is still more shameful that the *grand prix* of the Institute has not as yet furnished a single great painter, great musician, great architect, great sculptor; just as the suffrage for the last twenty years has not elected out of its tide of mediocrities a single great statesman. My observation makes me detect, as I think, an error which vitiates in France both education and politics. It is a cruel error, and it rests on the following principle, which organizers have misconceived:—

*Nothing, either in experience or in the nature of things, can give a certainty that the intellectual qualities of the adult youth will be those of the mature man.*

At this moment I am intimate with a number of distinguished men who concern themselves with all the moral maladies which are now afflicting France. They see, as I do, that our highest education is manufacturing temporary capacities,—temporary because they are without exercise and without future; that such education is without profit to the State because it is devoid of the vigor of belief and feeling. Our whole system of public education needs overhauling, and the work should be presided over by some man of great knowledge, powerful will, and gifted with that legislative genius which has never been met with among moderns, except perhaps in Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Possibly our superfluous numbers might be employed in giving elementary instruction so much needed by the people. The deplorable amount of crime and misdemeanors shows a social disease directly arising from the half-education given the masses, which tends to the destruction of social ties by making the people reflect just enough to desert the religious beliefs which are favorable to social order, and not enough to lift them to the theory of obedience and duty, which is the highest reach of the new transcendental philosophy. But as it is impossible to make a whole nation study Kant, therefore I say fixed beliefs and habits are safer for the masses than shallow studies and reasoning.

If I had my life to begin over again, perhaps I would enter a seminary and become a simple village priest, or the teacher of a country district. But I am too far advanced in my profession now to be a mere primary instructor; I can, if I leave my present post, act in a wider range than that of a school or a country parish. The Saint-Simonians, to whom I have been tempted to ally myself, want now to take a course in which I cannot follow them.

Nevertheless, in spite of their mistakes, they have touched on many of the sore spots which are the fruits of our present legislation, and which the State will only doctor by insufficient palliatives,—merely delaying in France the moral and political crisis that must come.

Adieu, dear Monsieur Grossetete; accept the assurance of my respectful attachment, which, notwithstanding all these observations, can only increase.

Gregoire Gerard.

According to his old habit as a banker, Grossetete had jotted down his reply on the back of the letter itself, heading it with the sacramental word, *Answered*.

It is useless, my dear Gerard, to discuss the observations made in your letter, because by a trick of chance (I use the term which is, as you say, the pet word of fools) I have a proposal to make to you which may result in withdrawing you from the situation you find so bad. Madame Graslin, the owner of the forests of Montegnac and of a barren plateau extending from the base of a chain of mountains on which are the forests, wishes to improve this vast domain, to clear her timber properly, and cultivate the stony plain.

To put this project into execution she needs a man of your scientific knowledge and ardor, and one who has also your disinterested devotion and your ideas of practical utility. It will be little money and much work! a great result from small means! a whole region to be changed fundamentally! barren places to be made to gush with plenty! Isn’t that precisely what you want,—you who are dreaming of constructing a poem? From the tone of sincerity which pervades your letter, I do not hesitate to bid you come and see me at Limoges. But, my good friend, don’t send in your resignation yet; get leave of absence only, and tell your administration that you are going to study questions connected with your profession outside of the government works. In this way, you will not lose your rights, and you will have time to judge for yourself whether the project conceived by the rector of Montegnac and approved by Madame Graslin is feasible.

I will explain to you by word of mouth the advantages you will find in case this great scheme can be carried out. Rely on the friendship of

Yours, etc, T. Grossetete.

Madame Graslin replied to Grossetete in few words: “Thank you, my friend; I shall expect your *protege*.” She showed the letter to the rector, saying,—

“One more wounded man for the hospital.”

The rector read the letter, reread it, made two or three turns on the terrace silently; then he gave it back to Madame Graslin, saying,—

“A fine soul, and a superior man. He says the schools invented by the genius of the Revolution manufacture incapacities. For my part, I say they manufacture unbelievers; for if Monsieur Gerard is not an atheist, he is a protestant.”

“We will ask him,” she said, struck by an answer.

# XVII. THE REVOLUTION OF JULY JUDGED AT MONTEGNAC

A fortnight later, in December, and in spite of the cold, Monsieur Grossetete came to the chateau de Montegnac, to “present his protege,” whom Veronique and Monsieur Bonnet were impatiently awaiting.

“I must love you very much, my dear child,” said the old man, taking Veronique’s two hands in his, and kissing them with that gallantry of old men which never displeases women, “yes, I must love you well, to come from Limoges in such weather. But I wanted to present to you myself the gift of Monsieur Gregoire Gerard here present. You’ll find him a man after your own heart, Monsieur Bonnet,” added the banker, bowing affectionately to the rector.

Gerard’s external appearance was not prepossessing. He was of middle height, stocky in shape, the neck sunk in the shoulders, as they say vulgarly; he had yellow hair, and the pink eyes of an albino, with lashes and eyebrows almost white. Though his skin, like that of all persons of that description, was amazingly white, marks of the small-box and other very visible scars had destroyed its original brilliancy. Study had probably injured his sight, for he wore glasses.

When he removed the great cloak of a gendarme in which he was wrapped, it was seen that his clothing did not improve his general appearance. The manner in which his garments were put on and buttoned, his untidy cravat, his rumpled shirt, were signs of the want of personal care with which men of science, all more or less absent-minded, are charged. As in the case of most thinkers, his countenance and his attitude, the development of his bust and the thinness of his legs, betrayed a sort of bodily debility produced by habits of meditation. Nevertheless, the ardor of his heart and the vigor of his mind, proofs of which were given in this letter, gleamed from his forehead, which was white as Carrara marble. Nature seemed to have reserved to herself that spot in order to place there visible signs of the grandeur, constancy, and goodness of the man. The nose, like that of most men of the true Gallic race, was flattened. His mouth, firm and straight, showed absolute discretion and the instinct of economy. But the whole mask, worn by study, looked prematurely old.

“We must begin by thanking you, monsieur,” said Madame Graslin, addressing the engineer, “for being willing to direct an enterprise in a part of the country which can offer you no other pleasure than the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing a real good.”

“Madame,” he replied, “Monsieur Grossetete has told me enough about your enterprise as we came along to make me already glad that I can in any way be useful to you; the prospect of living in close relations with you and Monsieur Bonnet seems to me charming. Unless I am dismissed from this region, I expect to end my days here.”

“We will try not to let you change your mind,” replied Madame Graslin, smiling.

“Here,” said Grossetete, addressing Veronique, whom he took aside, “are the papers which the *procureur-general* gave to me. He was quite surprised that you did not address

your inquiry about Catherine Curieux to him. All that you wished has been done immediately, with the utmost promptitude and devotion. Three months hence Catherine Curieux will be sent to you."

"Where is she?" asked Veronique.

"She is now in the hospital Saint-Louis," replied the old man; "they are awaiting her recovery before sending her from Paris."

"Ah! is the poor girl ill?"

"You will find all necessary information in these papers," said Grossetete, giving Veronique a packet.

Madame Graslin returned to her guests to conduct them into the magnificent dining-room on the ground-floor. She sat at table, but did not herself take part in the dinner; since her arrival at Montegnac she had made it a rule to take her meals alone, and Aline, who knew the reason of this withdrawal, faithfully kept the secret of it till her mistress was in danger of death.

The mayor, the *juge de paix*, and the doctor of Montegnac had been invited.

The doctor, a young man twenty-seven years of age, named Roubaud, was extremely desirous of knowing a woman so celebrated in Limoges. The rector was all the more pleased to present him at the chateau because he wanted to gather a little society around Veronique to distract her mind and give it food. Roubaud was one of those thoroughly well-trained young physicians whom the Ecole de Medecine in Paris sends forth to the profession. He would undoubtedly have shone on the vast stage of the capital; but frightened by the clash of ambitions in Paris, and knowing himself more capable than pushing, more learned than intriguing, his gentle disposition led him to choose the narrow career of the provinces, where he hoped to be sooner appreciated than in Paris.

At Limoges, Roubaud came in contact with the settled practice of the regular physicians and the habits of the people; he therefore let himself be persuaded by Monsieur Bonnet, who, judging by the gentle and winning expression of his face, thought him well-suited to co-operate in his own work at Montegnac. Roubaud was small and fair; his general appearance was rather insipid, but his gray eyes betrayed the depths of the physiologist and the patient tenacity of a studious man. There was no physician in Montegnac except an old army-surgeon, more devoted to his cellar than to his patients, and too old to continue with any vigor the hard life of a country doctor. At the present time he was dying.

Roubaud had been in Montegnac about eighteen months, and was much liked there. But this young pupil of Desplein and the successors of Cabanis did not believe in Catholicism. He lived in a state of profound indifference as to religion, and did not desire to come out of it. The rector was in despair. Not that Roubaud did any wrong; he never spoke against religion, and his duties were excuse enough for his absence from church; besides, he was incapable of trying to undermine the faith of others, and indeed behaved outwardly as the best of Catholics; he simply prohibited himself from thinking of a problem which he considered above the range of human thought. When the rector heard him say that pantheism had been the religion of all great minds he set him down as inclining to the doctrine of Pythagoras on reincarnation.

Roubaud, who saw Madame Graslin for the first time, experienced a violent sensation when he met her. Science revealed to him in her expression, her attitude, in the ravages of her face, untold sufferings both moral and physical, a nature of almost superhuman force, great faculties which would support her under the most conflicting trials; he detected all, —even the darkest corners of that nature so carefully hidden. He felt that some evil, some malady, was devouring the heart of that fine creature; for just as the color of a fruit shows the presence of a worm within it, so certain tints in the human face enable physicians to detect a poisoning thought.

From this moment Monsieur Roubaud attached himself so deeply to Madame Graslin that he became afraid of loving her beyond the permitted line of simple friendship. The brow, the bearing, above all, the glance of Veronique's eye had a sort of eloquence that men invariably understand; it said as plainly that she was dead to love as other women say the contrary by a reversal of the same eloquence. The doctor suddenly vowed to her, in his heart, a chivalrous worship.

He exchanged a rapid glance with the rector, who thought to himself, "Here's the thunderbolt which will convert my poor unbeliever; Madame Graslin will have more eloquence than I."

The mayor, an old countryman, amazed at the luxury of this dining-room and surprised to find himself dining with one of the richest men in the department, had put on his best clothes, which rather hampered him, and this increased his mental awkwardness. Moreover, Madame Graslin in her mourning garments seemed to him very imposing; he was therefore mute. After living all his life as a farmer at Saint-Leonard, he had bought the only habitable house in Montegnac and cultivated with his own hands the land belonging to it. Though he knew how to read and write, he would have been incapable of fulfilling his functions were it not for the help of his clerk and the *juge de paix*, who prepared his work for him. He was very anxious to have a notary established in Montegnac, in order that he might shift the burden of his responsibility on to that officer's shoulders. But the poverty of the village and its outlying districts made such a functionary almost useless, and the inhabitants had recourse when necessary to the notaries of the chief town of the arrondissement.

The *juge de paix*, named Clousier, was formerly a lawyer in Limoges, where cases had deserted him because he insisted on putting into practice that fine axiom that the lawyer is the best judge of the client and the case. In 1809 he obtained his present post, the meagre salary of which just enabled him to live. He had now reached a stage of honorable but absolute poverty. After a residence of twenty-one years in this poor village the worthy man, thoroughly countrified, looked, top-coat and all, exactly like the farmers about him.

Under this coarse exterior Clousier hid a clear-sighted mind, given to lofty meditation on public policy, though he himself had fallen into a state of complete indifference, derived from his intimate knowledge of men and their interests. This man, who baffled for a long time the rector's perspicacity and who might in a higher sphere have proved another l'Hopital, incapable of intrigue like all really profound persons, was by this time living in the contemplative state of an ancient hermit. Independent through privation, no personal consideration acted on his mind; he knew the laws and judged impartially. His life, reduced to the merest necessaries, was pure and regular. The peasants loved Monsieur

Clousier and respected him for the disinterested fatherly care with which he settled their differences and gave them advice in their daily affairs. The “goodman Clousier” as all Montegnac called him, had a nephew with him as clerk, an intelligent young man, who afterwards contributed much to the prosperity of the district.

Old Clousier’s personal appearance was remarkable for a broad, high forehead and two bushes of white hair which stood out from his head on either side of it. His highly colored complexion and well-developed corpulence might have made persons think, in spite of his actual sobriety, that he cultivated Bacchus as well as Troplong and Toullier. His half-extinct voice was the sign of an oppressive asthma. Perhaps the dry air of Montegnac had contributed to fix him there. He lived in a house arranged for him by a well-to-do cobbler to whom it belonged. Clousier had already seen Veronique at church, and he had formed his opinion of her without communicating it to any one, not even to Monsieur Bonnet, with whom he was beginning to be intimate. For the first time in his life the *juge de paix* was to be thrown in with persons able to appreciate him.

When the company were seated round a table handsomely appointed (for Veronique had sent all her household belongings from Limoges to Montegnac) the six guests felt a momentary embarrassment. The doctor, the mayor and the *juge de paix* knew nothing of Grossetete and Gerard. But during the first course, old Grossetete’s hearty good-humor broke the ice of a first meeting. In addition to this, Madame Graslin’s cordiality led on Gerard, and encouraged Roubaud. Under her touch these souls full of fine qualities recognized their relation, and felt they had entered a sympathetic circle. So, by the time the dessert appeared on the table, when the glass and china with gilded edges sparkled, and the choicer wines were served by Aline and Champion and Grossetete’s valet, the conversation became sufficiently confidential to allow these four choice minds, thus meeting by chance, to express their real thoughts on matters of importance, such as men like to discuss when they can do so and be sure of the discretion of their companions.

“Your furlough came just in time to let you witness the revolution of July,” said Grossetete to Gerard, with an air as if he asked an opinion of him.

“Yes,” replied the engineer. “I was in Paris during the three famous days. I saw all; and I came to sad conclusions.”

“What were they?” said the rector, eagerly.

“There is no longer any patriotism except under dirty shirts,” replied Gerard. “In that lies the ruin of France! July was the voluntary defeat of all superiorities,—name, fortune, talent. The ardent, devoted masses carried the day against the rich and the intelligent, to whom ardor and devotion are repugnant.”

“To judge by what has happened during the past year,” said Monsieur Clousier, “this change of government is simply a premium given to an evil that is sapping us,—individualism. Fifteen years hence all questions of a generous nature will be met by, *What is that to me?*—the great cry of Freedom of Will descending from the religious heights where Luther, Calvin, Zwinglius, and Knox introduced it, into even political economy. *Every one for himself*; *every man his own master*,—those two terrible axioms form, with the *What is that to me?* a trinity of wisdom to the burgher and the small land-owner. This egotism results from the vices of our present civil legislation (too hastily made), to which

the revolution of July has just given a terrible confirmation."

The *juge de paix* fell back into his usual silence after thus expressing himself; but the topics he suggested must have occupied the minds of those present. Emboldened by Clousier's words, and moved by the look which Gerard exchanged with Grossetete, Monsieur Bonnet ventured to go further.

"The good King Charles X.," he said, "has just failed in the most far-sighted and salutary enterprise a monarch ever planned for the welfare of the people confided to him; and the Church ought to feel proud of the part she took in his councils. But the upper classes deserted him in heart and mind, just as they had already deserted him on the great question of the law of primogeniture,—the lasting honor of the only bold statesman the Restoration has produced, namely, the Comte de Peyronnet. To reconstitute the nation through the family; to take from the press its venomous action and confine it to its real usefulness; to recall the elective Chamber to its true functions; and to restore to religion its power over the people,—such were the four cardinal points of the internal policy of the house of Bourbon. Well, twenty years from now all France will have recognized the necessity of that grand and sound policy. Charles X. was in greater peril in the situation he chose to leave than in that in which his paternal power has been defeated. The future of our noble country—where all things will henceforth be brought periodically into question, where our rulers will discuss incessantly instead of acting, where the press, become a sovereign power, will be the instrument of base ambitions—this future will only prove the wisdom of the king who has just carried away with him the true principles of government; and history will bear in mind the courage with which he resisted his best friends after having probed the wound and seen the necessity of curative measures, which were not sustained by those for whose sake he put himself into the breach."

"Ah! monsieur," cried Gerard, "you are frank; you go straight to your thought without disguise, and I won't contradict you. Napoleon in his Russian campaign was forty years in advance of the spirit of his age; he was never understood. The Russia and England of 1830 explains the campaign of 1812. Charles X. has been misunderstood in the same way. It is quite possible that in twenty-five years from now his ordinances may become the laws of the land."

"France, too eloquent not to gabble, too full of vanity to bow down before real talent, is, in spite of the sublime good sense of its language and the mass of its people, the very last nation in which two deliberative chambers should have been attempted," said the *juge de paix*. "Or, at any rate, the weaknesses of our national character should have been guarded against by the admirable restrictions which Napoleon's experience laid upon them. Our present system may succeed in a country whose action is circumscribed by the nature of its soil, like England; but the law of primogeniture applied to the transmission of land is absolutely necessary; when that law is suppressed the system of legislative representation becomes absurd. England owes her existence to the quasi-feudal law which entails landed property and family mansions on the eldest son. Russia is based on the feudal right of autocracy. Consequently those two nations are to-day on the high-road of startling progress. Austria could only resist our invasions and renew the way against Napoleon by virtue of that law of primogeniture which preserves in the family the active forces of a nation, and supplies the great productions necessary to the State. The house of Bourbon,

feeling that it was slipping to the third rank in Europe, by reason of liberalism, wanted to regain its rightful place and there maintain itself, and the nation has thrown it over at the very time it was about to save the nation. I am sure I don’t know how low down the present system will drop us.”

“If we have a war, France will be without horses, as Napoleon was in 1813, when, being reduced to those of France only, he could not profit by his two victories of Lutzen and Botzen, and so was crushed at Leipzig,” cried Grossetete. “If peace continues, the evil will only increase. Twenty-five years from now the race of cattle and horses will have diminished in France by one half.”

“Monsieur Grossetete is right,” remarked Gerard. “So that the work you are undertaking here, madame,” he added, addressing Veronique, “is really a service done to the country.”

“Yes,” said the *juge de paix*, “because Madame has but one son, and the inheritance will not be divided up; but how long will that condition last? For a certain length of time the magnificent culture which you are about to introduce will, let us hope, belong to only one proprietor, who will continue to breed horned beasts and horses; but sooner or later the day must come when these forests and fields will be divided up and sold in small parcels. Divided and redivided, the six thousand acres of that plain will have a thousand or twelve hundred owners, and thenceforth—no more horses and cattle!”

“Oh! as for those days”—began the mayor.

“There! don’t you hear the *What is that to me?* Monsieur Clousier talked of?” cried Monsieur Grossetete. “Taken in the act! But, monsieur,” resumed the banker, gravely addressing the dumfounded mayor, “those days have really come. In a radius of thirty miles round Paris the land is so divided up into small holdings that milch cows are no longer seen. The Commune of Argenteuil contains thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-five parcels of land, many of which do not return a farthing of revenue. If it were not for the rich refuse of Paris, which produces a fodder of strong quality, I don’t know how dairymen would get along. As it is, this over-stimulating food and confinement in close stables produce inflammatory diseases, of which the cows often die. They use cows in the neighborhood of Paris as they do horses in the street. Crops more profitable than hay—vegetables, fruit, apple orchards, vineyards—are taking the place of meadow-lands. In a few years we shall see milk sent to Paris by the mail-coaches as they now send fish. What is going on around Paris is also going on round all the large cities of France; the land will thus be used up before many years are gone. Chaptel states that in 1800 there were barely two million acres of vineyard in France; a careful estimate would give ten million to-day. Divided *ad infinitum* by our present system of inheritance, Normandy will lose half her production of horses and cattle; but she will have a monopoly of milk in Paris, for her climate, happily, forbids grape culture. We shall soon see a curious phenomenon in the progressive rise in the cost of meat. In twenty years from now, in 1850, Paris, which paid seven to eleven sous for a pound of beef in 1814, will be paying twenty—unless there comes a man of genius who can carry out the plan of Charles X.”

“You have laid your finger on the mortal wound of France,” said the *juge de paix*. “The root of our evils lies in the section relating to inheritance in the Civil Code, in which the equal division of property among heirs is ordained. That’s the pestle that pounds territory

into crumbs, individualizes fortunes, and takes from them their needful stability; decomposing ever and never recomposing,—a state of things which must end in the ruin of France. The French Revolution emitted a destructive virus to which the July days have given fresh activity. This vitiating element is the accession of the peasantry to the ownership of land. In the section ‘On Inheritance’ is the principle of the evil, the peasant is the means through which it works. No sooner does that class get a parcel of land into its maw than it begins to subdivide it, till there are scarcely three furrows left in each lot. And even then the peasant does not stop! He divides the three furrows across their length, as Monsieur Grossetete has just shown us at Argenteuil. The unreasonable price which the peasant attaches to the smallest scrap of his land makes it impossible to repurchase and restore a fine estate. Monsieur,” he went on, indicating Grossetete, “has just mentioned the diminution in the raising of horses and cattle; well, the Code has much to do with that. The peasant-proprietor owns cows; he looks to them for his means of living; he sells the calves, he sells his butter; he never dreams of raising cattle, still less of raising horses; but as he cannot raise enough fodder to support his cows through a dry season, he sends them to market when he can feed them no longer. If by some fatal chance the hay were to fail for two years running, you would see a startling change the third year in the price of beef, but especially in that of veal.”

“That may put a stop to ‘patriotic banquets,’” said the doctor, laughing.

“Oh!” exclaimed Madame Graslin, looking at Roubaud, “can’t politics get on without the wit of journalism, even here?”

“In this lamentable business, the bourgeoisie plays the same *role* as the pioneers of America,” continued Clousier. “It buys up great estates, which the peasantry could not otherwise acquire. It cuts them up and then sells, either at auction or in small lots at private sale, to the peasants. Everything is judged by figures in these days, and I know none more eloquent than these. France has ninety-nine million acres, which, subtracting highways, roads, dunes, canals, and barren, uncultivated regions deserted by capital, may be reduced to eighty millions. Now out of eighty millions of acres to thirty-two millions of inhabitants we find one hundred and twenty-five millions of small lots registered on the tax-list (I don’t give fractions). Thus, you will observe, we have gone to the utmost limit of agrarian law, and yet we have not seen the last of poverty or dissatisfaction. Those who divide territory into fragments and lessen production have, of course, plenty of organs to cry out that true social justice consists in giving every man a life interest, and no more, in a parcel of land; perpetual ownership, they say, is robbery. The Saint-Simonians are already proclaiming that doctrine.”

“The magistrate has spoken,” said Grossetete, “and here’s what the banker adds to those bold considerations. The fact that the peasantry and the lesser bourgeoisie can now acquire land does France an injury which the government seems not even to suspect. We may estimate the number of peasant families, omitting paupers, at three millions. These families subsist on wages. Wages are paid in money, and not in kind—”

“Yes, that’s another blunder of our laws!” cried Clousier, interrupting the banker. “The right to pay in kind might have been granted in 1790; now, if we attempted to carry such a law, we should risk a revolution.”

“Therefore, as I was about to say, the proletary draws to himself the money of the country,” resumed Grossetete. “Now the peasant has no other passion, desire, or will, than to die a land-owner. This desire, as Monsieur Clousier has well shown, was born of the Revolution, and is the direct result of the sale of the National domain. A man must be ignorant indeed of what is going on all over France in the country regions if he is not aware that these three million families are yearly hoarding at least fifty francs, thus subtracting a hundred and fifty millions from current use. The science of political economy has made it an axiom that a five-franc piece, passing through a hundred hands in one day, is equivalent to five hundred francs. Now, it is perfectly plain to all of us who live in the country and observe the state of affairs, that every peasant has his eye on the land he covets; he is watching and waiting for it, and he never invests his savings elsewhere; he buries them. In seven years the savings thus rendered inert and unproductive amount to eleven hundred million francs. But since the lesser bourgeoisie bury as much more, with the same purpose, France loses every seven years the interest of at least two thousand millions,—that is to say, about one hundred millions; a loss which in forty-two years amounts to six hundred million francs. But she not only loses six hundred millions, she fails to create with that money manufacturing or agricultural products, which represent a loss of twelve hundred millions; for, if the manufactured product were not double in value to its cost price, commerce could not exist. The proletariat actually deprives itself of six hundred millions in wages. These six hundred millions of dead loss (representing to a stern economist a loss of twelve hundred millions, through lack of the benefits of circulation) explain the condition of inferiority in which our commerce, our merchant service, and our agriculture stand, as compared with England. In spite of the difference of the two territories, which is more than two thirds in our favor, England could remount the cavalry of two French armies, and she has meat for every man. But there, as the system of landed property makes it almost impossible for the lower classes to obtain it, money is not hoarded; it becomes commercial, and is turned over. Thus, besides the evil of parcelling the land, involving that of the diminution of horses, cattle, and sheep, the section of the Code on inheritance costs us six hundred millions of interest, lost by the hoarding of the money of the peasantry and bourgeoisie, and twelve hundred millions, at least, of products; or, including the loss from non-circulation, three thousand millions in half a century!”

“The moral effect is worse than the material effect,” cried the rector. “We are making beggar-proprietors among the people and half-taught communities of the lesser bourgeoisie; and the fatal maxim ‘Each for himself,’ which had its effect upon the upper classes in July of this year, will soon have gangrened the middle classes. A proletariat devoid of sentiment, with no other god than envy, no other fanaticism than the despair of hunger, without faith, without belief, will come forward before long and put its foot on the heart of the nation. Foreigners, who have thriven under monarchical rule, will find that, having royalty, we have no king; having legality, we have no laws; having property, no owners; no government with our elections, no force with freedom, no happiness with equality. Let us hope that before that day comes God may raise up in France a providential man, one of those Elect who give a new mind to nations, and like Sylla or like Marius, whether he comes from above or rises from below, remakes society.”

“He would be sent to the assizes,” said Gerard. “The sentence pronounced against

Socrates and Jesus Christ would be rendered against them in 1831. In these days as in the old days, envious mediocrity lets thinkers die of poverty, and so gets rid of the great political physicians who have studied the wounds of France, and who oppose the tendencies of their epoch. If they bear up under poverty, common minds ridicule them or call them dreamers. In France, men revolt in the moral world against the great man of the future, just as they revolt in the political world against a sovereign."

"In the olden time sophists talked to a limited number of men; to-day the periodical press enables them to lead astray a nation," cried the *juge de paix*; "and that portion of the press which pleads for right ideas finds no echo."

The mayor looked at Monsieur Clousier in amazement. Madame Graslin, glad to find in a simple *juge de paix* a man whose mind was occupied with serious questions, said to Monsieur Roubaud, her neighbor, "Do you know Monsieur Clousier?"

"Not rightly until to-day, madame. You are doing miracles," he answered in a whisper. "And yet, look at his brow, how noble in shape! Isn't it like the classic or traditional brow given by sculptors to Lycurgus and the Greek sages? The revolution of July has an evidently retrograde tendency," said the doctor (who might in his student days have made a barricade himself), after carefully considering Grossetete's calculation.

"These ideas are threefold," continued Clousier. "You have talked of law and finance, but how is it with the government itself? The royal power, weakened by the doctrine of national sovereignty, in virtue of which the election of August 9, 1830, has just been made, will endeavor to counteract that rival principle which gives to the people the right to saddle the nation with a new dynasty every time it does not fully comprehend the ideas of its king. You will see that we shall then have internal struggles which will arrest for long periods together the progress of France."

"All these reefs have been wisely evaded by England," remarked Gerard. "I have been there; I admire that beehive, which sends its swarms over the universe and civilizes mankind,—a people among whom discussion is a political comedy, which satisfies the masses and hides the action of power, which then works freely in its upper sphere; a country where elections are not in the hands of a stupid bourgeoisie, as they are in France. If England were parcelled out into small holdings the nation would no longer exist. The land-owning class, the lords, guide the social mechanism. Their merchant-service, under the nose of Europe, takes possession of whole regions of the globe to meet the needs of their commerce and to get rid of their paupers and malcontents. Instead of fighting capacities, as we do, thwarting them, nullifying them, the English aristocratic class seeks out young talent, rewards it, and is constantly assimilating it. Everything which concerns the action of the government, in the choice of men and things, is prompt in England, whereas with us all is slow; and yet the English are slow by nature, while we are impatient. With them money is bold and actively employed; with us it is timid and suspicious. What Monsieur Grossetete has said of the industrial losses which the hoarding peasantry inflict on France has its proof in a fact I will show to you in two words: English capital, by its perpetual turning over, has created ten thousand millions of manufacturing and interest-bearing property; whereas French capital, which is far more abundant, has not created one tenth of that amount."

“And that is all the more extraordinary,” said Roubaud, “because they are lymphatic, and we, as a general thing, are sanguine and energetic.”

“Ah! monsieur,” said Clousier, “there you touch a great question, which ought to be studied: How to find institutions properly adapted to repress the temperament of a people! Assuredly Cromwell was a great legislator. He alone made the England of to-day, by inventing the ‘Navigation Act,’ which has made the English enemies of all the world, and infused into them a ferocious pride and self-conceit, which is their mainstay. But, in spite of their Malta citadel, if France and Russia will only comprehend the part the Mediterranean and the Black Sea ought to be made to play in the future, the road to Asia through Egypt or by the Euphrates, made feasible by recent discoveries, will kill England, as in former times the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope killed Venice.”

“Not one word of God’s providence in all this!” cried the rector. “Monsieur Clousier and Monsieur Roubaud are oblivious of religion. How is it with you, monsieur?” he added, turning to Gerard.

“Protestant,” put in Grossetete.

“You guessed it,” cried Veronique, looking at the rector as she took Clousier’s arm to return to the salon.

The prejudice Gerard’s appearance excited against him had been quickly dispelled, and the three notables congratulated themselves on so good an acquisition.

“Unfortunately,” said Monsieur Bonnet, “there is a cause of antagonism between Russia and the Catholic countries which border the Mediterranean, in the very unimportant schism which separates the Greek religion from the Latin religion; and it is a great misfortune for humanity.”

“We all preach our own saint,” said Madame Graslin. “Monsieur Grossetete thinks of the lost millions; Monsieur Clousier, of the overthrow of rights; the doctor here regards legislation as a question of temperaments; and the rector sees an obstacle to the good understanding of France and Russia in religion.”

“Add to that, madame,” said Gerard, “that I see, in the hoarding of capital by the peasant and the small burgher, the postponement of the building of railroads in France.”

“Then what is it you all want?” she asked.

“We want the wise State councillors who, under the Emperor, reflected on the laws, and a legislative body elected by the intelligence of the country as well as by the land-owners, whose only function would be to oppose bad legislation and capricious wars. The Chamber, as constituted to-day, will proceed, as you will soon see, to govern, and that is the first step to legal anarchy.”

“Good God!” cried the rector, in a flush of sacred patriotism, “how can such enlightened minds as these,” and he motioned to Clousier, Roubaud, and Gerard, “how can they see evil so clearly and suggest remedies without first looking within and applying a remedy to themselves? All of you, who represent the attacked classes, recognize the necessity of the passive obedience of the masses of the State, like that of soldiers during a war; you want the unity of power, and you desire that it shall never be brought into

question. What England has obtained by the development of her pride and self-interest (a part of her creed) cannot be obtained in France but through sentiments due to Catholicism, and none of you are Catholics! Here am I, a priest, obliged to leave my own ground and argue with arguers. How can you expect the masses to become religious and obedient when they see irreligion and want of discipline above them? All peoples united by any faith whatever will inevitably get the better of peoples without any faith at all. The law of public interest, which gives birth to patriotism, is destroyed by the law of private interest, which it sanctions, but which gives birth to selfishness. There is nothing solid and durable but that which is natural; and the natural thing in human policy is the Family. The family must be the point of departure for all institutions. A universal effect proves a universal cause; and what you have just been setting forth as evident on all sides comes from the social principle itself; which is now without force because it has taken for its basis independence of thought and will, and such freedom is the parent of individualism. To make happiness depend on the stability, intelligence, and capacity of all is not as wise as to make happiness depend on the stability and intelligence of institutions and the capacity of a single head. It is easier to find wisdom in one man than in a whole nation. Peoples have heart and no eyes; they feel, and see not. Governments ought to see, and not determine anything through sentiment. There is, therefore, an evident contradiction between the impulses of the multitude and the action of power whose function it is to direct and unify those impulses. To meet with a great prince is certainly a rare chance (to use your term), but to trust to a whole assembly, even though it is composed of honest men only, is folly. France is committing that folly at this moment. Alas! you are just as much convinced of that as I am. If all right-minded men, like yourselves, would only set an example around them, if all intelligent hands would raise, in the great republic of souls, the altars of the one Church which has set the interests of humanity before her, we might again behold in France the miracles our fathers did here.”

“But the difficulty is, monsieur,” said Gerard,—“if I may speak to you with the freedom of the confessional,—I look upon faith as a lie we tell to ourselves, on hope as a lie we tell about the future, and on charity as a trick for children to keep them good by the promise of sugar-plums.”

“Still, we sleep better for being rocked by hope, monsieur,” said Madame Graslin.

This speech stopped Roubaud, who was about to reply; its effect was strengthened by a look from Grossetete and the rector.

“Is it our fault,” said Clousier, “that Jesus Christ had not the time to formulate a government in accordance with his moral teaching, as did Moses and Confucius, the two greatest human law-givers?—witness the existence, as a nation, of the Jews and Chinese, the former in spite of their dispersion over the whole earth, and the latter in spite of their isolation.”

“Ah! dear me! what work you are cutting out for me!” cried the rector naively. “But I shall triumph, I shall convert you all! You are much nearer to the true faith than you think you are. Truth always lurks behind falsehood; go on a step, turn round, and then you’ll see it.”

This little outburst of the good rector had the effect of changing the conversation.

# XVIII. CATHERINE CURIEUX

Before taking his departure the next day, Monsieur Grossetete promised Veronique to associate himself in all her plans, as soon as the realization of them was a practicable thing. Madame Graslin and Gerard accompanied his carriage on horseback, and did not leave him till they reached the junction of the high-road of Montegnac with that from Bordeaux to Lyon. The engineer was so impatient to see the land he was to reclaim, and Veronique was so impatient to show it to him, that they had planned this expedition the evening before.

After bidding adieu to the kind old man, they turned off the road across the vast plain, and skirted the mountain chain from the foot of the rise which led to the chateau to the steep face of the Roche-Vive. The engineer then saw plainly the shelf or barricade of rock mentioned by Farrabesche; which forms, as it were, the lowest foundation of the hills. By so directing the water that it should not overflow the indestructible canal which Nature had built, and by clearing out the accumulation of earth which choked it up, irrigation would be helped rather than hindered by this natural sluice-way, which was raised, on an average, ten feet above the plain. The first important point was to estimate the amount of water flowing through the Gabou, and to make sure whether or not the slopes of the valley allowed any to escape in other directions.

Veronique gave Farrabesche a horse, and directed him to accompany the engineer and to explain to him everything he had himself noticed. After several days' careful exploration, Gerard found that the base of the two parallel slopes was sufficiently solid, though different in composition, to hold the water, allowing none to escape. During the month of January, which was rainy, he estimated the quantity of water flowing through the Gabou. This quantity, added to that of three streams which could easily be led into it, would supply water enough to irrigate a tract of land three times as extensive as the plain of Montegnac. The damming of the Gabou and the works necessary to direct the water of the three valleys to the plain, ought not to cost more than sixty thousand francs; for the engineer discovered on the commons a quantity of calcareous soil which would furnish the lime cheaply, the forest was close at hand, the wood and stone cost nothing, and the transportation was trifling. While awaiting the season when the Gabou would be dry (the only time suitable for the work) all the necessary preparations could be made so as to push the enterprise through rapidly when it was once begun.

But the preparation of the plain was another thing; that according to Gerard, would cost not less than two hundred thousand francs, without including the sowing and planting. The plain was to be divided into square compartments of two hundred and fifty acres each, where the ground had to be cleared, not only of its stunted growths, but of rocks. Laborers would have to dig innumerable trenches, and stone them up so as to let no water run to waste, also to direct its flow at will. This part of the enterprise needed the active and faithful arms of conscientious workers. Chance provided them with a tract of land without natural obstacles, a long even stretch of plain, where the waters, having a fall of ten feet, could be distributed at will. Nothing hindered the finest agricultural results, while at the same time, the eye would be gratified by one of those magnificent sheets of verdure which

are the pride and the wealth of Lombardy. Gerard sent for an old and experienced foreman, who had already been employed by him elsewhere in this capacity, named Fresquin.

Madame Graslin wrote to Grossetete, requesting him to negotiate for her a loan of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, secured on her income from the Funds, which, if relinquished for six years, would be enough to pay both capital and interest. This loan was obtained in March. By this time the preliminary preparations carried on by Gerard and his foreman, Fresquin, were fully completed; also, the surveying, estimating, levelling, and sounding. The news of this great enterprise spreading about the country, stimulated the laboring population. The indefatigable Farrabesche, Colorat, Clousier, the mayor of Montegnac, Roubaud, and others, interested either in the welfare of the neighborhood or in Madame Graslin, selected such of these laborers as seemed the poorest, or were most deserving of employment. Gerard bought for himself and for Monsieur Grossetete a thousand acres on the other side of the high-road to Montegnac. Fresquin, the foreman, bought five hundred, and sent for his wife and children.

Early in April, 1832, Monsieur Grossetete came to see the land bought for him by Gerard, though his journey was chiefly occasioned by the advent of Catherine Curieux, who had come from Paris to Limoges by the diligence. Grossetete now brought her with him to Montegnac. He found Madame Graslin just starting for church. Monsieur Bonnet was to say a mass to implore the blessing of heaven on the works that were then beginning. All the laborers with their wives and children were present.

“Here is your protegee,” said the old gentleman, presenting to Veronique a feeble, suffering woman, apparently about thirty years of age.

“Are you Catherine Curieux?” asked Madame Graslin.

“Yes, madame.”

Veronique looked at Catherine for a moment. She was rather tall, well-made, and fair; her features wore an expression of extreme gentleness which the beautiful gray tones of the eyes did not contradict. The outline of the face, the shape of the brow had a nobility both simple and august, such as we sometimes meet with in country regions among very young girls,—a sort of flower of beauty, which field labors, the constant cares of the household, the burning of the sun, and want of personal care, remove with terrible rapidity. Her movements had that ease of motion characteristic of country girls, to which certain habits unconsciously contracted in Paris gave additional grace. If Catherine had remained in the Correze she would by this time have looked like an old woman, wrinkled and withered; her complexion, once rosy, would have coarsened; but Paris, though it paled her, had preserved her beauty. Illness, toil, and grief had endowed her with the mysterious gifts of melancholy, the inward vitalizing thought, which is lacking to poor country-folk whose lives are almost animal. Her dress, full of that Parisian taste which all women, even the least coquettish, contract so readily, distinguished her still further from an ordinary peasant-woman. In her ignorance as to what was before her, and having no means of judging Madame Graslin, she appeared very shy and shame-faced.

“Do you still love Farrabesche?” asked Veronique, when Grossetete left them for a moment.

“Yes, madame,” she replied coloring.

“Why, then, having sent him a thousand francs during his imprisonment, did you not join him after his release? Have you any repugnance to him? Speak to me as though I were your mother. Are you afraid he has become altogether corrupt; or did you fear he no longer wanted you?”

“Neither, madame; but I do not know how to read or write, and I was serving a very exacting old lady; she fell ill and I had to nurse her. Though I knew the time when Jacques would be released, I could not get away from Paris until after the lady’s death. She did not leave me anything, notwithstanding my devotion to her interests and to her personally. After that I wanted to be cured of an ailment caused by night-watching and hard work, and as I had used up my savings, I resolved to go to the hospital of Saint-Louis, which I have just left, cured.”

“Very good, my child,” said Madame Graslin, touched by this simple explanation. “But tell me now why you abandoned your parents so abruptly, why you left your child behind you, and why you did not send any news of yourself, or get some one to write for you.”

For all answer Catherine wept.

“Madame,” she said at last, reassured by the pressure of Madame Graslin’s hand, “I may have done wrong, but I hadn’t the strength to stay here. I did not fear myself, but others; I feared gossip, scandal. So long as Jacques was in danger, I was necessary to him and I stayed; but after he had gone I had no strength left,—a girl with a child and no husband! The worst of creatures was better than I. I don’t know what would have become of me had I stayed to hear a word against my boy or his father; I should have gone mad; I might have killed myself. My father or my mother in a moment of anger might have reproached me. I am too sensitive to bear a quarrel or an insult, gentle as I am. I have had my punishment in not seeing my child, I who have never passed a day without thinking of him in all these years! I wished to be forgotten, and I have been. No one thought of me,—they believed me dead; and yet, many a time, I thought of leaving all just to come here for a day and see my child.”

“Your child—see, here he is.”

Catherine then saw Benjamin, and began to tremble violently.

“Benjamin,” said Madame Graslin, “come and kiss your mother.”

“My mother!” cried Benjamin, surprised. He jumped into Catherine’s arms and she pressed him to her breast with almost savage force. But the boy escaped her and ran off crying out: “I’ll go and fetch *him*.”

Madame Graslin made Catherine, who was almost fainting, sit down. At this moment she saw Monsieur Bonnet and could not help blushing as she met a piercing look from her confessor, which read her heart.

“I hope,” she said, trembling, “that you will consent to marry Farrabesche and Catherine at once. Don’t you recognize Monsieur Bonnet, my dear? He will tell you that Farrabesche, since his liberation has behaved as an honest man; the whole neighborhood thinks well of him, and if there is a place in the world where you may live happy and

respected it is at Montegnac. You can make, by God's help, a good living as my farmers; for Farrabesche has recovered citizenship."

"That is all true, my dear child," said the rector.

Just then Farrabesche appeared, pulled along by his son. He was pale and speechless in presence of Catherine and Madame Graslin. His heart told him actively benevolent the one had been, and how deeply the other had suffered in his absence. Veronique led away the rector, who, on his side, was anxious to talk with her alone.

As soon as they were far enough away not to be overheard, Monsieur Bonnet looked fixedly at Veronique; she colored and dropped her eyes like a guilty person.

"You degrade well-doing," he said, sternly.

"How?" she asked, raising her head.

"Well-doing," he replied, "is a passion as superior to that of love as humanity is superior to the individual creature. Now, you have not done this thing from the sole impulse and simplicity of virtue. You have fallen from the heights of humanity to the indulgence of the individual creature. Your benevolence to Farrabesche and Catherine carries with it so many memories and forbidden thoughts that it has lost all merit in the eyes of God. Tear from your heart the remains of the javelin evil planted there. Do not take from your actions their true value. Come at last to that saintly ignorance of the good you do which is the grace supreme of human actions."

Madame Graslin had turned away to wipe the tears that told the rector his words had touched the bleeding wound that was still unhealed in her heart.

Farrabesche, Catherine, and Benjamin now came up to thank their benefactress, but she made them a sign to go away and leave her alone with the rector.

"See how that grieves them," she said to him as they sadly walked away. The rector, whose heart was tender, recalled them by a sign.

"You shall be completely happy," she then said, giving to Farrabesche a paper which she was holding in her hand. "Here is the ordinance which gives you back your rights of citizenship and exempts you from humiliating inspection."

Farrabesche respectfully kissed the hand held toward him and looked at Veronique with an eye both tender and submissive, calm and devoted, the expression of a devotion which nothing could ever change, the look of a dog to his master.

"If Jacques has suffered, madame," said Catherine, her fine eyes lighting with pleasure, "I hope I can give him enough happiness to make up for his pain, for, no matter what he has done, he is not bad."

Madame Graslin turned away her head; she seemed overcome by the sight of that happy family. The rector now left her to enter the church, whither she dragged herself presently on the arm of Monsieur Grossetete.

After breakfast every one, even the aged people of the village, assembled to see the beginning of the great work. From the slope leading up to the chateau, Monsieur Grossetete and Monsieur Bonnet, between whom was Veronique, could see the direction

of the four first cuttings marked out by piles of gathered stones. At each cutting five laborers were digging out and piling up the good loam along the edges; clearing a space about eighteen feet wide, the width of each road. On either side, four other men were digging the ditches and also piling up the loam at the sides to make a bank. Behind them, as the banks were made, two men were digging holes in which others planted trees. In each of these divisions, thirty old paupers, a score of women, and forty or more girls and children were picking up stones, which special laborers piled in heaps along the roadside so as to keep a record of the quantity gathered by each group. Thus the work went on rapidly, with picked workmen full of ardor. Grossetete promised Madame Graslin to send her some trees and to ask her other friends to do the same; for the nurseries of the chateau would evidently not suffice to supply such an extensive plantation. Toward the close of the day, which was to end in a grand dinner at the chateau, Farrabesche requested Madame Graslin to grant him an audience for a few moments.

“Madame,” he said, presenting himself with Catherine, “you were so good as to offer me the farm at the chateau. By granting me so great a favor I know you intended to put me in the way of making my fortune. But Catherine has ideas about our future which we desire to submit to you. If I were to succeed and make money there would certainly be persons envious of my good fortune; a word is soon said; I might have quarrels,—I fear them; besides, Catherine would always be uneasy. In short, too close intercourse with the world will not suit us. I have come therefore to ask you to give us only the land at the opening of the Gabou on the commons, with a small piece of the woodland behind the Roche-Vive. In July you will have a great many workmen here, and it would be very easy then to build a farmhouse in a good position on the slope of the hill. We should be happy there. I will send for Guepin. My poor comrade will work like a horse; perhaps I could marry him here. My son is not a do-nothing either. No one would put us out of countenance; we could colonize this corner of the estate, and I should make it my ambition to turn it into a fine farm for you. Moreover, I want to propose as farmer of your great farm near the chateau a cousin of Catherine, who has money and would therefore be more capable than I could be of managing such a large affair as that farm. If it please God to bless your enterprise, in five years from now you will have five or six thousand horned beasts or horses on that plain below, and it wants a better head than mine to manage them.”

Madame Graslin agreed to his request, doing justice to the good sense of it.

From the time the work on the plain began, Veronique’s life assumed the regularity of country existence. In the morning she heard mass, took care of her son, whom she idolized, and went to see her laborers. After dinner she received her friends from Montegnac in the little salon to the right of the clock-tower. She taught Roubaud, Clousier, and the rector to play whist, which Gerard knew already. The rubbers usually ended at nine o’clock, after which the company withdrew. This peaceful life had no other events to mark it than the success of the various parts of the great enterprise.

In June the torrent of the Gabou went dry, and Gerard established his headquarters in the keeper’s house. Farrabesche had already built his farmhouse, which he called Le Gabou. Fifty masons, brought from Paris, joined the two mountains by a wall twenty feet thick, with a foundation twelve feet deep and heavily cemented. The wall, or dam, rose

nearly sixty feet and tapered in until it was not more than ten feet thick at the summit. Gerard backed this wall on the valley side with a cemented slope, about twelve feet wide at its base. On the side toward the commons a similar slope, covered with several feet of arable earth, still further supported this great work, which no rush of water could possibly damage. The engineer provided in case of unusual rains an overflow at a proper height. The masonry was inserted into the flank of each mountain until the granite or the hard-pan was reached, so that the water had absolutely no outlet at the sides.

This dam was finished by the middle of August. At the same time Gerard was preparing three canals in the principal valleys, and none of these works came up to his estimated costs. The chateau farm could now be finished. The irrigation channels through the plain, superintended by Fresquin, started from the canal made by nature along the base of the mountains on the plain side, through which culverts were cut to the irrigating channels. Water-gates were fitted into those channels, the sides of which the abundance of rock had enabled them to stone up, so as to keep the flow of water at an even height along the plain.

Every Sunday after mass, Veronique, the engineer, the rector, the doctor, and the mayor walked down through the park to see the course of the waters. The winter of 1832 and 1833 was extremely rainy. The water of the three streams which had been directed to the torrent, swollen by the water of the rains, now formed three ponds in the valley of the Gabou, carefully placed at different levels so as to create a steady reserve in case of a severe drought. At certain places where the valley widened Gerard had taken advantage of a few hillocks to make islands and plant them with trees of varied foliage. These vast operations completely changed the face of the country; but five or six years were of course needed to bring out their full character. “The country was naked,” said Farrabesche, “and madame has clothed it.”

Since these great undertakings were begun, Veronique had been called “Madame” throughout the whole neighborhood. When the rains ceased in June, 1833, they tried the irrigating channels through the planted fields, and the young verdure thus nourished soon showed the superior qualities of the *marciti* of Italy and the meadows of Switzerland. The system of irrigation, modelled on that of the farms in Lombardy, watered the earth evenly, and kept the surface as smooth as a carpet. The nitre of the snow dissolving in these channels no doubt added much to the quality of the herbage. The engineer hoped to find in the products of succeeding years some analogy with those of Switzerland, to which this nitrous substance is, as we know, a source of perpetual riches.

The plantations along the roads, sufficiently moistened by the water allowed to run through the ditches, made rapid growth. So that in 1838, six years after Madame Graslin had begun her enterprise, the stony plain, regarded as hopelessly barren by twenty generations, was verdant, productive, and well planted throughout. Gerard had built five farmhouses with their dependencies upon it, with a thousand acres to each. Gerard’s own farm and those of Grossetete and Fresquin, which received the overflow from Madame’s domains, were built on the same plan and managed by the same methods. The engineer also built a charming little house for himself on his own property. When all was completely finished, the inhabitants of Montegnac, instigated by the present mayor, who was anxious to retire, elected Gerard to the mayoralty of the district.

In 1840 the departure of the first herd of cattle sent from Montegnac to the Paris

markets was made the occasion of a rural fete. The farms of the plain raised fine beasts and horses; for it was found, after the land was cleaned up, that there were seven inches of good soil which the annual fall of leaves, the manure left by the pasturage of animals, and, above all, the melting of the snows contained in the valley of the Gabou, increased in fertility.

It was in this year that Madame Graslin found it necessary to obtain a tutor for her son, who was now eleven years of age. She did not wish to part with him, and yet she was anxious to make him a thoroughly well-educated man. Monsieur Bonnet wrote to the Seminary. Madame Graslin, on her side, said a few words as to her wishes and the difficulty of obtaining the right person to Monsieur Dutheil, recently appointed archbishop. The choice of such a man, who would live nine years familiarly in the chateau, was a serious matter. Gerard had already offered to teach mathematics to his friend Francis; but he could not, of course, take the place of a regular tutor. This question agitated Madame Graslin's mind, and all the more because she knew that her health was beginning to fail.

The more prosperous grew her dear Montegnac, the more she increased the secret austerities of her life. Monseigneur Dutheil, with whom she corresponded regularly, found at last the man she wanted. He sent her from his late diocese a young professor, twenty-five years of age, named Ruffin, whose mind had a special vocation for the art of teaching. This young man's knowledge was great, and his nature was one of deep feeling, which, however, did not preclude the sternness necessary in the management of youth. In him religion did not in any way hamper knowledge; he was also patient, and extremely agreeable in appearance and manner. "I make you a fine present, my dear daughter," wrote the prelate; "this young man is fit to educate a prince; therefore I think you will be glad to arrange the future with him, for he can undoubtedly be a spiritual father to your son."

Monsieur Ruffin proved so satisfactory to Madame Graslin's faithful friends that his arrival made no change in the various intimacies that grouped themselves around this beloved idol, whose hours and moments were claimed by each with jealous eagerness.

By the year 1843 the prosperity of Montegnac had increased beyond all expectation. The farm of the Gabou rivalled the farms of the plain, and that of the chateau set an example of constant improvement to all. The five other farms, increasing in value, obtained higher rent, reaching the sum of thirty thousand francs for each at the end of twelve years. The farmers, who were beginning to gather in the fruits of their sacrifices and those of Madame Graslin, now began to improve the grass of the plains, sowing seed of better quality, there being no longer any occasion to fear drought.

During this year a man from Montegnac started a diligence between the chief town of the arrondissement and Limoges, leaving both places each day. Monsieur Clousier's nephew sold his office and obtained a license as notary in Montegnac. The government appointed Fresquin collector of the district. The new notary built himself a pretty house in the upper part of Montegnac, planted mulberries in the grounds, and became after a time assistant-mayor to his friend Gerard.

The engineer, encouraged by so much success, now conceived a scheme of a nature to render Madame Graslin's fortune colossal,—she herself having by this time recovered

possession of the income which had been mortgaged for the repayment of the loan. Gerard’s new scheme was to make a canal of the little river, and turn into it the superabundant waters of the Gabou. This canal, which he intended to carry into the Vienne, would form a waterway by which to send down timber from the twenty thousand acres of forest land belonging to Madame Graslin in Montegnac, now admirably managed by Colorat, but which, for want of transportation, returned no profit. A thousand acres could be cut over each year without detriment to the forest, and if sent in this way to Limoges, would find a ready market for building purposes.

This was the original plan of Monsieur Graslin himself, who had paid very little attention to the rector’s scheme relating to the plain, being much more attracted by that of turning the little river into a canal.

# XIX. A DEATH BLOW

At the beginning of the following year, in spite of Madame Graslin's assumption of strength, her friends began to notice symptoms which foreshadowed her coming death. To all the doctor's remarks, and to the inquiries of the most clear-sighted of her friends, Veronique made the invariable answer that she was perfectly well. But when the spring opened she went round to visit her forests, farms, and beautiful meadows with a childlike joy and delight which betrayed to those who knew her best a sad foreboding.

Finding himself obliged to build a small cemented wall between the dam of the Gabou and the park of Montegnac along the base of the hill called especially La Correze, Gerard took up the idea of enclosing the whole forest and thus uniting it with the park. Madame Graslin agreed to this, and appointed thirty thousand francs a year to this work, which would take seven years to accomplish and would then withdraw that fine forest from the rights exercised by government over the non-enclosed forests of private individuals. The three ponds of the Gabou would thus become a part of the park. These ponds, ambitiously called lakes, had each its island.

This year, Gerard had prepared, in collusion with Grossetete, a surprise for Madame Graslin's birthday. He had built a little hermitage on the largest of the islands, rustic on the outside and elegantly arranged within. The old banker took part in the conspiracy, in which Farrabesche, Fresquin, Clousier's nephew, and nearly all the well-to-do people in Montegnac co-operated. Grossetete sent down some beautiful furniture. The clock tower, copied from that at Vevay, made a charming effect in the landscape. Six boats, two for each pond, were secretly built, painted, and rigged during the winter by Farrabesche and Guepin, assisted by the carpenter of Montegnac.

When the day arrived (about the middle of May) after a breakfast Madame Graslin gave to her friends, she was taken by them across the park—which was finely laid out by Gerard, who, for the last five years, had improved it like a landscape architect and naturalist—to the pretty meadow of the valley of the Gabou, where, at the shore of the first lake, two of the boats were floating. This meadow, watered by several clear streamlets, lay at the foot of the fine ampitheatre where the valley of the Gabou begins. The woods, cleared in a scientific manner, so as to produce noble masses and vistas that were charming to the eye, enclosed the meadow and gave it a solitude that was grateful to the soul. Gerard had reproduced on an eminence that chalet in the valley of Sion above the road to Brieg which travellers admire so much; here were to be the dairy and the cow-sheds of the chateau. From its gallery the eye roved over the landscape created by the engineer which the three lakes made worthy of comparison with the beauties of Switzerland.

The day was beautiful. In the blue sky, not a cloud; on earth, all the charming, graceful things the soil offers in the month of May. The trees planted ten years earlier on the banks —weeping willows, osier, alder, ash, the aspen of Holland, the poplars of Italy and Virginia, hawthorns and roses, acacias, birches, all choice growths arranged as their nature and the lay of the land made suitable—held amid their foliage a few fleecy vapors, born of the waters, which rose like a slender smoke. The surface of the lakelet, clear as a mirror

and calm as the sky, reflected the tall green masses of the forest, the tops of which, distinctly defined in the limpid atmosphere, contrasted with the groves below wrapped in their pretty veils. The lakes, separated by broad causeways, were three mirrors showing different reflections, the waters of which flowed from one to another in melodious cascades. These causeways were used to go from lake to lake without passing round the shores. From the chalet could be seen, through a vista among the trees, the thankless waste of the chalk commons, resembling an open sea and contrasting with the fresh beauty of the lakes and their verdure.

When Veronique saw the joyousness of her friends as they held out their hands to help her into the largest of the boats, tears came into her eyes and she kept silence till they touched the bank of the first causeway. As she stepped into the second boat she saw the hermitage with Grossetete sitting on a bench before it with all his family.

“Do they wish to make me regret dying?” she said to the rector.

“We wish to prevent you from dying,” replied Clousier.

“You cannot make the dead live,” she answered.

Monsieur Bonnet gave her a stern look which recalled her to herself.

“Let me take care of your health,” said Roubaud, in a gentle, persuasive voice. “I am sure I can save to this region its living glory, and to all our friends their common tie.”

Veronique bowed her head, and Gerard rowed slowly toward the island in the middle of the lake, the largest of the three, into which the overflowing water of the first was rippling with a sound that gave a voice to that delightful landscape.

“You have done well to make me bid farewell to this ravishing nature on such a day,” she said, looking at the beauty of the trees, all so full of foliage that they hid the shore. The only disapprobation her friends allowed themselves was to show a gloomy silence; and Veronique, receiving another glance from Monsieur Bonnet, sprang lightly ashore, assuming a lively air, which she did not relinquish. Once more the hostess, she was charming, and the Grossetete family felt she was again the beautiful Madame Graslin of former days.

“Indeed, you can still live, if you choose!” said her mother in a whisper.

At this gay festival, amid these glorious creations produced by the resources of nature only, nothing seemed likely to wound Veronique, and yet it was here and now that she received her death-blow.

The party were to return about nine o’clock by way of the meadows, the road through which, as lovely as an English or an Italian road, was the pride of its engineer. The abundance of small stones, laid aside when the plain was cleared, enabled him to keep it in good order; in fact, for the last five years it was, in a way, macadamized. Carriages were awaiting the company at the opening of the last valley toward the plain, almost at the base of the Roche-Vive. The horses, raised at Montegnac, were among the first that were ready for the market. The manager of the stud had selected a dozen for the stables of the chateau, and their present fine appearance was part of the programme of the fete. Madame Graslin’s own carriage, a gift from Grossetete, was drawn by four of the finest animals,

plainly harnessed.

After dinner the happy party went to take coffee in a little wooden kiosk, made like those on the Bosphorus, and placed on a point of the island from which the eye could reach to the farther lake beyond. From this spot Madame Graslin thought she saw her son Francis near the nursery-ground formerly planted by Farrabesche. She looked again, but did not see him; and Monsieur Ruffin pointed him out to her, playing on the bank with Grossetete's children. Veronique became alarmed lest he should meet with some accident. Not listening to remonstrance, she ran down from the kiosk, and jumping into a boat, began to row toward her son. This little incident caused a general departure. Monsieur Grossetete proposed that they should all follow her and walk on the beautiful shore of the lake, along the curves of the mountainous bluffs. On landing there Madame Graslin saw her son in the arms of a woman in deep mourning. Judging by the shape of her bonnet and the style of her clothes, the woman was a foreigner. Veronique was startled, and called to her son, who presently came toward her.

"Who is that woman?" she asked the children round about her; "and why did Francis leave you to go to her?"

"The lady called him by name," said a little girl.

At that instant Madame Sauviat and Gerard, who had outstripped the rest of the company, came up.

"Who is that woman, my dear child?" asked Madame Graslin as soon as Francis reached her.

"I don't know," he answered; "but she kissed me as you and grandmamma kissed me—she cried," whispered Francis in his mother's ear.

"Shall I go after her?" asked Gerard.

"No!" said Madame Graslin, with an abruptness that was not usual in her.

With a delicacy for which Veronique was grateful, Gerard led away the children and went back to detain the rest of the party, leaving Madame Sauviat, Madame Graslin, and Francis alone.

"What did she say to you?" asked Madame Sauviat of her grandson.

"I don't know; she did not speak French."

"Couldn't you understand anything she said?" asked Veronique.

"No; but she kept saying over and over,—and that's why I remember it,—*My dear brother*!"

Veronique took her mother's arm and led her son by the hand, but she had scarcely gone a dozen steps before her strength gave way.

"What is the matter? what has happened?" said the others, who now came up, to Madame Sauviat.

"Oh! my daughter is in danger!" said the old woman, in guttural tones.

It was necessary to carry Madame Graslin to her carriage. She signed to Aline to get

into it with Francis, and also Gerard.

“You have been in England,” she said to the latter as soon as she recovered herself, “and therefore no doubt you speak English; tell me the meaning of the words, *my dear brother*.”

On being told, Veronique exchanged a look with Aline and her mother which made them shudder; but they restrained their feelings.

The shouts and joyous cries of those who were assisting in the departure of the carriages, the splendor of the setting sun as it lay upon the meadows, the perfect gait of the beautiful horses, the laughter of her friends as they followed her on horseback at a gallop, —none of these things roused Madame Graslin from her torpor. Her mother ordered the coachman to hasten his horses, and their carriage reached the chateau some time before the others. When the company were again assembled, they were told that Veronique had gone to her rooms and was unable to see any one.

“I fear,” said Gerard to his friends, “that Madame Graslin has had some fatal shock.”

“Where? how?” they asked.

“To her heart,” he answered.

The following day Roubaud started for Paris. He had seen Madame Graslin, and found her so seriously ill that he wished for the assistance and advice of the ablest physician of the day. But Veronique had only received Roubaud to put a stop to her mother and Aline’s entreaties that she would do something to benefit her; she herself knew that death had stricken her. She refused to see Monsieur Bonnet, sending word to him that the time had not yet come. Though all her friends who had come from Limoges to celebrate her birthday wished to be with her, she begged them to excuse her from fulfilling the duties of hospitality, saying that she desired to remain in the deepest solitude. After Roubaud’s departure the other guests returned to Limoges, less disappointed than distressed; for all those whom Grossetete had brought with him adored Veronique. They were lost in conjecture as to what might have caused this mysterious disaster.

One evening, two days after the departure of the company, Aline brought Catherine to Madame Graslin’s apartment. La Farrabesche stopped short, horrified at the change so suddenly wrought in her mistress, whose face seemed to her almost distorted.

“Good God, madame!” she cried, “what harm that girl has done! If we had only foreseen it, Farrabesche and I, we would never have taken her in. She has just heard that madame is ill, and sends me to tell Madame Sauviat she wants to speak to her.”

“Here!” cried Veronique. “Where is she?”

“My husband took her to the chalet.”

“Very good,” said Madame Graslin; “tell Farrabesche to go elsewhere. Inform that lady that my mother will go to her; tell her to expect the visit.”

As soon as it was dark Veronique, leaning on her mother’s arm, walked slowly through the park to the chalet. The moon was shining with all its brilliancy, the air was soft, and the two women, visibly affected, found encouragement, of a sort, in the things of nature. The mother stopped now and then, to rest her daughter, whose sufferings were poignant,

so that it was well-nigh midnight before they reached the path that goes down from the woods to the sloping meadow where the silvery roof of the chalet shone. The moonlight gave to the surface of the quiet water, the tint of pearls. The little noises of the night, echoing in the silence, made softest harmony. Veronique sat down on the bench of the chalet, amid this beauteous scene of the starry night. The murmur of two voices and the footfall of two persons still at a distance on the sandy shore were brought by the water, which sometimes, when all is still, reproduces sounds as faithfully as it reflects objects on the surface. Veronique recognized at once the exquisite voice of the rector, and the rustle of his cassock, also the movement of some silken stuff that was probably the material of a woman's gown.

"Let us go in," she said to her mother.

Madame Sauviat and her daughter sat down on a crib in the lower room, which was intended for a stable.

"My child," they heard the rector saying, "I do not blame you,—you are quite excusable; but your return may be the cause of irreparable evil; she is the soul of this region."

"Ah! monsieur, then I had better go away to-night," replied the stranger. "Though—I must tell you—to leave my country once more is death to me. If I had stayed a day longer in that horrible New York, where there is neither hope, nor faith, nor charity, I should have died without being ill. The air I breathed oppressed my chest, food did not nourish me, I was dying while full of life and vigor. My sufferings ceased the moment I set foot upon the vessel to return. I seemed to be already in France. Oh! monsieur, I saw my mother and one of my sisters-in-law die of grief. My grandfather and grandmother Tascheron are dead; dead, my dear Monsieur Bonnet, in spite of the prosperity of Tascheronville,—for my father founded a village in Ohio and gave it that name. That village is now almost a town, and a third of all the land is cultivated by members of our family, whom God has constantly protected. Our tillage succeeded, our crops have been enormous, and we are rich. The town is Catholic, and we have managed to build a Catholic church; we do not allow any other form of worship, and we hope to convert by our example the many sects which surround us. True religion is in a minority in that land of money and selfish interests, where the soul is cold. Nevertheless, I will return to die there, sooner than do harm or cause distress to the mother of our Francis. Only, Monsieur Bonnet, take me to-night to the parsonage that I may pray upon *his* tomb, the thought of which has brought me here; the nearer I have come to where *he* is, the more I felt myself another being. No, I never expected to feel so happy again as I do here."

"Well, then," said the rector, "come with me now. If there should come a time when you might return without doing injury, I will write to you, Denise; but perhaps this visit to your birthplace will stop the homesickness, and enable you to live over there without suffering —"

"Oh! to leave this country, now so beautiful! What wonders Madame Graslin has done for it!" she exclaimed, pointing to the lake as it lay in the moonlight. "All this fine domain will belong to our dear Francis."

"You shall not go away, Denise," said Madame Graslin, who was standing at the stable

door.

Jean-Francois Tascheron's sister clasped her hands on seeing the spectre which addressed her. At that moment the pale Veronique, standing in the moonlight, was like a shade defined upon the darkness of the open door-way. Her eyes alone shone like stars.

"No, my child, you shall not leave the country you have come so far to see again; you shall be happy here, or God will refuse to help me; it is He, no doubt, who has brought you back."

She took the astonished Denise by the hand, and led her away by a path toward the other shore of the lake, leaving her mother and the rector, who seated themselves on the bench.

"Let her do as she wishes," said Madame Sauviat.

A few moments later Veronique returned alone, and was taken back to the chateau by her mother and Monsieur Bonnet. Doubtless she had formed some plan which required secrecy, for no one in the neighborhood either saw Denise or heard any mention of her.

Madame Graslin took to her bed that day and never but once left it again; she went from bad to worse daily, and seemed annoyed and thwarted that she could not rise,—trying to do so on several occasions, and expressing a desire to walk out into the park. A few days, however, after the scene we have just related, about the beginning of June, she made a violent effort, rose, dressed as if for a gala day, and begged Gerard to give her his arm, declaring that she was resolved to take a walk. She gathered up all her strength and expended it on this expedition, accomplishing her intention in a paroxysm of will which had, necessarily, a fatal reaction.

"Take me to the chalet, and alone," she said to Gerard in a soft voice, looking at him with a sort of coquetry. "This is my last excursion; I dreamed last night the doctors arrived and captured me."

"Do you want to see your woods?" asked Gerard.

"For the last time, yes," she answered. "But what I really want," she added, in a coaxing voice, "is to make you a singular proposition."

She asked Gerard to embark with her in one of the boats on the second lake, to which she went on foot. When the young man, surprised at her intention, began to move the oars, she pointed to the hermitage as the object of her coming.

"My friend," she said, after a long pause, during which she had been contemplating the sky and water, the hills and shores, "I have a strange request to make of you; but I think you are a man who would obey my wishes—"

"In all things, sure that you can wish only what is good."

"I wish to marry you," she answered; "if you consent you will accomplish the wish of a dying woman, which is certain to secure your happiness."

"I am too ugly," said the engineer.

"The person to whom I refer is pretty; she is young, and wishes to live at Montegnac. If you will marry her you will help to soften my last hours. I will not dwell upon her virtues

now; I only say her nature is a rare one; in the matter of grace and youth and beauty, one look will suffice; you are now about to see her at the hermitage. As we return home you must give me a serious yes or no."

Hearing this confidence, Gerard unconsciously quickened his oars, which made Madame Graslin smile. Denise, who was living alone, away from all eyes, at the hermitage, recognized Madame Graslin and immediately opened the door. Veronique and Gerard entered. The poor girl could not help a blush as she met the eyes of the young man, who was greatly surprised at her beauty.

"I hope Madame Farrabesche has not let you want for anything?" said Veronique.

"Oh no! madame, see!" and she pointed to her breakfast.

"This is Monsieur Gerard, of whom I spoke to you," went on Veronique. "He is to be my son's guardian, and after my death you shall live together at the chateau until his majority."

"Oh! madame, do not talk in that way!"

"My dear child, look at me!" replied Veronique, addressing Denise, in whose eyes the tears rose instantly. "She has just arrived from New York," she added, by way of introduction to Gerard.

The engineer put several questions about the new world to the young woman, while Veronique, leaving them alone, went to look at the third and more distant lake of the Gabou. It was six o'clock as Veronique and Gerard returned in the boat toward the chalet.

"Well?" she said, looking at him.

"You have my promise."

"Though you are, I know, without prejudices," she went on, "I must not leave you ignorant of the reason why that poor girl, brought back here by homesickness, left the place originally."

"A false step?"

"Oh, no!" said Veronique. "Should I offer her to you if that were so? She is the sister of a workman who died on the scaffold—"

"Ah! Tascheron," he said, "the murderer of old Pingret."

"Yes, she is the sister of a murderer," said Madame Graslin, in a bitter tone; "you are at liberty to take back your promise and—"

She did not finish, and Gerard was obliged to carry her to the bench before the chalet, where she remained unconscious for some little time. When she opened her eyes Gerard was on his knees before her and he said instantly:—

"I will marry Denise."

Madame Graslin took his head in both hands and kissed him on the forehead; then, seeing his surprise at so much gratitude, she pressed his hand and said:

"Before long you will know the secret of all this. Let us go back to the terrace, for it is

late; I am very tired, but I must look my last on that dear plain."

Though the day had been insupportably hot, the storms which during this year devastated parts of Europe and of France but respected the Limousin, had run their course in the basin of the Loire, and the atmosphere was singularly clear. The sky was so pure that the eye could seize the slightest details on the horizon. What language can render the delightful concert of busy sounds produced in the village by the return of the workers from the fields? Such a scene, to be rightly given, needs a great landscape artist and also a great painter of the human face. Is there not, by the bye, in the lassitude of Nature and that of man a curious affinity which is difficult to grasp? The depressing heat of a dog-day and the rarification of the air give to the least sound made by human beings all its signification. The women seated on their doorsteps and waiting for their husbands (who often bring back the children) gossip with each other while still at work. The roofs are casting up the lines of smoke which tell of the evening meal, the gayest among the peasantry; after which, they sleep. All actions express the tranquil cheerful thoughts of those whose day's work is over. Songs are heard very different in character from those of the morning; in this the peasants imitate the birds, whose warbling at night is totally unlike their notes at dawn. All nature sings a hymn to rest, as it sang a hymn of joy to the coming sun. The slightest movements of living beings seem tinted then with the soft, harmonious colors of the sunset cast upon the landscape and lending even to the dusty roadways a placid air. If any dared deny the influence of this hour, the loveliest of the day, the flowers would protest and intoxicate his senses with their penetrating perfumes, which then exhale and mingle with the tender hum of insects and the amorous note of birds.

The brooks which threaded the plain beyond the village were veiled in fleecy vapor. In the great meadows through which the high-road ran,—bordered with poplars, acacias, and ailanthus, wisely intermingled and already giving shade,—enormous and justly celebrated herds of cattle were scattered here and there, some still grazing, others ruminating. Men, women, and children were ending their day's work in the hay-field, the most picturesque of all the country toils. The night air, freshened by distant storms, brought on its wings the satisfying odors of the newly cut grass or the finished hay. Every feature of this beautiful panorama could be seen perfectly; those who feared a coming storm were finishing in haste the hay-stacks, while others followed with their pitchforks to fill the carts as they were driven along the rows. Others in the distance were still mowing, or turning the long lines of fallen grass to dry it, or hastening to pile it into cocks. The joyous laugh of the merry workers mingling with the shouts of the children tumbling each other in the hay, rose on the air. The eye could distinguish the pink, red, or blue petticoats, the kerchiefs, and the bare legs and arms of the women, all wearing broad-brimmed hats of a coarse straw, and the shirts and trousers of the men, the latter almost invariably white. The last rays of the sun were filtering through the long lines of poplars planted beside the trenches which divided the plain into meadows of unequal size, and caressing the groups of horses and carts, men, women, children, and cattle. The cattlemen and the shepherd-girls were beginning to collect their flocks to the sound of rustic horns.

The scene was noisy, yet silent,—a paradoxical statement, which will surprise only those to whom the character of country life is still unknown. From all sides came the carts, laden with fragrant fodder. There was something, I know not what, of torpor in the scene. Veronique walked slowly and silently between Gerard and the rector, who had joined her

on the terrace.

Through the openings made by the rural lanes running down below the terrace to the main street of Montegnac Gerard and Monsieur Bonnet could see the faces of men, women, and children turned toward them; watching more particularly, no doubt, for Madame Graslin. How much of tenderness and gratitude was expressed on those faces! How many benedictions followed Veronique's footsteps! With what reverent attention were the three benefactors of a whole community regarded! Man was adding a hymn of gratitude to the other chants of evening.

While Madame Graslin walked on with her eyes fastened on the long, magnificent green pastures, her most cherished creation, the priest and the mayor did not take their eyes from the groups below, whose expression it was impossible to misinterpret; pain, sadness, and regret, mingled with hope, were plainly on all those faces. No one in Montegnac or its neighborhood was ignorant that Monsieur Roubaud had gone to Paris to bring the best physician science afforded, or that the benefactress of the whole district was in the last stages of a fatal illness. In all the markets through a circumference of thirty miles the peasants asked those of Montegnac,—

"How is your good woman now?"

The great vision of death hovered over the land, and dominated that rural picture. Afar, in the fields, more than one reaper sharpening his scythe, more than one young girl, her arms resting on her fork, more than one farmer stacking his hay, seeing Madame Graslin, stood mute and thoughtful, examining that noble woman, the blessing of the Correze, seeking some favorable sign or merely looking to admire her, impelled by a feeling that arrested their work.

"She is out walking; therefore she must be better."

These simple words were on every lip.

Madame Graslin's mother, seated on the iron bench which Veronique had formerly placed at the end of the terrace, studied every movement of her daughter; she watched her step in walking, and a few tears rolled from her eyes. Aware of the secret efforts of that superhuman courage, she knew that Veronique at that moment was suffering the tortures of a horrible agony, and only maintained herself erect by the exercise of her heroic will. The tears—they seemed almost red—which forced their way from those aged eyes, and furrowed that wrinkled face, the parchment of which seemed incapable of softening under any emotion, excited those of young Graslin, whom Monsieur Ruffin had between his knees.

"What is the matter, my boy?" said the tutor, anxiously.

"My grandmother is crying," he answered.

Monsieur Ruffin, whose eyes were on Madame Graslin as she came toward them, now looked at Madame Sauviat, and was powerfully struck by the aspect of that old head, like that of a Roman matron, petrified with grief and moistened with tears.

"Madame, why did you not prevent her from coming out?" said the tutor to the old mother, august and sacred in her silent grief.

As Veronique advanced majestically with her naturally fine and graceful step, Madame Sauviat, driven by despair at the thought of surviving her daughter, allowed the secret of many things that awakened curiosity to escape her.

“How can she walk like that,” she cried, “wearing a horrible horsehair shirt, which pricks into her skin perpetually?”

The words horrified the young man, who was not insensible to the exquisite grace of Veronique’s movements; he shuddered as he thought of the constant and terrific struggle of the soul to maintain its empire thus over the body.

“She has worn it thirteen years,—ever since she ceased to nurse the boy,” said the old woman. “She has done miracles here, but if her whole life were known they ought to canonize her. Since she came to Montegnac no one has ever seen her eat, and do you know why? Aline serves her three times a day a piece of dry bread, and vegetables boiled in water, without salt, on a common plate of red earth like those they feed the dogs on. Yes, that’s how the woman lives who has given new life to this whole canton. She kneels to say her prayers on the edge of that hair-shirt. She says she could not have that smiling air you know she always has unless she practised these austerities. I tell you this,” added the old woman, sinking her voice, “so that you may repeat it to the doctor that Monsieur Roubaud has gone to fetch. If they could prevent my daughter from continuing these penances, perhaps they might still save her, though death has laid its hand upon her head. See for yourself! Ah! I must be strong indeed to have borne so many things these fifteen years.”

The old woman took her grandson’s hand and passed it over her forehead and cheeks as if the child’s touch shed a healing balm there; then she kissed it with an affection the secret of which belongs to grandmothers as much as it belongs to mothers.

Veronique was now only a few feet from the bench, in company with Clousier, the rector, and Gerard. Illuminated by the glow of the setting sun, she shone with a dreadful beauty. Her yellow forehead, furrowed with long wrinkles massed one above the other like layers of clouds, revealed a fixed thought in the midst of inward troubles. Her face, devoid of all color, entirely white with the dead, greenish whiteness of plants without light, was thin, though not withered, and bore the signs of terrible physical sufferings produced by mental anguish. She fought her soul with her body, and *vice versa*. She was so completely destroyed that she no more resembled herself than an old woman resembles her portrait as a girl. The ardent expression of her eyes declared the despotic empire exercised by a devout will over a body reduced to what religion requires it to be. In this woman the soul dragged the flesh as the Achilles of profane story dragged Hector; for fifteen years she dragged it victoriously along the stony paths of life around the celestial Jerusalem she hoped to enter, not by a vile deception, but with acclamation. No solitary that ever lived in the dry and arid deserts of Africa was ever more master of his senses than was Veronique in her magnificent chateau, among the soft, voluptuous scenery of that opulent land, beneath the protecting mantle of that rich forest, whence science, the heir of Moses’ wand, had called forth plenty, prosperity, and happiness for a whole region. She contemplated the results of twelve years’ patience, a work which might have made the fame of many a superior man, with a gentle modesty such as Pontorno has painted in the sublime face of his “Christian Chastity caressing the Celestial Unicorn.” The mistress of the manor, whose silence was respected by her companions when they saw that her eyes were roving over

those vast plains, once arid, and now fertile by her will, walked on, her arms folded, with a distant look, as if to some far horizon, on her face.

# XX. THE LAST STRUGGLE

Suddenly she stopped, a few feet from her mother, who looked at her as the mother of Christ must have looked at her son upon the cross. She raised her hand, and pointing to the spot where the road to Montegnac branched from the highway, she said, smiling:—

“See that carriage with the post-horses; Monsieur Roubaud is returning to us. We shall now know how many hours I have to live.”

“Hours?” said Gerard.

“Did I not tell you I was taking my last walk?” she replied. “I have come here to see for the last time this glorious scene in all its splendor!” She pointed first to the village where the whole population seemed to be collected in the church square, and then to the beautiful meadows glowing in the last rays of the setting sun. “Ah!” she said, “let me see the benediction of God in the strange atmospheric condition to which we owe the safety of our harvest. Around us, on all sides, tempests, hail, lightning, have struck incessantly and pitilessly. The common people think thus, why not I? I do so need to see in this a happy augury for what awaits me after death!”

The child stood up and took his mother’s hand and laid it on his head. Veronique, deeply affected by the action, so full of eloquence, took up her son with supernatural strength, seating him on her left arm as though he were still an infant at her breast, saying, as she kissed him:—

“Do you see that land, my son? When you are a man, continue there your mother’s work.”

“Madame,” said the rector, in a grave voice, “a few strong and privileged beings are able to contemplate their coming death face to face, to fight, as it were, a duel with it, and to display a courage and an ability which challenge admiration. You show us this terrible spectacle; but perhaps you have too little pity for us; leave us at least the hope that you may be mistaken, and that God will allow you to finish that which you have begun.”

“All I have done is through you, my friends,” she said. “I have been useful, I can be so no longer. All is fruitful around us now; nothing is barren and desolated here except my heart. You well know, my dear rector, that I can only find peace and pardon *there*.”

She stretched her hand toward the cemetery. Never had she said as much since the day of her arrival, when she was taken with sudden illness at the same spot. The rector looked attentively at his penitent, and the habit of penetration he had long acquired made him see that in those simple words he had won another triumph. Veronique must have made a mighty effort over herself to break her twelve years’ silence with a speech that said so much. The rector clasped his hands with a fervent gesture that was natural to him as he looked with deep emotion at the members of this family whose secrets had passed into his heart.

Gerard, to whom the words “peace and pardon” must have seemed strange, was bewildered. Monsieur Ruffin, with his eyes fixed on Veronique, was stupefied. At this

instant the carriage came rapidly up the avenue.

“There are five of them!” cried the rector, who could see and count the travellers.

“Five!” exclaimed Gerard. “Can five know more than two?”

“Ah,” cried Madame Graslin suddenly, grasping the rector’s arm, “the *procureur-general* is among them! What is he doing here?”

“And papa Grossetete, too!” cried Francis.

“Madame,” said the rector, supporting Veronique, and leading her apart a few steps, “show courage; be worthy of yourself.”

“But what can he want?” she replied, leaning on the balustrade. “Mother!” (the old woman ran to her daughter with an activity that belied her years.) “I shall see him again,” she said.

“As he comes with Monsieur Grossetete,” said the rector, “he can have none but good intentions.”

“Ah! monsieur, my child will die!” cried Madame Sauviat, seeing the effect of the rector’s words on her daughter’s face. “How can her heart survive such emotions? Monsieur Grossetete has always hitherto prevented that man from seeing Veronique.”

Madame Graslin’s face was on fire.

“Do you hate him so much?” said the Abbe Bonnet.

“She left Limoges to escape the sight of him, and to escape letting the whole town into her secrets,” said Madame Sauviat, terrified at the change she saw on Madame Graslin’s features.

“Do you not see that he will poison my few remaining hours? When I ought to be thinking of heaven he will nail me to earth,” cried Veronique.

The rector took her arm and constrained her to walk aside with him. When they were alone he stopped and gave her one of those angelic looks with which he was able to calm the violent convulsions of the soul.

“If it is really so,” he said, “as your confessor, I order you to receive him, to be kind and affectionate to him, to quit that garment of wrath, and forgive him as God will forgive you. Can there still be the remains of passion of a soul I believed to be purified. Burn this last incense on the altar of your penitence, or else your repentance is a lie.”

“There was still that effort to make—and it is made,” she answered, wiping her eyes. “The devil lurked in that last fold of my heart, and God, no doubt, put into Monsieur de Grandville’s mind the thought that brings him here. Ah! how many times must God strike me?” she cried.

She stopped, as if to say a mental prayer; then she returned to Madame Sauviat and said in a low voice:

“My dear mother, be kind and gentle to Monsieur de Grandville.”

The old woman clasped her hands with a feverish shudder.

“There is no longer any hope,” she said, seizing the rector’s hand.

The carriage, announced by the postilion’s whip, was now coming up the last slope; the gates were opened, it entered the courtyard, and the travellers came at once to the terrace. They were the illustrious Archbishop Dutheil, who was on his way to consecrate Monseigneur Gabriel de Rastignac, the *procureur-general*, Monsieur de Grandville, Monsieur Grossetete, Monsieur Roubaud, and one of the most celebrated physicians in Paris, Horace Bianchon.

“You are very welcome,” said Veronique, advancing toward them,—“you particularly,” she added, offering her hand to Monsieur de Grandville, who took it and pressed it.

“I counted on the intervention of Monseigneur and on that of my friend Monsieur Grossetete to obtain for me a favorable reception,” said the *procureur-general*. “It would have been a life-long regret to me if I did not see you again.”

“I thank those who brought you here,” replied Veronique, looking at the Comte de Grandville for the first time in fifteen years. “I have felt averse to you for a very long time, but I now recognize the injustice of my feelings; and you shall know why, if you can stay till the day after to-morrow at Montegnac.” Then turning to Horace Bianchon and bowing to him, she added: “Monsieur will no doubt confirm my apprehensions. God must have sent you, Monseigneur,” she said, turning to the archbishop. “In memory of our old friendship you will not refuse to assist me in my last moments. By whose mercy is it that I have about me all the beings who have loved and supported me in life?”

As she said the word *loved* she turned with a gracious look to Monsieur de Grandville, who was touched to tears by this mark of feeling. Silence fell for a few moments on every one. The doctors wondered by what occult power this woman could still keep her feet, suffering as she must have suffered. The other three men were so shocked at the ravages disease had suddenly made in her that they communicated their thoughts by their eyes only.

“Allow me,” she said, with her accustomed grace, “to leave you now with these gentlemen; the matter is urgent.”

She bowed to her guests, gave an arm to each of the doctors, and walked toward the chateau feebly and slowly, with a difficulty which told only too plainly of the coming catastrophe.

“Monsieur Bonnet,” said the archbishop, looking at the rector, “you have accomplished a miracle.”

“Not I, but God, Monseigneur,” he replied.

“They said she was dying,” said Monsieur Grossetete, “but she is dead; there is nothing left of her but spirit.”

“A soul,” said Gerard.

“And yet she is still the same,” cried the *procureur-general*.

“A stoic after the manner of the Porch philosophers,” said the tutor.

They walked in silence the whole length of the balustrade, looking at the landscape still

red with the declining light.

“To me who saw this scene thirteen years ago,” said the archbishop, pointing to the fertile plain, the valley, and the mountains of Montegnac, “this miracle is as extraordinary as that we have just witnessed. But how comes it that you allow Madame Graslin to walk about? She ought to be in her bed.”

“She was there,” said Madame Sauviat; “for ten days she did not leave it; but to-day she insisted on getting up to take a last look at the landscape.”

“I can understand that she wanted to bid farewell to her great creation,” said Monsieur de Grandville; “but she risked expiring on this terrace.”

“Monsieur Roubaud told us not to thwart her,” said Madame Sauviat.

“What a stupendous work! what a miracle has been accomplished!” said the archbishop, whose eyes were roving over the scene before him. “She has literally sown the desert! But we know, monsieur,” he added, turning to Gerard, “that your scientific knowledge and your labors have a large share in it.”

“They have been only the workmen,” replied the mayor. “Yes, the hands only; she has been the thought.”

Madame Sauviat here left the group, to hear, if possible, the decision of the doctors.

“We need some heroism ourselves,” said Monsieur de Grandville to the rector and the archbishop, “to enable us to witness this death.”

“Yes,” said Monsieur Grossetete, who overheard him, “but we ought to do much for such a friend.”

After several turns up and down the terrace, these persons, full of solemn thoughts, saw two farmers approaching them, sent as a deputation from the village, where the inhabitants were in a state of painful anxiety to know the sentence pronounced by the physician from Paris.

“They are still consulting, and as yet we know nothing, my friends,” said the archbishop.

As he spoke, Monsieur Roubaud appeared coming toward them, and they all hurried to meet him.

“Well?” said the mayor.

“She cannot live forty-eight hours longer,” replied Monsieur Roubaud. “During my absence the disease has fully developed; Monsieur Bianchon does not understand how it was possible for her to have walked. Such phenomenal exhibitions of strength are always caused by great mental exaltation. So, gentlemen,” said the doctor to the priests, “she belongs to you now; science is useless, and my illustrious fellow-physician thinks you have barely time enough for your last offices.”

“Let us go now and say the prayers for the forty hours,” said the rector to his parishioners, turning to leave the terrace. “His Grace will doubtless administer the last sacraments.”

The archbishop bowed his head; he could not speak; his eyes were full of tears. Every one sat down, or leaned against the balustrade, absorbed in his own thought. The church bells presently sent forth a few sad calls, and then the whole population were seen hurrying toward the porch. The gleam of the lighted tapers shone through the trees in Monsieur Bonnet's garden; the chants resounded. No color was left in the landscape but the dull red hue of the dusk; even the birds had hushed their songs; the tree-frog alone sent forth its long, clear, melancholy note.

"I will go and do my duty," said the archbishop, turning away with a slow step like a man overcome with emotion.

The consultation had taken place in the great salon of the chateau. This vast room communicated with a state bedchamber, furnished in red damask, in which Graslin had displayed a certain opulent magnificence. Veronique had not entered it six times in fourteen years; the grand apartments were quite useless to her, and she never received her friends there. But now the effort she had made to accomplish her last obligation, and to overcome her last repugnance had exhausted her strength, and she was wholly unable to mount the stairs to her own rooms.

When the illustrious physician had taken the patient's hand and felt her pulse he looked at Monsieur Roubaud and made him a sign; then together they lifted her and carried her into the chamber. Aline hastily opened the doors. Like all state beds the one in this room had no sheets, and the two doctors laid Madame Graslin on the damask coverlet. Roubaud opened the windows, pushed back the outer blinds, and called. The servants and Madame Sauviat went in. The tapers in the candelabra were lighted.

"It is ordained," said the dying woman, smiling, "that my death shall be what that of a Christian should be—a festival!"

During the consultation she said:—

"The *procureur-general* has done his professional duty; I was going, and he has pushed me on."

The old mother looked at her and laid a finger on her lips.

"Mother, I shall speak," replied Veronique. "See! the hand of God is in all this; I am dying in a red room—"

Madame Sauviat went out, unable to bear those words.

"Aline," she said, "she will speak! she will speak!"

"Ah! madame is out of her mind," cried the faithful maid, who was bringing sheets. "Fetch the rector, madame."

"Your mistress must be undressed," said Bianchon to the maid.

"It will be very difficult to do it, monsieur; madame is wrapped in a hair-cloth garment."

"What! in the nineteenth-century can such horrors be revived?" said the great doctor.

"Madame Graslin has never allowed me to touch her stomach," said Roubaud. "I have been able to judge of the progress of the disease only from her face and her pulse, and the

little information I could get from her mother and the maid."

Veronique was now placed on a sofa while the bed was being made. The doctors spoke together in a low voice. Madame Sauviat and Aline made the bed. The faces of the two women were full of anguish; their hearts were wrung by the thought, "We are making her bed for the last time—she will die here!"

The consultation was not long. But Bianchon exacted at the outset that Aline should, in spite of the patient's resistance, cut off the hair shirt and put on a night-dress. The doctors returned to the salon while this was being done. When Aline passed them carrying the instrument of torture wrapped in a napkin, she said:—

"Madame's body is one great wound."

The doctors returned to the bedroom.

"Your will is stronger than that of Napoleon, madame," said Bianchon, after asking a few questions, to which Veronique replied very clearly. "You keep your mind and your faculties in the last stages of a disease which robbed the Emperor of his brilliant intellect. From what I know of you I think I ought to tell you the truth."

"I implore you to do so," she said. "You are able to estimate what strength remains to me; and I have need of all my vigor for a few hours."

"Think only of your salvation," replied Bianchon.

"If God has given me grace to die in possession of all my faculties," she said with a celestial smile, "be sure that this favor will be used to the glory of his Church. The possession of my mind and senses is necessary to fulfil a command of God, whereas Napoleon had accomplished all his destiny."

The doctors looked at each other in astonishment at hearing these words, said with as much ease as though Madame Graslin were still presiding in her salon.

"Ah! here is the doctor who is to cure me," she said presently, when the archbishop, summoned by Roubaud, entered the room.

She collected all her strength and rose to a sitting posture, in order to bow graciously to Monsieur Bianchon, and beg him to accept something else than money for the good news he gave her. She said a few words in her mother's ear, and Madame Sauviat immediately led away the doctors; then Veronique requested the archbishop to postpone their interview till the rector could come to her, expressing a wish to rest for a while. Aline watched beside her.

At midnight Madame Graslin awoke, and asked for the archbishop and rector, whom Aline silently showed her close at hand, praying for her. She made a sign dismissing her mother and the maid, and, at another sign, the two priests came to the bedside.

"Monseigneur, and you, my dear rector," she said, "will hear nothing you do not already know. You were the first, Monseigneur, to cast your eyes into my inner self; you read there nearly all my past; and what you read sufficed you. My confessor, that guardian angel whom heaven placed near me, knows more; I have told him all. You, whose minds are enlightened by the spirit of the Church, I wish to consult you as to the manner in which I

ought as a true Christian to leave this life. You, austere and saintly spirits, think you that if God deigns to pardon one whose repentance is the deepest, the most absolute, that ever shook a human soul, think you that even then I have made my full expiation here below?"

"Yes," said the archbishop; "yes, my daughter."

"No, my father, no!" she said rising in her bed, the lightning flashing from her eyes. "Not far from here there is a grave, where an unhappy man is lying beneath the weight of a dreadful crime; here in this sumptuous home is a woman, crowned with the fame of benevolence and virtue. This woman is blessed; that poor young man is cursed. The criminal is covered with obloquy; I receive the respect of all. I had the largest share in the sin; he has a share, a large share in the good which has won for me such glory and such gratitude. Fraud that I am, I have the honor; he, the martyr to his loyalty, has the shame. I shall die in a few hours, and the canton will mourn me; the whole department will ring with my good deeds, my piety, my virtue; but he died covered with insults, in sight of a whole population rushing, with hatred to a murderer, to see him die. You, my judges, you are indulgent to me; yet I hear within myself an imperious voice which will not let me rest. Ah! the hand of God, less tender than yours, strikes me from day to day, as if to warn me that all is not expiated. My sins cannot be redeemed except by a public confession. He is happy! criminal, he gave his life with ignominy in face of earth and heaven; and I, I cheat the world as I cheated human justice. The homage I receive humiliates me; praise sears my heart. Do you not see, in the very coming of the *procureur-general*, a command from heaven echoing the voice in my own soul which cries to me: Confess!"

The two priests, the prince of the Church as well as the humble rector, these two great lights, each in his own way, stood with their eyes lowered and were silent. Deeply moved by the grandeur and the resignation of the guilty woman, the judges could not pronounce her sentence.

"My child," said the archbishop at last, raising his noble head, macerated by the customs of his austere life, "you are going beyond the commandments of the Church. The glory of the Church is to make her dogma conform to the habits and manners of each age; for the Church goes on from age to age in company with humanity. According to her present decision secret confession has taken the place of public confession. This substitution has made the new law. The sufferings you have endured suffice. Die in peace: God has heard you."

"But is not this desire of a guilty woman in conformity with the law of the first Church, which has enriched heaven with as many saints and martyrs and confessing souls as there are stars in the firmament?" persisted Veronique, vehemently. "Who said: *Confess yourselves to one another*? Was it not the disciples, who lived with the Saviour? Let me confess my shame publicly on my knees. It will redeem my sin to the world, to that family exiled and almost extinct through me. The world ought to know that my benefactions are not an offering, but the payment of a debt. Suppose that later, after my death, something tore from my memory the lying veil which covers me. Ah! that idea is more than I can bear, it is death indeed!"

"I see in this too much of calculation, my child," said the archbishop, gravely. "Passions are still too strong in you; the one I thought extinct is—"

“Oh! I swear to you, Monseigneur,” she said, interrupting the prelate and fixing her eyes, full of horror, upon him, “my heart is as purified as that of a guilty and repentant woman can be; there is nothing now within me but the thought of God.”

“Monseigneur,” said the rector in a tender voice, “let us leave celestial justice to take its course. It is now four years since I have strongly opposed this wish; it is the only difference that has ever come between my penitent and myself. I have seen to the depths of that soul, and I know this earth has no longer any hold there. Though the tears, the remorse, the contrition of fifteen years relate to the mutual sin of those two persons, believe me there are no remains of earthly passion in this long and terrible bewailing. Memory no longer mingles its flames with those of an ardent penitence. Yes, tears have at last extinguished that great fire. I guarantee,” he said, stretching his hand over Madame Graslin’s head, and letting his moistened eyes be seen, “I guarantee the purity of that angelic soul. And also I see in this desire the thought of reparation to an absent family, a member of which God has brought back here by one of those events which reveal His providence.”

Veronique took the trembling hand of the rector and kissed it.

“You have often been very stern to me, dear pastor, but at this moment I see where you keep your apostolic gentleness. You,” she said, looking at the archbishop, “you, the supreme head of this corner of God’s kingdom, be to me, in this moment of ignominy, a support. I must bow down as the lowest of women, but you will lift me up pardoned and—possibly—the equal of those who never sinned.”

The archbishop was silent, weighing no doubt all the considerations his practised eye perceived.

“Monseigneur,” said the rector, “religion has had some heavy blows. This return to ancient customs, brought about by the greatness of the sin and its repentance, may it not be a triumph we have no right to refuse?”

“But they will say we are fanatics! They will declare we have exacted this cruel scene!”

And again the archbishop was silent and thoughtful.

At this moment Horace Bianchon and Roubaud entered the room, after knocking. As the door opened Veronique saw her mother, her son, and all the servants of the household on their knees praying. The rectors of the two adjacent parishes had come to assist Monsieur Bonnet, and also, perhaps, to pay their respects to the great prelate, for whom the French clergy now desired the honors of the cardinalate, hoping that the clearness of his intellect, which was thoroughly Gallican, would enlighten the Sacred College.

Horace Bianchon returned to Paris; before departing, he came to bid farewell to the dying woman and thank her for her munificence. Slowly he approached, perceiving from the faces of the priests that the wounds of the soul had been the determining cause of those of the body. He took Madame Graslin’s hand, laid it on the bed and felt the pulse. The deep silence, that of a summer night in a country solitude, gave additional solemnity to the scene. The great salon, seen through the double doors, was lighted up for the little company of persons who were praying there; all were on their knees except the two priests who were seated and reading their brevaries. On either side of the grand state bed were the

prelate in his violet robes, the rector, and the two physicians.

“She is agitated almost unto death,” said Horace Bianchon, who, like all men of great talent, sometimes used speech as grand as the occasion that called it forth.

The archbishop rose as if some inward impulse drove him; he called to Monsieur Bonnet, and together they crossed the room, passed through the salon, and went out upon the terrace, where they walked up and down for some moments. When they returned, after discussing this case of ecclesiastical discipline, Roubaud met them.

# XXI. CONFESSION AT THE GATES OF THE TOMB

At ten o’clock in the morning the archbishop, wearing his pontifical robes, came into Madame Graslin’s chamber. The prelate, as well as the rector, had such confidence in this woman that they gave her no advice or instructions as to the limits within which she ought to make her confession.

Veronique now saw an assemblage of clergy from all the neighboring districts. Monseigneur was assisted by four vicars. The magnificent vessels she had bestowed upon her dear parish church were brought to the house and gave splendor to the ceremony. Eight choristers in their white and red surplices stood in two rows from the bed to the door of the salon, each holding one of the large bronze-gilt candelabra which Veronique had ordered from Paris. The cross and the church banner were held on either side of the bed by white-haired sacristans. Thanks to the devotion of her servants, a wooden altar brought from the sacristy had been erected close to the door of the salon, and so prepared and decorated that Monseigneur could say mass upon it.

Madame Graslin was deeply touched by these attentions, which the Church, as a general thing, grants only to royal personages. The folding doors between the salon and the dining-room were open, and she could see a vista of the ground-floor rooms filled with the village population. Her friends had thought of everything; the salon was occupied exclusively by themselves and the servants of the household. In the front rank and grouped before the door of the bedroom were her nearest friends, those on whose discretion reliance could be placed. MM. Grossetete, de Grandville, Roubaud, Gerard, Clousier, Ruffin, took the first places. They had arranged among themselves that they should rise and stand in a group, thus preventing the words of the repentant woman from being heard in the farther rooms; but their tears and sobs would, in any case, have drowned her voice.

At this moment and before all else in that audience, two persons presented, to an observer, a powerfully affecting sight. One was Denise Tascheron. Her foreign garments, of Quaker simplicity, made her unrecognizable by her former village acquaintance. The other was quite another personage, an acquaintance not to be forgotten, and his apparition there was like a streak of lurid light. The *procureur-general* came suddenly to a perception of the truth; the part that he had played to Madame Graslin unrolled itself before him; he divined it to its fullest extent. Less influenced, as a son of the nineteenth century, by the religious aspect of the matter, Monsieur de Grandville’s heart was filled with an awful dread; for he saw before him, he contemplated the drama of that woman’s hidden self at the hotel Graslin during the trial of Jean-Francois Tascheron. That tragic period came back distinctly to his memory,—lighted even now by the mother’s eyes, shining with hatred, which fell upon him where he stood, like drops of molten lead. That old woman, standing ten feet from him, forgave nothing. That man, representing human justice, trembled. Pale, struck to the heart, he dared not cast his eyes upon the bed where lay the woman he had loved so well, now livid beneath the hand of death, gathering strength to conquer agony from the greatness of her sin and its repentance. The mere sight of Veronique’s thin profile, sharply defined in white upon the crimson damask, caused him a vertigo.

At eleven o’clock the mass began. After the epistle had been read by the rector of Vizay

the archbishop removed his dalmatic and advanced to the threshold of the bedroom door.

“Christians, gather here to assist in the ceremony of extreme unction which we are about to administer to the mistress of this house,” he said, “you who join your prayers to those of the Church and intercede with God to obtain from Him her eternal salvation, you are now to learn that she does not feel herself worthy, in this, her last hour, to receive the holy viaticum without having made, for the edification of her fellows, a public confession of the greatest of her sins. We have resisted her pious wish, although this act of contrition was long in use during the early ages of Christianity. But, as this poor woman tells us that her confession may serve to rehabilitate an unfortunate son of this parish, we leave her free to follow the inspirations of her repentance.”

After these words, said with pastoral unction and dignity, the archbishop turned aside to give place to Veronique. The dying woman came forward, supported by her old mother and the rector,—the mother from whom she derived her body, the Church, the spiritual mother of her soul. She knelt down on a cushion, clasped her hands, and seemed to collect herself for a few moments, as if to gather from some source descending from heaven the power to speak. At this moment the silence was almost terrifying. None dared look at their neighbor. All eyes were lowered. And yet the eyes of Veronique, when she raised them, encountered those of the *procureur-general*, and the expression on that blanched face brought the color to hers.

“I could not die in peace,” said Veronique, in a voice of deep emotion, “if I suffered the false impression you all have of me to remain. You see in me a guilty woman, who asks your prayers, and who seeks to make herself worthy of pardon by this public confession of her sin. That sin was so great, its consequences were so fatal, that perhaps no penance can atone for it. But the more humiliation I submit to here on earth, the less I may have to dread the wrath of God in the heavenly kingdom to which I am going. My father, who had great confidence in me, commended to my care (now twenty years ago) a son of this parish, in whom he had seen a great desire to improve himself, an aptitude for study, and fine characteristics. I mean the unfortunate Jean-Francois Tascheron, who thenceforth attached himself to me as his benefactress. How did the affection I felt for him become a guilty one? I think myself excused from explaining this. Perhaps it could be shown that the purest sentiments by which we act in this world were insensibly diverted from their course by untold sacrifices, by reasons arising from our human frailty, by many causes which might appear to dismiss the evil of my sin. But even if the noblest affections moved me, was I less guilty? Rather let me confess that I, who by education, by position in the world, might consider myself superior to the youth my father confided to me, and from whom I was separated by the natural delicacy of our sex,—I listened, fatally, to the promptings of the devil. I soon found myself too much the mother of that young man to be insensible to his mute and delicate admiration. He alone, he first, recognized my true value. But perhaps a horrible calculation entered my mind. I thought how discreet a youth would be who owed his all to me, and whom the chances of life had put so far away from me, though we were born equals. I made even my reputation for benevolence, my pious occupations, a cloak to screen my conduct. Alas!—and this is doubtless one of my greatest sins—I hid my passion under cover of the altar. The most virtuous of my actions—the love I bore my mother, the acts of devotion which were sincere and true in the midst of my wrong-doing—all, all were made to serve the ends of a desperate passion, and were links

in the chain that held me. My poor beloved mother, who hears me now, was for a long time, ignorantly, an accomplice in my sin. When her eyes were opened, too many dangerous facts existed not to give her mother's heart the strength to be silent. Silence with her has been the highest virtue. Her love for her daughter has gone beyond her love to God. Ah! I here discharge her solemnly from the heavy burden of secrecy which she has borne. She shall end her days without compelling either eyes or brow to lie. Let her motherhood stand clear of blame; let that noble, sacred old age, crowned with virtue, shine with its natural lustre, freed of that link which bound her indirectly to infamy!"

Tears checked the dying woman's voice for an instant; Aline gave her salts to inhale.

"There is no one who has not been better to me than I deserve," she went on,—"even the devoted servant who does this last service; she has feigned ignorance of what she knew, but at least she was in the secret of the penances by which I have destroyed the flesh that sinned. I here beg pardon of the world for the long deception to which I have been led by the terrible logic of society. Jean-Francois Tascheron was not as guilty as he seemed. Ah! you who hear me, I implore you to remember his youth, and the madness excited in him partly by the remorse that seized upon me, partly by involuntary seductions. More than that! it was a sense of honor, though a mistaken honor, which caused the most awful of these evils. Neither of us could endure our perpetual deceit. He appealed, unhappy man, to my own right feeling; he sought to make our fatal love as little wounding to others as it could be. We meant to hide ourselves away forever. Thus I was the cause, the sole cause, of his crime. Driven by necessity, the unhappy man, guilty of too much devotion to an idol, chose from all evil acts the one which might be hereafter reparable. I knew nothing of it till the moment of execution. At that moment the hand of God threw down that scaffolding of false contrivances—I heard the cries; they echo in my ears! I divined the struggle, which I could not stop,—I, the cause of it! Tascheron was maddened; I swear it."

Here Veronique turned her eyes upon Monsieur de Grandville, and a sob was heard to issue from Denise Tascheron's breast.

"He lost his mind when he saw what he thought his happiness destroyed by unforeseen circumstances. The unhappy man, misled by his love, went headlong from a delinquent act to crime—from robbery to a double murder. He left my mother's house an innocent man, he returned a guilty one. I alone knew that there was neither premeditation nor any of the aggravating circumstances on which he was sentenced to death. A hundred times I thought of betraying myself to save him; a hundred times a horrible and necessary restraint stopped the words upon my lips. Undoubtedly, my presence near the scene had contributed to give him the odious, infamous, ignoble courage of a murderer. Were it not for me, he would have fled. I had formed that soul, trained that mind, enlarged that heart; I knew it; he was incapable of cowardice or meanness. Do justice to that involuntarily guilty arm, do justice to him, whom God, in his mercy, has allowed to sleep in his quiet grave, where you have wept for him, suspecting, it may be, the extenuating truth. Punish, curse the guilty creature before you! Horrified by the crime when once committed, I did my best to hide my share in it. Trusted by my father—I, who was childless—to lead a child to God, I led him to the scaffold! Ah! punish me, curse me, the hour has come!"

Saying these words, her eyes shone with the stoic pride of a savage. The archbishop, standing behind her, and as if protecting her with the pastoral cross, abandoned his

impassible demeanor and covered his eyes with his right hand. A muffled cry was heard, as though some one were dying. Two persons, Gerard and Roubaud, received and carried away in their arms, Denise Tascheron, unconscious. That sight seemed for an instant to quench the fire in Veronique's eyes; she was evidently uneasy; but soon her self-control and serenity of martyrdom resumed their sway.

"You now know," she continued, "that I deserve neither praise or blessing for my conduct here. I have led in sight of Heaven, a secret life of bitter penance which Heaven will estimate. My life before men has been an immense reparation for the evils I have caused; I have marked my repentance ineffaceably on the earth; it will last almost eternally here below. It is written on those fertile fields, in the prosperous village, in the rivulets brought from the mountains to water the plain once barren and fruitless, now green and fertile. Not a tree will be cut for a hundred years to come but the people of this region will know of the remorse that made it grow. My repentant soul will still live here among you. What you will owe to its efforts, to a fortune honorably acquired, is the heritage of its repentance,—the repentance of her who caused the crime. All has been repaired so far as society is concerned; but I am still responsible for that life, crushed in its bud,—a life confided to me and for which I am now required to render an account."

The flame of her eyes was veiled in tears.

"There is here, before me, a man," she continued, "who, because he did his duty strictly, has been to me an object of hatred which I thought eternal. He was the first inflictor of my punishment. My feet were still too deep in blood, I was too near the deed, not to hate justice. So long as that root of anger lay in my heart, I knew there was still a lingering remnant of condemnable passion. I had nothing to forgive that man, I have only had to purify that corner of my heart where Evil lurked. However hard it may have been to win that victory, it is won."

Monsieur de Grandville turned a face to Veronique that was bathed in tears. Human justice seemed at that moment to feel remorse. When the confessing woman raised her head as if to continue, she met the agonizing look of old man Grossetete, who stretched his supplicating hands to her as if to say, "Enough, enough!" At the same instant a sound of tears and sobs was heard. Moved by such sympathy, unable to bear the balm of this general pardon, she was seized with faintness. Seeing that her daughter's vital force was gone at last, the old mother summoned the vigor of her youth to carry her away.

"Christians," said the archbishop, "you have heard the confession of that penitent woman; it confirms the sentence of human justice. You ought to see in this fresh reason to join your prayers to those of the Church which offers to God the holy sacrifice of the mass, to implore his mercy in favor of so deep a repentance."

The services went on. Veronique, lying on the bed, followed them with a look of such inward contentment that she seemed, to every eye, no longer the same woman. On her face was the candid and virtuous expression of the pure young girl such as she had been in her parents' home. The dawn of eternal life was already whitening her brow and glorifying her face with its celestial tints. Doubtless she heard the mystic harmonies, and gathered strength to live from her desire to unite herself once more with God in the last communion. The rector came beside the bed and gave her absolution. The archbishop

administered the sacred oils with a fatherly tenderness that showed to all there present how dear the lost but now recovered lamb had been to him. Then, with the sacred anointing, he closed to the things of earth those eyes which had done such evil, and laid the seal of the Church upon the lips that were once too eloquent. The ears, by which so many evil inspirations had penetrated her mind, were closed forever. All the senses, deadened by repentance, were thus sanctified, and the spirit of evil could have no further power within her soul.

Never did assistants of this ceremony more fully understand the grandeur and profundity of the sacrament than those who now saw the acts of the Church justly following the confession of that dying woman.

Thus prepared, Veronique received the body of Jesus Christ with an expression of hope and joy which melted the ice of unbelief against which the rector had so often bruised himself. Roubaud, confounded in all his opinions, became a Catholic on the spot. The scene was touching and yet awesome; the solemnity of its every feature was so great that painters might have found there the subject of a masterpiece.

When this funeral part was over, and the dying woman heard the priests begin the reading of the gospel of Saint John, she signed to her mother to bring her son, who had been taken from the room by his tutor. When she saw Francis kneeling by the bedside the pardoned mother felt she had the right to lay her hand upon his head and bless him. Doing so, she died.

Old Madame Sauviat was there, at her post, erect as she had been for twenty years. This woman, heroic after her fashion, closed her daughter's eyes—those eyes that had wept so much—and kissed them. All the priests, followed by the choristers, surrounded the bed. By the flaming light of the torches they chanted the terrible *De Profundis*, the echoes of which told the population kneeling before the chateau, the friends praying in the salon, the servants in the adjoining rooms, that the mother of the canton was dead. The hymn was accompanied with moans and tears. The confession of that grand woman had not been audible beyond the threshold of the salon, and none but loving ears had heard it.

When the peasants of the neighborhood, joining with those of Montegnac, came, one by one, to lay upon their benefactress the customary palm, together with their last farewell mingled with prayers and tears, they saw the man of justice, crushed by grief, holding the hand of the woman whom, without intending it, he had so cruelly but so justly stricken.

Two days later the *procureur-general*, Grossetete, the archbishop, and the mayor, holding the corners of the black pall, conducted the body of Madame Graslin to its last resting-place. It was laid in the grave in deep silence; not a word was said; no one had strength to speak; all eyes were full of tears. "She is now a saint!" was said by the peasants as they went away along the roads of the canton to which she had given prosperity,—saying the words to her creations as though they were animate beings.

No one thought it strange that Madame Graslin was buried beside the body of Jean-Francois Tascheron. She had not asked it; but the old mother, as the last act of her tender pity, had requested the sexton to make the grave there,—putting together those whom earth had so violently parted, and whose souls were now reunited through repentance in purgatory.

Madame Graslin’s will was found to be all that was expected of it. She founded scholarships and hospital beds at Limoges solely for working-men; she assigned a considerable sum—three hundred thousand francs in six years—for the purchase of that part of the village called Les Tascherons, where she directed that a hospital should be built. This hospital, intended for the indigent old persons of the canton, for the sick, for lying-in women if paupers, and for foundlings, was to be called the Tascheron Hospital. Veronique ordered it to be placed in charge of the Gray Sisters, and fixed the salaries of the surgeon and the physician at four thousand francs for each. She requested Roubaud to be the first physician of this hospital, placing upon him the choice of the surgeon, and requesting him to superintend the erection of the building with reference to sanitary arrangements, conjointly with Gerard, who was to be the architect. She also gave to the village of Montegnac an extent of pasture land sufficient to pay all its taxes. The church, she endowed with a fund to be used for a special purpose, namely: watch was to be kept over young workmen, and cases discovered in which some village youth might show a disposition for art, or science, or manufactures; the interest of the fund was then to be used in fostering it. The intelligent benevolence of the testatrix named the sum that should be taken for each of these encouragements.

The news of Madame Graslin’s death, received throughout the department as a calamity, was not accompanied by any rumor injurious to the memory of this woman. This discretion was a homage rendered to so many virtues by the hard-working Catholic population, which renewed in this little corner of France the miracles of the “Lettres Edifiantes.”

Gerard, appointed guardian of Francis Graslin, and obliged, by terms of the will, to reside at the chateau, moved there. But he did not marry Denise Tascheron until three months after Veronique’s death. In her, Francis found a second mother.