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THE COURTSHIP OF SILVÈRE AND MIETTE.

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BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

THE

FORTUNE OF THE ROUGONS:

A REALISTIC NOVEL.

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA.

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 21ST FRENCH EDITION.

Illustrated with Eight Page Engravings.

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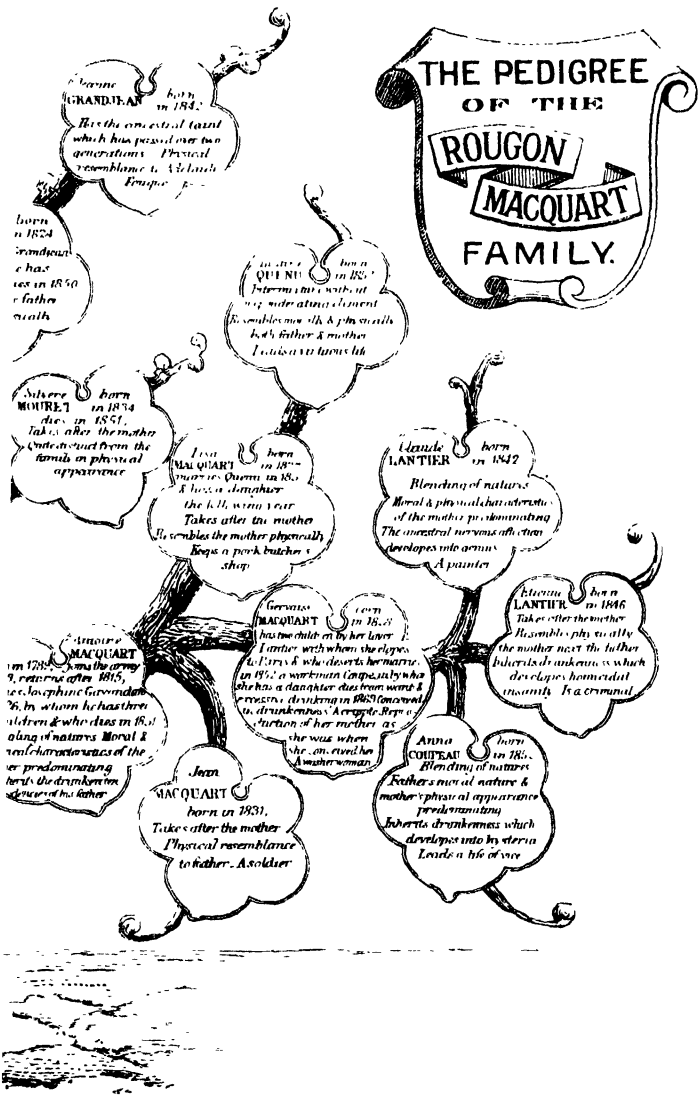
THE PEDIGREE
OF THE
ROUGON
MACQUART
FAMILY.
born in 1824
has
ies in 1850
father
wealth
born in 1834
dies in 1851.
Takes after the mother
Quite exempt from the
family on physical
appearance
born in 18--
Quenu in 18--
& has a daughter
the 1.11. wing year
Takes after the mother
Resembles the mother physically
Keeps a pork butcher's
shop
born in 1842
Blending of natures
Moral & physical characteristics
of the mother predominating
The ancestral nervous affection
developes into ataxia
A painter
born in 1846
Takes after the mother
Resembles physically
the mother next the father
Inherits drunkenness which
developes hom'cidal
insanity. Is a criminal
born in 18--
has two children by her lover
Lantier with whom she elopes
to Paris & who deserts her marries
in 18-- a workman (Coupeau) who
she has a daughter dies from worry &
excesses drinking in 1869 conceived
in drunkenness. A regular Repre-
sentation of her mother as
she was when
she...ons ex-wife
A washer woman
born in 1831.
Takes after the mother
Physical resemblance
to father. A soldier
born in 18--
Blending of natures
Father's moral nature &
mother's physical appearance
predominating
Inherits drunkenness which
developes into hysteria
Leads a life of vice

PREFACE.

I WISH to show how a family, a small group of persons, comports itself amidst the surroundings in which it is placed, expanding and giving birth to ten, twenty individuals who appear at first sight extremely dissimilar, but who, on examination, will be found to be intimately connected with each other. Heredity, the same as gravity, is governed by certain laws.

By resolving the double question of temperament and surroundings, I shall endeavour to discover and follow out the thread which conducts mathematically from one individual to another. And when I have gathered up all the threads, when I have the whole social group in my hands, I shall exhibit the several members of it at work as actors in an epoch of history; I shall portray them in all the complex diversities of their efforts; and, at the same time, I shall analyse the sum of each individual's volition, and the general tendency of the whole.*

* The present is the first volume of the "Rougon-Macquart" series, "the Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire." A list is appended of all the published volumes of the series in the order in which they were originally issued.

La Fortune des Rougons.
La Curée.
Le Ventre de Paris.
La Conquête de Plassans.
La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret.
Son Excellence Eugène Rougon.
L'Assommoir.
Une Page d'Amour.
Nana.
Pot-Bouille.
Au Bonheur des Dames.
La Joie de Vivre.
Germinal.
L'Œuvre.

The characteristic of the Rougon-Macquart family, the group which I propose to study, is their unbridled passions, that great revolutionising element of our age, inciting to excessive self-indulgence. Physiologically speaking, these appetites are the gradual outcome of certain nervous and sanguineous modifications which manifest themselves in a race of beings, as a consequence of some previous organic lesion, and which determine the sentiments, the desires, the passions of each individual of the race according to his surroundings; in short, all those natural and instinctive manifestations of human nature, which, in their results, assume the conventional names of virtues and vices. Historically speaking, these appetites originate with the people, whence they spread to contemporary society, affecting all stages under the influence of that impulse, essentially modern, which is communicated to the lower classes during the progress of their social development, and they thus tell the story of the Second Empire, by the help of their individual dramas, from the perfidy of the Coup d'État to the treason of Sedan.

I had been collecting documents for this vast work for about three years, and the present volume was, indeed, already written, when the fall of the Bonapartes—which was essential to complete my picture, and which, with a kind of fatality, always turned up at the end of the drama—came to my aid, though I had not dared to expect it so near, to supply the terrible and necessary issue of my work. The latter is now complete; it moves in a finished circle; it becomes the picture of a defunct reign, of a strange epoch of folly and shame.

This work, which will comprise several episodes, embodies in my mind the natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire. And the first episode, "The Fortune of the Rougons," may, for scientific purposes, be very aptly entitled "The Origin."

EMILE ZOLA.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE PREFIXED TO THE FIRST EDITION OF "UNE PAGE D'AMOUR."

I HAVE determined on prefixing to this volume the Genealogical Tree of the Rougon-Macquart family, and I have been prompted to this decision by two reasons.

Firstly: The requests to have an adequate sketch of this Tree have been very numerous, in so far as it would allow my readers to thread their way through a maze of details concerning the many members of the family of which I have constituted myself the historian.

My second reason is somewhat more complicated. It is a regret to me that I did not give this Genealogical Tree to the world in the first volume of the series, as its publication would have permitted my plan being grasped at a glance. Were I to withhold it longer, I should be accused in the end of having furbished it up after the event. It is time enough to put on record the fact that it was conceived as it stands in 1868, before I had written a single line, and that it was clearly pictured forth in the first of these fictions, published under the title of "La Fortune des Rougons," in which I could not well depict the original representatives of the family, till I had settled, before everything, its branches and offshoots. The difficulty was all the greater as the idiosyncracies of four generations were to be contrasted, and my characters were to enact their parts within a period of only eighteen years.

The publication of this Tree will be my answer to such as charge me with a persistent leaning to undue realism and vicious detail. Since 1868 I have been embodying the conception I then outlined, and in this Genealogical Tree I have laid down the broad lines from which I have swerved neither to right nor to left. To it I must yield my undivided attention; it is at once my incentive and my guide. Its results are not attained fortuitously; it contains what I have schemed out and what I am busily realising.

It now remains for me to say that circumstances only

have forced me to publish the detailed Family Tree with "Une Page d'Amour," a work which is essentially domestic, and in which I have made no attempt at elaborate portraiture. It should properly have been prefixed to the last volume of the series. Eight have appeared, twelve are still on the stocks, and this fact sufficiently explains my impatience. Some day hereafter it will serve as frontispiece to the last of the volumes, where it will have an intimate connection with the progress of the story. In my mind it has taken shape as embodying the observations of Pascal Rougon, a physician, and a member of the family, who in the closing fiction will sum up the scientific results of the complete work. Doctor Pascal will analyse and elucidate the whole, filling in blanks with exact details which I have hitherto necessarily omitted, lest the succeeding volumes should lose in beauty and interest. The natural and social characteristics of each member of the family will be definitely pictured, and the uncouthness of technical phrases will be smoothed away by explanatory details. My perfected scheme can be made intelligible to my readers from other sources of information. I cannot give here a list of all the physiological works which I have consulted, but would only mention "L'Hérédité Naturelle," by Dr. Lucas, in which the curious may find information regarding the results obtained by physiological science, allowing me to build up the Rougon-Macquart Family Tree.

I have now merely the wish to prove that my novels published during the last nine years are but interdependent units in a complete whole, the plan of which was decided on before putting pen to paper, and that consequently, while judging of the merits of each individual story, my readers should pay some regard to its being in harmony with the perfect scheme. Bearing this in mind, they will be enabled to pass on my work a somewhat juster and more liberal opinion than might otherwise be the case.

EMILE ZOLA.

THE FORTUNE OF THE ROUGONS.

CHAPTER I.

On quitting Plassans by the Porte de Rome, situated at the southern part of the town, you will find, on the right of the road to Nice, and a little way past the first houses of the Faubourg, a plot of land known in that part of the country as the Aire Saint-Mittre.

The Aire Saint-Mittre is an oblong piece of ground on a level with the footpath of the adjacent road, from which it is separated by a strip of trodden grass. A narrow lane, having no thoroughfare, borders it on the right with a row of hovels; while on the left, and at the further end, it is closed in by two bits of wall overgrown with moss, and above which can be seen the top branches of the mulberry-trees of the Jas-Meiffren —an extensive property—the entrance to which lies lower down. Enclosed thus on three sides, the Aire Saint-Mittre is like a place which leads nowhere, and is used solely as a promenade.

In former times a cemetery existed there under the protection of Saint-Mittre, a Provençal saint, who was greatly honoured in the country. In 1851 the old people of Plassans still remembered having seen the walls of the cemetery standing, although it had been closed for several years. The earth, which had been glutted with corpses for more than a century, literally perspired with death; and it had been necessary to open a new burial-ground at the other end of the town. The old cemetery, long abandoned, had been gradually purified by the dark, thick-set vegetation which used to sprout over it every spring. This rich soil, in which the gravediggers could no longer delve without turning up some human remains, possessed a most formidable fertility. The tall weeds, which overtopped the walls after the May rains and the June sun-

shine, were plainly visible from the high road; while inside, the place presented the appearance of a deep sombre green sea studded with large blossoms of singular brilliancy. Under the shade of the close-set stalks the very sap seemed, as it were, to boil and ooze out from the damp soil.

Among the curiosities of this field were some large pear-trees, with twisted boughs forming huge knots; none of the housewives of Plassans cared to pluck the large fruit which grew upon them, and which the townspeople used to speak of with grimaces of disgust. No such delicacy, however, restrained the young urchins of the Faubourg, who were in the habit of assembling at twilight in bands, and climbing the walls to steal the pears, even before they were ripe.

The trees and vegetation, in their vigorous growth, had rapidly assimilated the decomposing matter in the old cemetery of Saint-Mittre; while the malaria rising from the human remains had been greedily absorbed by the flowers and fruits; so that eventually the only odour one could detect, in passing by this accumulation of putrefaction, was that arising from the strong smell of the wild gillyflowers. It was merely a question of a few summers.

At about this time the townspeople determined to utilise this common property, which had long been useless. The walls bordering the roadway. and the blind-alley were pulled down; the weeds and the pear-trees were uprooted; the sepulchral remains were removed; the ground was dug several yards deep, and the bones, which the earth was willing to surrender, were heaped up in a corner. For nearly a month the youngsters, who lamented the loss of the pear-trees, played at bowls with the skulls, and one night some practical jokers suspended femurs and tibias to all the bell-handles of the town. This scandal, which is still remembered at Plassans, did not cease until the authorities decided to have the heaps of bones shot into a hole which had been dug in the new cemetery. All work, however, is usually carried out with a discreet dilatoriness in the country, and during an entire week the inhabitants saw, at distant intervals, a solitary cart occupied in removing these human remains, just as one would cart away rubbish. The worst of it was, the cart had to traverse the whole length of Plassans, and, in consequence of the bad condition of the roads, every jolt of the vehicle scattered fragments of bones and handfuls of rich mould. There was not the least

semblance of a religious ceremony, nothing but a slow, brutal cartage. Never before was a town so disgusted.

For several years the old cemetery remained an object of terror. Although it was situated in the main thoroughfare and was open to all comers, it was left quite deserted, a prey to another vegetarian raid. The authorities of the town, who had doubtless counted on selling it and seeing houses built upon it, had evidently been unable to find a purchaser. The recollection of the heap of bones, and the solitary cart jolting through the streets with the oppressive persistence of an incubus, doubtless made the people recoil from the spot; or perhaps this indifference should rather be ascribed to that indolence, to that repugnance to pulling down and setting up again which is so characteristic of country people. As a matter of fact, the authorities still retained possession of this plot of ground, and finally altogether forgot their original desire to dispose of it. They did not even erect a fence round it, but left it open to all comers. As time rolled on, the people grew accustomed to this barren spot; they used to sit on the grass, walk about, or congregate in groups. When the grass had got worn away and the trodden soil had become grey and hard, the old cemetery resembled a badly-levelled public promenade. As if the more effectually to efface every objectionable record, the inhabitants were slowly and unwittingly led to change the very appellation of the place, contenting themselves with the name of the saint only, which was likewise used to designate the blind alley at one corner of the field. Thus there was the Aire Saint-Mittre and the Impasse Saint-Mittre.

These facts date, however, from some considerable time back. For more than thirty years past, the Aire Saint-Mittre has presented a strange picture. The townspeople, much too inert and indifferent to derive any advantage from it, had let it, for a trifling consideration, to some wheelwrights of the Faubourg, who had turned it into a woodyard. At the present day it is still encumbered with enormous pieces of timber thirty or forty feet long, lying here and there in piles, and looking like immense overturned columns. These parallel piles of timber, reaching from one end of the yard to the other, are a continual source of delight to the youngsters. In some places the ground is covered with the fallen wood, forming a kind of uneven flooring over which it is impossible to walk, except by balancing one's self in a marvellous way. Troops of children

amuse themselves all day long with this exercise. You will see them jumping over the great planks, walking along the narrow ends one after another, and crawling astride them: various games which generally terminate in blows and bellowings. Sometimes a dozen of them will sit, closely packed one against the other, on the thin end of a pole raised a few feet above the ground, balancing themselves for hours together. The Aire Saint-Mittre thus serves as a recreation ground for all the little ragamuffins of the Faubourg, who, for more than a quarter of a century, have been in the habit of resorting there to wear out the seats of their breeches.

The strange associations of the place are enhanced by the circumstance that the wandering gipsies, by a sort of traditional custom, always select this waste land for their encampments. Whenever any of these nomadic establishments, which generally consist of an entire tribe, arrive at Plassans, they take up their quarters in the Aire Saint-Mittre. The place is consequently never empty. There is always some strange-looking band there, some troop of wild men and horribly dried-up women, among whom may be seen groups of healthy-looking children rolling about on the grass. These people live in the open air, devoid of all sense of shame, regardless of everybody, boiling their pots, eating nameless things, displaying their tattered garments, sleeping, fighting, kissing, and reeking with filth and misery.

This field, formerly deathlike and deserted, save for the buzzing of the hornets around the rich blossoms in the calm sunshine, has thus become a very rowdy spot, resounding with the noisy quarrels of the gipsies and the shrill cries of the urchins of the Faubourg. In one corner, there is a primitive saw-mill for cutting the timber, the great noise of which forms a dull, continuous bass accompaniment to the sharp-sounding voices. The wood is placed on two high tressels, and a couple of sawyers, one of whom stands aloft on the piece of timber itself, and the other underneath, blinded by the falling sawdust, work a large saw to and fro, like wire-pulled puppets, for hours together, with the rigid regularity of a machine. The wood sawn by them is stacked, plank by plank, along the wall at the end, in piles six or eight feet high, which often remain there several seasons, overgrown by weeds close to the ground, and constitute one of the charms of the Aire Saint-Mittre. In between these stacks are

mysterious, retired little paths leading to the broader alley between the timber and the wall, a wild strip of verdure revealing only small patches of sky. The vigorous vegetation and the shuddering, deathlike stillness of the old cemetery still invade this alley, with its moss-covered walls and velvety turf. One can feel the soft warm vapours of death's voluptuousness wafted from the old graves lying under the sun. In the whole country round Plassans there is not a more entrancing spot, breathing, as it does, the very spirit of languor, solitude, and tenderness. It is a most delightful place for love-making. When the cemetery was being cleared, the bones must have been heaped up in this corner; for it frequently happens that one's foot comes across some fragments of a skull lying concealed in the damp turf.

Nobody, however, thinks of the bodies that have slept under the earth. In the day-time the children play hide-and-seek behind the piles of wood. The green alley is not frequented at all; the only thing to be seen is the woodyard crowded with timber and grey with dust. In the morning and afternoon, when the sun is warm, the whole place is astir. Above all the turmoil, above the ragamuffins playing among the timber, and the gipsies kindling the fire under their cauldrons, the figure of the sawyer mounted on his beam stands out in bold relief, moving to and fro with the precision of clockwork, as if to regulate the busy activity that has invaded the former home of death. Only the old people, as they sit on the planks basking in the setting sun, speak at times among themselves of the bones which they had seen conveyed through the streets of Plassans by the legendary cart.

At nightfall the Aire Saint-Mittre becomes quite deserted, and assumes a hollow look, like a great black hole. The dying embers of the gipsies' fires are no longer visible, although at times shadows can be distinguished gliding noiselessly into the dense mass of darkness. The place is especially miserable in winter time.

One Sunday evening, at about seven o'clock, a young man stepped lightly from the Impasse Saint-Mittre, and, passing close by the walls, disappeared among the timber in the woodyard. It was in the early part of December, 1851, when the weather was dry and cold. The full moon shone with that sharp brilliancy peculiar to winter moons. The woodyard did not present that deep, sinister

appearance which it wears on rainy nights; illuminated with sheets of white light, and wrapped in a deep, chill silence, it wore a soft, melancholy aspect.

The young man paused a few seconds on the edge of the yard and gazed mistrustfully in front of him. He carried a long gun, the butt-end of which was hidden under his coat, while the barrel, pointing towards the ground, glittered in the moonlight. Tightening his grasp of the weapon, he attentively examined the square shadows cast by the piles of timber. The ground looked like a chess-board, on which the black and white squares were clearly defined by the light and shade. The sawyer's tressels stood out in the centre of the plot of land on a strip of bare grey ground, forming a strange-looking, elongated picture, resembling an immense geometrical figure traced on paper. The rest of the yard, with the great beams lying about, formed a huge couch on which the light reposed, sparsely streaked here and there with slender black lines from the shadows which ran along the different pieces of timber. This sea of poles, lying motionless in the chill silence of the wintry moon, stiffened, as it were, with sleep and cold, recalled the corpses of the old cemetery. The young man cast a rapid glance round the empty space; there was not a creature, not a sound, no danger of being seen or heard. The black patches at the further end caused him some anxiety at first, but after a brief examination he plucked up courage and hurriedly crossed the woodyard.

As soon as he felt himself under cover he slackened his pace. He was then in the green alley which runs along the wall behind the piles of planks. Here his very footsteps became inaudible; the frozen grass scarcely crackled under his tread. This spot must have possessed some charm for him, for he seemed to experience a feeling of comfort, apprehending no danger, and coming there solely for the pleasure it afforded him. He now no longer concealed his gun. The alley, as it extended itself, looked like a dark trench, while the moon, gliding ever and anon between the piles of timber, streaked the grass with patches of light. The whole place was wrapped in one soft, sad slumber. No words can describe the calm peacefulness of this pathway. The young man traversed its entire length, and stopped at the end where the walls of the Jas-Meiffren form an angle. Here he listened attentively for any sound that might be coming from the adjoining estate.

At last, hearing nothing, he stooped down, and removing one of the planks, hid his gun amongst the timber.

An old tombstone, which had been overlooked in the clearing of the burial ground lay in the corner, resting on its side and forming a kind of slightly-sloping raised seat. The rain had worn its edges, and the moss was slowly eating into it. Nevertheless, the following fragment of an epitaph, engraved on that portion of the surface which was sinking in the ground, was still distinguishable by the moonlight. "*Here lieth . . . Marie . . . died . . .*" The finger of time had effaced the rest.

When he had concealed his gun, the young man again listened attentively, and hearing nothing, resolved to jump up on the stone. The wall being rather low, he was able to rest his elbows on the top of it. He did not perceive anything excepting a flood of light beyond the row of mulberry-trees along the wall. The flat, barren grounds of the Jas-Meiffren spread out under the moon like an immense sheet of unbleached linen; a hundred yards off the mansion and outhouses formed a still whiter patch. The young man stood gazing anxiously in that direction when, suddenly, one of the clocks of the town struck seven with slow, solemn strokes. He counted the strokes, and then jumped down, apparently surprised and relieved.

He seated himself on the tombstone, as though he was prepared to wait some considerable time. He remained there for about half-an-hour, motionless and deep in thought, and apparently quite unconscious of the cold, while his eyes gazed fixedly at a dense mass of shadow. He had seated himself in a dark corner; but the rising moon gradually gained upon him, and soon shone full over his head.

He was a strong, sturdy-looking lad, whose fine mouth, and soft, delicate skin betrayed his youthfulness. He must have been about seventeen years of age, and possessed a characteristic kind of beauty.

His thin, long face looked like the work of a skilful sculptor; the high forehead, prominently arched eyebrows, aquiline nose and large flat chin, the cheeks with protruding tapering cheek-bones, gave a singularly bold relief to his head. Such a face would, with advancing age, develop pronounced bony features, as attenuated as those of a knight errant. But at this stage of puberty the angularity of his face, which was lightly covered

with a soft down, was relieved by a certain charming effeminacy and childlike indistinctness of outline. His soft black eyes, still glowing with youth, infused a delicacy into his vigorous-looking countenance. The young fellow would probably not have fascinated most women, as he was not what one would call handsome; but his features, as a whole, were full of such ardent and sympathetic life, such enthusiastic and vigorous beauty, that they must have attracted the gaze and engaged the thoughts of the girls of his country—those sunburnt girls of the South—as he passed their doors in the sultry July evenings.

He remained seated upon the tomb-stone, wrapped in thought, and apparently quite unconscious of the moonlight which now fell upon his chest and legs. He was of middle stature, rather thickset, with over-developed arms and a labourer's hands, already hardened by toil; his feet, encased in heavy laced boots, looked strong and square-toed. His general appearance, more particularly the coarseness of his limbs, clearly betrayed his lowly origin. There was, however, something in him, in his upright neck, in the thoughtful glances of his eyes, which seemed to indicate an inner revolt against the brutifying manual labour which was beginning to bend him to the ground. His was, no doubt, an intelligent nature buried beneath the oppressive burden of race and class; one of those delicate refined spirits imbedded in a rough exterior, from which they in vain struggle to emancipate themselves. Thus, in spite of his vigour, he seemed timid and restless, feeling a kind of unconscious shame at his imperfection. An honest lad, whose very ignorance generated enthusiasm, whose manly heart was impelled by a childish intellect, displaying alike the submissiveness of a woman and the courage of a hero. On the evening in question, he was dressed in a coat and trousers of greenish corduroy. A soft felt hat, placed lightly on the back of his head, cast a shadow over his face.

As the neighbouring clock struck the half hour, he started from his reverie with a bound. Perceiving that the moon was shining full upon him, he gazed anxiously in front. Then he abruptly dived back into the shadow, but he was unable to recover the thread of his thoughts. He now perceived that his hands and feet were very cold, and, showing signs of impatience, he jumped up on the stone again, to look into the

Jas-Meiffren still empty and silent. Finally, at a loss how to kill time, he jumped down, fetched his gun from the pile of planks where he had concealed it, and amused himself by working the trigger. His weapon was a long, heavy carbine, which had doubtless belonged to some smuggler. The thickness of the butt-end and the heavy breech of the barrel showed it to be an old flintlock which had been altered to take percussion caps by some local gunsmith. Such firearms are frequently found in farm-houses, hung against the wall over the chimney-piece. The young man caressed his gun with affection; twenty times or more, he pulled the trigger, thrust his little finger into the barrel, and examined the butt-end attentively. Led on gradually by a youthful enthusiasm, combined with a little childish frolicsomeness, he ended by pointing his weapon without aiming at anything, like a recruit going through his drill.

It was now very nearly eight o'clock, and he had been holding his gun levelled for over a minute, when a low, panting voice, light as a breeze, came from the direction of the Jas-Meiffren.

"Are you there, Silvère?" the voice asked.

Silvère dropped his gun and bounded on to the tombstone.

"Yes, yes," he replied, also in a hushed voice. "Wait, I'll help you."

Before he could stretch out his arms the head of a young girl appeared above the wall. The child, with singular agility, had assisted herself by the aid of the trunk of a mulberry-tree, climbing up like a kitten. The ease and certainty with which she moved showed that she was familiar with this strange spot. In another moment she was seated on the top of the wall. Silvère, taking her in his arms, lifted her, not without a struggle on her part, on to the seat.

"Let go," she laughingly cried; "let go, I can get down alone very well."

"Have you been waiting for me long?" she asked, when she was seated on the stone. "I've been running, and am quite out of breath."

Silvère made no reply. He seemed in no laughing humour, as he gazed sorrowfully into the girl's face.

"I wanted to see you, Miette," he said, as he seated himself beside her. "I should have waited all night for you. I am going away early to-morrow morning."

Miette had just caught sight of the gun lying on the grass, and, with an air of thoughtfulness, murmured:

"Ah! so it's decided then; there's your gun!"

"Yes," replied Silvère, after a brief silence, his voice still faltering, "it's my gun. I thought it best to remove it from the house to-night; to-morrow morning aunt Dide might have seen me take it, and have felt uneasy about it. I am going to hide it, and shall come and fetch it just before leaving."

Seeing that Miette could not remove her eyes from the weapon which he had so foolishly left on the ground, he jumped up and hid it again among the planks of wood.

"We learnt this morning," he said, as he resumed his seat, "that the insurgents of La Palud and Saint Martin-de-Vaulx are on the march, and passed the night yesterday at Alboise. We have decided to join them. Some of the workmen of Plassans have already left the town this afternoon: those who still remain will rejoin their brothers to-morrow."

He pronounced the word brothers with a youthful emphasis.

"The struggle is becoming inevitable," he added; "but, at any rate, we have right on our side and we shall triumph."

Miette listened to Silvère, her eyes gazing fixedly in front of her, without looking at anything.

"Very well," she said, when he had finished speaking.

After a brief silence she continued:

"You had warned me, yet I still hoped. However, it is decided."

Neither of them knew what else to say. The green alley in the deserted corner of the woodyard resumed its melancholy stillness, as the moon chased the shadows of the piles of timber over the grass. The figures of the two young people on the tombstone remained still and motionless in the pale light. Silvère had passed his arm round Miette's waist, and she was reclining gently against his shoulder. They did not kiss, but pressed close to each other with a love that was full of the innocent tenderness of fraternal affection.

Miette was enveloped in a long brown hooded cloak reaching down to her feet, and leaving only her head and hands visible. Among the women of the lower classes in Provence —the peasants and the labourers—these ample cloaks, which are there called pelisses, and which have probably been worn for ages, are still to be met with. Miette had thrown her

hood back on arriving. Living in a hot climate, she was not accustomed to wear a cap in the open air, and her bare head stood out in bold relief against the moonlit wall. Although a mere child, she was already ripening into womanhood. She had arrived at that adorable indistinct stage of development where the frolicsome girl gives place to the grown-up young woman. There is in that stage a delicacy of the shooting bud, a hesitating conformation, which lends an exquisite charm to young girls. The full voluptuous outlines of puberty are already indicated in the innocent meagreness of childhood; the woman shoots forth, preserving, with the unconscious avowal of her sex, the maidenly modesty and embarrassment of the young girl. This period is very unpropitious for some girls, who grow up coarse and ugly, with sickly, sallow complexions like early plants; but for girls who, like Miette, are healthy and live in the open air, it is especially favourable, and, once passed, cannot be recalled.

Miette was thirteen years of age, and although strong and vigorous did not look older, owing to the bright childish smile which lit up her countenance. In consequence of the climate and the rude life which she led, she was rapidly ripening into womanhood, and was even now marriageable. She was nearly as tall as Silvère, plump and teeming with life. Like her lover, she possessed an uncommon kind of beauty. She would not have been considered ugly, although she might have appeared peculiar to most handsome young people. Her rich black hair, which rose shaggy and erect above her forehead, fell behind in long tresses like surging billows, and flowed over her head and neck like seething, bubbling waters. It was very thick, and caused her considerable inconvenience, as she did not know how to arrange it. She twisted it as tight as possible, so as to occupy little room, into several plaits as thick as a child's fist, and tied them into a tuft at the back of her head. As she had but little time to devote to her toilette, this immense chignon, hastily contrived without the aid of a mirror, often assumed, under her hands, a powerful grace and beauty. Seeing her head covered with this sort of natural casque, with this mass of frizzed hair which hung about her neck and temples like an animal's mane, one could readily comprehend why she was in the habit of going bareheaded, heedless of the rain and frost.

The dark outlines traced by the hair gave the form and

colour of a golden lunar crescent to her face. Her big eyes starting out of her head, her short turned-up nose with dilated nostrils, and her thick ruddy lips, when regarded apart, would have looked very ugly; viewed, however, in relation to the exquisitely rounded contour and the vivacity of her countenance, these details formed an ensemble of strange, ravishing beauty. When Miette laughed, throwing her head back and gently reclining it on her right shoulder, she resembled the ancient Bacchante, her throat swollen with sonorous gaiety, her cheeks rounded like those of a child, her teeth large and white, her twists of woolly hair tossed about by every outburst of merriment, and forming, as it were, a crown of vine branches. The maiden youthfulness of the girl of thirteen summers was distinguishable in the innocence of her broad womanly grins, and especially in the child-like delicacy of her chin and the soft transparency of her temples. Miette's face, tanned by the sun, reflected, in certain lights, an amber colour. A soft black down already shaded her upper lip. Toil was commencing to disfigure her small hands, which, if left idle, would have become charmingly plump and delicate.

Miette and Silvère remained silent for a long time. They were reading their own troubled thoughts, and, as they pondered, ever and anon, upon the unknown terrors of the morrow, they tightened their mutual embrace. Their two hearts were communing with each other, feeling the uselessness and bitterness of verbal plaint. The young girl, however, could no longer contain herself, and, choking with emotion, gave expression, in one phrase, to their mutual misgivings.

"You will come back again, won't you?" she whispered, as she hung on Silvère's neck.

Silvère made no reply, but, half-suffocated, and fearing lest he should give way, as Miette had done, he kissed her on the cheek like a brother, at a loss for any other consolation to offer. Then disengaging themselves they again lapsed into silence.

After a moment Miette shuddered. She was no longer leaning against Silvère's shoulder, and felt herself becoming icy cold. She would not have shuddered thus had she been in this deserted alley the previous evening, seated on this tombstone, where for several seasons they had carried on their flirtations amid the silence of the old corpses.

"I'm very cold," she said, as she pulled her hood over her head.

"Would you like to get up and walk?" the young man asked her. "It's not yet nine o'clock; we can take a stroll along the main road."

Miette reflected that she would probably not have the pleasure of another meeting for a long time—another of those evening chats, the joy of which served to sustain her throughout the day.

"Yes, let us walk a little," she quickly replied. "Let us go as far as the mill. I could pass the whole night like this if you wanted to."

They rose from the tombstone, and were soon hidden in the shadows of the piles of planks. Here Miette took off her cloak, which was quilted in the form of little lozenges with a red twill lining, and threw its large warm skirt over Silvère's shoulders, so as to envelop him entirely and draw him close to her under the same garment. They passed their arms round each other's waists, locking themselves together in a close embrace. When they were thus joined, as it were, into a single being, buried in the folds of the pelisse which concealed their human shape, they began to walk slowly in the direction of the high road, passing fearlessly through the vacant parts of the woodyard lighted up by the moon. Miette had thrown the cloak over Silvère, who had submitted to the operation quite naturally, as though it had performed a similar service for them every evening.

The road to Nice, along both sides of which the houses of the Faubourg are built, was, in the year 1851, lined with elm trees a hundred years old, grand old gigantic ruins, still full of vigour, which the fastidious town council have replaced, some years since, by small plane-trees. While Silvère and Miette were under the trees, the immense boughs of which cast shadows on the footpath in the moonlight, they met two or three black groups moving along silently close to the houses. Like them, they were amorous couples, closely wrapped in cloaks, and carrying on their flirtations in the dark.

This style of promenading has been instituted by young lovers in the Southern towns. Those boys and girls among the people, who will marry each other sooner or later, but who do not dislike a kiss a little in advance, have no resort where they can carry on their flirtations at their ease, without exposing themselves to scandal and gossip. Although their parents allow them full liberty, they would soon be the talk of

the town if they were to hire an apartment or meet each other alone; moreover, they have no time in the evenings to resort to the solitude of the country. They have, therefore, adopted the middle course, frequenting the suburbs, the vacant plots, the footpaths of the high roads, in fact all those places where there are few passers-by and numerous shady nooks. And as the inhabitants are all known to each other, they take the further precaution to conceal their identity by wrapping themselves in these long cloaks, large enough to cover a whole family. The parents tolerate these proceedings carried on in the dark; the stiff propriety of the country does not appear to entertain any apprehension; it is understood that the lovers shall not stand still or sit down in any of these retired nooks, and this suffices to calm all chaste susceptibilities. It is thought that they can hardly do more than kiss each other while they are walking; sometimes, however, a girl is led astray—the lovers have sat down.

Nothing is more charming than these lovers' rambles, which give free scope to the Southerner's suasive fanciful imagination. It is a veritable masquerade, fertile in innocent enjoyments within the reach of the most humble. The girl clasps her sweetheart to her bosom, enveloping him in her warm cloak, just as young ladies sometimes conceal their lovers under couches or in cupboards. This forbidden fruit has a particularly sweet flavour, eaten, as it is, in the open air, along the high roads, amidst persons who are quite indifferent to what is going on. The certainty of being able to kiss each other with impunity before all the world, to remain publicly in each other's embrace for evenings together, without running the danger of being recognised or pointed out, must add an exquisite ravishing charm to these flirtations. All the couples, looking like brown masses, resemble each other. The belated pedestrian, seeing these groups gliding about, regards what is going on as nothing more than a little innocent flirtation of no significance whatsoever. The lovers know they are safely concealed; they converse in undertones and make themselves quite at home; most frequently they do not converse at all but walk along at random, enjoying the charm of being enveloped in the same wrap and combining pleasure with propriety. The climate alone is to blame for having in the first instance invited these young lovers to retire to the secluded spots in the suburbs. On fine summer nights one cannot walk round Plassans without coming

across a hooded couple; certain places, the Aire Saint-Mittre for instance, are full of these black-cloaked parties gliding softly past each other amid the warm night breezes; one would imagine they were guests invited to some mysterious ball given by the stars to the lovers among the poorer classes. When it is very warm, and the young girls do not wear cloaks, they turn up their over-skirts. In the winter, the most passionate lovers even make light of the frosts; and as they descended the Nice road, Miette and Silvère thought but little of the chill December night.

They passed along the slumbering Faubourg without exchanging a word, resuming with mute delight their warm embrace. Their hearts were heavy; the joy which they felt in pressing close to each other was not unmixed with sad thoughts of an approaching farewell, and it seemed to them that they could never exhaust the mingled sweetness and bitterness of this silence which slowly lulled their steps. The houses were now becoming more scarce as they reached the end of the Faubourg. There stands the entrance to the Jas-Meiffren, an iron gate fixed to two strong pillars; a long row of mulberry trees is visible through the bars. Silvère and Miette instinctively cast a glance inside as they passed.

From the Jas-Meiffren the main road descends with a gentle slope to the bottom of a valley, which serves as the bed of a little rivulet, the Viorne, a brook in summer, but a torrent in winter. The two rows of elms were still in existence at this time, and lent to the high road the appearance of a magnificent avenue intersecting the hill, which was planted with corn and slender vines, with a broad band of gigantic trees. On this December night, under the clear cold moonlight, the newly-ploughed fields, as they extended along both sides of the road, resembled vast beds of greyish wadding which would have deadened all the noises in the air. The dull murmur of the Viorne in the distance alone sent a thrill through the immense silence of the surrounding country.

When the young people had commenced to descend the avenue, Miette's thoughts reverted to the Jas-Meiffren which they had just left behind.

"I had great difficulty in getting away this evening," she said. "My uncle wouldn't let me go. He shut himself up in a cellar, where, I believe, he was hiding his money, for he

seemed very frightened this morning at the events that are taking place."

She clasped Silvère gently to her side.

"Don't be frightened," he replied. "The time will come when we shall be able to see each other freely the whole day long. You must not fret."

"Oh," replied the young girl, shaking her head, "you are very hopeful. Sometimes I feel very sad. It isn't the hard work which grieves me; on the contrary, I am often very glad of my uncle's severity, and the tasks he sets me. He was quite right to make me a peasant; I should perhaps have turned out bad; for, do you know, Silvère, there are moments when I fancy myself under a curse. I feel, then, that I should like to be dead. I think of you know whom."

As she pronounced these last words, her voice broke into a sob. Silvère interrupted her somewhat harshly.

"Be quiet!" he said. "You promised not to think about it. It's no crime of yours. We love each other very much, don't we?" he added in a gentler tone. "When we're married you'll have no more unpleasant hours."

"I know," murmured Miette. "You are so kind, you sustain me. But what am I to do? I cannot shake off these fears and inward revolts which I sometimes feel. I think, at times, that I have been wronged, and should like to do something wicked. You see I pour forth my heart to you. Whenever my father's name is thrown in my face, I feel a burning indignation. When the urchins cry at me, as I pass, 'Eh! Chantegreil,' I lose all control of myself, and feel that I should like to lay hold of them and whip them."

After a savage silence, she resumed:

"As for you, you're a man; you're going to fight; you're very lucky."

Silvère had let her continue speaking. After a few steps, he observed, sorrowfully:

"You are wrong, Miette, to be angry. You shouldn't rebel against justice. As far as I'm concerned, I'm going to fight in defence of our common rights, not to gratify any personal animosity."

"All the same," the young girl continued, "I should like to be a man to handle a gun. I feel that it would do me good."

She perceived, from Silvère's silence, that she had displeased

him. Her ardour collapsed and she whispered in a supplicating tone:

"You are not angry with me, are you? It's your departure which grieves me and awakens such ideas. I know very well you are right—that I ought to be humble."

She commenced to cry, and Silvère, moved by her tears, grasped her hands and imprinted a kiss upon them.

"See now, how you pass from anger to tears like a child," he said lovingly. "You must be reasonable. I'm not scolding you. I only want to see you happier, and that depends chiefly upon yourself."

The remembrance of this drama, which Miette had so sadly evoked, cast a temporary gloom over the lovers. They continued their walk with bowed heads and troubled thoughts.

"Do you think I'm much happier than you?" Silvère asked, resuming the conversation, after a momentary silence, in spite of himself. "If my grandmother had not taken care of me and educated me, what would have become of me? With the exception of my uncle Antoine, who is an artisan like myself, and who taught me to love the Republic, all my other relations seem to fear that I should contaminate them by coming near them."

He was now speaking with considerable animation, and suddenly stopped, holding Miette in the middle of the road.

"God is my witness," he continued, "that I do not envy nor hate anybody. But if we triumph, I shall have to speak my mind to those fine gentlemen. Uncle Antoine knows all about this matter. You'll see when we return. We shall all live free and happy."

Miette pulled him gently, and they resumed their walk.

"You dearly love the Republic?" the girl asked, essaying a joke. "Do you love me as much?"

Her smile was not altogether free from a tinge of bitterness. She was thinking, perhaps, how easily Silvère abandoned her to go and scour the country. The lad gravely replied:

"You are my wife, to whom I have given my heart. I love the Republic on account of my affection for you. When we are married we shall want plenty of happiness, and it is to procure a part of this happiness that I'm going away from you to-morrow morning. Would you, then, persuade me to remain at home?"

"Oh, no!" cried the young girl eagerly. "A man should

be brave; courage is noble! You must forgive my jealousy. I should like to be as strong as you. You would love me all the more, wouldn't you?"

After a moment's silence, she added, with charming vivacity and ingenuousness:

"Ah! how delighted I shall be to kiss you on your return!"

This outburst of a loving and courageous heart deeply affected Silvère. He clasped Miette in his arms and imprinted several kisses on her cheek, and, as she laughingly struggled to get free, her eyes were bathed in tears of emotion.

Around the lovers the country still slumbered, in the vast stillness of the cold. They were now half-way down the hill. On the top of a hillock, to the left, stood the ruins of a windmill, blanched by the moon; the tower, which had fallen in on one side, alone remained. This was the limit which the young people had assigned to their walk. They had come straight from the Faubourg without casting a single glance at the fields they passed between. When he had kissed Miette's cheeks, Silvère raised his head and observed the mill.

"What a long walk we've had!" he exclaimed. "See—here is the mill. It must be nearly half-past nine. We must go home."

Miette made a wry face.

"Let us walk a little further," she implored; "only a few steps, just as far as the little cross road, no farther."

Silvère smiled, as he again took her round the waist. They continued to descend the hill, no longer fearing the glances of the curious, as they had not met a living soul after passing the last houses. They nevertheless remained enveloped in the long pelisse, which constituted, as it were, a natural nest for their love-making. It had concealed them for so many delightful evenings! Walking side by side, they would have felt small and isolated in the vast country around. This blending together into one form, however, emboldened them—made them feel bigger. Through the folds of the pelisse they gazed upon the fields stretching on the two sides of the road, without experiencing that overwhelming sensation with which vast indifferent horizons usually oppress the human affections. It seemed to them as though they had brought their house with them; they felt a pleasure in viewing the country around, as one would from a window, delighting in the calm solitude, the sheets of slumbering light, the glimpses of nature

through the dark wintry shroud, fascinated with the whole valley, in fact, though the charm was not sufficiently powerful to efface the pleasure of their mutual embrace.

Their colloquy had ceased; they spoke no more about other people, nor even about themselves. They were absorbed by the present, pressing each other's hands, uttering exclamations at the sight of a landscape, speaking at rare intervals, and with little attention to each other, as though overwhelmed by the warmth of their bodies. Silvère forgot his republican enthusiasm; Miette no longer reflected that her lover would be leaving her in an hour, for a long time, perhaps for ever. The transports of their affection lulled them into a feeling of security, as on other days, when no farewell marred the tranquillity of their meetings.

They continued walking, and soon reached the little cross-road mentioned by Miette—a bit of a lane which led through the fields to a village on the banks of the Viorne. But they passed on, pretending not to notice this path, where they had agreed to stop. A few minutes after, however, Silvère whispered:

"It must be very late; you will get tired."

"No; I assure you I'm not at all tired," the young girl replied; "I could walk several leagues like this easily." Then, in a tone of persuasion, she added:

"Let us walk down as far as the meadows of Sainte-Claire. There we will really stop and turn back."

Silvère, who with open eyes was lulled into a gentle slumber by the young girl's rhythmic gait, made no objection, and they returned to their state of rapture. They proceeded rather more slowly, fearing the moment when they would have to retrace their steps. Whilst they walked onward, they felt as though they were advancing to the eternity of their mutual embrace; the return meant a separation, a bitter leave-taking.

The declivity of the road was gradually becoming less steep. At the bottom of the valley there are meadows extending as far as the Viorne, which runs at the other end, beside a range of low hills. These meadows, separated from the high road by thick-set hedges, are the meadows of Sainte-Claire.

"Bah!" exclaimed Silvère, this time, as he caught sight of the first patches of grass; "we'll go as far as the bridge."

Miette burst out laughing, clasping the young man round the neck with exuberant affection.

At the spot where the hedges begin, there were in those days two elms forming the end of the long avenue, two colossal trees larger than any of the others. The treeless fields stretch out from the high road, like a large band of green wool, as far as the willows and birches of the river. The distance from the last elms to the bridge was scarcely three hundred yards. The lovers took a good quarter of an hour to traverse this space. At last, in spite of their slow gait, they reached the bridge, where they stopped.

The road to Nice ran up in front of them, along the opposite slope of the valley. They could only see a small portion of it, however, as it takes a sudden turn about half-a-mile from the bridge, and loses itself among the wooded hills. On looking round they caught sight of the other end of the road, that which they had just come along, which leads in a direct line from Plassans to the Viorne. In the beautiful winter moonlight it looked like a long silver ribbon, skirted with two sombre borders by the rows of elms. On the right and left the tilled lands of the hills formed enormous grey, vague seas, intersected by this ribbon, by this roadway white with frost, and emitting a metallic lustre. Up above, on a level with the horizon, the light shone from several windows in the Faubourg, resembling glowing sparks. By degrees Miette and Silvère had left it fully a league behind They gazed at the intervening road as though struck with admiration at the vast amphitheatre, which seemed to rise to the firmament, and over which flowed bluish streams of light, as over the stages of a gigantic waterfall. This strange scenery, this colossal apotheosis stood out amidst the still and deathly silence which pervaded it. Nothing could have been of more sovereign grandeur.

The young people, who had just been leaning against a parapet of the bridge, were now gazing beneath them. The Viorne, swollen by the rains, flowed on at their feet with a dull, continuous sound. Up the river and below, amidst the darkness which filled the hollows, they perceived the black forms of the trees growing on the banks; here and there glided the moonbeams, casting a trail of molten tin, as it were, on the water, which glittered and danced about like a ray of light on the scales of some live animal. This glimmer flowed with mysterious charm along the greyish course of the torrent, among the vague shadows of the foliage. It might have been

an enchanted valley, some strange retreat inhabited by a curious race of people composed of lights and shades.

This part of the river was familiar to the lovers; they had often gone there in the warm July nights, when they passed hours, hidden among the clusters of willows on the right bank, at the spot where the meadows of Sainte-Claire spread their verdant tapestry up to the waterside. They remembered every bend of the stream, every stone on which they had to step in crossing the Viorne, when it was as narrow as a brook, every little grassy spot where they had indulged in their dreams of love. Miette, therefore, contemplated from the bridge the right bank of the torrent with a longing gaze.

"If it were warmer," she sighed, "we might go down and rest there awhile before going back up the hill."

Then, after a short silence, during which she kept her eyes fixed on the banks of the Viorne, she resumed:

"Look down there, Silvère, at that black mass in front of the dam. Do you remember? That's the brushwood where we sat last Corpus Christi day."

"Yes, so it is," replied Silvère, softly.

This was the place where they had ventured to kiss each other. The remembrance of it just awakened by the young girl caused them both a delightful sensation, an emotion in which the joys of the day gone by mingled with the hopes of the morrow. They saw, as though by a flash of lightning, the delightful evenings they had passed together, especially that evening of Corpus Christi day, with its most trifling details, the warm sky, the cool willows of the Viorne, and their own loving talk. Whilst they joyously recalled these past incidents, they pictured to themselves the unknown future, their dreams realised, and they marching through life arm in arm—as they had just been doing on the highway—warmly wrapped in the same cloak. They yielded to this transport, and smiled in each other's eyes, lost amidst the silent brilliancy of the scene.

Suddenly Silvère raised his head, and, throwing off the cloak, listened attentively to something. Miette, in her surprise, imitated him, not knowing why he started so abruptly from her.

Confused sounds were issuing from behind the hills, in the midst of which the Nice road wends its way. They sounded like the distant jolts of a procession of carts, but were rendered

more indistinct by the roaring of the Viorne. Gradually the sounds became stronger, resembling the stamping of an army on the march. Amidst this continuous and increasing roll the uproar of a crowd became distinguishable, like strange rhythmical blasts of a hurricane; one could have fancied they were the thunderclaps of a storm which was rapidly approaching and already causing a disturbance in the slumbering atmosphere. Silvère listened attentively, unable to catch the voice of the tempest, the distinct perception of which was obstructed by the hills. Suddenly a dark mass appeared at the turn of the road, and the "Marseillaise," sung with vindictive fury, thundered forth.

"Ah, there they are!" cried Silvère, with a burst of joyous enthusiasm.

He commenced to run up the hill, dragging Miette with him. On the left side of the road lay a slope planted with evergreen oaks, up which he clambered with the young girl, to avoid being carried away by the surging, howling multitude.

When they had reached the top of the slope, in the shadow of the brushwood, the young girl, rather pale, gazed sorrowfully at those men, whose distant songs had sufficed to steal Silvère from her embrace. It seemed as if the whole band had interposed itself between them. They were so happy a few minutes before, locked in each other's arms, alone and lost amidst the overwhelming silence and discreet brilliancy of the moon! And now Silvère's eyes, as he looked around, ignoring even her presence, were riveted on those strangers whom he called his brothers.

The band descended with superb, irresistible stride. The irruption of those thousands of men upon the deathly cold silence of the horizon produced a scene of grandeur not unmixed with terror. The highway became a torrent, rolling with living waves which seemed inexhaustible. At the bend in the road appeared a constant succession of dark masses, whose songs swelled more and more the loud roar of this human tempest. When the last battalion had made its appearance, the shouts became deafening. The "Marseillaise" filled the heavens as if blown through enormous trumpets by giant mouths, which transmitted it, vibrating, into every corner of the valley. The slumbering country awoke with a bound—quivering throughout like a drum beaten by drumsticks, and echoing from its very bowels the formidable sounds of the

national song. The singing was no longer confined to the men. The distant rocks, the tilled lands, the meadows, the clusters of trees, every bit of brushwood, all seemed to emit human voices. The large amphitheatre, extending from the river to Plassans, the gigantic cascade over which the bluish moonlight flowed, seemed to be filled with countless numbers of invisible people cheering the insurgents; and in the deep pools of the Viorne, along the waters streaked by the mysterious rays of molten tin, every dark nook and corner seemed to conceal human beings, who took up each refrain with ever-increasing ardour. In the commotion of the air and earth the country cried for vengeance and liberty. So long as the little army was descending the slope, the roar of the populace burst forth in sonorous waves mingled with abrupt shouts, and shook the very stones in the roadway.

Silvère, livid with emotion, listened and looked on. The insurgents who led the van, drawing behind them this swarming, roaring trail, vastly indistinct in the darkness, rapidly approached the bridge.

"I thought," murmured Miette, "that you would not have to pass through Plassans?"

"They must have altered their plan of operations," Silvère replied; "we were, in fact, to have marched to the chief town by the Toulon road, passing to the left of Plassans and Orchères. They must have left Alboise this afternoon and advanced in the evening to Les Tulettes."

The head of the column had already arrived in front of the young people. The little army was more orderly than one would have expected from a band of undisciplined men. The contingents from each town and borough formed separate battalions, marching a few feet distant from each other. These battalions were apparently under the orders of certain chiefs. The pace at which they were at the moment descending the declivity converted them into a compact solid mass of invincible strength. There were probably about three thousand persons, all united and carried away by the same storm of indignation. The strange details of this scene were not discernible amidst the shadows projected along the highway by the lofty slope. Five or six feet from the brushwood, however, where Miette and Silvère were sheltered, the left hand slope sank slightly to give passage to a little pathway which ran alongside of the Viorne; and the moon, gliding along this gap, striped the

road with a broad luminous band. On the first insurgents traversing this beam, they suddenly found themselves lit up with a brilliancy, the sharp whiteness of which revealed, with singular distinctness, the slightest ruggedness of visage or costume. As the insurgents defiled, the young people watched them emerge, fiercely and without cessation, from the darkness.

At the first sight of the men passing through the light Miette instinctively clung to Silvère, although she knew she was safe even from their gaze. She passed her arm round his neck, reclining her head against his shoulder. She stood upright, her pale face enveloped by the hood of the pelisse, her eyes gazing fixedly at this square patch of light as it was rapidly traversed by these strange faces, transfigured by enthusiasm, their dark open mouths filled with the vindictive cry of the "Marseillaise." Silvère, whom she felt trembling at her side, bent towards her ear and named the various contingents as they passed.

The column marched along, eight abreast. In front there were some big, square-headed fellows, who seemed to possess the Herculean strength and naïve confidence of giants. They were blind, intrepid defenders of the Republic. They carried large axes on their shoulders, the edges of which, freshly sharpened, glittered in the moonlight.

"The woodcutters of the forests of the Seille," said Silvère. "They have been formed into a corps of sappers. At a signal from their chiefs these men would march straight to Paris, battering down the gates of the towns with their axes, as they cut down the old cork-trees on the mountain."

The young man spoke with pride of the heavy fists of his brethren. He continued, as he watched a band of labourers and rough-bearded men, tanned by the sun, coming along behind the wood-cutters:

"The contingent from La Palud. That is the borough which first broke out into rebellion. The men in blouses are labourers who cut up the cork-trees; the others in the velvet jackets must be huntsmen and colliers, living in the passes of the Seille. The huntsmen knew your father, Miette. They have some good firearms, which they handle skilfully. Ah! if all were armed in the same manner! We are short of muskets. See, the labourers have only got cudgels."

Miette, speechless, looked on and listened. As Silvère spoke to her of her father the blood rushed quickly to her

cheeks. Her face burning, she scrutinised the huntsmen with an air of mingled indignation and sympathy. From this moment she seemed to become animated by the feverish emotions which the insurgents' songs awakened.

The column, which had just recommenced the "Marseillaise," continued to march down as though lashed by the sharp blasts of the *Mistral*. The men of La Palud were followed by another troop of workmen, among whom a goodly number of gentlemen in great-coats were to be seen.

"These are the men of Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx," Silvère resumed. "That borough rose almost at the same time as La Palud. The masters joined the workmen. There are some rich men there, Miette; men whose wealth would enable them to live peacefully at home, but who prefer to risk their lives in defence of liberty. One cannot but admire these men. Weapons are very scarce, they've scarcely got a few fowling-pieces—Do you see those men there, Miette, with a red band round the left elbow? They are the leaders."

The contingents descended the hills, however, more rapidly than Silvère could speak. While he was naming the men from Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx, two battalions had already traversed the ray of light which blanched the roadway.

"Did you see," he asked, "the insurgents from Alboise and Les Tulettes pass by just now? I recognised Burgat the blacksmith. They must have joined the band to-day. How they do run!"

Miette now leaned forward, in order to scrutinise more closely the little bands as they were described by the young man. A cold chill assailed her, penetrating her whole body. At this moment a battalion, larger and better disciplined than the others, appeared. The insurgents composing it, who were nearly all dressed in blue blouses, wore red sashes round their waists. One would have thought they were arrayed in uniform. A man on horseback, with a sabre at his side, marched in the midst of them. Most of these improvised soldiers carried guns, probably carbines and old muskets of the National Guard.

"I don't know those," Silvère said. "The man on horseback must be the chief I've heard speak of. He brought with him the contingents from Faverolles and the neighbouring villages. The whole column ought to be equipped in the same manner."

He had no time to take breath.

"Ah! see, here are the country people!" he cried.

Small groups, consisting of ten or twenty men at most, were advancing behind the men of Faverolles. They all wore the short jacket of the Southern peasants. As they sang, they brandished pitchforks and scythes. Some of them had only large navvies' shovels. Every hamlet had sent its able-bodied men.

Silvère, who recognised the parties by their leaders, enumerated them with a feverish voice.

"The contingent from Chavanoz!" he said. "There are only eight men but they are strong; uncle Antoine knows them. Here's Nazères! here's Poujols! they're all here, not one has failed to answer the summons. Valqueyras! Hold, there's the parson amongst them; I've heard about him, he's a staunch republican."

He was becoming intoxicated, and, as each battalion consisted only of a few insurgents, the haste and precipitation with which he named them gave him the appearance of one in a frenzy.

"Ah! Miette," he continued, "what a fine march past! Rozan! Vernoux! Corbière! and there are more still, you'll see. They've only got scythes, but they'll mow down the troops as close as the grass in their meadows—Saint-Eutrope! Mazet! Les Gardes! Marsanne! the entire north side of the Seille! Ah! we shall be victorious! The whole country is with us. Look at those men's arms, they are brawny and black as iron. There's no end to them. There's Pruinas! Roches-Noires! These last are smugglers: they are carrying carbines. Still more scythes and pitchforks, the contingents from the country are still passing. Castel-le-Vieux! Sainte-Anne! Graille! Estourmel! Murdaran!"

And, with a voice stifled by emotion, he finished naming these men who seemed to be borne away by a whirlwind as fast as he enumerated them. Stretching forward with burning countenance, he pointed out the several contingents with a nervous gesture. Miette followed his movements. She felt attracted towards the end of the road as by the depths of a precipice. To avoid slipping down the incline, she clung to the young man's neck. A strange intoxication rose from this crowd of men, inebriated with clamour, courage, and confidence. These creatures, seen through a ray of light, growing lads and

matured men, these old people brandishing their strange weapons and dressed in the most diverse costumes, from the workman's smock-frock to the gentleman's overcoat, this endless file of heads, which the time and circumstances had rendered indelible images of fanatical energy and enthusiasm, gradually assumed, before the young girl's eyes, the whirling impetuosity of a torrent. At certain moments, she fancied they were not moving, that they were really being carried away by the force of the "Marseillaise" with its hoarse, formidable intonations. She could not distinguish any conversation, hearing only one continuous rumbling, alternating from dull to shrill notes, as sharp as nails stuck into one's flesh by jerks. This roaring of the revolt, this call to combat, to death, with its outbursts of indignation, its burning desires for liberty, its remarkable mixture of massacres and sublime flights, as it struck her heart unceasingly, and more deeply at every fierce outburst of the rhythm, caused her one of those exquisite pangs of a virgin martyr standing erect and smiling under the lash. And the crowd flowed on, rolling upon the sonorous billow. The march-past, which did not last more than a few minutes, seemed to the young people to be interminable.

Truly, Miette was but a child. She had turned pale at the approach of the band, she had wept for the loss of him who was dear to her; but she was a brave girl whose ardent nature was easily fired by enthusiasm. She shook off the emotion which had gradually got possession of her, and became as courageous as a boy. She would willingly have seized a weapon and followed the insurgents. As the muskets and scythes filed past, her white teeth peered forth longer and sharper from between her red lips, like the tusks of a young wolf eager to bite. And, as she listened to Silvère enumerating the contingents from the country with ever-increasing haste, the pace of the column seemed to her to accelerate still more with his every word. It soon appeared as though carried away, like a cloud of human dust swept along by a tempest. Everything began to whirl before her. She closed her eyes, from which large warm tears were rolling down her cheeks.

Silvère's eyelashes were also moist.

"I don't see the men who left Plassans this afternoon," he murmured.

He tried to distinguish the end of the column, which was still in the shade. Suddenly he cried with joyous exultation:

"Ah! here they are! They've got the banner—the banner has been entrusted to them!"

He wanted to leap from the slope in order to join his companions; at this moment, however, the insurgents halted. Words of command ran along the column, the "Marseillaise" died out in a final rumbling, and one could only hear the confused murmurs of the still surging crowd. Silvère, as he listened, comprehended the orders despatched to the various contingents, and which called the men of Plassans to the van. As each battalion ranged itself along the side of the road to make way for the banner, the young man began to re-ascend the slope, dragging Miette along with him.

"Come," he said, "we shall get in front of them at the other side of the bridge."

When they were on the top, among the tilled lands, they ran along to the mill, the dam of which bars the river. They crossed the Viorne on a plank, placed there by the millers. They cut aslant through the meadows of Sainte-Claire, running hand-in-hand, without exchanging a word. The column projected a dark line over the highway, which they followed along the hedges. There were some openings amidst the hawthorns. Silvère and Miette jumped on to the main road through one of them.

In spite of the circuitous way they had come, they arrived at the same time as the men of Plassans. Silvère shook hands with some of them. They must have thought he had ascertained the new route taken by the insurgents, and had come to meet them. Miette, whose face was half-concealed by the hood of her pelisse, was scrutinised rather inquisitively.

"Why, it's Chantegreil," said one of the men from the Faubourg, "the niece of Rébufat, the *méyer* * of the Jas-Meiffren."

"Where do you spring from, gad-about?" cried another voice.

Silvère, intoxicated with enthusiasm, had not thought of the singular figure which his sweetheart would offer to the certain jeers of the workmen. Miette, confused looked at him, as if to implore his aid. But before he could even open his lips another voice rose from the crowd, exclaiming with brutality:

* A *méyer* is a farmer in Provence, who shares the expenses and profits of his farm with the owner of the land.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

"Her father's in prison; we don't want the daughter of a thief and murderer amongst us."

Miette turned dreadfully pale.

"You lie!" she muttered; "if my father has killed anybody, he has never thieved."

And as Silvère, pale and trembling more than she, was clenching his fists:

"Stop," she continued, "this is my affair."

Then turning round to the group, she repeated with a shout:

"You lie! you lie! he never stole a copper from anybody. You know it well enough. Why do you insult him when he can't be here?"

She drew herself up, superb with indignation—her ardent, half-wild nature seemed to accept with resignation the accusation of murder, but the charge of theft exasperated her. They knew it, and that is why the crowd, from a stupid viciousness, often thrust the accusation in her face.

The man who had just called her father a thief was merely repeating what he had heard said for many years. The girl's defiant attitude only incited the workmen to jeer all the more. Silvère continued to clench his fists, and matters were becoming serious, when a huntsman from the Seille, who had been sitting on a heap of stones at the roadside awaiting the order to march, came to the young girl's assistance.

"The little one's right," he said, "Chantegreil was one of us. I knew him. Nobody knows the facts of his little matter. I always believed in the truth of his deposition before the judges. The gendarme whom he brought down at the chase with a ball from his musket was no doubt taking aim at him with his carbine. A man must defend himself I should think! But Chantegreil was a decent fellow, he committed no robbery."

As often happens in such cases, the testimony of this poacher sufficed to bring other defenders to Miette's aid. Several workmen also professed to have known Chantegreil.

"Yes, yes, it's quite true!" they all said. "He wasn't a thief. There are some scoundrels at Plassans who ought to be sent to prison in his place. Chantegreil was our brother. Come now, be calm, little one."

Miette had never heard any one speak well of her father. He was generally spoken of before her as a beggar, a villain, and now she found some brave hearts who had forgiving words for him, who declared him to be an honest man. She burst

into tears, feeling an emotion similar to that awakened in her by the "Marseillaise;" and she bethought herself how she could thank these men for their kindness to her in misfortune. For a moment she conceived the idea of shaking them all by the hand like a man. But her heart suggested something better. At her side stood the insurgent who carried the banner. She touched the staff, and, to express her gratitude, said in a suppliant tone:

"Give it to me; I will carry it."

The simple-minded workmen comprehended the ingenuous sublimity of this expression of thankfulness.

"Yes," they all cried, "Chantegreil shall carry the banner."

A wood-cutter ventured the remark that she would soon get tired, and would not be able to go very far.

"Oh! yes, I'm quite strong," she said, with pride, tucking up her sleeves and showing a pair of arms as big as those of a grown woman.

"Wait a minute," she resumed, as they handed her the banner.

She pulled off her cloak quickly and put it on again, after turning the red lining outside. In the clear moonlight she appeared to be covered with a large purple cloak reaching down to her feet. The hood hanging on the edge of her chignon formed a kind of Phrygian cap. She took the banner, pressed the staff to her bosom, and stood upright in the folds of the blood-coloured streamer which waved behind her. The elated child's head, with its curly hair, large eyes moist with tears, and lips half opened in a smile, rose with energetic pride as she drew herself up, as it were, towards the sky. At this moment she was the virgin Liberty.

The insurgents burst into tumultuous applause. The vivid imagination of these Southerners was fired with enthusiasm at the sudden apparition of this girl nervously clasping their banner to her bosom. Shouts rose from the crowd:

"Bravo, Chantegreil! Chantegreil for ever! She shall remain with us; she'll bring us luck!"

They would have cheered her for a long time had not the order to resume march arrived. Whilst the column was moving, Miette pressed Silvère's hand as he returned to her side, and whispered in his ear:

"You hear! I shall remain with you. Are you glad?"

MIETTE ACCOMPANYING THE INSURGENTS IN THEIR MARCH ON PLASSANS. p. 38.

CHAPTER II.

PLASSANS is a sub-prefecture of about ten thousand inhabitants. Built on a plateau overlooking the Viorne, and resting on the north side against the Garrigues hills, one of the last branches of the Alps, the town is situated, as it were, at the bottom of a cul-de-sac. In 1851 it communicated with the adjoining country by two roads only, the Nice road, which runs down to the east, and the Lyons road, which rises to the west, the one continuing the other in almost parallel lines. Since that time, a railway has been constructed which passes to the south of the town, at the foot of the hill which descends with a steep declivity from the old ramparts to the river. At the present day, on coming out of the station on the right bank of the little torrent, one can see, by raising one's head, the first houses of Plassans, the gardens of which form a terrace. It takes a full quarter of an hour's ascent to reach these houses.

About twenty years ago, owing, no doubt, to the lack of intercommunication, there was no town that had preserved more completely the devout and aristocratic character which distinguishes the old Provençale cities. It had, at that time, and has even now, a whole district of large mansions built in the time of Louis XIV and Louis XV, a dozen churches, houses belonging to the Jesuits and Capuchins, and a considerable number of convents. The distinction of class was preserved for a long time by the division of its various districts. Plassans has three of them, each forming, as it were, a separate and complete borough, with its own churches, promenades, customs, and horizons.

The district of the nobility, called Saint-Marc, after the name of one of its officiating parish churches, a sort of miniature Versailles with its straight streets overgrown with grass, the large square houses of which conceal extensive gardens behind them, extends to the south along the edge of the plateau. Some of the mansions built on the declivity itself have a double row of terraces from which one can see the whole valley of the

Viorne, forming an admirable post of observation much vaunted in the country. The old quarter, formed of the original town, rises on the north-west with its narrow tortuous lanes bordered with tottering hovels. The Mairie, the Civil Tribunal, the Market, and the Gendarmerie are situated there; this, the most populous part of Plassans, is inhabited by working-men, shopkeepers, and all the wretched, toiling, common people. The new town forms a sort of long square to the north-east, the well-to-do, those who have slowly amassed a fortune, and those engaged in the liberal professions, occupy houses built beautifully straight and covered with a light yellow coating. This district, which is embellished by the Sub-Prefecture, an ugly plaster building decorated with rosework, numbered scarcely five or six streets in 1851; it is of quite recent formation, and, since the construction of the railway, seems the only part which is growing in extent.

One circumstance which at the present time divides Plassans into three independent and distinct parts, is that the districts are clearly defined by broad thoroughfares. The Cours Sauvaire and the Rue de Rome, which is, as it were, a narrow extension of it, run from west to east, from the Grand'-Porte to the Porte de Rome, thus cutting the town into two portions, and dividing the quarter of the nobility from the two others. The latter are themselves bounded by the Rue de la Banne; this street, the finest one in that part of the country, commences at the extremity of the Cours Sauvaire, and ascends towards the north, leaving on its left the black masses of the old quarter, and on its right the light-yellow houses of the new town. There, about half-way along the street, stands the Sub-Prefecture at the back of a small Place planted with sickly trees; the people of Plassans are very proud of this monument.

As if to keep more isolated and shut up within itself, the town is surrounded by a belt of old ramparts, which only serve to increase the gloom of the place, and to render it more confined. These ridiculous fortifications, eaten into by ivy, and crowned with wild gillyflowers, and which are about as high and as thick as the walls of a convent, could be demolished by gunshot. They are pierced with several openings, the two principal ones of which, the Porte de Rome and the Grand'-Porte, open respectively on to the Nice road and the Lyons road at the other end of the town. Until 1853 these openings were furnished with enormous wooden two-leaved doors, arched at

the top, and strengthened with bars of iron. These gates were double-locked at eleven o'clock in summer, and ten o'clock in winter. The town, having thus shot the bolts like a timid girl, went quietly to sleep. A guardian, who lived in a little cell placed in one of the interior angles of each gateway, was authorised to open for any belated persons. But it was necessary to stand parleying a long time. The guardian would not let the people in until he had scrutinised their faces carefully through a peep-hole by the light of his lantern; if their looks displeased him they had to sleep outside. This custom of locking the gates every evening is highly characteristic of the spirit of the town, a mixture of cowardice, egotism, routine, exclusiveness, and religious longing for a cloistered life. Plassans, when it had well shut itself up would say to itself, "I am at home," with the satisfaction of a devout citizen, who, assured of the safety of his cash-box, and certain not to be roused by any noise, says his prayers and retires gladly to bed. No other town has, I believe, persisted so long in incarcerating itself like a nun.

The population of Plassans is divided into three groups, corresponding with the same number of districts. Putting aside the functionaries—the sub-prefect, the receiver of taxes, the mortgage commissioner, and the postmaster, who are all strangers to the country, where they are the objects of envy rather than esteem, and who live after their own fashion—the real inhabitants, those who were born there and have every intention of ending their days there, have too much respect for traditional usages and established boundaries not to pen themselves up in one or other of the groups of the town.

The nobility are hermetically immured. Since the fall of Charles X they scarcely ever go out, and when they do, they hasten back to their large dismal mansions, walking along furtively as though they were in a hostile country. They do not visit any one, nor do they even receive each other. Their drawing-rooms are frequented by a few priests only. They spend the summer in the châteaux which they possess in the environs; in the winter they sit round their firesides. They are, as it were, dead people weary of life. Consequently the gloomy silence of a cemetery hangs over their quarter of the town. The doors and windows are carefully barricaded; one would think their mansions were so many convents shut off from the tumult without. At rare intervals an abbé, whose measured

tread adds to the gloomy silence of these sealed houses, passes by and disappears like a shadow through a half-opened door.

The well-to-do people, the retired tradesmen, the lawyers, notaries, and all the little easy-going ambitious world inhabiting the new town, endeavour to infuse some liveliness into Plassans. They go to the parties given by the sub-prefect, and dream of making a similar return. They eagerly seek popularity, call a workman "my good man," chat with the peasants about the harvest, read the papers, and walk out with their wives on Sunday. They constitute the enlightened minds of the district, the only persons who venture to speak disparagingly of the ramparts; in fact they have several times demanded the demolition, by the "Ediles," of these old walls, relics of a former age. The most sceptical among them, moreover, give way to a violent feeling of delight whenever a marquis or a count deigns to honour them with a stiff salutation. The dream of every citizen of the new town is to be admitted to a drawing-room of the Saint-Marc quarter. They know very well that their ambition is not attainable, and the consciousness of this causes them to proclaim all the louder that they are freethinkers; but they are freethinkers in words only, firm friends of the authorities, ready to rush into the arms of the first deliverer on the least indication of popular discontent.

The group which toils and vegetates in the old quarter is not so clearly defined. The labouring classes are in a majority; but the retail traders and even a few wholesale dealers are to be found among them. As a matter of fact, Plassans is far from being a commercial centre; there is just sufficient trade done there to dispose of the products of the country—oil, wine, and almonds. As for industrial labour, it is almost entirely represented by three or four tanyards which infest one of the streets of the old quarter, a felt hat manufactory, and some soap-boiling works which are relegated to a corner of the Faubourg. This little commercial and industrial world, though it may on high days and holidays visit the people of the new town, generally takes up its quarters among the operatives of the old. Merchants, retail traders, and artisans have a community of interest which unites them together in one family. On Sunday only the masters wash themselves, and assemble together apart. The labouring classes, on the other hand, constituting scarcely a fifth of the population, mingle with the idlers of the country.

Once a week, only, during the fine weather, the three districts of Plassans come together face to face. The whole town repairs to the Cours Sauvaire on Sunday after vespers; even the nobility venture thither. Three separate and distinct currents move along this sort of boulevard planted with two rows of plane trees. The well-to-do citizens of the new town merely pass along it, quit the town by the Grand'-Porte, and take the Avenue du Mail on the right, where they walk up and down till nightfall. During this time, the nobility and the lower classes share the Cours Sauvaire between them. For more than a century past, the nobility have selected the walk on the south side, which is bordered with a row of large mansions, and is the first to escape the heat of the sun; the lower classes have to rest content with the other walk on the north side where the cafés, inns, and tobacconists are located. The people and the nobility promenade the whole afternoon, walking up and down the Cours without any one of either party thinking of changing sides. They are separated by six or eight yards, and yet they keep a thousand leagues away from each other, as it were, following scrupulously the two parallel lines, as though they ought not to meet one another here below. Even during the revolutionary epochs, each party kept to its own side. This regulation walk on Sunday and the locking of the gates in the evening are analogous cases which suffice to portray the character of the ten thousand souls inhabiting the town.

Here, in this particular spot, until the year 1848, there vegetated an obscure family who enjoyed little esteem, but whose head, Pierre Rougon, subsequently played an important rôle owing to certain circumstances.

Pierre Rougon was the son of a peasant. His mother's family, named Fouque, owned, towards the end of the last century, a vast piece of ground in the Faubourg, behind the old cemetery of Saint-Mittre, and which was subsequently joined to the Jas-Meiffren. The Fouques were the richest market-gardeners in the country; they used to supply an entire district of Plassans with vegetables. The name of this family died out a few years before the Revolution. Only one girl, Adélaïde, remained; she was born in 1768 and became an orphan at the age of eighteen. This girl, whose father died insane, was a long, lank, pale creature, with a scared look and strange gait, which one might have taken for shyness so long as she was a little girl. As she grew up, however,

she became still stranger; she did certain things which were inexplicable even to the cleverest heads of the Faubourg, and from that time it was rumoured that she was cracked like her father.

She had scarcely been an orphan six months, in possession of a fortune which rendered her an eagerly-sought heiress, when it transpired that she had married a young gardener named Rougon, a rough-hewn peasant from the Basses-Alpes. This Rougon, after the death of the last of the male Fouques, who had engaged him for a term, had remained in the service of the deceased's daughter. From a salaried servant he ascended rapidly to the enviable position of husband. This marriage was a first shock to public opinion. No one could comprehend why Adélaïde preferred this poor devil, coarse, heavy, vulgar, scarcely able to speak French, to those other young men, sons of well-to-do farmers, who had been seen hovering round her for some time. And, as provincial people do not allow anything to remain unexplained, they made sure there was some mystery at the bottom of this affair, alleging even that the marriage of the two young people had become an absolute necessity. But events proved the falsity of the accusation. Adélaïde had a son at end of twelve full months. The Faubourg was annoyed; it could not admit that it was wrong, and determined to penetrate the supposed mystery; therefore all the old gossips kept a watch upon the Rougons. They soon found ample matter for tittle-tattle. Rougon died almost suddenly, fifteen months after his marriage, from a sunstroke received one afternoon as he was weeding a bed of carrots.

Scarcely a year had elapsed before the young widow caused an unheard-of scandal. It became known, as an indisputable fact, that she had a lover. She did not appear to have made any secret of it; several persons asserted that they had heard her use endearing terms, in public, to poor Rougon's successor. Scarcely a year of widowhood and a lover already! Such a disregard of propriety seemed monstrous, out of all reason. The scandal was heightened by Adélaïde's strange choice. At that time there dwelt at the end of the Impasse Saint-Mittre, in a hovel the back of which abutted on the Fouques' plot of ground, a man of bad repute, who was generally referred to as "that scoundrel Macquart." This man used to vanish for weeks and then turn up one fine evening, sauntering about with empty arms and hands in his pockets, whistling as

though he had just come from a short walk. And the women sitting at their doorsteps would remark as he passed: "There's that scoundrel Macquart! he has hidden his bales and his gun in some hollow of the Viorne." The truth was, Macquart had no means, but he used to eat and drink like a happy drone during his short sojourns in the town. He drank enormously, with fierce obstinacy. Seating himself at a table apart at the furthest end of a tavern, he would lose all consciousness, fixing his eyes stupidly on his glass, neither seeing nor hearing anything around him. When the landlord closed his establishment, he would retire with a firm step, and keeping his head erect as if held up by inebriation. "Macquart walks pretty straight, he's dead drunk," people used to say, as they saw him going home. Usually when he had had no drink, he walked with a slight curvature, avoiding the gaze of the curious with a kind of savage timidity.

Since the death of his father, a journeyman tanner who had left him as a sole heritage the hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre, he was never known to have either relatives or friends. The proximity of the frontiers and the neighbouring forests of the Seille had turned this singular lazy personage into a combination of smuggler and poacher, one of those suspicious-looking persons of whom the passers-by observe: "I shouldn't care to meet that fellow at midnight in a dark wood." Tall, with a formidable beard and lean face, Macquart was the terror of the good women of the Faubourg; they used to accuse him of devouring little children raw. Though he was hardly thirty years old, he looked fifty. Under his stubbly beard and locks of hair which covered his face like a poodle, one could only distinguish the gleams of his brown eyes, the furtive sorrowful glance of a man of vagrant instincts, rendered vicious by wine and a pariah life. Although no crimes had actually been brought home to him, the first suspicions always fell upon him whenever a theft or murder had been perpetrated in the country.

And it was this monster, this brigand, this scoundrel Macquart whom Adélaïde had chosen! In twenty months she had two children, first a boy and then a girl. There was no question of marriage between them. Never had the Faubourg seen such audacious impropriety. The stupefaction was so great, the idea of Macquart having found a young and wealthy mistress upset to such a degree the beliefs of the gossips, that

they even felt somewhat grieved for Adélaïde. "Poor thing, she's gone quite mad" they would say: "If she had any relatives she would have been placed in confinement long ago." And as they never knew anything of the history of these strange amours, they accused that rogue Macquart of having taken advantage of Adélaïde's weak mind to rob her of her money.

The legitimate son, little Pierre Rougon, grew up with his mother's bastards. Adélaïde kept the latter with her, Antoine and Ursule, the young wolves as they were called in the district, treating them as affectionately as her first child. She did not appear to entertain a very clear idea of the position in life reserved for these two poor creatures. To her they were the same, in every respect, as her first-born. She would sometimes go out holding Pierre with one hand and Antoine with the other, not observing the difference with which the two little fellows were regarded.

It was a strange house. For nearly twenty years every one lived in it after his own fancy, the children like the mother. Everything went on free from control. In growing to womanhood, Adélaïde had remained that strange girl who, at the age of fifteen, was looked upon as a savage; not that she was insane, as the people of the Faubourg asserted, but there was a want of equilibrium between her nerves and her blood, a disorder of the brain and heart which made her lead a life out of the ordinary, different from the rest of the world. She was certainly very natural, very consistent with herself; to the eyes of the neighbours, however, her consistency sprang from her insanity. She seemed desirous of being conspicuous, wickedly allowing everything at home to go from bad to worse while she obeyed, with great naïveté, the impulses of her own nature.

Ever since her first confinement, she had been subject to nervous fits which brought on terrible convulsions. These attacks recurred periodically, every two or three months. The doctors whom she consulted declared they could do nothing for her, that age would weaken the severity of the attacks. They prescribed for her a dietary regimen of underdone meat and quinine. These repeated shocks produced the cerebral disorder. She lived from day to day like a child, like a fawning animal yielding to its instincts. When Macquart was on his round, she passed her days in lazy, pensive idleness, taking

no concern for her children, excepting when she wanted to kiss and play with them. Then as soon as her lover returned she would disappear.

Behind Macquart's hovel there was a little yard, separated from the Fouques' property by a wall. One morning the neighbours were much astonished to find a door placed in this wall which was not there the previous evening. Before an hour had elapsed, the entire Faubourg had flocked to the neighbouring windows. The lovers must have worked the whole night to pierce the opening and place the door there. They could now go freely from one house to the other. The scandal was revived, every one felt less pity for Adélaïde, who was certainly the disgrace of the Faubourg; this door, this tacit, brutal avowal of their union, was the cause of more reproaches being heaped upon her than even her two children. "People should at least study appearances," the most tolerant women would say. Adélaïde did not understand what was meant by studying appearances. She was very happy, very proud of her door; she had assisted Macquart to knock the stone from the wall and had even mixed the mortar so that the work might proceed the quicker; she came with childish delight on the morrow to inspect the work by daylight, which circumstance appeared the consummation of her shamelessness to three gossips who observed her contemplating the masonry. From that time, whenever Macquart reappeared, it was thought, as no one ever saw the young woman, that she had gone to live with him in the hovel of the Impasse Saint-Mittre.

The smuggler used to come very irregularly, almost always unexpectedly. Nobody ever knew what life the lovers led during the two or three days he spent in the town at distant intervals. They used to shut themselves up; the little dwelling seemed uninhabited. The Faubourg having decided that Macquart had seduced Adélaïde for the sole purpose of consuming her money, it was astonished, after a time, to see this man continue his former mode of existence, ever up hill and down dale, as badly equipped as heretofore. Perhaps the young woman loved him all the more for seeing him at rare intervals, perhaps he had disregarded her entreaties, feeling an irresistible desire for a life of adventure. The Faubourg invented a thousand fables, without succeeding in giving any reasonable explanation of a connection which had been formed and continued in an extraordinary manner. The hovel in

the Impasse Saint-Mittre remained hermetically sealed and preserved its secrets. One merely guessed that in all probability Macquart was in the habit of beating Adélaïde, although the sound of a quarrel never issued from the house. On several occasions she reappeared with her face black and blue, and her hair torn out in handfuls. However, she did not display the least dejection or grief, nor did she seek in any way to hide her wounds. She smiled, and always seemed happy. No doubt she allowed herself to be beaten without breathing a word. This existence lasted for more than fifteen years.

When Adélaïde returned home she would find the house upside down, but would not take the least notice of it. She was utterly ignorant of the practical meaning of life, of the proper value of things and the necessity for order.

She let her children grow up like those plum-trees which thrive along the highways at the pleasure of the rain and sun. They bore their natural fruits like wild stock which has never known the grafting or pruning knife. Never was nature allowed so much sway, never did such little mischievous creatures grow up more freely under the influence of their own natural impulses. Meanwhile they rolled among the vegetables, passing their days in the open air, playing and fighting like good-for-nothing boys. They would steal the provisions from the house and pillage the few fruit-trees in the enclosure; they were the demons of the family, the plunderers and squallers of this strange domicile of lucid insanity. When their mother was absent for days together, they used to make such an uproar, they hit upon such diabolical expedients for annoying people, that the neighbours had to threaten them with the whip. Moreover, Adélaïde did not frighten them much; if they were less obnoxious to other people when she was there, it was because they made her the victim, playing the truant regularly five or six times a week, doing everything they could to receive some punishment which would allow them to squall to their hearts' content. But she never beat them, nor even lost her temper; she lived very well in all the noise, placidly, indolently, in a state of mental abstraction.

At last, the frightful uproar of these good-for-nothing urchins became indispensable to her to fill the void in her brain. She smiled complacently when she heard any one say: "Her children will beat her, and it will serve her right." Her utter indifference to everything seemed to reply: "What

does it matter?" She troubled even less about her property than about her children. The Fouques' enclosure, during the many years this singular existence lasted, would have become a piece of waste ground, if the young woman had not had the good fortune to entrust the cultivation of her vegetables to the care of a clever market-gardener. This man, who was to share the profits with her, robbed her impudently, though she never noticed it. This circumstance had its advantage, however; for, in order to steal the more, the gardener had to draw as much as possible from the land, which almost doubled in value in consequence.

Pierre, the legitimate child, either from secret instinct or from his knowledge of the different manner in which they were treated by the neighbours, domineered over his brother and sister from his early childhood. In their quarrels, although he was much weaker than Antoine, he always got the better of him. With regard to Ursule, poor, puny, wan little creature, she was roughly handled by both of them. Indeed, until the age of fifteen or sixteen, the three children fraternally beat each other unmercifully, giving no reason for their vague mutual hatred, and not knowing very clearly how dissimilar they were to each other. It was only at this age that they found themselves face to face with their definite self-conscious personalities.

When seventeen, Antoine was a tall fellow, displaying the blended imperfections of Macquart and Adélaïde. Macquart, however, predominated with his love of vagrancy, his tendency to drunkenness, and his brutish passions. But under the nervous influence of Adélaïde those vices, which in the father assumed a kind of sanguinary frankness, became, in the son, an artfulness full of hypocrisy and cowardice. Antoine resembled his mother in his total want of dignified will, in his effeminate voluptuous egotism, which disposed him to accept any bed of infamy provided he could lounge upon it at his ease and sleep warmly in it. The people used to say to him: "Ah! the brigand! he has not even the courage of his villany like Macquart; if ever he commits a murder, it will be with pin pricks." Physically, Antoine inherited Adélaïde's thick lips only; his other features were those of the smuggler, but softened and rendered tapering and flexible.

Ursule, on the other hand, showed the greatest resemblance to the young woman, both physically and morally. The two

prototypes were, however, still closely interwoven, excepting that the poor little thing, who was born the second, at the time when Adélaïde's love was warmer than Macquart's considerably cooled affections, seemed to have received, with her sex, a deeper impress of her mother's temperament. Moreover, hers was not a fusion of the two natures, but rather a juxtaposition, a remarkably close soldering. The whimsical Ursule displayed, at times, the shyness, the melancholy, and the transports of a pariah. She would then generally break out into nervous fits of laughter, musing lazily, like a woman unsound in head and heart. Her eyes, which wore a scared look like those of Adélaïde, were as limpid as crystal, similar to those of young cats who are doomed to die of consumption.

In the face of these two bastards Pierre seemed a stranger; to one who had not penetrated to the roots of his being he would have appeared profoundly dissimilar. Never was a child so equally balanced between the two persons who had given birth to it. He was the exact medium between the peasant Rougon and the nervous Adélaïde. His mother had, as it were, rough-hewn his father in him. That latent evolution of temperaments which ultimately determines the amelioration or deterioration of a race seemed to have obtained a first result in Pierre. Although he was still nothing but a peasant, his skin was less coarse, his head less thick, his intellect more capacious and more supple. In him the defects of his father and mother advantageously reacted upon each other. If Adélaïde's nature, rendered exquisitely sensitive by her rebellious nerves, had combated and overcome Rougon's heaviness and ponderous gravity, the latter had successfully resisted, in the child, the young woman's tendency to cerebral disorders. Pierre did not know either the passions or the sickly ravings of Macquart's young wolves. Very badly brought up, unruly and noisy, like all children who are not restrained during their infancy, he nevertheless possessed a reasoning intelligence which would always preserve him from perpetrating any useless, unproductive folly. His vices, his laziness, his appetite for indulgence, had not that instinctive play about them which characterised Antoine's vices; he intended to cultivate and gratify them honourably and openly. In his plump person of medium height, in his long pale face, in which his father's features had borrowed a certain refinement from those of his mother, one could already discern the sly, crafty ambition, the

insatiable desire for gratification, the hard heart and envious hatred of a peasant's son, converted by his mother's fortune and nervous temperament into a member of the middle classes.

When, at the age of seventeen, Pierre observed and was able to understand Adélaïde's disorders and the singular position of Antoine and Ursule, he seemed neither sorry nor indignant, but, simply much preoccupied by the steps which his own interests counselled him to take. He was the only one of the three children who had pursued his studies with any industry. A peasant who begins to feel the need of instruction becomes, most frequently, a fierce calculator. At school his playmates roused his first suspicion by their hootings and the insulting manner in which they treated his brother. Later on he came to understand the significance of many looks and words. He clearly recognised, at last, the disordered state of the household. From that time forward, Antoine and Ursule were regarded by him as shameless parasites, as mouths who were devouring his own substance. Like the people of the Faubourg, he thought that his mother was a fit subject for a lunatic asylum, and was afraid that she would in the end squander all his money, if he did not take steps to prevent her. What principally broke his heart was the robbery committed by the gardener. This unruly child was transformed in one day into a thrifty, selfish lad, hurriedly matured, as regards his instincts, by the strange improvident life which he could no longer bear to see around him without a feeling of grief and anguish. Those vegetables, from the sale of which the market-gardener derived the largest profits, belonged to him; the wine which his mother's bastards drank, the bread they ate, belonged to him. The whole house, the entire fortune, was his; according to his boorish logic, he alone, the legitimate son, was the heir. And as his riches were in danger, as everybody was greedily gnawing at his future fortune, he sought a means of turning them all out—mother, brother, sister, servants—and of succeeding immediately to his inheritance.

The conflict was cruel; the lad knew that, first of all, he would have to battle with his mother. Step by step, with a patient tenacity, he executed a plan, every detail of which he had matured a long time previously. His tactics were to appear before Adélaïde as a living reproach—not that he flew into a passion, or upbraided her for her misconduct; but he had acquired

a certain manner of looking at her, without saying a word, which terrified her. When she returned from a short sojourn in Macquart's hovel she could not look at her son without a shudder. She felt his cold glances, as sharp as steel blades, pierce her deeply and pitilessly. The severe, taciturn attitude of Pierre, of the child of that man whom she had so soon forgotten, strangely troubled her poor disordered brain. She would fancy that Rougon had risen from the dead to punish her for her dissoluteness. Every week she became seized with one of those nervous fits which were shattering her constitution. During these attacks she was left to struggle until she recovered consciousness, after which she would refasten her clothes and creep about more feebly than ever. She would often sob the whole night, holding her head in her hands, accepting Pierre's insults with resignation, as the strokes of an avenging deity. At other times she repudiated him; she would not acknowledge her own flesh and blood in this coarse lad, whose calmness so sadly chilled her feverishness. She would a thousand times rather have been beaten than glared at like that. Those implacable looks, which followed her everywhere, caused her at last such insupportable shocks that on several occasions she determined not to see her lover any more. As soon, however, as Macquart returned she forgot her vows and hastened to him. The conflict recommenced, more mute, more terrible, when she returned. At the end of a few months she fell completely under her son's sway. She stood before him like a little girl doubtful of her own good behaviour and always fearing that she deserves to be whipped. Pierre had skilfully bound her hand and foot, and made a very submissive servant of her, without opening his lips, without entering into difficult and compromising explanations.

When the young man felt that his mother was in his power, that he could treat her like a slave, he commenced, in his own interest, to make the most of her cerebral weakness and the foolish terror with which one of his glances inspired her. His first care, as soon as he was master at home, was to dismiss the market-gardener and replace him by one of his own creatures. He took the supreme direction of the household, selling, buying, and holding the cash-box. On the other hand, he made no attempt to regulate Adélaïde's actions, nor to correct Antoine and Ursule for their laziness. It mattered little to him, for he counted upon getting rid of these people as soon as an oppor-

tunity presented itself. He contented himself with portioning out their bread and water. Then, having already got all the fortune in his own hands, he awaited an event which would permit him to dispose of it as he pleased.

Circumstances proved singularly favourable to him. He escaped the conscription on the ground of being the eldest son of a widow. But two years later Antoine was called out. His bad luck did not affect him much; he counted on his mother purchasing a substitute for him. Adélaïde, in fact, wished to save him from serving; Pierre, however, who held the money, turned a deaf ear. His brother's compulsory departure was a lucky event for him, greatly assisting the accomplishment of his plans. When his mother mentioned the matter to him he gave her such a look that she did not venture to pursue it. His glare signified: "Do you wish; then, to ruin me for the sake of your bastard?" She selfishly abandoned Antoine, seeking before everything her own peace and quietness. Pierre, who did not like violent measures, and who rejoiced at being able to eject his brother without a disturbance, then played the part of a man in despair: the year had been a bad one, money was scarce, and he would be compelled to sell a portion of the land, and this would be the commencement of their ruin. Then he pledged his word of honour to Antoine that he would buy him out the following year, though he was fully determined to do nothing of the sort. Antoine departed, duped and half satisfied.

Pierre got rid of Ursule in a still more unexpected manner. A journeyman hatter of the Faubourg, named Mouret, conceived an affection for the young girl whom he thought as white and delicate as any young lady from the Saint-Marc quarter. He married her. On his part it was a love match, a sincere affection, free from all sordid motives. As to Ursule, she accepted the marriage to escape from a home where her life was rendered intolerable by her eldest brother. Her mother, absorbed in her own enjoyments, and using her last efforts to defend herself, regarded the matter with absolute indifference. She was even glad of her departure, hoping that Pierre, now that he had no further cause for dissatisfaction, would let her live in peace after her own fashion. No sooner had the young people been married than Mouret perceived that he would have to quit Plassans, if he did not wish to hear every day disparaging remarks about his wife and his mother-in-law. He

went away, taking Ursule with him, to Marseilles, where he worked at his trade. Moreover, he had not asked for one sou as a dowry. When Pierre, somewhat surprised at this disinterestedness, commenced to stammer out some explanations, he closed his mouth by saying that he preferred to earn his wife's bread. The worthy son of the peasant Rougon remained uneasy at this indifference, which seemed to him to conceal some trap.

Adélaïde now remained to be disposed of. Nothing in the world would induce Pierre to live with her any longer. She was compromising him, it was with her that he had desired to make a start. But he found himself hemmed in by two very embarrasing alternatives: to keep her and expose himself to the stigma of her disgrace, and so bind a fetter round his feet which would arrest him in his ambitious flight; or to turn her out, with the certainty of being pointed at as a bad son, which would have upset the calculations of this well-intentioned man. Knowing that he would be in want of everybody, he desired to secure an untarnished name throughout Plassans. There was but one method to adopt, namely, to induce Adélaïde to leave of her own accord. Pierre neglected nothing to accomplish this end. He considered his mother's misconduct a sufficient excuse for his own hard-heartedness. He punished her as one would chastise a child. The tables were turned. The poor woman cowered under the stick which was constantly held over her. She was scarcely forty-two years old, and already had the stammerings of terror, the vague, pitiful looks of an old woman in her second childhood. Her son continued to stab her with his piercing glances, hoping that she would run away when her courage was exhausted. The unfortunate woman suffered terribly from shame, from restrained desires and injuries inflicted, receiving the blows with passive resignation and returning nevertheless to Macquart with the determination to die on the spot rather than submit. There were nights when she would have got out of bed, and thrown herself into the Viorne, if her weak, nervous, effeminate frame had not had an excruciating fear of death. On several occasions she thought of running away and rejoining her lover on the frontier. It was only because she did not know whither to go that she remained at the house, submitting to her son's contemptuous silence and secret brutality. Pierre perceived that she would have left long ago if she had only had a refuge. He awaited an opportunity to take a little apartment for her somewhere, when

a fortuitous circumstance, which he had not ventured to anticipate, abruptly brought about the realisation of his desires. Information reached the Faubourg that Macquart had just been killed on the frontier by a shot from a custom-house officer, at the moment when he was endeavouring to smuggle a cargo of Geneva watches into France. The story was true. They did not even bring back the smuggler's body, which was interred in the cemetery of a little mountain village. Adélaïde's grief was inane. Her son, who watched her curiously, did not observe her shed a single tear. Macquart had made her sole legatee. She inherited the hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre, and the carbine of the deceased, which a smuggler, braving the balls of the custom-house officers, had loyally brought back to her. On the following day she retired to the little house, hung the carbine above the mantelpiece, and lived there estranged from all the world, solitary and silent.

Pierre was at last sole master at the house. The Fouques' plot of ground belonged to him in fact, if not in law. He never thought of establishing himself there. It was too narrow a field for his ambition. To till the ground and cultivate vegetables seemed to him boorish, unworthy of his faculties. He was in a hurry to divest himself of the peasant. His nature, refined by his mother's nervous temperament, felt an irresistible longing for the pleasures of the middle-classes. In all his calculations, therefore, he had regarded the sale of the Fouques' property as the final consummation. This sale, by placing a round sum of money in his hands, would enable him to marry the daughter of some merchant who would take him into partnership. At this period the wars of the Empire were thinning considerably the ranks of eligible young men. Parents were not so fastidious in the choice of a son-in-law. Pierre persuaded himself that the money would smooth all difficulties, and that the gossip of the Faubourg would be overlooked; he knew well how to pose as a victim, as an honest man suffering from a family disgrace, which he deplored without being tainted by it or excusing it.

For several months he had turned his attentions to the daughter of an oil-dealer, Félicité Puech. The firm of Puech & Lacamp, whose warehouses were in one of the darkest lanes of the old quarter, was far from prosperous. It enjoyed a doubtful credit in the place, and people would talk vaguely

of a failure. It was precisely in consequence of these evil reports that Pierre turned his batteries in this direction. No well-to-do trader would have given him his daughter. He reckoned to arrive just at the moment when old Puech was at a loss which way to turn; he would then purchase Félicité of him, and re-establish the credit of the house by his own energy and intelligence. It was a clever expedient for ascending a rung of the ladder, for raising himself a peg above his station. Above all things, he wished to escape from that frightful Faubourg, where everybody reviled his family, to bury in obscurity those foul legends, by effacing even the very name of the Fouques' plot of ground. That is why the filthy streets of the old quarter seemed to him a paradise. There, only, he would change his skin.

The moment which he had been awaiting soon arrived. The firm of Puech & Lacamp was at the last gasp. The young man then negotiated the match with prudence and skill. He was received, if not as a deliverer, at least as a necessary and acceptable expedient. The marriage settled, he turned his attention to the sale of the plot of ground. The owner of the Jas-Meiffren, desiring to enlarge his estate, had made him repeated offers. A low thin party-wall alone separated the two estates. Pierre speculated on the eagerness of his neighbour, a rich man, who, to gratify his caprice, offered as much as fifty thousand francs for the land. It was double its value. Pierre, however, with the craftiness of a peasant, pulled a long face and said that he did not care to sell; that his mother would never consent to get rid of a property where the Fouques had lived from father to son for nearly two centuries. All the time he appeared to hold back he was making preparations for the sale. Certain doubts arose in his mind. According to his own brutal logic the property belonged to him, he had the right to dispose of it as he chose. Beneath this assurance, however, he entertained vague presentiments of legal complications. He determined to consult indirectly a lawyer of the Faubourg.

He learnt some fine things from him. According to the lawyer his hands were absolutely tied. His mother alone could alienate the property, and he doubted whether she would. But what he did not know, what came as a heavy blow to him, was that Ursule and Antoine, the bastards, the young wolves, had claims on the estate. What! those scoundrels would despoil him, rob him, the legitimate child! The lawyer's ex-

planations were clear and precise; Adélaïde had, it is true, married Rougon under the system of communion of goods; but as all the fortune consisted of landed property, the young woman, according to law, came again into possession of the fortune at her husband's death; on the other hand, Macquart and Adélaïde had acknowledged their children, who were accordingly entitled to inherit from their mother. For sole consolation, Pierre learnt that the law reduced the share of illegitimate children in favour of lawful ones. This, however, did not console him at all. He wanted to have the whole. He would not have shared ten sous with Ursule and Antoine.

This vista of the complications of the Code opened a new horizon before him, which he scanned with a singularly thoughtful air. He soon recognised that a shrewd man must always keep the law on his side. And this is what he discovered without consulting any one, not even the lawyer, whose suspicions he was afraid of arousing. He knew how to turn his mother round his finger. One fine morning he took her to a notary and made her sign an act of sale. Provided they left her the hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre, Adélaïde would have sold Plassans. Besides, Pierre assured her an annual income of six hundred francs, and made the most solemn promises to watch over his brother and sister. This oath satisfied the good woman. She recited, before the notary, the lesson which it pleased her son to whisper to her. On the following day the young man made her place her name at the foot of a document, in which she acknowledged having received fifty thousand francs as the price of the property. This was his stroke of genius, the act of a rogue He contented himself with telling his mother, who was a little surprised at signing such a receipt when she had not seen a centime of the fifty thousand francs, that it was a pure formality of no consequence whatever. As he slipped the paper into his pocket, he thought to himself, "Now, let the young wolves ask me to render an account. I will tell them the old woman has squandered everything. They will never dare to go to law with me about it." A week afterwards, the party-wall no longer existed; the plough had turned up the mould of the vegetable beds; the Fouques' plot of ground, in accordance with young Rougon's wish, was about to become a thing of the past. A few months later, the owner of the Jas-Meiffren

had the old house of the market-gardeners, which was falling to pieces, pulled down.

As soon as Pierre had secured the fifty thousand francs he married Félicité Puech without any delay beyond what was absolutely necessary. Félicité was a little dark woman, such as one meets with in Provence. She looked like one of those brown, lean, noisy grasshoppers, which strike their heads against the almond-trees with their sudden hops. Skinny, flat-breasted, with pointed shoulders and a face like the snout of a pole-cat with singularly sunken and accentuated features, it was not easy to tell her age; she looked just as much fifteen as thirty, although she was in reality only nineteen, four years younger than her husband. The slyness of a cat was visible under her narrow black eyes, as small as gimlet holes. The low convex forehead, the nose slightly depressed at the root, with dilated nostrils, delicate and quivering, as if the better to scent odours, the thin red line of her lips, the prominent chin, united to her cheeks by strange looking dimples, all this physiognomy of a cunning dwarf was a living mask of intrigue, of active, envious ambition. With all her ugliness, Félicité had a sort of gracefulness about her which rendered her seductive. People said of her that she could be pretty or ugly as she pleased. It would depend on the fashion in which she tied her magnificent hair; but it depended still more on the triumphant smile which illumined her golden complexion when she thought to get the better of somebody. Born under an evil star, and believing herself ill-used by fortune, she was generally content to appear an ugly creature. She did not, however, intend to abandon the struggle, but promised herself the pleasure of making the whole town burst with envy by the display of an insolent happiness and luxury. Had she been able to act her part on a more extensive scale where her untrammelled spirit could have developed itself at its ease, she would certainly have quickly realised her dream. Her intelligence was far superior to that of the girls of her own station and education. Evil tongues asserted that her mother, who died a few years after she was born, had, during the early period of her married life, been over familiar with the Marquis de Carnavant, a young nobleman of the Saint-Marc quarter. In fact, Félicité had the hands and feet of a marchioness, and, in this respect, did not appear to belong to that class of workers from which she was descended.

Her marriage with Pierre Rougon, that rough-hewn peasant, that man of the Faubourg, whose family was certainly not in very good odour there, kept the old quarter in a state of astonishment for more than a month. She let people gossip, receiving the stiff congratulations of her friends with strange smiles. Her calculations had been made; she chose Rougon for a husband as one would choose an accomplice. Her father, in accepting the young man, looked only to the advent of the fifty thousand francs which were going to save him from bankruptcy. Félicité, however, was more keen-sighted. She penetrated a long way into the future, and felt that she would be in want of a man of robust health, even if a little rustic, behind whom she could conceal herself, and whom she could move at her own will. She entertained a deliberate hatred for those insignificant little persons of the country, for that lean herd of notaries' clerks and prospective barristers, who stand shivering with cold while they are waiting for clients. Having no dowry, and despairing of ever marrying a rich merchant's son, she preferred a thousand times a peasant whom she could use as a passive tool to some meagre graduate who would overwhelm her with his academic superiority, and drag her all her life in search of hollow vanities. She was of opinion that the woman ought to make the man. She believed herself capable of carving a minister out of a cow-herd. She had regarded Rougon with favour on account of his broad chest and stubby body, which was not altogether wanting in a certain elegance. A youth of such a build would bear with ease and sprightliness the world of intrigues which she dreamed of placing on his shoulders. She appreciated her husband's strength and vigour because she clearly perceived that he was far from being a fool; under his coarse flesh she had scented the cunning tricks of his spirit; she was, however, a long way from really knowing her Rougon, she thought him much more stupid than he was. A few days after her marriage, as she was by chance fumbling in the drawer of a secrétaire, she came across the receipt for the fifty thousand francs signed by Adélaïde. She understood, and was rather frightened; her own natural mediocre honesty rendered her averse to such expedients. Her terror, however, was not unmixed with admiration; Rougon became, in her eyes, a very smart man.

This young couple set to work bravely to conquer fortune. The firm of Puech & Lacamp was not so embarrassed as Pierre

thought. Their liabilities were small, they were merely in want of ready-money. In the provinces, traders adopt measures of prudence which save them from serious disasters. Puech & Lacamp were prudent to an excessive degree; they would not risk a thousand crowns without fear, so that their house, a veritable hole, was an unimportant one. The fifty thousand francs that Pierre brought sufficed to pay the debts and extend the business. Their commencement was good. For three consecutive years the harvest from their olive-trees was an abundant one. Félicité, by a bold stroke which frightened even Pierre and old Puech, made them purchase a considerable quantity of oil, which they stored in their warehouse. During the two following years, as the young woman had foreseen, the harvest failed, and a considerable rise in price occurred, which enabled them to realise large profits by selling out their stock.

A short time after this haul Puech & Lacamp retired from the firm, content with the few sous they had just secured, and gnawed by the ambition to die men of independent means.

The young couple, now sole masters of the business, thought that they had at last laid the foundation of their fortune.

"You have vanquished my ill-luck," Félicité would sometimes say to her husband.

One of the rare weaknesses of her energetic nature was to believe herself stricken by misfortune. Hitherto, she maintained, nothing had been successful with either herself or her father, in spite of all their efforts. Assisted by her southern superstition, she prepared to struggle with fate as one struggles with a creature of flesh and blood who is endeavouring to strangle you.

Circumstances very soon justified her apprehensions in a singular manner. The ill-luck returned, inexorable: Every year some fresh disaster shook Rougon's business. A bankruptcy involved them in the loss of a few thousand francs; his estimates of the abundant harvests were falsified by the most incredible circumstances; the safest speculations ran aground miserably. It was a truceless, merciless combat.

"You see I was born under an unlucky star," Félicité would say with bitterness.

And yet she would continue to struggle furiously, not understanding why she, who had shown such a keen scent in

his first speculations, now only succeeded in giving her husband the most deplorable advice.

Pierre, dejected and less tenacious, would have liquidated his affairs a score of times had it not been for his wife's firm and obstinate attitude. She longed to be rich. She perceived that her ambition could only be built up by fortune. As soon as they possessed a few hundred thousand francs they would be masters of the town. She would get her husband appointed to an important post, and she would govern. It was not the attainment of these honours which troubled her; she felt herself marvellously well armed for that combat. But she was powerless in the face of the first bags of money, which had yet to be gained. If the ruling of men caused her no apprehension, she at least felt a sort of impotent rage before those five-franc pieces, inert, white and cold, over which her intriguing spirit had no power, and which obstinately resisted her.

The battle lasted for more than thirty years. The death of Puech was another heavy blow. Félicité, who counted upon an inheritance of about forty thousand francs, found that the selfish old man, in order to indulge himself in his old age, had sunk all his money in a life annuity. It made her quite ill. She was gradually becoming soured, she was growing more lean and harsh. To see her, from morning to night, whirling round the jars of oil, one would have said that she thought to stimulate the sale by continually flitting about like a restless fly. Her husband, on the contrary, became heavier; misfortune fattened him, making him duller and more indolent. These thirty years of struggle did not, however, bring him to ruin. At each annual stock-taking they managed to make both ends meet fairly well; if they suffered any loss during one season, they recouped themselves the next. It was this living from hand to mouth which exasperated Félicité. She would, by far, have preferred a big failure. They would then, perhaps, have been able to commence life over again, instead of obstinately persisting in their small way of business, working themselves to death to gain the bare necessaries of life. During a third part of a century they had not saved fifty thousand francs.

It should be mentioned that, from the very first years of their married life, they had a numerous family which became in the long run a heavy burden to them. Félicité, like many little women, had a fecundity which one would not have expected from a person of her meagre frame. In five years, from

1811 to 1815, she gave birth to three boys, one every two years. During the four following years she was delivered of two girls. Nothing is more conducive to procreative fertility than the placid, animal life of the country. The two last comers had but an indifferent welcome; daughters are a terrible embarrassment when one has no dowry to give them. Rougon declared, to whomsoever would listen, that he had enough, that the devil would have to be pretty sharp to send him a sixth child. It fact, Félicité did not go any further. It is doubtful at what figure she would herself have stopped.

The young woman, however, did not regard this troop of brats as the cause of their ruin. On the contrary, she reconstructed on her sons' heads the fortune which was crumbling in her own hands. They were hardly ten years old before she discounted in her dreams their future careers. Doubting whether she would ever succeed herself, she centred in them all her hopes of overcoming the animosity of fate. They would satisfy her disappointed vanities, they would give her that wealthy, honourable position which she had hitherto pursued in vain. From that time forward, without abandoning the struggle sustained by the business, she conceived a second plan to obtain the gratification of her domineering instincts. It seemed to her impossible that, amongst her three sons, there should not be a man of superior intellect, who would enrich them all. She felt it, she said. Accordingly, she nursed the brats with a fervour in which the severity of a mother was blended with the solicitude of a usurer. She amused herself by fattening them lovingly, as though they constituted a capital which would later on return a large interest.

"Enough!" Pierre would sometimes exclaim, "all children are ungrateful. You are spoiling them, you are ruining us."

When Félicité spoke of sending them to college, he got angry. Latin was a useless luxury, it would be quite sufficient if they went through the classes of a little neighbouring school. The young woman, however, persisted. She possessed certain elevated instincts which made her take a great pride in surrounding herself with accomplished children; moreover, she felt that she could never allow her sons to remain as illiterate as her husband, if she wished to see them one day prominent men. She fancied them all three at Paris in high positions, which, however, she did not clearly define. When Rougon consented and the three youngsters had entered the eighth class, Félicité

felt the most lively satisfaction she had ever experienced. She listened with delight as they talked of their professors and their studies. When she heard her eldest son make one of his brothers decline *Rosa*, it sounded like the most delicious music to her. It is only fair to add that her joy was unmixed with any sordid calculations. Even Rougon felt the satisfaction of an illiterate man perceiving his sons growing wiser than himself. The fellowship which naturally grew up between their sons and those of the big-wigs of the town completed the parents' gratification. The youngsters were on familiar terms with the sons of the mayor and the sub-prefect, and even with two or three young gentlemen whom the Saint-Marc quarter had deigned to send to the Plassans college. Félicité was at a loss how to repay such an honour. The education of the three lads seriously encumbered the budget of the Rougon household.

Until the boys had taken their degrees, their parents, who kept them at college at enormous sacrifices, lived in hopes of their success; and even when they had obtained their diplomas Félicité wished to continue her work, and persuaded her husband to send the three to Paris. Two of them devoted themselves to the study of law, and the third passed through the course of the School of Medicine. Then, when they were men, when they had exhausted the resources of the Rougon family and were obliged to return and establish themselves in the provinces, the disenchantment of the poor parents commenced. The country seemed to reconquer its prey. The three young men idled about and grew fat. The bitterness of her ill-luck again assailed Félicité. Her sons were making her a bankrupt. They had ruined her, they did not return any interest on the capital which they represented. This last blow of fate was the heaviest, as it struck at the same time her ambitions and her maternal vanity. Rougon repeated to her from morning till night "I told you so!" which only exasperated her all the more.

One day, as she was bitterly reproaching her eldest son with the large amount of money expended on his education, he said to her with equal bitterness: "I will repay you later on, if I can. But as you had no means, you should have brought us up to a trade. We are out of our element, we are suffering more than you."

Félicité understood the wisdom of these words. From that time she ceased to accuse her children, and turned her anger

against fate, which never wearied of striking her. She re-opened her grievances, and commenced to bemoan more and more the want of means which made her strand, as it were, in port. When Rougon used to say to her, "Your sons are lazy fellows, they will eat up all we have," she would sourly reply, "Would to God I had more money to give them; if they do vegetate, poor fellows, it's because they haven't got a sou to bless themselves with."

At the beginning of the year 1848, on the eve of the Revolution of February, the three young Rougons held very precarious positions at Plassans. They presented most curious types, profoundly dissimilar, although they were descended parallelly from the same stock. They were in reality superior to their parents. The race of the Rougons was destined to become refined through its female side. Adélaïde had made Pierre a man of moderate enterprise, disposed to low ambitions; Félicité had inspired her sons with a higher intelligence, with a capacity for greater vices and greater virtues.

By this time the eldest, Eugène, was nearly forty years old. He was a man of middle height, slightly bald, and already disposed to obesity. He had his father's face, a long face with broad features; beneath his skin one could perceive that fatness which produced the soft roundness of his features, and gave to his face the yellowish whiteness of wax. Though his massive square head betokened the peasant, his physiognomy was transfigured, lit up from within as it were, when, raising his drooping eyelids, he darted a glance from his eyes. In the son's case, the father's ponderousness had turned to gravity. This big fellow usually exhibited a formidable, sleepy attitude. From his heavy, languid movements one would have thought he was a giant stretching his limbs for action. By one of those alleged freaks of nature, of which, however, science is now commencing to discover the laws, the physical resemblance to Pierre was complete in Eugène, while Félicité seemed to have furnished him with the thinking substance. Eugène offered a curious case of certain moral and intellectual qualities inherited from the mother being imbedded in the coarse flesh of the father. He cherished lofty ambitions, possessed domineering instincts, and showed a singular contempt for trifling expedients and small fortunes.

He was a proof that Plassans perhaps was not mistaken in suspecting that Félicité had some blue blood in her veins. The

passion for indulgence, which received a formidable development in the Rougons, and which was, in fact, the family characteristic, attained in his case its highest pitch; he longed for self-indulgence, but through the pleasures of the mind which would gratify his burning desire for domination. A man such as this was never intended to succeed in a provincial town. He vegetated there for fifteen years, his eyes turned towards Paris, watching his opportunities. On his return to his little town, he had caused his name to be entered on the rolls, in order to be independent of his parents. He pleaded from time to time, earning a bare livelihood, without appearing to raise himself above an honest mediocrity. At Plassans his voice was considered thick, his movements heavy. He seldom succeeded in gaining a case for a client. He generally wandered from the question at issue, rambled, as the learned people of the place expressed it.

On one occasion particularly, when he was pleading in a case for damages, he forgot himself and strayed into a political disquisition. So much so that the President had to cut him short; whereupon he sat down immediately with a strange smile. His client was condemned to pay a considerable sum of money, a circumstance which did not, however, seem to cause Eugène the least regret for his irrelevant digression. He appeared to regard his speeches as mere exercises which would be of use to him later on. It was this that puzzled and disheartened Félicité. She would have liked to see her son dictating the law to the Civil Tribunal of Plassans. At last she came to entertain a very unfavourable opinion of her first-born. To her mind this lazy fellow could not be he who would shed a lustre on the family. Pierre, on the contrary, had absolute confidence in him, not that he was more penetrating than his wife, but because external appearances were sufficient for him, and he was flattering himself, as it were, by confidently believing in the genius of a son who was his living image. A month prior to the events of February, Eugène became restless; a special inspiration made him anticipate the crisis. From that time he seemed to feel out of his element at Plassans. He would wander about the streets like an oppressed soul. At last he formed a sudden resolution and left for Paris, with scarcely five hundred francs in his pocket.

Aristide, the youngest son, was, so to speak, diametrically opposed to Eugène. He had his mother's face, and a covetous-

ness and slyness of character adapted to trivial intrigues, in which his father's instincts predominated. Nature often feels the want of symmetry Short, with a pitiful countenance like the knob of a stick curiously carved into a Punch's head, Aristide ferreted and fumbled everywhere, without any scruples, eager only to gratify himself He loved money as his eldest brother loved power. While Eugène dreamed of bending a people to his will, and inebriated himself with visions of his future omnipotence, the other fancied himself ten times a millionaire, domiciled in a princely abode, eating and drinking to his heart's content, and gratifying the cravings of all his sensual and organic appetites. Above all things, he longed to make a rapid fortune. When he was constructing his castles in the air, they would rise in his mind as if by magic; he would become possessed of tons of gold in one night. These visions consorted best with his indolence, as he never troubled himself about the means, considering those the best which were the most expeditious. The race of the Rougons, of those coarse, greedy peasants with brute appetites, had matured too rapidly; all the desires for material indulgence were centred in Aristide, augmented threefold by a precocious education, and rendered more insatiable and dangerous by their deliberateness. In spite of her delicate, effeminate intuition, Félicité preferred this son; she did not perceive the greater affinity subsisting between herself and Eugène; she excused the follies and indolence of her youngest son under the pretext that he would some day be the superior genius of the family, and that such a man is entitled to live a disordered life until the time comes when his intellectual forces reveal themselves.

Aristide subjected his powers of self-indulgence to a rude test. At Paris he led a low, idle life; he was one of those students who enter their names for the terms at the taverns of the Quartier Latin. He did not remain there, however, more than two years; his father, growing apprehensive, and seeing that he had not yet passed a single examination, kept him at Plassans and spoke of finding a wife for him, hoping that domestic cares would make him more steady. Aristide submitted to be married.

He had not a very clear idea of his own ambitions at this time; life in the country did not displease him; he was battening in his little town—eating, sleeping, and sauntering about.

Félicité pleaded his cause so earnestly that Pierre consented to board and lodge the newly-married couple, on condition that the young man should turn his attention to business. From this time he led a life of ease and idleness. He spent his days and the best part of his nights at the club, slipping out of his father's office like a schoolboy to go and gamble away the few louis that his mother gave him clandestinely.

It is necessary to have lived in the heart of a department to form a conception of the four years of sottishness which the fellow spent in this fashion. In every little town there is a group of individuals who thus live upon their parents, pretending sometimes to work, but really cultivating idleness with a sort of religious zeal. Aristide was the type of these incorrigible drones, who may be seen slouching about with that lazy inanity which is so characteristic of country life. For four years he did nothing but play écarté. While he passed his time at the club, his wife, a fair-complexioned, inanimate-looking woman, helped to ruin the firm of Rougon by her inordinate love of showy dressing and her formidable appetite, a rather remarkable peculiarity in such a frail creature. Angèle adored sky-blue ribbons and roast beef. She was the daughter of a retired captain, called Commander Sicardot, a good-hearted old gentleman, who had given her a dowry of ten thousand francs—all his savings. Pierre, in selecting Angèle for his son, considered that he had made an unexpected bargain, so little did he esteem Aristide. This dowry of ten thousand francs, which determined his choice, ultimately became a millstone round his neck. His son was already a cunning rogue, and deposited the ten thousand francs with his father, with whom he entered into partnership. He refused, with the most sincere professions of devotion, to keep a single sou.

"We have no need of anything," he said; "you will keep my wife and myself, and we will reckon up later on."

Pierre was in straitened circumstances, and accepted, not, however, without some uneasiness at Aristide's disinterestedness. The latter calculated that it would be years before his father would have ten thousand francs ready money to repay him, so that he and his wife would live largely at his father's expense so long as the partnership could not be dissolved. It was an admirable investment for his few bank-notes. When the oil-dealer recognised what a foolish bargain he had made

he was not in a position to rid himself of Aristide; Angèle's dowry was involved in speculations which were turning out unfavourably. He was exasperated, stung to the heart, at having to feed his daughter-in-law's enormous appetite and keep his son in idleness. Had he been able to buy out their interest in the business he would twenty times over have turned out this vermin that was sucking his blood, as he emphatically expressed it. Félicité secretly defended them; the young man, who had penetrated her dreams of ambition, used to describe to her every evening the most elaborate plans by which he would very shortly realise a fortune. By a rare chance she remained on excellent terms with her daughter-in-law. It must be confessed that Angèle had no will of her own—she could be moved like a piece of furniture. Pierre fell into a rage when his wife spoke to him of the success their youngest son would ultimately achieve; he declared that he would really bring their house to ruin.

During the four years the young couple lived with him he stormed in this manner, wasting his impotent rage in quarrels, without in the least disturbing the smiling equanimity of Aristide and Angèle. They were located there, and there they intended to remain like blocks of wood. At last Pierre had a stroke of luck which enabled him to return the ten thousand francs to his son. When he wanted to reckon up accounts with him Aristide interposed so much chicanery that he had to let them go without deducting a sou for their board and lodging. They went and lived a little way off, in a part of the old quarter called the Place Saint-Louis. The ten thousand francs were soon consumed. They had everything to get for their new home. Aristide, moreover, did not change his mode of living as long as there was any money in the house. When he had reached his last hundred-franc note he felt rather nervous. He was seen prowling about the town in a suspicious manner. He no longer took his customary cup of coffee at the club; he watched feverishly whilst play was going on, without touching a card. Poverty made him more wretched than he really was. He bore the blow for a long time, obstinately refusing to do anything to avert the calamity.

In 1840 he had a son, little Maxime, whom his grandmother Félicité fortunately sent to college, paying his fees clandestinely. That made one mouth less at home; but poor Angèle was dying of hunger; her husband was at last com-

pelled to seek a situation. He procured a place at the Sub-Prefecture. He remained there nearly ten years, and only reached a salary of eighteen hundred francs. From that time forward, he longed, with ever increasing malevolence and rancour, for those enjoyments of which he was deprived. His lowly position exasperated him; the miserable hundred and fifty francs which he received every month seemed to him an irony of fate. Never did man burn with such desire for sensual gratification. Félicité, to whom he imparted his sufferings, was by no means grieved to see him so eager. She thought his misery would stimulate his energies. Lying in wait, with his ears open, he commenced to look about like a thief seeking a job. In the beginning of 1848, when his brother left for Paris, he had a faint idea of following him. But Eugène was a bachelor, whilst he could not take his wife so far with him without any money in his pocket. He waited, scenting a catastrophe, and prepared to strangle the first prey that fell in his way.

The other son, Pascal, who came between Eugène and Aristide, did not appear to belong to the family. His was one of those frequent cases which contradict the laws of heredity. Nature often produces, in the middle of a race, one being in whom she amalgamates all the elements of her procreative forces. Nothing in the moral or physical constitution of Pascal recalled the Rougons. Tall, with a smooth, stern-looking face, he had an uprightness of spirit, a love of study, a retiring modesty which contrasted strangely with the feverish ambitions and unscrupulous intrigues of his family. After having acquitted himself admirably in his medical studies at Paris, he retired, by preference, to Plassans, notwithstanding the offers he received from his professors. He loved a quiet country life; he maintained that for a studious man such a life was preferable to the excitement of Paris. Even at Plassans he did not exert himself to extend his practice. Very steady, and despising fortune, he contented himself with the few patients sent to him by chance. All his pleasures were concentrated in a pretty little house in the new town, where he kept himself religiously shut up, devoting his time with a real love to the study of natural history. He was particularly fond of physiology. It was known in the town that he frequently purchased dead bodies from the grave-digger of the hospital, a circumstance which rendered him an

object of horror to delicate ladies and certain timid gentlemen. Fortunately they did not actually look upon him as a sorcerer; but his practice diminished, he was regarded as an original character, to whom people of good society ought not to entrust even the tip of their finger, for fear of being compromised. The mayor's wife was one day heard to say:

"I would sooner die than be attended by that gentleman. He smells of death."

From that time, Pascal was condemned. He seemed to rejoice at this mute terror which he inspired. The fewer patients he had, the more time he could devote to his favourite sciences. As his fees were very moderate, the poorer people remained faithful to him; he earned just enough to live, and lived contentedly, a thousand leagues away from the rest of the country, absorbed in the pure delight of his researches and discoveries. From time to time he sent a memoir to the Académie des Sciences at Paris. Plassans did not know that this original character, this gentleman who smelt of death, was well-known and highly-esteemed in the world of learning. When people saw him starting, on Sunday, for an excursion among the Garrigues hills, with a botanist's bag hung round his neck and a geologist's hammer in his hand, they would shrug their shoulders, instituting a comparison between him and some other doctor of the town who was noted for his smart cravat, his affability to the ladies, and his splendid clothes, ever emitting a delicious odour of violet. Pascal's parents did not understand him any better than other people. When Félicité saw him adopting such a strange, unpretentious mode of life she was stupefied, and reproached him for disappointing her hopes. She, who tolerated Aristide's idleness because she thought it would prove fertile, could not view without regret the slow progress of Pascal, his love of obscurity and contempt for riches, his determined resolve to lead a life of retirement. He was certainly not the child who would ever gratify her vanities.

"But where do you spring from?" she would sometimes say to him. "You are not one of us. Look at your brothers, how they keep their eyes open, striving to profit by the education we have given them, while you waste your time on follies and trifles. You make a very poor return to us who have ruined ourselves for your education. No, you are certainly not one of us."

Pascal, who preferred to laugh whenever he had to feel annoyed, replied cheerfully, but not without a sting of irony:

"Oh, you need not be frightened, I shall never drive you to the verge of bankruptcy; when any of you are ill, I will attend you for nothing."

Moreover, though he never displayed any repugnance to his family, he very rarely saw them, following his instincts as against his natural inclinations. Before Aristide obtained a situation at the Sub-Prefecture, Pascal frequently came to his assistance. He had remained a bachelor. He had not the least suspicion of the grave events that were preparing. For two or three years he had been devoting himself to the study of the grand problem of heredity, comparing the human and animal races together, and was deeply absorbed in the strange results which he obtained. The observations which he had made in respect of himself and his family had been, as it were, the point of departure for his studies. The common people recognised so well, with a sort of unconscious intuition, that he was something quite different to the other Rougons, that they used to call him Monsieur Pascal, without ever adding his family name.

Three years prior to the revolution of 1848 Pierre and Félicité retired from business. Old age was coming on apace; they were both past fifty and were weary of the struggle. In the face of their ill fortune, they were afraid of being ultimately ruined if they obstinately persisted. Their sons, by disappointing their expectations, had struck the final blow. Now that they despaired of ever being enriched by them, they were anxious to make some provision at least for old age. They retired with forty thousand francs at the very most. This sum provided an annual income of two thousand francs, just sufficient to live in a small way in the provinces. Fortunately they were alone, having succeeded in marrying their daughters Marthe and Sidonie, the former residing at Marseilles and the latter at Paris.

They would have liked very much, after liquidating their affairs, to take up their abode in the new town, the quarter of the retired traders, but they could not risk it. Their income was too small; they were afraid that they would cut but a poor figure there. As a sort of compromise, they took apartments in the Rue de la Banne, the street which separates the old quarter from the new one. As their abode was in that row

of houses which borders the old quarter, they still lived among the common people; nevertheless they could see from their windows the town of the richer classes, so that they were just on the threshold of the promised land.

Their apartments, situated on the second floor, consisted of three large rooms, a dining-room, a drawing-room, and a bed-room. The first floor was occupied by the owner, a stick and umbrella manufacturer, who had a shop on the ground floor. The house, which was narrow and not very deep, had only two storeys. Félicité moved in with a bitter pang of regret. In the country, to live in another person's house is an avowal of poverty. Every family of position at Plassans has a house of its own, landed property being very cheap there. Pierre kept the purse-strings tied; he would not hear of any embellishments. The old furniture, faded, worn-out, and damaged, had to do without even being repaired. Félicité, however, who keenly felt the necessity for this parsimony, exerted herself to give a fresh polish to all these wrecks; she herself knocked nails into some of the furniture which was more dilapidated than the rest, and darned the frayed velvet of the arm-chairs.

The dining-room, which, like the kitchen, was at the back, was nearly bare; a table and a dozen chairs were lost in the darkness of this large apartment, the window of which opened on to the grey wall of a neighbouring house. As nobody ever went into the bed-room, Félicité had stowed all the useless furniture there; besides a bedstead, a wardrobe, a secrétaire, and a wash-stand, there were two cradles put one on top of the other, a sideboard the doors of which were missing, and a book-case quite empty, venerable ruins which the old woman could not make up her mind to part with. But all her cares were bestowed upon the drawing-room. She almost succeeded in making it comfortable and decent. The furniture was covered with yellowish velvet with satin flowers; in the middle stood a round table with a marble top, while console-tables, surmounted with mirrors, were placed at the two ends of the room. There was even a carpet, which only covered the middle of the floor, and a lustre adorned with a covering of white muslin, which the flies had spotted with black specks. On the walls were hung six lithographs representing the great battles of Napoleon. This furniture dated from the first years of the Empire. The only embellishment Félicité could obtain was to have the walls hung with an orange-

coloured paper figured with large flowers. The drawing-room thus wore a strange, yellow hue, which filled it with an artificial dazzling light. The furniture, the paper, and the window curtains were yellow; the carpet and even the marble tops of the round table and of the consoles had a touch of yellow. When the curtains were drawn, the colours harmonised fairly well and the drawing-room looked decent.

But Félicité had dreamed of quite a different kind of luxury. She regarded with mute despair this ill-concealed misery. She usually sat in the drawing-room, the best apartment in the house. One of her distractions, at the same time the sweetest and the bitterest, was to sit at one of the windows of this room, which looked upon the Rue de la Banne and from which she obtained a side view of the Place in front of the Sub-Prefecture. That was the paradise of her dreams. This little, neat, and tidy spot, with its bright houses, seemed to her a Garden of Eden. She would have given ten years of her life to possess one of those habitations. The house forming the left-hand corner, in which the receiver of taxes resided, was a particularly strong temptation to her. She contemplated it with the eager longing of a pregnant woman. Sometimes, when the windows of this abode were open, she could catch a glimpse of richly furnished recesses, and other little views of tasteful elegance which made her burn with envy.

At this period the Rougons were passing through a curious crisis of vanity and unsatiated appetites. The few proper feelings which they did once entertain were becoming exhausted. They posed as victims of evil fortune, not with resignation, but with the bitter determination not to die until they had satisfied their ambitions. In reality, they did not abandon any of their hopes, notwithstanding their advanced age. Félicité professed to feel a presentiment that she would die rich. But each day of poverty weighed them down the more. When they recapitulated their vain attempts—when they recalled their thirty years' struggle, and the defections of their children—when they saw their airy castles converted into this yellow drawing-room, the shabbiness of which had to be concealed behind the drawn curtains, they were consumed with bitter rage. Then, as a consolation, they would devise plans for making a colossal fortune, seeking all sorts of combinations. Félicité would fancy herself the winner of the grand prize of a hundred thousand francs in a lottery, while

Pierre saw himself alighting upon some wonderful speculation. They lived in one sole thought—to make a fortune immediately, in a few hours—to be rich and enjoy themselves, if only for a year. Their whole existence aimed at this end, with the stubbornness of an animal. They still cherished some faint hopes with regard to their sons, with that peculiar egotism of parents who cannot bear to think that they have sent their children to college without deriving some personal advantage from it.

Félicité did not appear to have aged, she was still the same little dark woman, restless and buzzing about like a grasshopper. Any person walking behind her on the pavement would have thought her a young girl of fifteen summers from the lightness of her step and the angularity of her shoulders and waist Her face had scarcely undergone any change, it was simply a little more sunken, assuming more and more a resemblance to the snout of a pole-cat. One would have said it was the head of a little girl, which had become dry and sallow without any alteration of features.

As for Pierre Rougon, he had grown corpulent, and had become a highly respectable citizen who only lacked a decent income to make him a very dignified individual. His pale, clammy complexion, his heaviness, his languid manner, seemed to savour of wealth. He had one day heard a peasant, who did not know him, say: "Ah! he's some rich fellow, that fat old gentleman there. He's no cause to worry about his dinner!" A reflection which stung him to the heart, for he considered it a cruel mockery to be a poor devil while possessing the corpulence and weight of a millionaire. When he shaved on Sunday in front of a small five-sou looking-glass hanging from the fastening of a window, he would think to himself how much better he would look at the Sub-Prefecture, in a dress-coat and white necktie, than such or such a functionary of Plassans. This peasant's son, grown sallow from business worries, and corpulent from a sedentary life, whose hateful passions were hidden under the natural placidity of his features, really had that air of solemn inanity and imbecility which gives a man an official appearance. People imagined that his wife held a rod over him, but they were mistaken. He was as self-willed as a brute. Any determined expression of extraneous will would drive him into a violent rage Félicité was too docile to thwart him;

the fluttering, lively nature of that dwarf had no intention of running her head against a post. When she wished to obtain something from her husband, or drive him the way she thought best, she would buzz round him in her grasshopper fashion, stinging him on all sides, and returning to the charge a hundred times until he yielded almost unconsciously. He felt, moreover, that she was wiser than he, and tolerated her advice with moderate patience. Félicité, more useful than the coachman's fly, would sometimes do all the work while she was buzzing round Pierre's ears. Strange to say, the husband and wife never accused each other of their ill-success. The only bone of contention was the education lavished on their children.

The revolution of 1848 found all the Rougons on the look-out, exasperated by their bad luck, and disposed to lay violent hands on fortune if ever they should meet her in a by-way. They were a family of bandits lying in wait, ready to rifle and plunder events. Eugène kept an eye on Paris; Aristide dreamed of strangling Plassans; the mother and father, probably the most eager of the lot, reckoned to work on their own account, and to derive some additional advantage from their sons' doings. Pascal alone, that discreet wooer of science, led the happy, indifferent life of a lover in his little bright house in the new town.

CHAPTER III.

AT Plassans, that immured town in which the distinction of classes was so clearly marked in 1848, the commotion caused by the political events was very slight. Even at the present day the popular voice is stifled there; the middle classes bring their prudence to bear, the nobility their mute despair, and the clergy their shrewd cunning. Kings may usurp thrones, or republics be established, with scarcely causing a slight commotion in the town. Plassans is asleep while Paris is fighting. But though on the surface the town may appear calm and indifferent, there is a hidden work going on underneath affording matter for strange reflection. Though shots are rare in the streets, intrigues are filling the drawing-rooms of the new town and the Saint-Marc quarter. Until the year 1830, the people were reckoned of no account. Even at the present day they are similarly ignored. Everything is settled between the clergy, the nobility, and the gentry. The priests, who are very numerous, prescribe the political colours of the place; they constitute, as it were, the subterranean mines and the blows in the dark, adopting a prudent, timorous system, which hardly effects a single step in advance or retreat in the space of ten years. These secret intrigues of men who desire above all things to avoid a disturbance require a special shrewdness, an aptitude for small matters, and the endurance of persons callous to all passions. It is thus that the provincial dilatoriness, which is so freely ridiculed at Paris, is full of treachery, of secret butchery, of hidden victories and defeats. These worthy men, particularly when their interests are at stake, kill at home with a snap of the finger, as we kill with a cannon in the public thoroughfare.

The political history of Plassans, like that of all little towns in Provence, is singularly characteristic. Until 1830, the inhabitants remained observant Catholics and fervent royalists; even the lower classes would swear only by God and their legitimate sovereigns. Then there came a sudden change;

faith departed, the working and middle classes deserted the cause of legitimacy, and gradually espoused the great democratic movement of our time. When the revolution of 1848 broke out, the nobility and the clergy were left alone to labour for the triumph of Henri V. For a long time they regarded the accession of the Orleanists as a ridiculous experiment, which sooner or later would bring back the Bourbons; although their hopes were singularly shaken, they nevertheless continued the struggle, scandalised by the defection of their former allies, whom they strove to win back to their cause. The Saint-Marc quarter, assisted by all the parish priests, set to work. Among the middle classes, and especially among the people, the enthusiasm was very great on the morrow of the events of February; these republican apprentices were in haste to expend their revolutionary fever. For the gentry of the new town, however, this conflagration had the brilliancy and duration of a straw fire. The small landlords and the retired tradespeople who had had their good days, or had made a round little fortune under the monarchy, were soon seized with panic; the Republic, with its constant shocks and convulsions, made them tremble for their money and their own selfish existence.

Consequently, when the clerical reaction of 1849 was proclaimed, nearly all the middle classes passed over to the Conservative party. They were received with open arms. The new town had never had such close relations with the Saint-Marc quarter: some of the nobility even went so far as to shake hands with the lawyers and retired oil-dealers. This unexpected familiarity kindled the enthusiasm of the new quarter, which henceforward waged a bitter warfare against the republican government. To bring about such a coalition, the clergy had to display marvellous skill and endurance. The nobility of Plassans were for the most part plunged, like a moribund, into an invincible prostration. They remained faithful, but they were seized by the lethargy of earth, and preferred to remain inactive, allowing the heavens to work their will. They would gladly have had their solitary silence interpreted as a protest, feeling, perhaps, a vague presentiment that their divinities were dead, and that there was nothing for them to do but go and rejoin them. Even at this period of confusion, when the catastrophe of 1848 gave them a momentary hope of the return of the Bourbons, they manifested a torpid

indifference, speaking of rushing into the *mêlée*, although they could never leave their hearths without a pang of regret.

The clergy combated indefatigably this feeling of impotence and resignation. They infused a kind of passion into their work: a priest, when he is in despair, struggles all the more fiercely. The fundamental policy of the Church is to march straight forward, even though she may have to postpone the accomplishment of her projects for several centuries; she never wastes a single hour, but is always pushing forward with increasing energy. It was the clergy, therefore, who led the reaction of Plassans; the nobility only lent them their name, nothing more. They concealed themselves behind the nobility, restrained them, directed them, and even succeeded in making them lead a factious life. When they had induced them to overcome their repugnance so far as to make common cause with the middle classes, they believed themselves certain of victory. The country was marvellously well prepared. This ancient royalist town, this population of peaceful householders and timorous tradespeople, were destined to range, sooner or later, on the side of law and order. The clergy, by their tactics, hastened the conversion. After gaining the landlords of the new town to their side, they succeeded in conquering the little retail-dealers of the old quarter. From that time the reactionary movement obtained complete possession of the town. All opinions were represented in this reaction; such a mixture of embittered Liberals, Legitimists, Orleanists, Bonapartists, and Clericals was never seen before. It mattered little, however, at this time. The sole object was to kill the Republic; and the Republic was at the point of death. A fraction of the people—a thousand workmen at most, out of the ten thousand souls in the town—still saluted the tree of liberty planted in the middle of the Place in front of the Sub-Prefecture.

The shrewdest politicians of Plassans, who led the reactionary movement, did not scent the Empire until very much later. The prince himself only inspired them with a moderate admiration. They reckoned him a nonentity, a dreamer, incapable of laying hands on France, and especially of maintaining his authority. To them he was only a tool whom they could make use of, who would clear their way, and whom they would turn out as soon as the hour arrived for the rightful claimant to show himself. In the meantime, months elapsed and they became uneasy. It was only then that they vaguely

perceived they were being duped: they had no time, however, to take any steps; the Coup d'État burst over their heads, and they were compelled to applaud. That great abomination, the Republic, had been assassinated; that, at least, was some sort of triumph. The clergy and the nobility accepted accomplished facts with resignation; postponing, until later, the realisation of their hopes, and making amends for their miscalculations by uniting with the Bonapartists for the purpose of crushing the last Republicans.

These events laid the foundation of the Rougons' fortune. Mixed up with the various phases of the crisis, they rose on the ruins of liberty. These bandits had been lying in wait to rob the Republic; as soon as it had been strangled, they assisted in plundering it.

After the events of February, Félicité, who had the keenest scent of the family, perceived that they were at last on the right track. She commenced to flutter round her husband, goading him on to bestir himself. The first rumours of the revolution had terrified Pierre. When his wife, however, had made him understand that they had little to lose and much to gain from a convulsion, he soon came round to her way of thinking.

"I don't know what you can do," Félicité repeatedly said, "but it seems to me there's plenty to be done. Did not Monsieur de Carnavant say to us one day that he would be rich if ever Henri V should return, and that this sovereign would magnificently recompense those who had worked for his return? Perhaps our fortune lies there. We may yet be lucky."

The Marquis de Carnavant, that nobleman who, according to the scandalous talk of the town, had had intimate relations with Félicité's mother, used to visit the married couple occasionally. Evil tongues asserted that Madame Rougon resembled him. He was a little, lean, active man, seventy-five years old at that time, and she certainly appeared to be taking his features and manner as she grew older. It was said that the wreck of his fortune, from which a big slice had already been cut by his father at the time of his emigration, had been squandered on women. Indeed, he cheerfully acknowledged his poverty. Brought up by one of his relations, the Count de Valqueyras, he lived the life of a parasite, eating at the count's table and occupying a small apartment under his roof.

"Little one," he would often say to Félicité, as he patted

her on the cheek, "if ever Henri V gives me a fortune, I will make you my heiress!"

He still called Félicité "little one," even when she was fifty years old. It was of these friendly pats, of these repeated promises of an inheritance, that Madame Rougon was thinking when she endeavoured to drive her husband into politics. Monsieur de Carnavant had often bitterly lamented his inability to render her any assistance. No doubt he would treat her like a father if ever he should acquire some influence. Pierre, to whom his wife half explained the situation in veiled terms, declared his readiness to move in any direction indicated.

The marquis's peculiar position qualified him for an energetic agent of the reactionary movement at Plassans from the first days of the Republic. This busy little man, who had everything to gain from the return of his legitimate sovereigns, worked assiduously for their cause. While the wealthy nobility of the Saint-Marc quarter were slumbering in mute despair, fearing perhaps to compromise themselves and again be condemned to exile, he multiplied himself, as it were, spread the propaganda and rallied the faithful. He was a weapon whose handle was held by an invisible hand. From that time forward he paid daily visits to the Rougons. He required a centre of operations. His relative, Monsieur de Valqueyras, having prohibited him from bringing any of his associates into his house, he had chosen Félicité's yellow drawing-room. Moreover, he very soon found Pierre a valuable aid. He could not go himself and preach the cause of Legitimacy to the petty traders and workmen of the old quarter; they would have hooted him. Pierre, on the other hand, who had lived amongst these people, spoke their language and knew their wants, was able to catechise them in a friendly way. He thus became an indispensable man. In less than a fortnight the Rougons were more determined royalists than the king himself. The marquis, perceiving Pierre's zeal, had shrewdly sheltered himself behind him. What was the use of making himself conspicuous, when a man with broad shoulders was willing to bear upon them the burden of all the follies of a party? He allowed Pierre to reign, to swell himself with importance, to speak with authority, content to restrain him or urge him on, according to the necessities of the cause. Accordingly, the old oil-dealer soon became an important personage. In the evening, when they were alone, Félicité used to say to him:

"Go on, don't be frightened. We're on the right track. If this continues we shall be rich; we shall have a drawing-room like the tax-receiver's, and we can give parties."

A nucleus of conservatives had been formed at the Rougons' house, where meetings were held every evening in the yellow drawing-room to declaim against the Republic.

There were three or four retired merchants who trembled for their money, and clamoured with all their might for a wise and strong government. An old almond-dealer, a member of the Municipal Council, Monsieur Isidore Granoux, was the head of this group. His hare-like mouth, cloven a little way from the nose, his round eyes, his air of mingled satisfaction and astonishment, made him resemble a fat goose whose digestion is attended by a wholesome terror of the cook. He spoke little, having but little command of words; he only pricked up his ears when any one accused the republicans of wishing to pillage the houses of the rich; then he would colour up to such a degree as to give rise to apprehensions of an approaching apoplectic fit, muttering at the same time low imprecations, in which the words "idlers," "scoundrels," "thieves," "assassins," frequently recurred.

All those who frequented the yellow drawing-room were not, however, as cross as this fat goose. A rich landlord, Monsieur Roudier, with a plump, insinuating face, used to discourse there for hours together, with the passionateness of an Orleanist whose calculations had been upset by the fall of Louis Philippe. He was formerly a hosier at Paris, where he had been purveyor to the Court, but had now retired to Plassans. He had made his son a magistrate, relying on the Orleanist party to promote him to the highest dignities. The revolution having ruined all his hopes, he rushed wildly into the reaction. His fortune, his early commercial relations with the Tuileries, which he represented as extremely cordial, that prestige which is enjoyed by every man in the provinces who has made his money in Paris and deigns to come and spend it in the heart of a department, gave him a very powerful influence in the country; some persons listened to him as though he were an oracle.

But the strongest intellect of the yellow drawing-room was certainly Commander Sicardot, Aristide's father-in-law. Of Herculean frame, with a brick-red face, scarred and planted with clusters of grey hair, he was reckoned amongst the most pompous old dolts of the Grande Armee. During the days of

February, he was exasperated at the street warfare; he never wearied of mentioning the subject, proclaiming with indignation that this kind of fighting was shameful, and he recalled with pride the grand reign of Napoleon.

There also frequented the Rougons' house an individual with moist hands and equivocal look, the worthy Monsieur Vuillet, a bookseller, who supplied all the devout ladies of the town with holy images and rosaries. Vuillet kept a library of classical and religious works; he was a strict Catholic, a circumstance which insured him the custom of the numerous convents and parish churches. By a stroke of genius he had combined with his business the publication of a little bi-weekly journal, the "Gazette de Plassans," which was devoted exclusively to the interests of the clergy. This paper involved an annual loss to him of a thousand francs, but it constituted him the champion of the Church, and enabled him to dispose of his sacred unsaleable stock. This illiterate man, whose orthography was faulty, himself wrote the articles of the "Gazette" with a humility and rancour that compensated for his lack of talent. The marquis, in entering on the campaign, perceived immediately the advantage that might be derived from the co-operation of this insipid sacristan, this coarse, mercenary pen. After February the articles in the "Gazette" contained fewer mistakes; the marquis revised them.

One can now imagine what a singular spectacle the Rougons' yellow drawing-room presented every evening. All opinions jostled each other, barking at the same time at the Republic. They were all agreed in their hatred. The marquis, who, indeed, never missed a meeting, appeased by his presence the little squabbles which arose between the commander and the other adherents. These plebeians were inwardly flattered at the handshakings which he distributed on his arrival and departure. Roudier, however, like a freethinker of the Rue Saint-Honoré, asserted that the marquis had not a sou to bless himself with, and was disposed to make light of him. The latter preserved the amiable smile of a nobleman lowering himself to the level of these middle-class people, without any of those contemptuous grimaces which any other resident of the Saint-Marc quarter would have thought it right to display. The parasite life he had led had rendered him flexible. He was the life and soul of the group, commanding in the name of unknown personages whom he never revealed. "They want

this, they don't want that," he would say. These concealed divinities, watching over the destinies of Plassans from behind their cloud, without appearing to interfere directly with public matters, must have been certain priests, the great political agents of the country. When the marquis pronounced this mysterious "they," which inspired the assembly with a marvellous respect, Vuillet confessed, with a gesture of devotion, that he knew them very well.

The happiest person of all was Félicité. At last she had people coming to her drawing-room. It was true she felt a little ashamed of her old yellow velvet furniture. She consoled herself, however, by thinking of the rich things she would purchase when the good cause should have triumphed. The Rougons had, in the end, regarded their royalism as very serious. Félicité went as far as to say, when Roudier was not there, that if they had not made a fortune in the oil business the fault lay in the monarchy of July. It was her mode of giving a political colour to their poverty. She had a friendly word for everybody, even for Granoux, inventing every evening some new polite mode of waking him up when it was time to depart.

The drawing-room, that nucleus of conservatives belonging to all parties, which daily augmented its numbers, soon wielded a powerful influence. Owing to the diversified characters of its members, and especially to the secret impulse which each one received from the clergy, it became the centre of the reactionary movement, spreading its influence throughout Plassans. The policy of the marquis, by submerging his own individuality, constituted Rougon the chief of the party. The meetings were held at his house, and this circumstance sufficed to stamp him, in the shortsighted view of the majority, as the head of this group, and to point him out for public observation. The whole work was attributed to him; he was believed to be the ringleader of the movement which was gradually bringing over to the conservative party those who were previously enthusiastic republicans. There are some situations which benefit only persons of bad repute. They lay the foundations of their fortune where men who are better situated and more influential would never dare to risk theirs. Surely Roudier, Granoux, and the others, all men of means and respectability, should have been preferred a thousand times to Pierre as the acting leaders of the conservative party! But none of them would have consented to turn their drawing-room into a centre

of political agitation; their convictions did not go so far as to induce them to compromise themselves openly; in fact they were only brawling provincial babblers, who liked to inveigh against the Republic at a neighbour's house as long as the neighbour was willing to bear the responsibility of their denunciations. The game was too risky. There was no one among the middle-classes of Plassans who would play it except the Rougons, whose insatiate longings urged them on to extreme measures.

In the month of April, 1849, Eugène suddenly left Paris, and came to stay with his father for a fortnight. Nobody ever knew the purpose of this journey. It is very probable that Eugène wanted to sound his native town, to ascertain whether he could successfully stand as a candidate for the Legislative Assembly, which was about to replace the Constituent Assembly. He was too shrewd to risk a failure. No doubt public opinion appeared to him little in his favour, for he abstained from any attempt. It was not known at Plassans, moreover, what had become of him, what he was doing at Paris. They found him on his arrival less heavy and lethargic. They surrounded him, endeavouring to make him speak. He feigned ignorance, and, persisting in this attitude, he compelled them to talk; a little perspicacity would have discovered under his apparent unconcern a great anxiety with regard to the political opinions of the town. He seemed to be sounding the ground more on behalf of a party than on his own account.

Although he had renounced all hope for himself, he nevertheless remained at Plassans until the end of the month, attending assiduously the meetings in the yellow drawing-room. As soon as the bell rang, he used to take up his position in the window recess, as far as possible from the lamp. He remained there the whole evening, resting his chin in the palm of his right hand, and listening religiously. The grossest absurdities did not disturb his equanimity. He signified his approval of everything by a shake of the head, even to the wild growls of Granoux. When any one asked him his opinion, he politely repeated the opinion of the majority. Nothing seemed to tire his patience, neither the empty dreams of the marquis, who would speak of the Bourbons as if it were the day after 1815, nor the effusions of citizen Roudier, who got quite pathetic when he recounted the number of pairs of socks which he had supplied to the citizen king. On the contrary, he

seemed quite at his ease amidst this Tower of Babel. Sometimes when these grotesque personages were storming with might and main against the Republic, his eyes were seen to smile without his lips losing their air of gravity. His meditative manner of listening, his invariable complacency, had earned for him the sympathy of every one. He was considered a nonentity, though a very decent fellow. Whenever an old oil or almond dealer could not get a hearing, amidst the clamour, for a plan by which he could save France if he were master, he would take himself off to Eugène and shout his marvellous suggestions in his ear. Eugène would gently nod his head, as though delighted with the grand projects he was listening to. Vuillet, alone, regarded him with a suspicious eye. This bookseller, half sacristan and half journalist, spoke less than the others, but was more observant. He had noticed that the lawyer conversed at times in a corner with Commander Sicardot. He determined to watch them, but he never succeeded in overhearing a single word. Eugène silenced the commander by a wink whenever Vuillet approached them. From that time, Sicardot never spoke of the Napoleons without a mysterious smile.

Two days before his return to Paris, Eugène met his brother, Aristide, on the Cours Sauvaire, and the latter accompanied him for a short distance with the importunity of a man in search of advice. Aristide was in great perplexity. From the day of the proclamation of the Republic, he had manifested the most lively enthusiasm for the new government. His intelligence, sharpened by his two years' stay at Paris, enabled him to see farther than the thick heads of Plassans. He foresaw the impotence of the Legitimists and Orleanists, without distinguishing clearly who was the third thief that would come and rob the Republic He had ranged himself on the side of the victors at all hazard. He had severed all connection with his father, whom he publicly denounced as an old fool, an old imbecile inveigled by the nobility.

"Yet mother is an intelligent woman," he would add. "I should never have thought her capable of inducing her husband to join a party whose hopes are chimerical. They are going the way to end their lives in poverty. But women know nothing about politics."

He wanted to sell himself as dearly as possible. His great anxiety, from that time, was to go with the stream, to range

himself on the side of that party which, in the hour of triumph, would be able to reward him munificently. Unfortunately he was groping in the dark. Shut up in his province, without a guide, without any precise information, he felt quite lost. Whilst waiting till the course of events traced out a sure path for him, he preserved the attitude of an enthusiastic republican, which he had assumed from the very first day. Thanks to this attitude, he remained at the Sub-Prefecture; his salary was even raised. Burning with desire to play a part, however, he persuaded a bookseller, a rival of Vuillet, to establish a democratic journal, of which he became one of the most energetic contributors. Under his impulse the "Indépendant" waged a merciless warfare against the reactionaries. But the current gradually carried him farther than he wished to go; he ended by writing inflammatory articles, which made him shudder when he re-read them. It was remarked at Plassans that a series of attacks were directed by the son against all those persons whom his father was in the habit of receiving of an evening in his famous yellow drawing-room. The wealth of Roudier and Granoux exasperated Aristide to such a degree as to make him forget all prudence. Urged on by his jealous, insatiate bitterness, he had made the middle classes his irreconcilable enemy, when Eugène's arrival and demeanour at Plassans caused him great consternation. He confessed to himself that his brother was a very able man. According to him, that big, drowsy fellow always slept with one eye open, like cats lying in wait in front of a mouse-hole. And here was Eugène spending entire evenings in the yellow drawing-room, devoting himself religiously to those grotesque personages whom he, Aristide, had so mercilessly ridiculed. When he discovered from the gossip of the town that his brother shook hands with Granoux and the marquis, he asked himself, with considerable anxiety, what was the meaning of it? Could he have been deceived to such a degree as that? Had the Legitimists or the Orleanists really any chance of success? This thought terrified him. He lost his equilibrium, and, as frequently happens, he fell upon the conservatives with more rancour to avenge his own blindness.

On the evening prior to the day when he stopped Eugène on the Cours Sauvaire, he had published, in the "Indépendant," a terrible article on the intrigues of the clergy, in response to a short paragraph from Vuillet, who accused the republicans of desiring to demolish the churches. Vuillet was Aristide's

bugbear. Never a week passed but these two journalists exchanged the coarsest insults. In the country, where a periphrastic style is still cultivated, polemics are clothed in high-sounding phrases instead of coarse abuse. Aristide called his adversary "brother Judas," or "slave of Saint-Anthony." Vuillet gallantly retorted by terming the republican "a monster gutted with blood supplied by the ignoble guillotine."

In order to sound his brother, Aristide, who did not dare to appear openly uneasy, contented himself with asking: "Did you read my article yesterday? What do you think of it?"

Eugène slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a simpleton, brother," was his sole reply.

"Then you think Vuillet right?" cried the journalist, turning pale; "you believe in Vuillet's triumph?"

"I!—Vuillet——"

He was certainly about to add, "Vuillet is as big a fool as you." But, observing his brother's distorted face stretching anxiously towards him, he appeared to be seized with a sudden mistrust.

"Vuillet has his good points," he calmly replied.

When he parted from his brother, Aristide felt himself more perplexed than before. Eugène must certainly have been making game of him, for Vuillet was really the most abominable person imaginable. He determined to be prudent, not to tie himself down any more, so that he might have his hands free in case he should one day be called upon to help any party in strangling the Republic.

On the morning of his departure, an hour before mounting the diligence, Eugène took his father into the bedroom and had a long conversation with him. Félicité, who remained in the drawing-room, tried in vain to catch what they were saying. The two men spoke low, as if they feared to allow a single word to be heard outside. When at last they quitted the bedroom they seemed in high spirits. After kissing his father and mother, Eugène, who usually spoke in a drawling tone, said with affected vivacity:

"You have understood me, father? There lies our fortune. We must work with all our energies in that direction. Trust to me."

"I'll follow your instructions faithfully," Rougon replied. "Only don't forget what I asked you as the price of my co-operation."

"If we succeed your demands shall be satisfied, I give you my word. Moreover, I will write to you and guide you, according to the direction which events take. Mind, no panic or excitement. You must obey me implicitly."

"What have you been plotting in there?" Félicité asked inquisitively.

"My dear mother," Eugène replied with a smile," you have had too little faith in me hitherto to induce me to confide my hopes to you to-day, as they only rest on probable calculations at present. You must be trustful in order to comprehend me. Moreover, father will inform you when the time comes."

And as Félicité assumed the attitude of a woman who feels somewhat piqued, he added in her ear, as he kissed her once more:

"I take after you, although you disowned me. Too much intelligence would be dangerous at the present moment. When the crisis comes, it is you who will have to manage the business."

He then left, but came back again and, opening the door, said in an imperious tone:

"Above all things, do not trust Aristide; he is a mar-all, who will spoil everything. I have studied him sufficiently to feel certain that he will always fall on his feet. Don't have any pity; if we make a fortune, he'll know how to rob us of his share."

When Eugène had gone, Félicité endeavoured to ferret out the secret they were hiding from her. She knew her husband too well to interrogate him openly. He would have replied angrily that it was no business of hers. In spite of the clever tactics she pursued, however, she learnt absolutely nothing. Eugène had chosen a good confidant for these troubled times, when the greatest discretion was necessary. Pierre, flattered by his son's confidence, exaggerated that passive heaviness which made him a grave, impenetrable mass. When Félicité saw she would not find out anything from him, she ceased to flutter round him. Only one curiosity remained, and that the most intense. The two men had mentioned a price stipulated by Pierre himself. What could that price be? That was the point of interest for Félicité, who did not care a rap for political matters. She knew that her husband must have sold himself dearly, but she was burning to know the nature of the bargain. One evening, when they had gone to bed, seeing Pierre in a

good humour, she brought the conversation round to the discomforts of their poverty.

"It's quite time to put an end to this," she said. "We have been ruining ourselves in oil and fuel since these gentlemen have been coming here. And who will pay the reckoning? Nobody, perhaps."

Her husband fell into the trap, and smiled with complacent superiority.

"Patience," he said. Then he added, with an air of shrewdness, as he looked into his wife's eyes: "Would you be glad to be the wife of a receiver of taxes?"

Félicité's face turned crimson with joyous warmth. She sat up and clapped her old withered little hands like a child.

"Really?" she stammered. "At Plassans?"

Pierre, without replying, gave a long affirmative nod. He enjoyed his consort's astonishment.

"But," she at last resumed, stifling with emotion, "you must deposit an enormous sum as security. I have heard that our neighbour, Monsieur Peirotte, had to deposit eighty thousand francs in the treasury."

"Eh!" said the retired oil-dealer, "that's nothing to do with me; Eugène will see to that. He will get the money advanced by a banker in Paris. You see, I selected an appointment with a good salary. Eugène at first made a wry face, saying one must be rich to occupy such posts, for which influential men were usually nominated. I persisted, however, and he yielded. To be a receiver of taxes one requires to know neither Greek nor Latin. I shall have a representative, like Monsieur Peirotte, and he will do all the work."

Félicité listened to him with rapture.

"I guessed, however," he continued, "what it was that perplexed our dear son. We're not much liked here. People know we have no means, and will make themselves obnoxious. But all sorts of things occur in a time of crisis. Eugène wished to get me an appointment in another town. I objected; I want to remain at Plassans."

"Yes, yes, we must remain here," the old woman quickly replied. "We have suffered here, and here we must triumph. Ah! I'll crush them all, those fine ladies on the Mail, who scornfully eye my woollen dresses! I didn't think of the appointment of receiver of taxes at all, I thought you wanted to become mayor."

"Mayor! nonsense. The appointment is honorary. Eugène also mentioned the mayoralty to me. I replied: 'I accept, if you give me an income of fifteen thousand francs.'"

This conversation, in which high figures flew about like rockets, excited Félicité. She frisked about, feeling a kind of internal itching. At last she assumed a pious attitude, and collecting herself:

"Come, let us reckon it out," she said; "how much will you earn?"

"Well," said Pierre," "the fixed salary, I believe, is three thousand francs."

"Three thousand," Félicité counted.

"Then there is so much per cent. on the receipts, which, at Plassans, may produce the sum of twelve thousand francs."

"That makes fifteen thousand."

"Yes, about fifteen thousand francs. That's what Peirotte earns. That's not all. Peirotte does a little banking business on his own account. It's allowed. Perhaps I shall be disposed to make a venture when I feel luck on my side."

"Well, let us say twenty thousand. Twenty thousand francs a year!" repeated Félicité, overwhelmed by the amount.

"We shall have to repay the advances," Pierre observed.

"That doesn't matter," Félicité replied, "we shall be richer than many of these gentlemen. Are the marquis and the others going to share the cake with you?"

"No, no; it will be all for us," he replied.

And as she continued to importune him with her questions, Pierre scowled, thinking that she wanted to wrest his secret from him.

"We've talked enough," he said, roughly. "It's late, let us go to sleep. It will bring us bad luck to make our calculations beforehand. I haven't got the place yet. Above all things, be prudent."

When the lamp was extinguished, Félicité could not sleep. With her eyes closed, she built the most marvellous castles in the air. The twenty thousand francs a year danced a diabolical dance before her in the darkness. She occupied splendid apartments in the new town, enjoyed Monsieur Peirotte's luxuries, gave parties, and bespattered the whole town with her wealth. That which tickled her vanity most was the high position her husband would then occupy. He would pay over their annuities to Granoux, Roudier, and all those people who

to-day came to her house as they would go to a café, to swagger and learn the latest news. She had noticed the free-and-easy manner in which these people entered her drawing-room, and it had made her take a dislike to them. Even the marquis, with his ironical politeness, was beginning to displease her. To triumph alone, therefore, to keep the cake for themselves, as she expressed it, was a revenge which she fondly cherished. Later on, when these ill-bred persons presented themselves, hats off, before Monsieur Rougon the receiver of taxes, she would crush them in her turn. She turned these thoughts over in her mind all night. On the morrow, as she opened the shutters, she instinctively cast her first glance on the other side of the street, at Monsieur Peirotte's house, and smiled as she contemplated the large damask curtains hanging behind the windows.

Félicité, in changing her hopes, only cherished them with greater intensity. Like all women, she did not object to a tinge of mystery. The secret object her husband was pursuing excited her more than the Legitimist intrigues of Monsieur de Carnavant had ever done. She abandoned, without much regret, the calculations based on the marquis's success from the moment that her husband declared he would be able to make large profits by other means. She displayed, moreover, remarkable prudence and discretion.

In reality, she was tortured by an anxious curiosity; she studied Pierre's slightest movements, endeavouring to discover their meaning. If by chance he were going on the wrong track? If Eugène were dragging them in his train into some break-neck pit, whence they would come out more hungered and more impoverished? Her confidence was not shaken, however. Eugène had commanded with such an air of authority that she ultimately came to believe in him. There again some unknown power was at work. Pierre used to speak mysteriously of the high personages whom their eldest son visited at Paris, although she did not know what he could have to do with them. She was unable, however, to close her eyes to Aristide's ill-advised acts at Plassans. In her own drawing-room they did not scruple to treat the democratic journalist with extreme severity. Granoux muttered that he was a brigand, and Roudier used to repeat, three or four times a week, to Félicité:

"Your son is writing some fine articles. Only yesterday

he attacked our friend Vuillet with a scurrility quite revolting."

The whole room joined in the chorus, and Commander Sicardot spoke of boxing his son-in-law's ears, while Pierre flatly disowned him. The poor mother hung her head, restraining her tears. For an instant she felt an inclination to burst forth, to tell Roudier that her dear child, in spite of his faults, was worth more than he and all the others put together. But she was tied down, and did not wish to compromise the position so laboriously attained. Seeing the whole town so bitter against Aristide, she despaired, thinking he was hopelessly ruining himself. On two occasions, she spoke to him secretly, conjuring him to return to them, and not to irritate the yellow drawing-room further. Aristide replied that she did not understand such matters; that she was the one who had committed a great blunder in placing her husband at the service of the marquis. She had to abandon him, resolving, however, if Eugène succeeded, to compel the latter to share the spoil with the poor fellow who was her favourite child.

After the departure of his eldest son, Pierre Rougon pursued his reactionary intrigues. Nothing seemed to have changed in the opinions of the famous yellow drawing-room. Every evening the same men came and spread the same propaganda in favour of a monarchy, while the master of the house approved and aided them with as much zeal as in the past. Eugène had left Plassans on the 1st of May. A few days later, the yellow drawing-room was in raptures. They were discussing the letter of the President of the Republic to General Oudinot, in which the siege of Rome was decided upon. This letter was regarded as a brilliant victory, due to the firm attitude of the reactionary party. Since 1848 the Chambers had been discussing the Roman question; it was reserved for a Bonaparte to go and stifle a rising Republic by an intervention of which France, if free, would never have been guilty. The marquis declared that they could not better promote the cause of Legitimacy. Vuillet wrote a superb article. The enthusiasm was unbounded when, a month later, Commander Sicardot entered the Rougons' house one evening and announced to the company that the French army was fighting under the walls of Rome. While everybody was exclaiming, he went up to Pierre, and shook hands with him in a significant manner. Then, when he had taken a seat, he commenced to

speak in eulogistic terms of the President of the Republic, who, he said, was the only person able to save France from anarchy.

"Let him save it, then, as quickly as possible," interrupted the marquis, "and let him then understand his duty by restoring it to its legitimate masters."

Pierre seemed to approve this fine retort with a lively satisfaction, and having thus given proof of his ardent royalism, he ventured to remark that Prince Louis Bonaparte had his entire sympathy in this matter. He thereupon exchanged a few short sentences with the commander in celebration of the excellent intentions of the President, and which one would have thought had been prepared and learnt beforehand. Bonapartism now entered, for the first time, into the yellow drawing-room. It is true that since the election of the 10th of December the prince had been treated there with a certain amount of consideration. They preferred him a thousand times to Cavaignac, and the whole reactionary party had voted for him. But they regarded him rather as an accomplice than a friend; and, as such, they distrusted him, and began to accuse him of a desire to keep for himself the chestnuts which he had pulled out of the fire. On this evening, however, owing to the campaign at Rome, they listened with fervour to the eulogies of Pierre and the commander.

Granoux and Roudier already demanded that the President should order all those republican rascals to be shot. The marquis, leaning against the mantelpiece, gazed meditatively at a faded rose on the carpet. When he at last lifted his head, Pierre, who seemed to follow furtively the effect of his words on his countenance, suddenly ceased speaking. Monsieur de Carnavant only smiled as he glanced at Félicité with a knowing look. This rapid by-play was not observed by the other people there. Vuillet alone remarked in a sharp tone:

"I would rather see your Bonaparte at London than at Paris. Our affairs would get along better."

The old oil-dealer turned slightly pale, fearing that he had gone too far.

"I don't care much about 'my' Bonaparte," he said, with firmness; "you know where I would send him to if I were master. I simply assert that the expedition to Rome was a good stroke."

Félicité had followed this scene with curious astonishment.

She did not broach the subject to her husband, which proved that she adopted it as the basis of a secret intuitional study. The marquis's smile, the significance of which escaped her, set her thinking.

From this day forward, Rougon, at distant intervals, whenever the occasion offered, slipped in a good word for the President of the Republic. On such evenings, Commander Sicardot acted the part of a complaisant old fellow. Moreover, the clerical opinion still reigned supreme in the yellow drawing-room. It was more particularly in the following year that this group of reactionaries gained such a determined hold upon the town, owing to the retrograde movement which was going on at Paris. The entire anti-Liberal legislation, by which the country designated the expedition to Rome, definitively secured the triumph of the Rougon faction. The last enthusiastic citizens saw the Republic tottering, and hastened to rally round the conservatives. The Rougons' hour had now arrived; the new town almost gave them an ovation on the day when the tree of Liberty, planted on the Place before the Sub-Prefecture, was sawed down. This tree, a young poplar brought from the banks of the Viorne, had gradually withered, much to the despair of the republican working-men, who used to come every Sunday to observe the progress of the ravage without being able to comprehend the cause of its slow death. A hatter's apprentice at last asserted that he had seen a woman leave Rougon's house and go and pour a pail of poisoned water at the foot of the tree. It thenceforward became a matter of history that Félicité in person used to get up every night to sprinkle the poplar with vitriol. When the tree was dead the Municipal Council declared that the dignity of the Republic demanded its removal. As they feared the displeasure of the working population, they selected an advanced hour of the night. The conservative householders of the new town got wind of this little ceremony, and all came down to the Place before the Sub-Prefecture in order to see how a tree of Liberty would fall. The frequenters of the yellow drawing-room planted themselves at the windows. When the poplar cracked and fell with a thud into the darkness, as rigid as a hero mortally wounded, Félicité felt bound to wave a white handkerchief. This induced the crowd to applaud, and the spectators responded to the salute by waving their handkerchiefs likewise. A group of people even came under the window shouting:

"We'll bury it, we'll bury it."

They meant the Republic, no doubt. Félicité's emotion almost brought on a nervous attack. It was a fine time for the yellow drawing-room.

Yet the marquis looked at Félicité with the same mysterious smile. This little old man was far too shrewd not to understand whither France was tending. He was among the first to scent the Empire. When the Legislative Assembly, later on, exhausted itself in useless squabbling, when the Orleanists and Legitimists tacitly accepted the idea of the Coup d'État, he said to himself that the game was decidedly lost. In fact, he was the only one who saw clearly. Vuillet certainly felt that the cause of Henri V, espoused by his paper, was becoming detestable; but it mattered little to him; he was content to be the obedient creature of the clergy; his entire policy was framed to enable him to dispose of as many of his rosaries and sacred images as possible. As for Roudier and Granoux, they lived in a state of blind scare; it was not certain whether they really had any opinions; all that they desired was to eat and sleep in peace, their political aspirations ended there. The marquis, though he had bid farewell to his hopes, continued to go to the Rougons' as regularly as ever. He enjoyed himself there. The shock to the ambitions of the middle classes, the display of their follies, had finally become an extremely amusing spectacle for him. He shuddered at the thought of again shutting himself in his little apartment, which he owed to the beneficence of the Count de Valqueyras. With a kind of malicious delight he preserved for himself the conviction that the hour of the Bourbons had not yet arrived. He feigned blindness, working as hitherto for the triumph of Legitimacy, and still remaining at the orders of the clergy and nobility. From the very first day he had penetrated Pierre's new line of action, and he believed Félicité was his accomplice.

One evening, being the first to arrive, he found the old woman alone in the drawing-room.

"Well! little one," he asked, with his smiling familiarity, "are your affairs going on all right? Why the deuce do you make such mysteries with me?"

"I'm not hiding anything from you," Félicité replied, somewhat perplexed.

"Come, do you think you can deceive an old fox like me,

eh? My dear child, treat me as a friend. I'm quite ready to help you secretly. Come now, be frank!"

A bright idea struck Félicité. She had nothing to tell; perhaps she would be able to find something out if she kept quiet.

"Why do you smile?" Monsieur de Carnavant resumed. "That's the beginning of a confession. I suspected that you must be behind your husband. Pierre is too stupid to invent the pretty treason you are hatching. I sincerely hope the Bonapartists will give you what I would have asked for you from the Bourbons."

This single sentence confirmed the suspicions which the old woman had entertained for some time past.

"Prince Louis has every chance, hasn't he?" she asked eagerly.

"Will you betray me if I tell you that I believe so?" the marquis laughingly replied. "I've donned my mourning over it, little one. I'm a good-natured old man, worn out and put on the shelf. It was for you, however, that I was working. Since you have been able to find the way without me, I shall feel some consolation in seeing you triumph from my defeat. Above all things, don't make any more mysteries. Come to me if you are in trouble."

And he added with the sceptical smile of a gentleman who has demeaned himself:

"Pshaw! I can also go in for a little treachery!"

At this moment the clan of retired oil and almond dealers arrived.

"Ah! the dear reactionaries!" Monsieur de Carnavant continued in an undertone. "You see, little one, the great art of politics consists in having a pair of good eyes when other people are blind. You've got all the best cards in the pack."

On the following day, Félicité, incited by this conversation, desired to assure herself on the matter. They were then in the first days of the year 1851. For more than eighteen months, Rougon had been in the habit of receiving a letter from his son Eugène regularly every fortnight. He used to shut himself in the bedroom to read these letters which he then hid in the bottom of an old secrétaire, the key of which he carefully kept in his waistcoat pocket. When his wife questioned him, he would only answer: "Eugène writes that he is going on all right." Félicité had long since thought of laying hands on her

son's letters. On the morning of the following day, while Pierre was still asleep, she got up and went on tiptoe to substitute the key of the chest of drawers in the waistcoat pocket for that of the secrétaire, which was of the same size. Then, as soon as her husband had gone out, she shut herself in in her turn, emptied the drawer, and read all the letters with feverish curiosity.

Monsieur de Carnavant had not been mistaken, and her own suspicions were confirmed. There were about forty letters, which enabled her to follow the great Bonapartist movement which was to terminate in the Empire. It was a sort of concise journal, exposing the facts as they occurred, and drawing hopes and suggestions from each of them. Eugène was confident. He described Prince Louis Bonaparte to his father as the destined necessary man who alone could unravel the situation. He had believed in him prior even to his return to France, when Bonapartism was treated as a ridiculous chimera. Félicité perceived that her son had been a very active secret agent since 1848. Although he did not explain very clearly his position in Paris, it was evident that he was working for the Empire, under the orders of persons whose names he mentioned with a sort of familiarity. Each of his letters gave information as to the progress of the cause to which an early denouement was foreshadowed. They usually concluded by pointing out the line of action Pierre should pursue at Plassans. Félicité could now comprehend certain words and acts of her husband, the significance of which had previously escaped her; Pierre was obeying his son, and blindly following his recommendations.

When the old woman had finished reading, she was convinced. Eugène's entire thoughts were clearly revealed to her. He reckoned upon making his political fortune in the squabble, and repaying his parents, with the results of this stroke, the debt owing for his education, by throwing them a scrap of the prey when the quarry was secured. However small the assistance his father might render to him and to the cause, it would not be difficult to get him appointed receiver of taxes. They would not be able to refuse anything to him who had steeped his hands in the most secret machinations. His letters were simply a kind attention on his part, an expedient to prevent the Rougons from committing any imprudence, for which Félicité felt deeply grateful. She read certain passages of the letters over again, those in which Eugène spoke, in vague terms, of

the final catastrophe. This catastrophe, the nature or bearings of which she could not well conceive, became a sort of end of the world for her. God would range the chosen ones on His right hand and the damned on His left, and she placed herself among the former.

When she succeeded in replacing the key in the waistcoat pocket on the following night, she made up her mind to employ the same expedient for reading every new letter that arrived. She resolved, likewise, to profess complete ignorance. This plan was an excellent one. Henceforward, she gave her husband the more assistance as she appeared to render it unconsciously. When Pierre thought he was working alone it was she who brought the conversation round to the desired topic, recruiting partisans for the decisive moment. She felt hurt at Eugène's distrust of her. She wanted to be able to say to him, after the success: "I knew all, and so far from spoiling anything, I have secured the victory." Never did an accomplice make less noise and work so hard. The marquis, whom she had taken into her confidence, was astounded at it.

The fate of her dear Aristide, however, continued to make her uneasy. Now that she shared the faith of her eldest son, the rabid articles of the "Indépendant" alarmed her still more. She longed to convert the unfortunate republican to Napoleonist ideas; but she did not know how to do it in a discreet manner. She recalled the emphasis with which Eugène had told them to be on their guard against Aristide. She submitted the matter to Monsieur de Carnavant, who was entirely of the same opinion.

"Little one," he said to her, "in politics one must know how to look after one's-self. If you were to convert your son, and the 'Indépendant' were to start writing in defence of Bonapartism, it would strike a rude blow to the party. The 'Indépendant' has been already condemned, its title alone suffices to enrage the middle classes of Plassans. Let dear Aristide flounder about, it moulds young people. He does not appear to me to be cut out for carrying on the rôle of a martyr for any length of time."

In her eagerness to point out the right way to her family, now that she believed herself in possession of the truth, Félicité went so far as to desire to indoctrinate her son Pascal. The doctor, with the egotism of a savant immersed in his researches, concerned himself very little with politics. Empires might

fall while he was making an experiment without his deigning to turn his head. He at last yielded, however, to the importunity of his mother, who accused him more than ever of living like an unsociable churl.

"If you were to go into society," she used to say to him, "you would get some well-to-do patients. Come, at least, and spend the evenings in our drawing-room. You will make the acquaintance of Messieurs Roudier, Granoux, and Sicardot, all gentlemen in good circumstances, who will pay you four or five francs a visit. The poor people will not enrich you."

The idea of succeeding in life, of seeing all her family attain to fortune, had become a monomania with Félicité. Pascal, to be agreeable to her, came and spent a few evenings in the yellow drawing-room. He was much less bored than he had apprehended. At first he was rather stupefied at the degree of imbecility to which a sane man can sink. The old oil and almond-dealers, the marquis and the commander even, appeared to him curious animals, which he had not till then had the opportunity of studying. He looked with a naturalist's interest at their faces relaxed into a grimace, in which he discerned their occupations and their appetites; he listened to their inane chatter, as he would have tried to catch the meaning of a cat's mewing or a dog's barking. At this time he was very much occupied with comparative natural history, applying to the human race the observations which he had been enabled to make upon animals with regard to the operations of heredity. When he was in the yellow drawing-room, therefore, he amused himself with the belief that he had fallen in with a menagerie. He established identities between each of these grotesque creatures and some animal of his acquaintance. The marquis reminded him exactly of a large green grasshopper, with his leanness and his small crafty-looking head. Vuillet gave him the pale, slimy impression of a toad. He was more considerate for Roudier, a fat sheep, and for the commander, an old toothless mastiff. But the prodigious Granoux was a perpetual cause of astonishment to him. He spent a whole evening measuring his facial angle. When he heard him mutter some indistinct imprecations against those blood-suckers the republicans, he always expected to hear him moan like a calf; and he could never see him rise, without imagining that he was about to leave the room on all fours.

"Talk to them," his mother used to say in an undertone; "try and make a practice out of these gentlemen."

"I am not a veterinary surgeon," he at last replied, exasperated.

One evening Félicité took him into a corner and tried to catechise him. She was glad to see him come to her house rather assiduously. She thought he was brought back to the world, not suspecting for a moment the singular amusement he derived from ridiculing these rich people. She cherished the secret project of making him the fashionable doctor at Plassans. It would be sufficient if men like Granoux and Roudier consented to give him a start. She wished, above all, to impart to him the political views of the family, considering that a doctor had everything to gain by constituting himself a warm partisan of the régime which was to succeed the Republic.

"My friend," she said to him, "as you have now become reasonable, you must give some thought to the future. You are accused of being a republican, because you are foolish enough to attend all the beggars of the town without making any charge. Be frank, what are your real opinions?"

Pascal looked at his mother with naïve astonishment, then with a smile he replied:

"My real opinions? I don't quite know—I am accused of being a republican, did you say? Very well! I don't feel at all offended. I am undoubtedly a republican, if you understand by that word a man that wishes the welfare of everybody."

"But you will not arrive at anything," Félicité quickly interrupted. "You will be swallowed up. Look at your brothers, they are trying to make their way."

Pascal comprehended that he was not called upon to defend his philosophic egotism. His mother simply accused him of not speculating on the political situation. He commenced to laugh somewhat sadly, and then turned the conversation. Félicité could never induce him to calculate the chances of the various parties, nor to enlist in that one which seemed likely to carry the day. He continued, however, to come now and again to spend the evening in the yellow drawing-room. Granoux interested him like an antediluvian animal.

In the meantime, events were progressing. The year 1851 was a year of anxiety and apprehension for the politicians of Plassans, and the secret cause of the Rougons profited by this

circumstance. The most contradictory news arrived from Paris, sometimes the republicans were in the ascendant, sometimes the conservative party crushed the Republic. The echo of the squabbles which were rending the Legislative Assembly penetrated into the interior of the country, exaggerated one day, attenuated the next, and varied to such a degree as to obscure the view of the most clear-sighted. The only general feeling was that a denouement was approaching. The prevailing ignorance as to the nature of this denouement kept these timid middle-class people in a terrible state of anxiety. Everybody wished to see the end of it. They were sick of this uncertainty, and would have rushed into the arms of the Grand Turk, if he would have deigned to save France from anarchy.

The marquis's smile became more pointed. In the evening, at the yellow drawing-room, when Granoux's growl was rendered indistinct by fright, he would draw near to Félicité and whisper in her ear:

"Come, little one, the fruit is ripe—but you must make yourself useful."

Félicité, who continued to read Eugène's letters, and knew that a decisive crisis might any day occur, had often felt the necessity of making herself useful, and questioned herself as to the manner in which the Rougons should employ themselves. At last she consulted the marquis.

"It all depends upon circumstances," the little old man replied. "If the department remains quiet, if no insurrection comes to terrify Plassans, it will be difficult for you to make yourself conspicuous and to render any services to the new government. I advise you, in that case, to remain at home, and await peacefully the bounties of your son Eugène. But if the people rise, and our brave citizens think themselves in danger, there will be a fine part to play. Your husband is somewhat heavy——"

"Oh!" said Félicité, "I'll undertake to make him supple. Do you think the department will revolt?"

"To my mind it's a certainty. Plassans, perhaps, will not make a stir; the reaction has secured too firm a hold here for that. But the neighbouring towns, especially the small boroughs and the country towns, have been worked for a long time by certain secret societies, and belong to the advanced republican party. If a Coup d'État does burst forth, the tocsin

will be heard throughout the entire country, from the forests of the Seille to the plateau of Sainte-Roure."

Félicité collected herself.

"You think, then," she resumed, "that an insurrection is necessary to ensure our fortune!"

"That's my opinion," replied Monsieur de Carnavant.

And he added, with a slightly ironical smile:

"A new dynasty is never founded excepting upon an affray. Blood is a good pasture. It will be fine if the Rougons date from a massacre, like certain illustrious families."

These words, accompanied by a sneer, sent a cold chill through Félicité's bones. But she was a strong-minded woman, and the sight of Monsieur Peirotte's beautiful curtains, which she religiously viewed every morning, sustained her courage. When she felt herself giving way, she used to plant herself at the window and contemplate the tax-receiver's house. For her it was the Tuileries. She had determined upon the most extreme measures, to secure an entrée into the new town, that promised land on the threshold of which she had stood with burning longings for so many years.

The conversation which she had held with the marquis had at last clearly revealed the situation to her. A few days afterwards, she succeeded in reading one of Eugène's letters, in which he, who was working for the Coup d'État, seemed also to rely upon an insurrection as the means of investing his father with some importance. Eugène knew his department well. All his suggestions had been framed with the object of placing as much influence as possible in the hands of the yellow drawing-room reactionaries, so that the Rougons might be able to hold the town at the critical moment. In accordance with his wishes, the yellow drawing-room was master of Plassans in November, 1851. Roudier represented the rich citizens there; his attitude would certainly decide that of the entire new town. Granoux was still more valuable; he had the Municipal Council behind him: he was its most powerful member, a fact which will give some idea of its other members. Finally, through Commander Sicardot, for whom the marquis had succeeded in getting an appointment as chief of the National Guard, the yellow drawing-room had the armed force at their disposal.

The Rougons, those poor disreputable devils, had thus succeeded in rallying round themselves the instruments of their own fortune. Every one, from cowardice or stupidity, would have

to obey them and work in the dark for their aggrandisement. They had to dread only those other influences which might be working towards the same end as they, and which would partially rob their efforts of the palm of victory. That was their great fear, for they wanted to reserve to themselves the rôle of deliverers. They knew beforehand that they would be rather aided than obstructed by the clergy and the nobility. But were the sub-prefect, the mayor, and the other functionaries to take a step in advance and stifle the insurrection immediately, they would find themselves thrown into the shade, and even arrested in their exploits; they would have neither time nor means to make themselves useful. What they longed for was a complete abstention, a general panic among the functionaries. If all regular administration were to disappear, if they could then dispose of the destinies of Plassans for one day only, their fortune would be firmly established.

Happily for them there was not a man in the administration with such firm convictions or in such needy circumstances as to feel disposed to risk the game. The sub-prefect was a man of liberal spirit whom the executive had ignored at Plassans, owing, no doubt, to the good repute of the town; of timid character and incapable of exceeding his authority, he would no doubt be greatly embarrassed in the face of an insurrection. The Rougons, who knew he was in favour of the democratic cause, and consequently never dreaded his zeal, were simply curious to know what attitude he would assume. The municipality did not cause them much apprehension. The mayor, Monsieur Garçonnet, was a Legitimist whose nomination had been procured by the Saint-Marc quarter in 1849. He detested the republicans and treated them with undisguised disdain; but he was too closely united by bonds of friendship with certain members of the church to lend any active hand to a Bonapartist Coup d'État. The other functionaries were in exactly the same position. The justices of the peace, the post-master, the tax collector, as well as Monsieur Peirotte, the receiver of taxes, all holding their posts through the influence of the clerical reaction, could not accept the Empire with any great outburst of enthusiasm. The Rougons, though they did not quite see how they could get rid of these people and clear the way for themselves, nevertheless indulged in sanguine hopes on discovering that there would be no one to dispute their rôle of deliverers with them.

The denouement was drawing near. In the last days of November, as the rumour of a Coup d'État was circulating, the prince-president was accused of seeking to be nominated emperor.

"Eh! we'll call him whatever he likes," Granoux exclaimed, "provided he has these republican rascals shot!"

This exclamation of Granoux, who was believed to be asleep, caused a great commotion. The marquis pretended not to have heard it; but all the people approved the old almond-dealer by a nod. Roudier, who did not fear to add his loud applause, because he was rich, went so far as to declare, as he glanced at Monsieur de Carnavant out of the corner of his eye, that the position was no longer tenable, and that France must be chastised as soon as possible, never mind by what hand.

The marquis still maintained a silence which was interpreted as an acquiescence. The conservative clan, abandoning the cause of Legitimacy, then ventured to make vows on behalf of the Empire.

"My friends," said Commander Sicardot, getting up from his seat, "only a Napoleon can now protect the lives and properties menaced. Have no fear, I've taken the necessary precautions to preserve order at Plassans."

In fact the commander, in concert with Rougon, had concealed, in a kind of cart-house near the ramparts, a supply of cartridges and a considerable number of muskets; he had, at the same time, secured the co-operation of the National Guards on whom he believed he could rely. His words produced a very favourable impression. On separating for the evening, the peaceful citizens of the yellow drawing-room spoke of massacring the "Reds" if they dared to stir.

On the 1st of December Pierre Rougon received a letter from Eugène which he took with him to read in his bed-room, in accordance with his prudent habit. Félicité observed that he was very agitated when he came out again. She fluttered round the secrétaire all day. When night came, she could not restrain her impatience any longer. Her husband had scarcely fallen asleep, when she got up quietly, took the key of the secrétaire from the waistcoat pocket, and got possession of the letter with as little noise as possible. Eugène, in ten lines, warned his father that the crisis was about to take place, and advised him to inform his mother as to the situation of

affairs. The hour for informing her had arrived; he might stand in need of her advice.

Félicité awaited, on the following day, a disclosure which, however, did not come. She did not dare to avow her curiosity; she continued to feign ignorance, enraged at the foolish distrust of her husband who, doubtless, considered her a gossip, and weak like other women. Pierre, with that marital pride which inspires a man with the belief of his superiority in the household, had ended by attributing all their past ill-luck to his wife. From the time that he fancied he was conducting matters alone everything seemed to him to go as he wished. He had decided, therefore, to dispense altogether with his consort's counsels, and to confide nothing to her, in spite of his son's recommendations.

Félicité was piqued to such a degree that she would have upset the whole affair, had she not desired the triumph as ardently as Pierre. She continued to work energetically for victory, endeavouring to take her revenge at the same time.

"Ah! if he could only have some great fright," thought she; "if he would only commit some imprudence! Then I should see him come to me and humbly ask for advice; it would be my turn to lay down the law."

She felt somewhat uneasy at the imperious attitude Pierre would certainly assume if he were to triumph without her aid. When she married this peasant's son, in preference to some notary's clerk, she had intended to make use of him as a dancing puppet, whose strings she would pull in her own way; and now, at the decisive moment, the puppet, in his blind stupidity, wanted to work alone! All the cunning, all the feverish activity of the old woman protested against it. She knew Pierre was quite capable of some brutal determination, such as that which he had made when he compelled his mother to sign the receipt for fifty thousand francs; the tool was certainly a useful and unscrupulous one; but she felt the necessity for guiding it, especially under present circumstances when considerable versatility was requisite.

The official news of the Coup d'État did not reach Plassans until the afternoon of the 3rd of December—a Thursday. Since seven o'clock in the evening, there had been a full meeting in the yellow-drawing-room. Although the crisis was eagerly desired, a vague uneasiness was depicted on the faces of the majority. They discussed the events amid endless chatter.

Pierre, who, like the others was slightly pale, thought it right, as an extreme measure of prudence, to excuse Prince Louis's decisive act before the Legitimists and Orleanists who were present.

"There is talk of an appeal to the people," he said, "the nation will then be free to choose whatever government it likes. The president is a man who will retire before our legitimate masters."

The marquis, who preserved his gentlemanly coolness, was the only one who greeted these words with a smile. The others, in the enthusiasm of the moment, concerned themselves very little about what would follow. All their opinions foundered. Roudier, forgetting the esteem which as a former shopkeeper he had entertained for the Orleanists, stopped Pierre rather abruptly. Everybody exclaimed:

"Don't argue the matter. Let us think of preserving order."

These good people were terribly afraid of the republicans. The town, however, had only experienced a slight commotion on the announcement of the events at Paris. Crowds had collected in front of the notices posted on the door of the Sub-Prefecture; it was also rumoured that a few hundred workmen had left their work and were endeavouring to organise resistance. That was all. No serious disturbance seemed likely to occur. The attitude assumed by the neighbouring cities and towns was, however, anything but reassuring; but it was not so far known in what manner they had received the news of the Coup d'État.

Granoux arrived at about nine o'clock, quite out of breath. He had just left a sitting of the Municipal Council convoked on urgent business. In a voice stifled with emotion he announced that the mayor, Monsieur Garçonnet, had declared, with due reserve, that he was determined to preserve order by the most stringent measures. But the intelligence which produced the most noisy brawling in the yellow drawing-room was that of the resignation of the sub-prefect. This functionary had absolutely refused to communicate the despatches of the Minister of the Interior to the inhabitants of Plassans; he had just left the town, Granoux asserted, and it was through the mayor's intercession that the messages had been posted. He was perhaps the only sub-prefect in France who ever had the courage of his democratic opinions.

Although Monsieur Garçonnet's firm attitude caused the Rougons some secret anxiety, they rubbed their hands at the flight of the sub-prefect, which left the post vacant for them. It was decided on this memorable evening that the yellow drawing-room party should accept the Coup d'État and declare openly that they were in favour of accomplished facts. Vuillet was commissioned to write an article immediately to that effect, and publish it on the morrow in the "Gazette." Neither he nor the marquis raised any objection. They had, no doubt, received instructions from the mysterious individuals to whom they sometimes made devout allusions. The clergy and the nobility had already determined to lend a strong hand to the victors, in order to crush their common enemy, the Republic.

While the yellow drawing-room was deliberating on the evening in question, Aristide's anxiety brought a cold perspiration upon him. Never had a gambler, staking his last louis on a card, felt such anguish. During the day the resignation of his chief had given him much matter for reflection. He had heard him repeat several times that the Coup d'État must prove a failure. This functionary, who was endowed with a limited amount of honesty, believed in the final triumph of the democracy, although he had not the courage to work for this triumph by offering resistance. Aristide was in the habit of listening at the doors of the Sub-Prefecture, in order to get some precise information; he felt that he was walking in the dark, and clung to the intelligence which he gleaned from the administration. The sub-prefect's opinion struck him, causing him considerable perplexity. He thought to himself: "Why does he go away if he is so certain the prince-president will meet with a check?" However, as he was compelled to espouse one side or the other, he resolved to continue his opposition. He wrote an article very hostile to the Coup d'État, which he took to the "Indépendant" the same evening for the following morning's issue. He had corrected the proofs of this article, and was returning home somewhat calmed, when, as he was passing along the Rue de la Banne, he mechanically raised his head and glanced at the Rougons' windows. These windows were brilliantly illuminated.

"What can they be plotting up there?" the journalist asked himself, with anxious curiosity.

A fierce desire to know the opinion of the yellow drawing-room in regard to recent events assailed him. He credited this

group of reactionaries with a moderate amount of intelligence; but his doubts recurred, he was in that frame of mind when one would seek advice from a four-year-old child. He could not think of entering his father's home at that time, after the campaign he had waged against Granoux and the others. He went up, however, thinking of the singular figure he would present if he were surprised on the staircase by any one. Arrived at the Rougons' door, he could only catch a confused sound of voices.

"What a child I am," said he, "fear makes me stupid."

And he was about to descend again, when he heard his mother seeing somebody out. He had only just time to hide himself in a dark corner formed by a little staircase leading to the garret of the house. The door opened, and the marquis appeared, followed by Félicité. Monsieur de Carnavant usually left before the gentlemen of the new town, no doubt to avoid having to shake hands with them in the street.

"Eh! little one," he said on the landing, in a hushed voice, "these men are greater cowards than I should have thought. With such men France will always be at the mercy of whoever dares to lay hands upon her!"

And he added with some bitterness, as though speaking to himself:

"The monarchy is decidedly becoming too good for modern times. Its day is at an end."

"Eugène had announced the crisis to his father," Félicité said, "Prince Louis's triumph seems to him certain."

"Oh, you can proceed without fear," the marquis replied, as he descended the first steps. "In two or three days the country will be well bound and gagged. Good-bye till to-morrow, little one."

Félicité closed the door again. Aristide, in his dark corner, was bewildered. Without waiting till the marquis had reached the street, he bounded down the staircase, four steps at a time, rushed outside like a madman, and turned his steps towards the printing-office of the "Indépendant." A flood of thoughts rushed to his mind. He was enraged, and accused his family of having duped him. What! Eugène kept his parents informed of the situation, and yet his mother had never given him any of his eldest brother's letters to read, in order that he might have followed blindly the advice given therein! And it was only at this moment he learnt by chance that his eldest

brother regarded the success of the Coup d'État as certain! This circumstance, moreover, confirmed certain presentiments of his which that idiot of a sub-prefect had prevented him from obeying. He was especially exasperated against his father, whom he thought stupid enough for a Legitimist, but who revealed himself at the right moment as a Bonapartist.

"They have allowed me to perpetrate all these follies," he muttered as he ran along. "I'm a fine fellow now. Ah! what a school! Granoux is more capable than I."

He entered the offices of the "Indépendant" like a hurricane, and asked for his article in a choking voice. The article had already been imposed. He had the form unlocked, and would not rest until he had himself destroyed the article, mixing the type in a furious manner, like a set of dominoes. The bookseller who managed the paper looked at him in amazement. He was, in reality, rather glad of the incident, as the article seemed to him somewhat dangerous. But he was absolutely compelled to have some copy, if he wished the "Indépendant" to appear.

"Are you going to give me something else?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Aristide.

He sat down at the table and commenced a very warm panegyric on the Coup d'État. In the very first line, he swore that Prince Louis had just saved the Republic; but he had hardly written a page before he stopped and seemed to be at a loss how to continue. His pole-cat face assumed a troubled look.

"I must go home," he said at last. "I will send you this immediately. Your paper can appear a little later, if necessary."

He walked slowly on his way home, lost in reflection. He was again giving way to indecision. Why should he veer round so quickly? Eugène was an intelligent fellow, but his mother had perhaps exaggerated the significance of a single sentence in his letter. In any case, it would be better to wait and hold his tongue.

An hour later Angèle called at the bookseller's, feigning deep emotion.

"My husband has just severely injured himself," she said. "He jammed his four fingers in a door as he was coming in. In spite of his acute sufferings, he has dictated this little note, which he begs you to publish to-morrow."

On the following day the "Indépendant," made up almost

entirely of various items of news, appeared with these few lines at the head of the first column:—

"A deplorable accident which has occurred to our eminent contributor Monsieur Aristide Rougon will deprive us of his articles for some time. He will cruelly feel this silence under the present grave circumstances. None of our readers will doubt, however, the good wishes which his patriotism cherishes for the welfare of France."

This burlesque note had been maturely studied. The last sentence could be explained in favour of all parties. By this expedient, Aristide arranged a glorious return for himself after the victory, by means of a panegyric on the victors. On the following day he showed himself to all the town, with his arm in a sling. His mother, frightened by the notice in the paper, hastened to him, but he refused to show her his hand and spoke with a harshness which the old woman knew how to interpret.

"It's not very bad," she said in a reassuring and somewhat sarcastic tone, as she was leaving. "You only want a little rest."

It was no doubt owing to this pretended accident, and to the sub-prefect's departure, that the "Indépendant" was not interfered with, like most of the democratic papers of the departments.

The 4th day of the month was comparatively quiet at Plassans. In the evening there was a public demonstration which the mere appearance of the gendarmes sufficed to disperse. A band of working men came to demand of Monsieur Garçonnet the communication of the despatches he had received from Paris, which the latter haughtily refused; as they withdrew the band shouted: "Long live the Republic! Long live the Constitution." After this, order was restored. The yellow drawing-room, after commenting at some length on this innocent parade, decided that affairs were going on excellently.

The 5th and 6th were, however, more disquieting. Intelligence was received, successively, of the insurrection of the small neighbouring towns; the entire southern portion of the department had taken up arms; La Palud and Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx were the first to rise, leading behind them the villages of Chavanos, Nazères, Poujols, Valqueyras and Vernoux. The yellow drawing-room party was now becoming seriously alarmed. It was especially uneasy at seeing Plassans isolated in the very

midst of the revolt. Bands of insurgents would certainly scour the country and cut off all communications. Granoux announced, with a terrified look, that the mayor was without any news. Some people even asserted that blood had been shed at Marseilles, and that a formidable revolution had broken out in Paris. Commander Sicardot, enraged at the cowardice of the middle-class citizens, vowed he would die at the head of his men.

On Sunday the 7th the terror had reached its height. Since six o'clock, the yellow drawing-room, where a sort of reactionary committee held a permanent sitting, had been crowded with a host of men, pale and trembling, who conversed with each other in undertones, as though they were in a chamber of death. It had been ascertained during the day that a column of insurgents, about three thousand strong, had assembled at Alboise, a borough not more than three leagues away. It was true that this column had been ordered to make for the chief town, leaving Plassans on its left; but the plan of the campaign might at any time be altered; moreover, it was quite enough for these cowardly gentlemen to know that there were insurgents a few miles off, to make them feel the horny hands of the working-men already tightened round their throats. They had had a foretaste of the revolt in the morning; the few republicans at Plassans, seeing that they would be unable to make any determined move in the town, had resolved to join their brethren of La Palud and Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx; the first group had left at about eleven o'clock, by the Porte de Rome, shouting the "Marseillaise" and smashing a few windows. Granoux had one of his broken. He mentioned the circumstance with stammerings of terror.

In the meantime, the most acute anxiety was agitating the yellow drawing-room. The commander had sent his servant to obtain some information as to the movements of the insurgents, and they awaited this man's return, making the most astonishing surmises. They had a full meeting. Roudier and Granoux, sinking into their arm-chairs, exchanged the most pitiable glances, whilst behind them moaned the terror-stricken group of retired tradesmen. Vuillet, without appearing too scared, was thinking what precautions he should take to protect his shop and person; he was deliberating whether he should hide himself in his garret or cellar, and inclined towards the cellar. Pierre and the commander walked up and down, exchanging a word ever and anon. The old oil-dealer

clung to his friend Sicardot, to borrow a little courage from him. He had been awaiting the crisis for such a long time, and now endeavoured to keep his countenance, in spite of the emotion which was stifling him. As for the marquis, more spruce and smiling than ordinarily, he conversed in a corner with Félicité, who seemed very gay.

At last a ring came. These gentlemen started as if they had heard the report of a gun. A dead silence reigned in the drawing-room as Félicité went to open the door, towards which their pale, anxious faces were turned. The commander's servant appeared on the threshold, quite out of breath, and said abruptly to his master:

"Sir, the insurgents will be here in an hour."

This was a thunderbolt. They all started up, vociferating and raising their arms towards the ceiling. For several minutes it was impossible to hear one's-self speak. They all surrounded the messenger, overwhelming him with questions.

"Damnation!" the commander at length shouted, "don't make such a row. Do be calm, or I won't answer for anything."

Every one sank back in his chair again, heaving long-drawn sighs. They could not get any details. The messenger had met the column at Les Tulettes, and had hastened to return.

"There are at least three thousand of them," he said. "They are marching in battalions, like soldiers. I thought I caught sight of some prisoners in their midst."

"Prisoners!" cried the terrified citizens.

"There's no doubt about it," the marquis broke in with his flutey voice. "I've heard that the insurgents arrest all persons who are known to have conservative leanings."

This piece of information completed the consternation of the yellow drawing-room. A few citizens got up and stealthily made for the door, reflecting that they had not too much time before them to gain a place of safety.

The announcement of the arrests made by the republicans appeared to strike Félicité. She took the marquis aside and asked him:

"What do these men do with the people they are arresting?"

"Why, they carry them off in their train," Monsieur de Carnavant replied. "They no doubt consider them excellent hostages."

"Ah!" the old woman rejoined, in a strange tone.

She composed herself to follow in a thoughtful manner the curious scene of panic which was enacting in the drawing-room. The citizens gradually disappeared; very soon there remained only Vuillet and Roudier, whom the approaching danger inspired with courage. As for Granoux, he likewise remained in his corner; his legs refusing to perform their function.

"Faith! I like this better," Sicardot remarked, as he observed the flight of the other adherents. "The cowards were exasperating me at last. For more than two years they've been speaking of shooting all the republicans in the country, and to-day they wouldn't even fire a halfpenny cracker under their noses."

He took up his hat and turned towards the door.

"Let's see," he continued, "time presses. Come, Rougon."

Félicité seemed to be waiting for this moment. She placed herself between the door and her husband, who, for that matter, was not very eager to follow the formidable Sicardot.

"I don't want you to go out," she cried, feigning a sudden despair. "I won't let you leave my side. Those scoundrels will kill you."

The commander stopped in amazement.

"Hang it all!" he growled, "if the women are going to whine now—Come along, Rougon!"

"No, no," continued the old woman, affecting an exaggerated terror, "he sha'n't follow you. I will hang on to his clothes and prevent him."

The marquis, very much surprised at the scene, looked inquiringly at Félicité. Was this really the woman who was just now conversing so merrily? What comedy was she playing? Pierre, of course, seeing that his wife wanted to detain him, pretended he would go out by all means.

"I tell you you shall not go out," the old woman reiterated, as she clung to one of his arms.

And turning towards the commander:

"How can you think of offering any resistance? They are three thousand strong, and you won't be able to gather together a hundred men of any spirit. You are rushing into the cannon's mouth to no purpose."

"Eh! that is our duty," said Sicardot, impatiently.

Félicité burst into sobs.

"If they don't kill him, they'll make him a prisoner," she continued, looking fixedly at her husband. "Good heavens! What will become of me, left alone in an abandoned town?"

"But," exclaimed the commander, "don't you think we shall be arrested just the same if we allow the insurgents to enter the town unmolested? I vow that before an hour has passed, the mayor and all the functionaries will be prisoners, to say nothing of your husband and the frequenters of this drawing-room."

The marquis thought he saw a vague smile play about Félicité's lips as she answered, with a scared look:

"Do you think so?"

"Of course!" replied Sicardot, "the republicans are not so stupid as to leave enemies behind them. To-morrow Plassans will be emptied of its functionaries and good citizens."

At these words, which she had cleverly provoked, Félicité released her husband's arms. Pierre no longer looked as if he wanted to go out. Thanks to his wife, whose prudent tactics escaped him however, and whose secret complicity he never for a moment suspected, he had just caught a glimpse of a whole plan of campaign.

"We must deliberate before taking any decision," he said to the commander. "My wife is perhaps not wrong in accusing us of forgetting the true interests of our families."

"No, indeed, madame is not wrong," cried Granoux, who had been listening to Félicité's terrified cries with the rapture of a coward.

The commander clapped his hat on his head with an energetic action, and said in a clear voice:

"Right or wrong, it matters little to me. I am commander of the National Guard. I ought to have been at the mayor's before this. Confess that you are afraid, that you leave me to act alone. So good-night."

He was just turning the handle of the door, when Rougon forcibly detained him.

"Listen, Sicardot," he said.

He drew him into a corner, as he saw Vuillet prick up his big ears. There he explained to him, in an undertone, that it would be a good plan to leave some energetic men behind the insurgents, who could restore order in the town. As the fierce commander obstinately refused to desert his post, Pierre offered to place himself at the head of the reserve corps.

"Give me the key of the cart-shed in which the arms and ammunition are kept," he said to him, "and order some fifty of our men not to stir until I call for them."

Sicardot ended by consenting to these prudent measures. He entrusted Pierre with the key of the cart-shed, convinced himself of the inexpediency of present resistance, but still desirous of sacrificing himself.

During this conversation, the marquis whispered a few words in Félicité's ear with a knowing look. He was complimenting her, no doubt, on her theatrical display. The old woman could not repress a gentle smile. And, as Sicardot shook hands with Rougon and was preparing to go:

"Are you determined to leave us?" she asked him, resuming her bewildered look.

"One of Napoleon's old soldiers will never allow himself to be intimidated by the mob," he replied.

He was already on the landing, when Granoux hurried after him, crying:

"If you are going to the mayor's tell him what's going on. I'll just run home to my wife to reassure her."

Félicité now bent towards the marquis's ear, and whispered with discreet gaiety:

"Faith! I prefer that this devil of a commander should go and get himself arrested. He's too zealous."

Meanwhile, Rougon had brought Granoux back to the drawing-room. Roudier, who quietly followed the scene from his corner, giving his support by gestures to the proposed measures of prudence, got up and joined them. When the marquis and Vuillet had likewise risen, Pierre said:

"Now that we are alone, among peaceable men, I propose that we conceal ourselves to avoid certain arrest, so that when we again become the stronger party, we shall be free."

Granoux was ready to embrace him. Roudier and Vuillet breathed more easily.

"I shall want you shortly, gentlemen," the oil-dealer continued, with an air of importance. "It is for us that the honour of restoring order in Plassans is reserved."

"You may rely upon us!" cried Vuillet, with an enthusiasm which troubled Félicité.

Time was pressing. These singular defenders of Plassans, who hid themselves in order to render the town more secure, hastened to bury themselves at the bottom of some hole,

Pierre, left alone with his wife, advised her not to make the mistake of barricading herself in, but to reply, if anybody came to question her, that he, Pierre, had gone for a short journey. And as she acted the simpleton, feigning terror and asking what all this was coming to, he replied abruptly:

"That's nothing to do with you. Let me manage our affairs alone. They'll get on all the better."

A few minutes later he was threading his way rapidly along the Rue de la Banne. Arrived at the Cours Sauvaire, he saw a band of armed workmen leaving the old quarter and singing the "Marseillaise."

"By Jove!" he thought. "It was quite time, indeed; why here's the town in revolt now!"

He quickened his steps in the direction of the Porte de Rome. A cold perspiration came over him while he was waiting there for the dilatory guard to open the gate. As soon as he set foot on the main road, he perceived in the moonlight at the other end of the Faubourg the column of insurgents, whose guns were emitting little white flames. He ran as fast as his legs would carry him, dived into the Impasse Saint-Mittre, and reached his mother's house, where he had not been for many a long year.

CHAPTER IV.

ANTOINE MACQUART returned to Plassans after the fall of Napoleon. He had had the incredible good fortune to escape all the final and murderous campaigns of the Empire. He had moved from barrack to barrack, dragging on his stultifying military existence. This mode of life completed the development of his natural vices. His idleness became deliberate; his intemperance, which brought him a countless number of punishments, was, to his mind, a veritable religious observance. But that which above all made him the worst of scape-graces was the supercilious disdain which he entertained for the poor devils who had to earn their bread.

"I've got money waiting for me at home," he often said to his comrades; "when I've served my time, I shall be able to live like a gentleman."

This belief, together with his stupid ignorance, prevented his promotion even to the grade of corporal.

Since his departure, he had never spent a day's furlough at Plassans, as his brother invented a thousand pretexts to keep him at a distance. He was therefore completely ignorant of the adroit manner in which Pierre had got possession of their mother's fortune. Adélaïde, in her profound indifference, did not even write to him three times to tell him how she was going on. The silence which generally greeted his numerous requests for money did not awaken the least suspicion in him; Pierre's stinginess sufficed to explain to Antoine the difficulty he experienced in securing from time to time a miserable twenty-franc piece. This, however, only increased his animosity towards his brother, who left him to languish in military service in spite of his formal promise to purchase his discharge. He vowed to himself that on his return he would no longer submit like a child, but would flatly demand his share of the fortune to enable him to live as he pleased. In the coach which conveyed him home he dreamed of a delightful life of idleness. The shattering of his castles in the air was terrible. When he reached the Faubourg, and could no longer

recognise the Fouques' plot of ground, he was stupefied. He was compelled to ask for his mother's new address. There a terrible scene occurred. Adélaïde calmly informed him of the sale of the property. He fell into a rage, and even raised his hand against her.

The poor woman kept repeating:

"Your brother has taken everything; it was understood that he would take care of you."

At last he left her and ran off to see Pierre, whom he had informed of his return, and who was prepared to receive him in such a way as to put an end to the matter at the first word of abuse.

"Listen," the oil dealer said to him, affecting a distant coldness, "don't rouse my anger or I'll turn you out. As a matter of fact I don't know you. We don't bear the same name. It's quite misfortune enough for me that my mother has misconducted herself without having her bastards coming here and insulting me. I was well disposed towards you, but since you are insolent I shall do nothing for you, absolutely nothing."

Antoine was almost choking with rage.

"And what about my money," he cried; "will you give it up, you thief, or shall I have to drag you before the magistrate?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"I've got no money of yours," he replied, gradually becoming calmer. "My mother disposed of her fortune as she thought proper. I am certainly not going to poke my nose into her business. I willingly renounced all hope of an inheritance. I am quite safe from your foul accusations."

And as his brother, exasperated by this composure, and not knowing what to think, muttered something, Pierre thrust Adélaïde's receipt under his nose. The reading of this scrap of paper completed Antoine's dismay.

"Very well," he said, in a calmer voice, "I know now what I have to do."

The truth was, however, he did not know what to do. His inability to hit upon any immediate expedient for obtaining his share of the money and satisfying his desire for revenge, exasperated him furiously. He went back to his mother and subjected her to a disgraceful cross-examination. The wretched woman could do nothing but refer him to Pierre.

"Do you think you are going to make me run to and fro like a shuttle?" he cried, insolently. "I'll soon find out which of you two has the hoard. You've already devoured it, perhaps?"

And making an allusion to her former misconduct he asked her if she had not still some low fellow to whom she gave her last sous? He did not even spare his father, that drunkard Macquart, as he called him, who must have lived on her till the day of his death, and who left his children in poverty. The poor woman listened with a stupefied air; big tears rolled down her cheeks. She defended herself with the terror of a child, replying to her son's questions as though he were a judge; she swore that she was living respectably, and reiterated with emphasis that she had never had a sou, that Pierre had taken everything. Antoine almost came to believe it at last.

"Ah! the scoundrel!" he muttered; "that's why he wouldn't purchase my discharge."

He had to sleep at his mother's house, on a straw mattress placed in a corner. He had returned with his pockets perfectly empty, and was chiefly exasperated at finding himself without any resources, abandoned like a dog in the streets, without hearth or home, while his brother, as he thought, was in a good way of business, and living on the fat of the land. As he had no money to buy clothes with, he went out on the following day in his regimental cap and trousers. He had the good fortune to find, at the bottom of a cupboard, an old yellowish velvet jacket, threadbare and patched, which had belonged to Macquart. In this strange attire he walked about the town, relating his story to every one, and demanding justice.

The people whom he went to consult received him with a contempt which made him shed tears of rage. In the provinces people are inexorable towards fallen families. According to the general opinion, it was only natural that the Rougon-Macquarts should seek to devour each other; the spectators, instead of separating them, would more likely have urged them on. Pierre, however, was beginning to purify himself from his early stigma. People laughed at his roguery; some persons even went so far as to say that he had acted quite right, if he really had taken possession of the money, and that it would be a good lesson to the profligates of the town.

Antoine returned home discouraged. A lawyer had advised him, in a scornful manner, to wash his dirty linen at home, though not until he had skilfully ascertained whether Antoine possessed the requisite means to carry on a law-suit. According to this man, the case was very involved, the pleadings would be very lengthy, and success was doubtful. Moreover, it would require money, and plenty of it.

Antoine treated his mother more harshly that evening; not knowing on whom to wreak his vengeance he repeated his accusation of the previous day; he kept the wretched woman up till midnight, trembling with shame and fright. Adélaïde having informed him that Pierre made her an allowance, he felt certain that his brother had pocketed the fifty thousand francs. But, in his irritation, he still affected to doubt it, with a refinement of cruelty which brought him relief. He did not cease to question her in his insinuating manner, by which he made it appear that he still believed she had consumed her fortune in company with her lovers.

"Come now, my father was not the only one," he at last coarsely observed.

This last blow sent her reeling on to an old chest, where she lay the whole night sobbing.

Antoine soon found out that, alone and without resources, he could not successfully carry on a contest against his brother. He at first endeavoured to gain Adélaïde to his cause; an accusation lodged by her would have serious consequences. But, at Antoine's first suggestion of it, the poor, lazy, lethargic woman firmly refused to bring trouble on her eldest son.

"I am a wretched creature," she stammered; "you are quite right to be angry. But, you see, I should feel too much remorse if I caused one of my sons to be sent to prison. No; I'd rather let you beat me."

He saw that he would get nothing but tears this way, and contented himself with saying that she was justly punished, and that he had no pity for her. In the evening, Adélaïde, upset by the continued quarrels which her son sought with her, had one of those nervous attacks which kept her as rigid as death, with her eyes open. The young man threw her on her bed; then, without even loosening her garments, he began to rummage about the house to see if the wretched woman had no savings hidden away somewhere. He found about forty francs. He took possession of them, and, while his mother

was lying there, rigid and unable to breathe, he quietly took the Marseilles diligence.

He had just bethought himself that Mouret, the journeyman hatter who had married his sister Ursule, must be indignant at Pierre's roguery, and would no doubt be willing to defend his wife's interests. But he did not find in him the man he expected. Mouret plainly told him that he had become accustomed to look upon Ursule as an orphan, and he would have no contention with her family at any price. Their affairs were prospering. Antoine was received so coldly that he hastened to take the diligence back. But, before leaving, he was anxious to revenge himself for the secret contempt which he read in the workman's look; and observing that his sister appeared rather pale and dejected, he said to her husband, in a slyly cruel way, as he took his departure:

"Take care, my sister was always sickly, and I find her much changed for the worse; you may lose her altogether."

The tears which rushed to Mouret's eyes convinced him that he had touched a sore wound. But those work-people made too great a display of their happiness.

When he was back again in Plassans, Antoine became more menacing, from having assured himself of his absolute impotence. He was to be seen all over the place for a whole month. He paraded the streets, recounting his history to all who would listen to him. Whenever he succeeded in extorting a franc from his mother, he would go and drink it away at some tavern where he would revile his brother, declaring that the rascal should hear from him shortly. In places like these, the good-natured fraternity which reigns among drunkards procured him a sympathetic audience; all the scum of the town espoused his cause, and poured forth bitter imprecations against that beggar Rougon, who left a brave soldier to starve. Their meetings generally terminated with an indiscriminate condemnation of the rich. Antoine, with a refinement of vengeance, continued to march about in his regimental cap and trousers and his old yellow velvet jacket, although his mother had offered to purchase some more becoming clothes for him. He displayed his rags, and paraded them on Sunday in the most frequented parts of the Cours Sauvaire.

One of his most exquisite pleasures was to pass in front of Pierre's shop ten times a day. He would extend the holes in his jacket with his fingers, slacken his step, and sometimes

MACQUART AFTER HIS RETURN FROM THE ARMY.

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stand talking in front of the door, so as to remain in the street longer. On these occasions he used to bring one of his drunken friends who would gossip with him; he would tell him about the theft of the fifty thousand francs, accompanying his narrative with insults and menaces, uttered in loud tones which could be heard by every one in the street, taking particular care that his abuse should strike home at the furthest end of the shop.

"He'll finish by coming to beg in front of our house," Félicité used to say in despair.

The vain little woman suffered terribly from this scandal. She even at this time felt some regret at ever having married Rougon; his family connections were so objectionable. She would have given all she had in the world to prevent Antoine parading his rags. But Pierre, who was maddened by his brother's conduct, would not allow the latter's name to be mentioned in his presence. When his wife tried to convince him that it would perhaps be better to free himself from all annoyance by giving Antoine a little money:

"No, nothing; not a sou," he cried with rage. "Let him starve!"

He confessed, however, at last that Antoine's demeanour was becoming intolerable. One day Félicité, desiring to put an end to it, called "that man," as she styled him with a disdainful curl on her lip. "That man" was in the act of calling her a rogue in the middle of the street, where he was standing with one of his friends, even more ragged and tattered than he. They were both drunk.

"Come, they want us in there," said Antoine to his companion in a jeering tone.

Félicité drew back, muttering:

"It's you alone we wish to speak to."

"Bah!" the young man replied, "my friend's a decent fellow. You needn't mind him hearing. He'll be my witness."

The witness sat down heavily on a chair. He did not take off his hat, but began to stare around him, with that maudlin, stupid grin of drunkards and coarse people who want to be insolent. Félicité, ashamed, stood in front of the shop door so that people outside could not see what strange company she was entertaining. Fortunately her husband came to the rescue. A violent quarrel ensued between him and his brother. The latter, whose thick speech was entangled in abuse, reiterated

his old grievances twenty times over. At last he began to cry, and his companion was very near following his example. Pierre defended himself in a very dignified manner.

"Look here," he said at last, "you're unfortunate, and I'm very sorry for you. Although you have cruelly insulted me, I can't forget that we are children of the same mother. If I give you anything, however, you must understand I give it you out of kindness, and not from fear. Would you like a hundred francs to help you out of your difficulties?"

This abrupt offer of a hundred francs dazzled Antoine's companion. He looked at him with an air of delight, which clearly signified: "As the gentleman offers a hundred francs, it is time to leave off abusing him." Antoine, however, was determined to speculate on his brother's favourable attitude towards him. He asked him whether he took him for a fool; it was his share, ten thousand francs, he wanted.

"You're wrong, you're wrong," stuttered his friend.

At last, as Pierre, losing all patience, was threatening to turn them both out, Antoine modified his demands and claimed only one thousand francs. They quarrelled for another quarter of an hour over this figure. At last Félicité interfered. A crowd was gathering round the shop.

"Listen," she said, excitedly, "my husband will give you two hundred francs. I'll undertake to buy you a suit of clothes, and hire a room for a year for you."

Rougon got angry. But Antoine's comrade cried with transports of joy.

"All right, it's settled, then; my friend accepts."

Antoine did, in fact, declare, in a gruff tone, that he would accept. He felt he would not be able to get any more. It was arranged that the money and clothes should be sent to him on the following day, and that a few days later, as soon as Félicité had found a room for him, he should take up his quarters there. As they were leaving, the young man's intoxicated companion became as respectful as he was previously insolent. He bowed to the company more than ten times, in an awkward and humble manner, muttering some indistinct thanks, as if the Rougons' gifts had been intended for him.

A week later Antoine occupied a large room in the old quarter in which Félicité, exceeding her promises, had placed a bed, a table, and some chairs, on the young man formally undertaking not to molest them in future. Adélaïde felt no regret at her

son's departure; she was condemned to bread and water for more than three months by the short stay he had made in her house. Antoine had soon eaten and drunk the two hundred francs. He never thought, for a moment, of investing them in some little business which would have helped him to live. When he was again penniless, having no trade, and averse, moreover, to any regular work, he wished to dive again into the Rougons' purse. Circumstances, however, were not the same as before, and he failed to intimidate them. Pierre even took advantage of this opportunity to turn him out, and forbade him to ever set foot again in his house. It was of no avail for Antoine to repeat his former accusations. The townspeople, who were acquainted with his brother's munificence from the publicity which Félicité had given to it, condemned him and called him a lazy, idle fellow. In the meantime, hunger was pressing. He threatened to turn smuggler like his father, and perpetrate some crime which would dishonour his family. The Rougons shrugged their shoulders; they knew he was too much of a coward to risk his neck. At last, blindly enraged against his relatives in particular and society in general, Antoine made up his mind to seek some work.

In a tavern of the Faubourg he had made the acquaintance of a basket-maker who worked at home. He offered to help him. In a short time he learnt to plait baskets and hampers—a coarse and poorly-paid kind of labour which finds a ready sale. He was very soon able to work on his own account. This trade pleased him as it was not too laborious. He could still indulge his idleness, and that was what he cared for above everything. He would take to his work when he was no longer able to do otherwise, hurriedly plaiting a dozen baskets which he would go and sell in the market. As long as the money lasted he lounged about, visiting all the taverns and digesting in the sunshine. Then, when he had fasted a whole day, he would take up his twigs of osier with low growls, reviling the wealthy who live in idleness. The trade of a basket-maker, when followed in such a manner, is a very thankless one. His work would not have sufficed to pay for his drinking bouts, if he had not contrived a means of procuring his osier at a low cost. As he never bought any at Plassans, he used to say that he went every month to purchase a stock at a neighbouring town, where he pretended it was sold cheaper. The fact of the matter was, however, he used to supply himself from the osier-

grounds of the Viorne, when the nights were dark. The rural policeman even caught him once in the very act, and Antoine underwent a few days' imprisonment in consequence. It was from that time forward that he posed in the town as a fierce republican. He declared that he was quietly smoking his pipe at the riverside when the rural policeman arrested him. And he added:

"They would like to get me out of the way because they know what my opinions are. But I'm not afraid of them, those rich scoundrels!"

At the end of ten years of idleness, however, Antoine considered that he had been working too hard. His constant dream was to invent some expedient by which he could live at his ease without having to do anything. His idleness would never have rested content with bread and water, like certain lazy persons who are willing to put up with hunger provided they can keep their hands in their pockets. He liked good feeding and nothing to do. He talked at one time of taking a situation as servant in some nobleman's house in the Saint-Marc quarter. But one of his friends, a groom, frightened him by describing the exacting demands of his masters. Macquart, sick of his baskets, and seeing the time approach when he would be compelled to purchase the requisite osier, was on the point of selling himself as a substitute in the army and resuming his military life, which he preferred a thousand times to that of an artisan, when he made the acquaintance of a woman, whose encounter modified his plans.

Joséphine Gavaudan, who was known throughout the town under the familiar diminutive of Fine, was a tall, strapping woman of about thirty years of age. With a square face of masculine proportions, and a few terribly long hairs about her chin and lips, she was considered a superior woman on account of the weight of her fist Her broad shoulders and enormous arms consequently inspired all the young urchins with marvellous respect; and they did not even dare to smile at her moustache. Notwithstanding all this, Fine had a gentle voice, thin and clear like that of a child. Those who were acquainted with her asserted that she was as gentle as a lamb in spite of her formidable appearance. As she was very hardworking, she might have put some money aside if she had not had a partiality for liqueurs. She adored aniseed. She very often had to be carried home on Sunday evenings.

During the week she would toil with the stubbornness of an animal. She had three or four different occupations; she used to sell fruits or boiled chestnuts in the market, according to the season; went out charing for a few well-to-do people; washed up the plates and dishes at houses where parties were given, and employed her spare time in mending old chairs. She was more particularly known in the town as a chair-mender. In the South a large number of straw-bottomed chairs are used.

Antoine Macquart formed an acquaintance with Fine at the market. When he went to sell his baskets in the winter he used to stand at the side of the stove on which she cooked her chestnuts and warm himself. He was astonished at her courage, he who was frightened of the least work. By degrees, he discovered beneath the apparent roughness of this strapping woman the timidity of a latent kindliness. He frequently saw her give handfuls of chestnuts to the ragged brats who stood in ecstasy round her smoking pot. At other times, when the market inspector hustled her, she very nearly began to cry, apparently forgetting all about her heavy fists. Antoine at last decided that she was exactly the woman he wanted. She would work for both and he would lay down the law at home. She would be his beast of burden, an obedient indefatigable animal. As for her partiality for liqueurs, he regarded it as quite natural. After well weighing the advantages of such an union, he declared himself to Fine, who was delighted with his proposal. No man had ever yet ventured to propose to her. Though she was told that Antoine was the most worthless of vagabonds she did not feel brave enough to refuse matrimony, the want of which had long ago been felt by her vigorous nature. The very evening of the nuptials, the young man took up his abode in his wife's lodgings in the Rue Civadière, near the market. These lodgings, consisting of three rooms, were much more comfortably furnished than his own, and he gave a sigh of satisfaction as he stretched himself out on the two excellent mattresses which covered the bedstead.

Everything went on very well for the first few days. Fine attended to her various occupations as in the past; Antoine, seized with a sort of marital self pride which astonished even himself, plaited in one week more baskets than he had ever before done in a month. On the Sunday, however, war broke out. The couple had a goodly sum of money in the house, and they spent it freely. In the night, when they were both drunk,

they beat each other outrageously, without their being able on the following day to remember, for the life of them, how the quarrel had commenced. They had remained on most affectionate terms until about ten o'clock, when Antoine commenced to beat Fine brutally, while the latter, becoming exasperated and forgetting her meekness, gave him back as much as she received. She went to work again bravely on the following day, as though nothing had happened. But her husband, with sullen rancour, rose late and passed the remainder of the day smoking his pipe in the sunshine.

From that time forward, the Macquarts adopted the kind of life which they were destined to lead for the future. It became, as it were, tacitly understood between them that the wife should toil and moil to keep her husband. Fine, who had an instinctive liking for work, did not object. She was as patient as a saint, provided she had had no drink, considering it quite natural that her husband should be idle, and even striving to spare him the most trifling labours. Her little weakness, aniseed, did not make her vicious, but just. On the evenings when she had forgotten herself, in the presence of a bottle of her favourite liqueur, if Antoine tried to pick a quarrel with her, she would set upon him with might and main, reproaching him with his idleness and ingratitude. The neighbours were accustomed to the periodical disturbances which broke out in the room of this married couple. The two battered each other conscientiously; the wife slapped like a mother chastising a naughty child; but the husband, treacherous and spiteful, measured his blows, and, on several occasions, very nearly crippled the unfortunate woman.

"You'll look very fine when you've broken one of my arms or legs," she would say to him. "Who'll keep you then, you lazy fellow?"

Excepting for these turbulent scenes, Antoine began to find his new mode of existence quite endurable. He was well-clothed, and ate and drank his fill. He had laid aside the basket work altogether; sometimes, when he was feeling over-bored, he would resolve to plait a dozen baskets for the next market-day; but very often he did not even finish the first one. He kept, under a couch, a bundle of osier which he did not use up in twenty years.

The Macquarts had three children, two girls and a boy. Lisa, born the first, in 1827, one year after the marriage,

was not much at home. She was a fine, big, ruddy, healthy-looking child, very much resembling her mother. She did not, however, inherit her animal devotion and endurance. Macquart had implanted in her a most decided longing for ease and comfort. While she was still a child, she once consented to work for a whole day in return for a cake. When she was scarcely seven years old, the wife of the postmaster, who was a neighbour of theirs, took a liking to her. She made a little maid of her. When she lost her husband in 1839, and went to live in Paris, she took Lisa away with her. The parents had almost given their daughter to her.

The second girl, Gervaise, born the following year, was a cripple from birth. Conceived in drunkenness, probably on one of those disgraceful nights when the husband and wife had been fighting each other, her right thigh was withered and deformed, a curious hereditary reproduction of the brutalities which her mother had had to endure during a fierce drunken brawl. Gervaise remained puny, and Fine, observing her pallor and weakness, put her on a course of aniseed, under the pretext that she required something to strengthen her. The poor creature became still more emaciated. She was a tall, lank girl, whose frocks, always too large, hung round her as if they had nothing under them. Above her emaciated and deformed body she had a sweet little head like a doll, a tiny round face, pale and exquisitely delicate. Her infirmity almost became graceful. Her body swayed gently at every step with a sort of cadenced swing.

The Macquarts' son, Jean, was born three years later. He was a robust child, recalling in no respect Gervaise's leanness. Like the eldest girl, he took after his mother, without having any physical resemblance to her. He was the first to import into the Rougon-Macquart stock a fat face with regular features, displaying the indifference of a grave nature wanting in intelligence. This boy grew up with the tenacious desire of some day making an independent position for himself. He attended school diligently, racking his dull brain to drum a little arithmetic and spelling into it. After that he became an apprentice, repeating the same efforts with a perseverance the more meritorious as it took him a whole day to learn what others acquired in an hour.

As long as these poor little things remained a burden to the house, Antoine grumbled. They were useless mouths who

nibbled his share. He vowed, like his brother, he would have no more children, those greedy creatures who bring their parents to penury. It was something to hear him bemoan his lot when they were five at table, and the mother gave the best morsels to Jean, Lisa, and Gervaise.

"That's right," he would growl; "stuff them, make them burst!"

Whenever Fine bought a garment or a pair of boots for them, he would sulk for several days afterwards. Ah! if he had only known, he would never have had that parcel of brats, which compelled him to limit his smoking to four sous' worth of tobacco a day, and brought too frequently stewed potatoes for dinner, a dish which he heartily detested.

Later on, however, as soon as Jean and Gervaise earned their first francs, he found some good in children after all. Lisa was no longer there. He lived upon the earnings of the other two without the least compunction, as he had already lived upon their mother. It was a very well planned speculation on his part. As soon as she was eight years old, little Gervaise went to a neighbouring dealer's to crack almonds; she earned ten sous a day, which the father pocketed right royally, without even a question from Fine as to what became of the money. The young girl was next apprenticed to a laundress, and as soon as she received two francs a day for her work, the two francs strayed in a similar manner into Macquart's hands. Jean, who had learnt the trade of a carpenter, was likewise despoiled on pay-days, whenever Macquart succeeded in catching him before he had handed the money to his mother. If the money escaped him, which sometimes happened, he became frightfully surly. He would stare at his wife and children in a furious manner for a whole week, picking a quarrel for nothing, although he was, as yet, ashamed to confess the real cause of his irritation. On the next pay-day he would be on the watch, and as soon as he had succeeded in pilfering the youngster's earnings, he would disappear for days together.

Gervaise, beaten and brought up in the streets with all the lads of the neighbourhood, became a mother when she was fourteen years of age. The father of her child was not eighteen years old. He was a journeyman tanner named Lantier. Macquart was furious, but he calmed down somewhat when he learnt that Lantier's mother, who was a

worthy woman, was willing to take charge of the child. He kept Gervaise, however; she was already earning twenty-five sous, and he, therefore, avoided all question of a marriage. Four years later she had a second child, which was likewise taken in by Lantier's mother. This time Macquart shut his eyes altogether. And when Fine timidly suggested that it was time to come to some understanding with the tanner, in order to end a state of things which was causing a scandal, he flatly declared that his daughter should not leave him, and that he would give her to her seducer later on "when he was worthy of her, and had enough money to furnish a home."

This was a fine time for Antoine Macquart. He dressed like a gentleman, in frock-coats and trousers of the finest cloth. Cleanly shaved, and grown almost stout, he was no longer that emaciated, ragged vagabond who used to frequent the taverns. He dropped into cafés, read the papers, and strolled on the Cours Sauvaire. He played the gentleman as long as he had any money in his pocket. On the days of impecuniosity he remained at home, exasperated at being kept in his hovel and prevented from taking his customary cup of coffee. On such occasions he would reproach the whole human race with his poverty, making himself ill with rage and envy, until Fine, out of pity, would often give him the last silver coin in the house so that he could spend his evening at the café. This amiable individual was fiercely selfish. Gervaise, who brought home as much as sixty francs a month, wore only thin cotton frocks, while he had black satin waistcoats made for him by one of the best tailors in Plassans.

Jean, that big lad who earned three or four francs a day, was perhaps robbed even more impudently. The café where his father passed entire days was just opposite his master's workshop, and as he planed or sawed away he could see "Monsieur" Macquart on the other side of the way, sweetening his coffee and playing piquet with some little householder. It was his money that the lazy old fellow was gambling away. He never stepped inside a café, he never had so much as five sous to pay for a drink. Antoine treated him like a little girl, never leaving him a centime, and always demanding an exact account of the manner in which he had employed his time. If the unfortunate lad, led away by some of his mates, wasted a day somewhere in the country, on the banks of the Viorne, or on the slopes of the Garrigues, his father would storm and

almost strike him, bearing a grudge against him for a long time on account of the four francs less he received at the end of the fortnight. He thus held his son in a state of interested dependence, sometimes even looking upon the sweethearts whom the young carpenter courted as his own. Several of Gervaise's friends used to come to the Macquarts' house, work-girls from sixteen to eighteen years of age, bold and boisterous girls who, on certain evenings, filled the room with youth and gaiety. Poor Jean, deprived of all pleasure, kept at home by the lack of money, looked at these girls with longing eyes; but the childish life which he was compelled to lead implanted an invincible shyness in him; he played with his sister's friends, although he was hardly bold enough to touch them with the tips of his fingers. Macquart used to shrug his shoulders with pity:

"What a simpleton!" he would mutter, with an air of ironical superiority.

And it was he who would kiss the young girls, when his wife's back was turned. He carried his attentions even further with a little laundress whom Jean pursued rather more earnestly than the others. One fine evening he stole her almost from his arms. The old rogue prided himself on his gallantry.

There are some men who live upon their mistresses. Antoine Macquart lived on his wife and children with as much shamelessness and impudence. He did not feel the least compunction in pillaging the home and going out to enjoy himself when the house was bare. He still assumed a supercilious air, returning from the café only to rail bitterly against the poverty and wretchedness that awaited him at home. He found the dinner detestable, he called Gervaise a blockhead, and declared that Jean would never be a man. Immersed in his own selfish indulgence, he would rub his hands whenever he had eaten the best piece in the dish; he would then smoke his pipe, with short puffs, while the two poor children, broken down with fatigue, went to sleep on the table. Thus he passed his days in lazy enjoyment. It seemed to him quite natural that he should be kept in idleness like a girl, to sprawl about on the benches of some tavern, or stroll in the cool of the day along the Cours or the Mail. At last he went so far as to relate his little amorous escapades in the presence of his son, who listened with eyes of eager longing. The children never

protested, being accustomed to see their mother humble herself before her husband.

Fine, that strapping woman who drubbed him soundly when they were both intoxicated, always trembled before him when she was sober, and allowed him to rule despotically at home. He robbed her in the night time of the sous which she earned during the day at the market, but she never dared to protest, excepting by means of veiled rebukes. Sometimes, when he had devoured the week's money in advance, he accused her, poor thing, who worked herself to death, of being stupid and not knowing how to get out of difficulties. Fine, as gentle as a lamb, replied, in her soft, clear voice, which contrasted so strangely with her large person, that she was no longer twenty years old, and that money was becoming very hard to earn. In order to console herself, she used to buy a pint of aniseed, which she would drink in little glassfuls with her daughter of an evening, when Antoine had gone back to the café. That was their dissipation. Jean went to bed, while the two women remained at the table, listening attentively in order to remove the bottle and glasses at the least sound.

When Macquart was late, they often became intoxicated by the quantity they drank without thinking of it. Stupefied and gazing at each other with vague smiles, this mother and daughter at last began to stutter. Red patches appeared on Gervaise's cheeks; her delicate little doll's face was bathed in a look of maudlin beatitude; nothing was more heart-rending than to see this wretched, pale child, inflamed with drink, wearing an idiotic, drunken smile about her moist lips. Fine, settled in her chair, became heavy and drowsy. They sometimes forgot to keep watch, or had not the strength to remove the bottle and glasses when Antoine's footsteps were heard on the stairs. On those occasions blows were freely exchanged among the Macquarts. Jean had to get up to separate his father and mother and make his sister go to bed, as she would otherwise have slept on the floor.

Every party has its grotesques and villains. Antoine Macquart, devoured by envy and hatred, and meditating revenge against society in general, welcomed the Republic as a happy era when he would be allowed to fill his pockets from his neighbour's cash-box, and even strangle the neighbour if he manifested the least displeasure. His café life, the articles

he had read in the papers without understanding them, had made him a terrible prater, enunciating the strangest political theories in the world. One must have heard one of these malcontents who have ill-digested their reading haranguing in some provincial smoking-room in order to conceive the degree of wicked folly at which Macquart had arrived. As he talked a good deal, had seen active service, and was naturally regarded as a man of energy and spirit, he was much sought after and listened to by the simpletons. Although he was not the chief of any party, he had succeeded in collecting a small group of workmen who took his jealous ravings for expressions of honest and conscientious indignation.

As early as February, he persuaded himself that Plassans was his, and, as he strolled along the streets, the jeering manner in which he regarded the little retail traders who stood terrified at their shop doors, clearly signified: "Our day has come, my lambs; we are going to lead you a fine dance!" He had grown insolent beyond belief; he enacted his part of the victorious despot to such a degree, that he ceased to pay for his drinks at the café, and the proprietor, a simpleton who trembled when Antoine rolled his eyes, never dared to present his bill. The numbers of cups of coffee he consumed during this time was incalculable; sometimes he invited his friends, and shouted for hours together that the people were dying of hunger, and that the rich ought to share their wealth with them. He himself would never have given a sou to a beggar.

What chiefly converted him into a fierce republican was the hope of at last being able to revenge himself on the Rougons, who openly ranged themselves on the side of the reactionary party. Ah, what a triumph! if he could only hold Pierre and Félicité at his mercy! Although the latter had not succeeded over-well in business, they had at last become gentlefolks, while he, Macquart, had remained a working-man. That exasperated him. Perhaps he was still more mortified because one of their sons was a barrister, another a doctor, and the third a clerk, while his son Jean worked at a carpenter's shop only, and his daughter Gervaise at a washerwoman's. When he compared the Macquarts with the Rougons, he was still more ashamed to see his wife selling chestnuts in the market, and mending the greasy old straw chairs of the neighbourhood in the evening. Pierre, after all, was only his brother, and had no more right to live fatly on his income than

he. Moreover, his brother was actually playing the gentleman with money stolen from him. Whenever he touched upon this subject, he became fiercely enraged; he clamoured for hours together, repeating to satiety his old accusations, and never wearying of exclaiming:

"If my brother was where he ought to be, I should be the moneyed man at the present time."

When any one asked him where his brother ought to be, he would reply, "At the galleys!" in a formidable voice.

His hatred increased still more when the Rougons had gathered the group of conservatives round them, and had acquired a certain influence in Plassans. The famous yellow drawing-room became, in his hare-brained chatter at the café, a cave of bandits, an assembly of villains who swore every evening on their daggers to murder the people. In order to incite the starving populace against Pierre, he went so far as to circulate a report that the retired oil dealer was not so poor as he pretended, and that he concealed his treasures through avarice and fear of robbers. His tactics thus tended to rouse the poor people by relating the most absurdly ridiculous tales, which he often came to believe himself at last. His personal animosity and desire for revenge were ill-concealed under the veil of his professions of patriotism; but he was heard so frequently, he had such a thundering voice, that no one would have dared to doubt the genuineness of his convictions.

In fact all the members of this family had the same brutish passions. Félicité, who knew that Macquart's exalted theories were nothing more than suppressed rage and embittered envy, would have liked very much to purchase his silence. Unfortunately she was short of money, and did not dare to interest him in the dangerous game which her husband was playing. Antoine injured them very much among the well-to-do people of the new town. It was quite enough that he was a relation of theirs. Granoux and Roudier reproached them, with continual scorn, for having such a man in their family. Félicité consequently asked herself with anguish how they could manage to cleanse themselves of this stain.

Later on it seemed to her monstrous and indecent that Monsieur Rougon had a brother whose wife sold chestnuts, and who himself lived in crapulous idleness. She at last commenced to tremble for the success of their secret intrigues, which Antoine was compromising at his pleasure. When the

diatribes which this man fulminated against the yellow drawing-room were reported to her, she shuddered at the thought that he was capable of becoming desperate and ruining all their hopes by some scandal.

Antoine knew what consternation his demeanour must have caused the Rougons, and it was solely for the purpose of exhausting their patience that he affected from day to day the wildest convictions. At the café he used to speak of "my brother Pierre" in a voice which made all the people turn round; if he happened to meet some reactionary from the yellow drawing-room in the street, he would mutter low abuse which the worthy citizen, amazed at such audacity, would repeat to the Rougons in the evening, as though he wished to make them responsible for his disagreeable encounter.

One day Granoux arrived in a state of fury.

"Really," he exclaimed, when scarcely on the threshold, "it's intolerable: one can't move a step without being insulted."

Then addressing Pierre, he added:

"When one has a brother like yours, sir, one should rid society of him. I was just quietly walking past the Sub-Prefecture, when this wretch passed by me muttering something in which I could clearly distinguish the words 'old rogue.'"

Félicité turned pale, and felt it necessary to make some apology to Granoux, but the worthy gentleman refused to accept any excuses, and threatened to leave altogether. The marquis exerted himself to arrange matters.

"It's very strange," he said, "that the wretch should have called you an old rogue. Are you sure that he intended the insult for you?"

Granoux was perplexed; he admitted, at last, that Antoine might have muttered: "Do you still go to that old rogue's?"

Monsieur de Carnavant stroked his chin to conceal the smile which rose to his lips in spite of himself.

Rougon then said, with the most delightful indifference:

"I thought as much; the 'old rogue' was no doubt intended for me. I'm very glad that this misunderstanding is now explained. Gentlemen, pray avoid the man in question, whom I formally repudiate."

Félicité, however, did not take matters so coolly; every fresh scandal caused by Macquart made her more uneasy; she

would sometimes pass the whole night wondering what the gentlemen must think of the matter.

A few months before the Coup d'État, the Rougons received an anonymous letter, three pages of foul insults, in which they were warned that if ever their party should triumph, the scandalous history of Adélaïde's amours would be published in some paper, together with an account of the robbery perpetrated by Pierre, when he compelled his mother, whom debauchery had made an imbecile, to sign a receipt for fifty thousand francs. This letter was a heavy blow for Rougon himself. Félicité could not refrain from reproaching her husband with his disreputable family; for the husband and wife never doubted for a moment that this letter was Antoine's work.

"We shall have to get rid of the blackguard at any price," Pierre said in a gloomy tone. "He's becoming too troublesome by far."

In the meantime, Macquart, resorting to his former tactics, looked about among his family for accomplices against the Rougons. He had counted upon Aristide at first, when he read his terrible articles in the "Indépendant." But the young man, in spite of his jealous rage, was not so foolish as to make common cause with such a fellow as his uncle. He never even took the trouble to treat him politely, but always kept him at a respectful distance, a circumstance which induced Antoine to regard him suspiciously; in the taverns, where the latter reigned supreme, people went so far as to say the journalist was paid to provoke disturbances. Baffled on this side, Macquart had no alternative but to sound his sister Ursule's children.

Ursule had died in 1839, thus realising her brother's evil prognostications. Her mother's nervous disease had been converted, in her case, into a slow consumption which gradually killed her. She left three children: a daughter, eighteen years old, named Hélène, who married a clerk, and two boys, the eldest, François, a young man of twenty-three years, and the youngest, a sickly little thing scarcely six years old, named Silvère. The death of his wife, whom he adored, was a thunderbolt for Mouret. He dragged on his existence for a year, neglecting his business and losing all the money he had saved. Then, one morning, he was found hanging in a cupboard where Ursule's dresses were still suspended. His eldest

son, who had received a good commercial training, took a situation in the house of his uncle Rougon, where he replaced Aristide, who had just quitted it.

Rougon, in spite of his profound hatred for the Macquarts, gladly welcomed his nephew, who he knew was industrious and sober. He was in want of a youth whom he could trust, and who would help him to retrieve his affairs. Moreover, during the time of Mouret's prosperity, he had learnt to esteem the young couple, who knew how to make money, and he had soon become reconciled with his sister. Perhaps he thought to make François some compensation by taking him into his business; he had robbed the mother, he would spare himself all remorse by giving employment to the son; even rogues make honest calculations sometimes. It was a good thing for him. If the house of Rougon did not make a fortune at this time, it was certainly through no fault of this quiet, punctilious youth, who seemed born to pass his life behind a grocer's counter, between a jar of oil and a bundle of dried cod-fish. Although physically he resembled his mother very much, he inherited from his father a just and narrow intelligence, with an instinctive liking for a methodical life and the safe calculations of the small trader.

Three months after his arrival, Pierre, pursuing his system of compensation, married him to his young daughter Marthe, whom he did not know how to dispose of. The two young people fell in love with each other quite suddenly, in a few days. A peculiar circumstance had doubtless determined and enhanced their mutual affection. There was a remarkably close resemblance between them, like that of brother and sister. François inherited, through Ursule, the face of his grandmother, Adélaïde. Marthe's case was still more curious; she was an equally exact portrait of Adélaïde, although Pierre Rougon had none of his mother's features distinctly marked; the physical resemblance had taken a leap, as it were, over Pierre, to reappear more forcibly in his daughter. The fraternity of the married couple stopped, however, at the face; if the worthy son of the steady matter-of-fact hatter was distinguishable in François, Marthe had the wild look, the mental derangement of her grandmother, of whom she was a distant, though singularly exact reproduction. Perhaps it was their combined physical resemblance and moral dissimilarity which threw them into each others' arms. From 1840 to 1844

they had three children. François remained in his uncle's employ until the latter retired. Pierre wanted to sell him the business, but the young man knew what chance there was of making a fortune in trade at Plassans; he declined and went to Marseilles, where he established himself with his little savings.

Macquart soon had to abandon all hope of dragging this big industrious fellow into his campaign against the Rougons, and, with the spite of a lazy person, he looked upon him as a cunning miser. He fancied, however, that he had discovered the accomplice he was seeking in Mouret's second son, a lad of fifteen years of age. Young Silvère had never even been to school at the time when Mouret was found hanging among his wife's skirts. His eldest brother, not knowing what to do with the poor little fellow, took him also to his uncle's. The latter made a wry face on beholding the child; he had no intention of carrying his compensation so far as to feed a useless mouth. Silvère, to whom Félicité also took a dislike, was growing up in tears, like an unfortunate little outcast, when his grandmother, at one of those rare visits which she paid to the Rougons, took pity on him, and expressed a wish to have him with her. Pierre was delighted; he let the child go, without even suggesting an increase of the meagre allowance he made Adélaïde, and which henceforward would have to suffice for two.

Adélaïde was then nearly seventy-five years of age. Grown old in a cloistered existence, she was no longer the thin and ardent girl who formerly ran to embrace the smuggler Macquart. She had stiffened and hardened in her hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre, that dismal silent hole wherein she lived entirely alone on potatoes and dry vegetables, and which she did not leave once in a month. To see her walking along, one would have thought she was one of those old nuns, delicately white, with automatic gait, severed by the cloister from all concern in this world. Her pale face, always scrupulously enveloped in a white cap, was like the visage of a dying woman, a vague, calm countenance bearing an air of supreme indifference. Her prolonged taciturnity had made her dumb; the darkness of her dwelling, the continual sight of the same objects, had dulled her glance and given to her eyes the limpidity of spring water. It was a complete self-abnegation, a slow physical and moral death, which, little by little, had converted the crazy lover into a grave matron. When her

eyes were mechanically fixed, gazing without seeing anything, one could perceive a large internal void through those deep bright cavities.

Nothing now remained of her former voluptuous ardour but a softness of the flesh and a senile tremor of the hands. She had loved with the brutishness of a she-wolf, and now nothing but the insipid odour of withered foliage exhaled from this miserable, worn-out creature, already sufficiently decomposed for the grave. Strange workings of the nerves, of eager desires which had consumed themselves beneath an involuntary and compulsory chastity. Her amorous longings, after the death of Macquart who was indispensable to her existence, had burned within her, devouring her like a cloistered girl, and yet she had never for a moment thought of gratifying them. A life of shame would perhaps have left her less weary, less stupefied than that state of unsatiated desires procuring their own gratification by means of slow and hidden ravages which modified her organism.

Sometimes this moribund, pale old woman, who did not seem to have any blood left in her, was attacked with nervous fits like electric shocks which galvanised her, causing her for an hour an existence of excruciating violence. She remained on her bed rigid, with her eyes open; then she was seized with hiccough, and would writhe and struggle; she had the frightful strength of those hysterical madwomen who are obliged to be tied down to prevent them breaking their heads against the wall. This return to her former vigour, these sudden attacks, shattered her poor aching body in a heartrending manner. It seemed as though all the warm passions of her youth were bursting forth shamefully in her sexagenarian frigidity. When she came to, she would stagger with such a scared, stupefied look, that the gossips of the Faubourg used to say: "She's been drinking, the crazy old thing!"

Little Silvère's childish smile was for her the last pale ray which communicated some warmth to her frozen limbs. Weary of solitude, and frightened at the thought of dying alone in one of her fits, she had asked to have the child. With this little babe running about her, she felt secure against death. Without relinquishing her habit of taciturnity, or rendering her automatic movements more supple, she conceived an inexpressible affection for him. Stiff, speechless, she used to watch him playing for hours together, listening with delight to the in-

tolerable noise with which he filled the old hovel. This tomb resounded with uproar from the time that Silvère ran about it, bestriding broomsticks, knocking himself up against the doors, shouting and crying. He brought Adélaïde back to the world, as it were; she looked after him with the most adorable awkwardness; she who, in her youth, had neglected the duties of a mother for the enjoyments of a lover, now felt the divine pleasures of a young mother in washing his face, dressing him, and watching untiringly over the frail creature. It was a re-awakening of love, the soothing of a last passion, which heaven had granted to this woman who had been completely ravaged by the want of some one to love. A touching agony of a heart which had lived in the most acute desires, and which was now dying in the love of a child.

She was already too dead to pour forth the babbling effusions of good plump grandmothers; she secretly adored the child with the bashfulness of a young girl, without knowing how to fondle him. Sometimes she took him on her knees, and gazed at him for a long time with her pale eyes. When the little one, frightened by her mute white visage, commenced to cry, she seemed to be perplexed by what she had done, and quickly put him down on the floor without even kissing him. Perhaps she recognised in him a faint resemblance to Macquart the poacher.

Silvère was always in Adélaïde's company as he grew up. With childish cajolery he used to call her aunt Dide, a name which ultimately clung to the old woman; the word "aunt," employed in this connection, is simply a term of endearment in Provence. The child entertained a singular affection, not unmixed with respectful terror, for his grandmother. During one of her nervous fits, when he was quite a little boy, he ran away from her crying, terrified by her disfigured countenance; he came back, timidly, after the attack, but ready to run away again, just as though the old woman had been well enough to beat him. Later on, however, when he was twelve years old, he would stop there bravely, watching in order that she might not hurt herself by falling off the bed. He stood for hours holding her tightly in his arms to subdue the rude shocks which contorted her limbs. During the calm intervals he would contemplate with pity her convulsed features, her withered frame, on which her skirts lay like a shroud. These hidden dramas, which recurred every month, this old woman as rigid as a

corpse, this child bent over her, silently watching for the return of consciousness, presented, in the darkness of the hovel, a strange picture of gloomy terror and broken-hearted tenderness.

When aunt Dide came round, she would get up with difficulty, re-fasten her clothes, and set about her work in the hovel, without even questioning Silvère. She did not remember anything, and the child, from a sort of instinctive prudence, avoided the least allusion to what had just taken place. These recurring fits, more than anything else, strengthened Silvère's deep attachment to his grandmother. In the same manner as she adored him without any garrulous effusiveness, he felt a sort of hidden, almost bashful, affection for her. Although he was really very grateful to her for having taken him in and brought him up, he could not help regarding her as an extraordinary creature, a prey to some strange malady, whom he ought to pity and respect. No doubt there was not sufficient humanity left in Adélaïde; she was too white and too stiff for Silvère to fondle round the neck. They lived together thus, in a melancholy silence, beneath which they felt the tremor of a boundless love.

This sad, solemn atmosphere, which he had breathed from his childhood, gave him a strong heart, which harboured the greatest enthusiasm. He early became a serious, thoughtful little man, seeking instruction with a kind of stubbornness. He only learnt a little spelling and arithmetic at the school of the Christian Brothers, which he was compelled to leave when he was but twelve years old, on account of his apprenticeship. He never acquired the first rudiments. He read all the odd volumes which fell into his hands, and thus formed for himself a strange baggage; he had a knowledge of a multitude of subjects, an ill-digested knowledge, which he could never classify distinctly in his head. When he was quite young, he had been in the habit of playing in the workshop of a master wheelwright, a worthy man named Vian, who lived at the entrance of the blind-alley in front of the Aire Saint-Mittre where the wheelwright stored his timber. He used to jump up on the wheels of the tilted carts undergoing repairs, and amuse himself by dragging along the heavy tools which his tiny hands could scarcely lift; one of his greatest pleasures was to assist the workmen by holding a piece of wood for them or bringing them the iron-work which they required.

When he had grown older he naturally became apprenticed to Vian; the latter had taken a liking to the little fellow, who was always kicking about his heels, and asked Adélaïde to let him have the lad, refusing to take anything for his board and lodging. Silvère eagerly accepted, already foreseeing the time when he would be able to make poor aunt Dide some return for all she had spent upon him. In a short time, he became an excellent workman. He cherished, however, more elevated ambitions. Having once seen, at a coachbuilder's at Plassans, a fine new carriage, shining with varnish, he vowed he would one day build such carriages himself. This carriage remained in his mind as a rare and unique work of art, as an ideal towards which his aspirations should tend. The tilted carts at which he worked in Vian's shop, those carts which he had lovingly cherished, now seemed unworthy of his affections. He began to attend the drawing-school, where he formed a connection with a youngster who had left college, and who lent him his old treatise on geometry. He plunged into this study without a guide, racking his brains for weeks together in order to grasp the simplest problem in the world. In this manner he gradually became one of those learned workmen who can hardly sign their name and yet talk about algebra as though it were an intimate friend.

Nothing unsettles the mind so much as this desultory education, which never reposes on any firm foundation. Most frequently these scraps of knowledge convey an absolutely false idea of the highest truths, and render persons of limited intellect insufferably stupid. In Silvère's case, however, these scraps of stolen knowledge only augmented his liberal aspirations. He was conscious of horizons which were at present closed to him. He formed for himself divine conceptions of those things which were beyond his reach, and contemplated, with a profound innocent religion, those noble thoughts and grand conceptions towards which he was raising himself, but which he did not as yet comprehend. He stood at the threshold of the temple with a sublime naïveté, kneeling before the tapers which he took from a distance for stars.

The hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre consisted, in the first place, of a large room into which the street door opened. The only pieces of furniture in this room, which had a stone floor and served both as a kitchen and a dining-room, were some straw chairs, a table on tressels, and an old coffer which

Adélaïde had converted into a sofa, by spreading a piece of cloth over the lid; in the left hand corner of the large fireplace stood a plaster image of the Holy Virgin, surrounded with artificial flowers; she is the traditional good mother of all the old Provençal women, however irreligious they may be. A passage led from the room into the yard situated at the rear of the house, and in which was a well. Aunt Dide's bedroom was on the left side of the passage, a narrow little apartment containing an iron bedstead and one chair; Silvère slept in a still smaller room on the right hand side, just large enough for a folding bedstead; and he had been obliged to plan a set of shelves reaching up to the ceiling, to keep by him all those dear odd volumes which he used to save his sous to purchase from a neighbouring second-hand dealer. When he read at night-time, he would hang his lamp on a nail at the head of the bed. If his grandmother had an attack, he only had to leap out at the first gasp to be at her side in a moment.

The young man led the life of a child. He passed his existence in this deserted spot. Like his father, he felt a repugnance to public-houses and Sunday strolling. His mates wounded his delicate susceptibilities by their coarse jokes. He preferred to read, to rack his brain over some simple geometrical problem. Since aunt Dide had entrusted him with the little affairs of the household, she did not go out at all, living estranged even from her family. The young man sometimes thought of her forlornness; he would gaze at this poor old woman, living but a few steps from those children who strove to forget her, as though she were dead; this made him love her all the more, for himself and for the others. When he at times entertained a vague idea that aunt Dide was expiating some former faults, he would say to himself: "I was born to pardon her."

A nature such as this, ardent and restrained, naturally cherished the most exalted republican ideas. At night in his little hovel, Silvère used to read over and over again a work of Rousseau, which he had picked up at the neighbouring dealer's, among a number of old locks. The reading of this book kept him awake till daybreak. In the dream of universal happiness so dear to the poor, the words liberty, equality, fraternity, rang in his ears with that sonorous sacred music of the bells, at the sound of which the faithful fall on their knees. When, therefore, he learnt that the Republic had just been proclaimed, he

fancied the whole world would henceforth enjoy a life of celestial beatitude. His imperfect knowledge made him see farther than the other workmen, his aspirations did not stop at his daily bread; but his excessive ingenuousness, his complete ignorance of mankind, held him in a state of theoretic phantasy, in a Garden of Eden where universal justice reigned. His paradise was for a long time a delightful spot in which he forgot himself.

When he came to perceive that everything did not go on quite satisfactorily in the best of republics he was sorely grieved, he conceived a different vision, that of compelling men to be happy even by force. Every act which seemed to him prejudicial to the interests of the people roused him to revengeful indignation. Though he was as gentle as a child, he cherished the fiercest political animosities. He would not have killed a fly, and yet he was for ever talking of a call to arms. Liberty was his passion, an unreasoning, absolute passion, to which he clung with an enthusiastic devotion. Blinded by this enthusiasm, he was at once too ignorant and too learned to allow any toleration, and would place no reliance upon men; he required an ideal government of perfect justice and perfect liberty. It was at this period that his uncle Macquart thought of pitting him against the Rougons. He persuaded himself that this young enthusiast would work terrible havoc, if he were only exasperated to the proper pitch. This calculation was not altogether devoid of a certain shrewdness.

Antoine, therefore, sought to induce Silvère to visit him by professing an inordinate admiration for the young man's ideas. He very nearly compromised the whole matter at the outset. He had a way of regarding the triumph of the Republic as a question of personal interest, as an era of happy idleness and endless junketting, which chilled his nephew's purely moral aspirations. He perceived that he was on the wrong track and plunged into a strange pathos, into a string of empty but high-sounding words, which Silvère accepted as a satisfactory proof of his civism. Very soon the uncle and nephew saw each other two or three times a week. During their long discussions, in which the fate of the country was plainly settled, Antoine endeavoured to persuade the young man that the Rougons' drawing-room was the chief obstacle to the welfare of France. But he again made a false move by calling his mother "old jade" in Silvère's presence. He even repeated to him the early scandals about

the poor old woman. The young man blushed for shame, and listened to him without interruption. He did not ask him for this information; he was heartbroken by these confidences, which wounded his feeling of respectful affection for aunt Dide.

From that time forward he lavished more attention upon his grandmother, greeting her always with a pleasant smile, and kind looks full of forgiveness. Indeed, Macquart felt that he had acted foolishly, and he strove to take advantage of Silvère's love for Adélaïde by charging the Rougons with her forlornness and poverty. According to him, he had always been the best of sons, while his brother had behaved disgracefully; he had robbed his mother, and now, when she was penniless, he was ashamed of her. He never ceased descanting on this subject. Silvère was indignant with his uncle Pierre, much to the satisfaction of his uncle Antoine.

The same scenes were enacted every time the young man called. He used to come in the evening, while the Macquarts were at dinner. The father would be swallowing some potato stew with a growl, picking out the pieces of bacon, and following the dish with his eyes when it passed into the hands of Jean and Gervaise.

"You see, Silvère," he would say with a sullen rage which was ill-concealed under his air of cynical indifference, "more potatoes, always potatoes! We never eat anything else now. Meat is only for rich people. It's getting quite impossible to make both ends meet with children who have the devil's appetite and their own too."

Gervaise and Jean bent over their plates, no longer daring to cut themselves some bread. Silvère, who in his dream lived in heaven, did not grasp the situation. In a calm voice he pronounced these storm-laden words:

"But you should work, uncle."

"Ah! yes," sneered Macquart stung to the quick. "You want me to work, eh! To let those beggars, the rich folk, continue to live upon me. I should earn probably twenty sous a day, and ruin my constitution. It's worth while, isn't it?"

"Every one earns what he can," the young man replied. "Twenty sous are twenty sous; and all helps in a home. Besides, you're an old soldier, why don't you seek some employment?"

Fine would then interpose, with a thoughtlessness which she soon repented.

"That's what I'm always telling him," she said. "The inspector of the market wants an assistant; I mentioned my husband to him, and he seems well disposed towards us."

Macquart interrupted her with a fulminating look.

"Eh! hold your tongue," he growled with suppressed anger. "Women never know what they're talking about! Nobody would have me; my opinions are too well-known."

Every time he was offered a situation he displayed a similar irritation. He did not cease, however, to ask for employment, though he always refused any that was found for him, assigning the most extraordinary reasons. When pressed upon the point he became terrible.

If Jean were to take up a newspaper after dinner he would at once exclaim:

"You'd better go to bed. You'll be getting up late to-morrow, and that'll be another day lost. To think of that young rascal bringing home eight francs short last week! However, I've requested his master not to give him his money in future; I'll call for it myself."

Jean would go to bed to avoid his father's recriminations. He had but little sympathy with Silvère; politics bored him, and he thought his cousin "cracked." When only the women remained, if they unfortunately started conversing in whispers after clearing the table, Macquart would cry:

"Now, you idlers! Is there nothing that requires mending? We're all in rags. Look here, Gervaise, I was at your mistress's to-day, and I learnt some fine things. You're a good-for-nothing, a gad-about."

Gervaise, a grown-up girl more than twenty years old, coloured up at being scolded thus in the presence of Silvère, who himself felt uncomfortable. One evening, having come rather late, when his uncle was not at home, he had found the mother and daughter dead drunk before an empty bottle. From that time, he could never see his cousin without recalling the disgraceful spectacle of the child, with a maudlin grin and large red patches on her wretched, pale, diminutive face. He was not less shocked by the nasty stories circulated with regard to her. Brought up in a cenobitic chastity, he sometimes looked at her stealthily, with the timid surprise of a schoolboy in the presence of a prostitute.

When the two women had taken up their needles, and were ruining their eyesight in order to mend his old shirts, Mac-

quart, taking the best seat, would repose comfortably, sipping and smoking like a man who relishes his laziness. This was the time when the old rogue generally railed against the wealthy for living on the sweat of the poor man's brow. He was superbly indignant with the gentlemen of the new town, who lived in idleness, and compelled the poor people to keep them in luxury. The fragments of communistic notions which he culled from the newspapers in the morning assumed the most grotesque exaggerated forms in his verbal expression of them. He would talk of the time, which was shortly to arrive, when no one would be obliged to work. He always, however, displayed the fiercest animosity towards the Rougons. He never could digest the potatoes which he had eaten.

"I saw that rascally Félicité buying a chicken in the market this morning," he used to say. "Those robbers of inheritances must eat chicken, forsooth!"

"Aunt Dide," Silvère would interpose, "says that uncle Pierre was very kind to you when you left the army. Didn't he spend a large sum of money in lodging and clothing you?"

"A large sum of money!" roared Macquart in exasperation; "your grandmother is mad. Those thieves spread such reports themselves, so as to close my mouth. I never had anything."

Fine again foolishly interfered, reminding him that he had had two hundred francs, besides a suit of clothes and a year's rent. Antoine shouted to her to hold her tongue, and continued with increasing fury:

"Two hundred francs! a fine thing! I want my due, ten thousand francs. Ah! yes, talk of the hole they shoved me into like a dog, and the old frock-coat which Pierre gave me because he was ashamed to wear it any longer himself, it was so dirty and ragged!"

He was not speaking the truth; but, seeing the rage he was in, nobody ventured to protest further. Then, turning towards Silvère:

"It's very stupid of you to defend them!" he added. "They robbed your mother, who, good woman, would be alive now if she had the means of taking care of herself."

"No, you're not just, uncle," the young man said, "my mother did not die for want of attention, and I'm certain my father would never have accepted a sou from his wife's family!"

"Pooh! don't talk to me! your father would have taken

the money just like anybody else. We were disgracefully plundered, and it's high time we had our rights."

And Macquart commenced, for the hundredth time, the story of the fifty thousand francs. His nephew, who knew it by heart, and all the different versions with which he embellished it, listened to him rather impatiently.

"If you were a man," Antoine would say in conclusion, "you would come one day with me, and we would kick up a nice row at the Rougons. We would not leave without having some money given us."

Silvère, however, grew serious, and frankly replied:

"If those wretches robbed us, so much the worse for them. I don't want their money. Don't you see, uncle, it's not for us to smite our family. If they've done wrong, one of these days they'll be severely punished for it."

"Ah! what a big simpleton you are!" the uncle cried. "When we have the upper hand, you'll see whether I sha'n't settle my own little affairs myself. God cares a lot about us indeed! What a foul family ours is! Were I starving to death, not one of those scoundrels would throw me a dry crust."

Whenever Macquart touched upon this subject, he was inexhaustible. He laid bare the still bleeding wounds of envy. He got mad with rage when he came to think that he was the only unlucky one in the family, that he was forced to eat potatoes while the others had meat to their heart's content. He would pass all his relations under review, even his grand-nephews, and find some grievance and some menace against every one of them.

"Yes, yes," he repeated bitterly, "they'd leave me to die like a dog."

Gervaise, without raising her head or stopping her needle, would sometimes say, timidly:

"Still, father, cousin Pascal was very kind to us, last year, when you were ill."

"He attended you without charging a sou," continued Fine, coming to her daughter's aid, "and he often slipped a five-franc piece into my hand to make you some broth."

"He! he'd have killed me if I hadn't had a strong constitution!" Macquart exclaimed. "Hold your tongues, fools! You'd let yourselves be twisted about like children. They'd all like to see me dead. When I'm ill again, I beg you not to

go and fetch my nephew, for I didn't feel at all comfortable in his hands. He's only a cheap doctor, and hasn't got a decent patient in all his practice."

Macquart, now fairly launched, would go on for ever.

"It's like that little viper, Aristide," he would say, "a false brother, a traitor. Are you taken in by his articles in the 'Indépendant,' Silvère? You would be a famous fool if you were. They're not even good French; I've always maintained that this contraband republican is in league with his worthy father to humbug us. You'll see how he'll turn his coat. And his brother, the illustrious Eugène, that big blockhead of whom the Rougons make such a fuss! why, they've got the impudence to assert that he occupies a good position in Paris! I know something about his position; he's employed at the Rue de Jérusalem; he's a police spy."

"Who told you so? You don't know anything about it," interrupted Silvère, whose upright spirit was at last feeling wounded by his uncle's lying accusations.

"Ah! I don't know anything about it? Do you think so? I tell you he's a police-spy. You'll be shorn like a lamb one of these days, with your benevolence. You're not manly enough. I don't want to say anything against your brother François; but, if I were in your place, I shouldn't like the scurvy manner in which he treats you. He earns a heap of money at Marseilles, and yet he never sends you a miserable twenty-franc piece for pocket-money. If ever you become poor, I shouldn't advise you to look to him for anything."

"I've no need of anybody," the young man replied in a proud and slightly injured tone of voice. "My own work suffices for aunt Dide and myself. You're cruel, uncle."

"I only say what's true, that's all. I should like to open your eyes. Our family are a disreputable lot; it's sad but true. There's no one, even to that little Maxime, Aristide's son, that little nine-year-old brat, who doesn't poke his tongue out at me when he meets me. That child will one day strike his mother, and a good job too. Say what you like, those people don't deserve their luck; but it's always so in families, the good ones suffer while the bad ones make their fortune."

All this dirty linen, which Macquart would wash with such satisfaction before his nephew, profoundly disgusted the young man. He would have liked to regain his dream. As soon as

he commenced to show unmistakable signs of impatience, Antoine would employ strong expedients to exasperate him against their relatives.

"Defend them! defend them!" he would say, appearing to calm down. "I, for my part, have arranged to have nothing more to do with them. I only mention the matter out of pity for my poor mother, whom all that gang treat in a most revolting manner."

"They are wretches!" Silvère murmured.

"Oh! you don't know, you don't understand. These Rougons pour all sorts of insults and abuse on the good woman. Aristide has forbidden his son even to recognise her. Félicité talks of having her placed in a lunatic asylum."

The young man, as white as a sheet, abruptly interrupted his uncle:

"Enough!" he cried. "I don't want to know anything more about it. There will have to be an end to all this."

"I will hold my tongue, since it annoys you," the old rascal continued in a good-natured way. "Still, there are some things that you ought not to be ignorant of, unless you want to play the part of a fool."

Macquart, while exerting himself to set Silvère against the Rougons, felt an exquisite pleasure in drawing tears of anguish to the young man's eyes. He detested him, perhaps, more than the others, because he was an excellent workman and never drank. He whetted his most refined cruelties in inventing atrocious falsehoods which stung the poor lad to the heart; then he revelled in his paleness, his trembling hands, his heart-rending looks with the delight of an evil spirit who plans his stabs and strikes his victim in the right place. When he thought he had wounded and exasperated Silvère sufficiently, he would at last touch upon politics.

"I've been assured," he would say, lowering his voice, "that the Rougons are preparing some treachery."

"Treachery?" Silvère asked, becoming attentive.

"Yes, one of these nights they are going to seize all the good citizens of the town and throw them into prison."

The young man at first was disposed to doubt it, but his uncle gave precise details; he spoke of lists being drawn up, he mentioned the persons whose names were on these lists, he indicated in what manner, at what hour, and under what circumstances the plot would be carried into effect. Gradually

Silvère allowed himself to be taken in by this old woman's tale, and was soon raving against the enemies of the Republic.

"We shall have to reduce them to impotence, if they persist in betraying the country," he cried. "And what do they intend to do with the citizens whom they arrest?"

"What do they intend to do with them? Why, they will shoot them in the lowest dungeons of the prison, of course," replied Macquart, with a little hoarse laugh.

And as the young man, stupefied with horror, looked at him without knowing what to say:

"This is not the first lot that will have been assassinated there," he continued. "You need only go and prowl about the Palais de Justice of an evening, to hear the shots and groans."

"Oh, the wretches!" Silvère murmured.

Thereupon uncle and nephew launched out into politics. Fine and Gervaise, observing them debating loudly, quietly went to bed without attracting their attention. The two men remained thus till midnight, commenting on the news from Paris and discussing the approaching and inevitable struggle. Macquart bitterly denounced the men of his own party, Silvère dreamed aloud, and for himself only, his dream of ideal liberty. Strange conversations, during which the uncle filled a countless number of little glasses for himself, and from which the nephew emerged quite intoxicated with enthusiasm. Antoine, however, never succeeded in obtaining from the young republican a perfidious calculation, or a plan of warfare against the Rougons; in vain he tried to goad him on, he never heard from his mouth anything but appeals to eternal justice, which sooner or later would punish the evil doers.

The ingenuous youth spoke indeed with warmth of taking up arms and massacring the enemies of the Republic; but as soon as these enemies quitted his dream and were personified in his uncle Pierre or any other person of his acquaintance, he relied upon heaven to spare him the horror of shedding blood. It is very probable that he would have ceased his visits to Macquart, whose jealous fury made him uncomfortable, if he had not found a pleasure in being able to speak freely there of his dear Republic. His uncle, nevertheless, exercised a decided influence over his destiny, he irritated his nerves with his continual diatribes; he succeeded in making him eagerly long for the armed struggle, for the violent conquest of universal happiness.

When Silvère reached his sixteenth year, Macquart had him admitted into the secret society of the Montagnards, a powerful association which wielded its influence over the entire South. From that moment, the young republican looked with longing eyes at the smuggler's carbine, which Adélaïde had hung up over the chimney-piece. One night, while his grandmother was asleep, he cleaned and restored it. Then he replaced it on its nail and waited. He lulled himself with his brilliant reveries, building up gigantic epopees; seeing, in his mind's eye, Homeric struggles and knightly tournaments from which the defenders of liberty emerged victorious and acclaimed by the whole world.

Macquart, in spite of the fruitlessness of his efforts, was not discouraged. He said to himself that he would be able to strangle the Rougons alone if he ever got them into a corner. His envious rage and slothful greed became augmented by successive accidents which compelled him to resume work. In the early part of 1850 Fine died, almost suddenly, from inflammation of the lungs, which she caught by going one evening to wash the linen of the family in the Viorne, and carrying it home wet on her back. She returned soaked with water and perspiration, crushed by the load which was enormously heavy, and never recovered.

This death struck Macquart with consternation. His most reliable source of income was gone. When, after a few days, he sold the cauldron in which his wife used to boil the chestnuts, and the wooden horse which she used in new-bottoming her old chairs, he foully accused God of having taken away the deceased, that strong, strapping woman of whom he had been ashamed, but whose real worth he now appreciated. He fell upon his children's earnings with greater avidity. But, a month later, Gervaise, tired of his continual exactions, ran away with her two children and Lantier, whose mother was dead. The lovers took refuge in Paris. Antoine, astounded, foully abused his daughter, expressing the hope that she might die in the hospital like most of her kind. This flood of abuse did not improve the situation, which was decidedly becoming bad. Jean soon followed his sister's example. He waited till one pay-day, and then contrived to receive the money himself. As he was leaving he told one of his friends, who repeated it to Antoine, that he would not keep his lazy father any longer, and that if the latter should take it into his head to have him

brought back by the gendarmes he was determined not to touch a saw or a plane.

On the morrow, when Antoine, having sought for him in vain, found himself alone and penniless in the house where for twenty years he had been comfortably kept, he fell into a violent rage, kicking the furniture about, and yelling the vilest imprecations. Then he sank down exhausted, and began to drag his feet and moan like a convalescent. The fear of having to earn his bread made him positively ill. When Silvère came to see him, he complained, with tears in his eyes, of his children's ingratitude. Had he not always been a good father to them? Jean and Gervaise were monsters, who made an evil return for all he had done for them. Now they abandoned him because he was old, and they could not get anything more out of him.

"But, uncle," said Silvère, "you are not yet too old to work!"

Macquart, coughing and stooping, shook his head mournfully, as if to say that he could not bear the least fatigue for any length of time. Just as his nephew was about to withdraw, he borrowed ten francs of him. He lived for a month by taking his children's old clothes, one by one, to a second-hand dealer, selling likewise, little by little, all the small articles in the house. Very soon nothing remained but a table, a chair, his bed and the clothes on his back. He ended by exchanging the walnut-wood bedstead for a plain strap one. When he had exhausted all his resources, he cried with rage; and, with the fierce lividness of a man resigned to suicide, he went to look for the bundle of osier, forgotten in some corner for a quarter of a century. As he took it up, he seemed to be lifting a mountain. He set to work again to plait baskets and hampers, denouncing the human race for their neglect.

It was at this time especially that he talked of dividing the riches of the wealthy. He appeared terrible. His speeches set the tavern ablaze where his furious looks secured him unlimited credit. Moreover, he never worked, excepting when he had been unable to get a five-franc piece out of Silvère or a comrade. He was no longer "Monsieur" Macquart, that workman, clean-shaven and in Sunday clothes every day, who played the gentleman: he became again that slovenly old devil who had once speculated on his rags. Now that he went almost every market-day to sell his baskets, Félicité did not dare to go to the market. He once had a violent quarrel with

her. His hatred against the Rougons grew with his wretchedness. He swore, uttering horrible threats, that he would execute justice himself, since the rich were in league to compel him to toil.

In this state of mind, he welcomed the Coup d'État with the ardent, obstreperous delight of a dog scenting the quarry. The few honest Liberals in the town not having succeeded in arriving at an understanding amongst themselves, and holding themselves apart, he became naturally one of the most prominent agents of the insurrection. The workmen, notwithstanding the unfavourable opinion which they at last came to entertain of this lazy fellow, would, when the time arrived, have to accept him as the rallying flag. The first few days, however, the town remained quiet, and Macquart thought his plans were frustrated. It was not until the news arrived of the insurrection in the country that he recovered hope. He would not have left Plassans for all the world; he therefore invented some pretext for not following the workmen who, on the Sunday morning, went to join the insurrectionary band of La Palud and Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx.

On the evening of the same day he was in some obscure tavern of the old quarter with a few friends, when a comrade arrived and informed him that the insurgents were only a few miles from Plassans. This news had just been brought by an express, who had succeeded in making his way into the town, and who had been charged to get the gates open for the column. There was an outburst of triumph. Macquart, especially, appeared to be delirious with enthusiasm. The unforeseen arrival of the insurgents seemed to him a delicate thoughtfulness of Providence on his account. His hands trembled at the idea that he would soon hold the Rougons by the throat.

In the meantime, Antoine and his friends hastily quitted the tavern. All the republicans who had not yet left the town were soon assembled on the Cours Sauvaire. It was this band that Rougon had observed as he was running to conceal himself in his mother's house. When the band had reached the top of the Rue de la Banne, Macquart, who had stationed himself at the rear, made four of his companions remain behind, great big fellows not over-burdened with brains whom he swayed by his tavern bluster. He easily persuaded them that the enemies of the Republic must be arrested immediately if

they wished to avoid the greatest calamities. The truth was, he was afraid Pierre might escape him in the midst of the confusion which the entry of the insurgents would produce. The four big fellows followed him with exemplary docility, and went and knocked violently at the Rougons' abode. In this critical situation Félicité displayed admirable courage. She went down and opened the street door.

"We want to go upstairs into your rooms," Macquart said to her brutally.

"Very well, gentlemen, walk up," she replied with ironical politeness, pretending not to recognise her brother-in-law.

When they were upstairs, Macquart ordered her to go and fetch her husband.

"My husband is not here," she said more and more calmly; "he is travelling on business. He took the diligence for Marseilles at six o'clock this evening."

Antoine at this declaration, uttered in a clear voice, made a gesture of rage. He rushed into the drawing-room, went into the bedroom, turned the bed up, looked behind the curtains and under the furniture. The four big fellows assisted him. They searched about the place for a quarter of an hour; Félicité quietly seated herself on the drawing-room sofa, and began to fasten the strings of her petticoats, like a person who has just been surprised in her sleep and has not had time to dress properly.

"It's true then, he's run away, the coward!" Macquart muttered, returning to the drawing-room.

He continued, however, to look about him with a suspicious air. He felt a presentiment that Pierre could not have given up the game at the decisive moment. He approached Félicité, who was yawning:

"Show us the place where your husband is hidden," he said to her, "and I promise that no harm shall be done to him."

"I have told you the truth," she replied impatiently. "I can't deliver my husband to you as he's not here. You have searched everywhere, haven't you? Then leave me alone now."

Macquart, exasperated by her composure, was just going to strike her, when a dull noise rose from the street. It was the column of insurgents entering the Rue de la Banne.

He had to leave the yellow drawing-room after shaking his fist at his sister-in-law, calling her an old beggar, and threatening to return soon. At the foot of the staircase, he took

MACQUART, IN COMPANY WITH OTHER INSURGENTS, CALLING TO ARREST ROUGON. p. 156.

aside one of the men who were accompanying him, a navvy named Cassoute, the most wooden-headed of the four, and ordered him to sit on the first step, and not to stir from there till further orders.

"You must come and inform me," he said to him, "if you see the scoundrel from upstairs return."

The man sat down heavily. When Macquart was on the pavement, he raised his eyes and observed Félicité leaning out of the window of the yellow drawing-room, watching curiously the march past of the insurgents, as if it was nothing but a regiment passing through the town to the strains of its band. This last sign of perfect composure irritated him to such a degree that he was almost tempted to go up and throw the old woman into the street. He followed the column, muttering in a hoarse voice:

"Yes, yes, look at us passing. We'll see whether you will sit at your balcony to-morrow."

It was nearly eleven o'clock at night when the insurgents entered the town by the Porte de Rome. It was the workmen remaining at Plassans who opened the gates for them, in spite of the wailings of the keeper, from whom they could only wrest the keys by force. This man, very jealous of his office, stood dumbfoundered in the presence of this surging crowd; he, who never allowed more than one person to pass in at a time, and then only after a prolonged examination of his face, murmured that he was dishonoured. The men of Plassans were still marching at the head of the column guiding the others; Miette in the front rank, with Silvère on her left, held up the banner with more swagger now that she could feel, behind the closed blinds, the scared looks of the well-to-do citizens startled out of their sleep. The insurgents passed along the Rue de Rome and the Rue de la Banne slowly and warily; at every crossway they were afraid of being received with bullets, although they well knew the quiet disposition of the inhabitants. The town seemed dead, however; there was scarcely a stifled exclamation to be heard at the windows. Five or six shutters only were opened; some old householder appeared in his shirt, candle in hand, leaning out to obtain a better view; then, as soon as the old man distinguished the tall red girl who appeared to be drawing this crowd of black demons behind her, he hastily closed his window again, terrified by the diabolical apparition.

The silence of the slumbering town reassured the insurgents, who ventured to make their way through the lanes of the old quarter, reaching thereby the market-place and the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, which communicate with each other through a short broad street These two open spaces, planted with meagre trees, were brilliantly illuminated by the moon. The Hôtel-de-Ville, recently restored, depicted against the clear sky a large white spot, on which the balcony of the first floor displayed in fine black lines its arabesques of wrought iron. Several persons could be plainly distinguished standing on this balcony, the mayor, Commander Sicardot, three or four municipal councillors, and other functionaries. The doors below were closed. The three thousand republicans, who covered the two open spaces, halted with uplifted heads, ready to force the doors with a single shove.

The arrival of the insurrectionary column at such an hour took the authorities by surprise. Before going to the mayor's, Commander Sicardot had taken the opportunity to don his uniform. He then had to run and rouse the mayor. When the keeper of the Porte de Rome, left free by the insurgents, came to announce that the villains were already in the town, the commander had only succeeded with difficulty in rallying about twenty of the national guards. The gendarmes, whose barracks, however, were close by, could not even be warned. It was necessary to shut the doors hastily, in order to deliberate. Five minutes later a dull and continuous rumbling announced the approach of the column.

Monsieur Garçonnet, out of hatred to the Republic, would have ardently wished to offer resistance. But he was a prudent man, and comprehended the fruitlessness of the struggle as he saw around him only a few pale men scarcely awake. The deliberation did not last long. Sicardot alone was obstinate; he wanted to fight, asserting that twenty men would be sufficient to bring those three thousand villains to reason. Monsieur Garçonnet shrugged his shoulders, and declared that the only step to take was to make an honourable capitulation. As the uproar of the mob increased, he went out on the balcony, followed by all the persons present. Silence was gradually obtained. Below, among the black, quivering mass of insurgents, the guns and scythes glittered in the moonlight.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" cried the mayor in a loud voice.

Thereupon a man in a greatcoat, a landowner of La Palud, advanced.

"Open the door," he said, without replying to Monsieur Garçonnet's question. "Avoid a fratricidal conflict."

"I call upon you to withdraw," the mayor continued. "I protest in the name of the law."

These words provoked deafening shouts from the crowd. When the tumult was somewhat calmed, vehement interpellations rose to the balcony. Voices shouted:

"We have come in the name of the law."

"Your duty as a functionary is to secure respect for the fundamental law of the land, the constitution, which has just been outrageously violated."

"Long live the constitution! Long live the Republic!"

And as Monsieur Garçonnet endeavoured to make himself heard, and continued to invoke his official dignity, the landowner of La Palud, who was standing under the balcony, interrupted him with great vehemence:

"You are no longer anything but the functionary of a fallen functionary; we have come to deprive you of your office."

Hitherto, Commander Sicardot had been biting his moustache in a formidable manner, swallowing these gross insults. The sight of the cudgels and scythes exasperated him; he was making unheard-of efforts to restrain himself from treating these miserable soldiers, who had not even a gun apiece, as they deserved. But when he heard a gentleman in a plain greatcoat speak of deposing a mayor girded with his scarf, he could no longer contain himself and shouted:

"Pack of villains! If I only had four men and a corporal, I'd come down and pull your ears for you, and make you behave yourselves!"

It did not require so much to raise a very serious disturbance. A long shout rose from the mob as it made a rush for the doors. Monsieur Garçonnet, in consternation, hastily quitted the balcony, entreating Sicardot to be reasonable unless he wished to have them massacred. In two minutes the doors gave way, the people invaded the building and disarmed the national guards. The mayor and the other functionaries present were arrested. Sicardot, who declined to surrender his sword, had to be protected by the chief of the contingent from Les Tulettes, a man of great self-possession, against the fury of some of the insurgents. When the Hôtel-de-Ville was in

the hands of the republicans, they led the prisoners away to a small café in the market-place, where they were closely watched.

The insurrectionary army would have avoided marching through Plassans if their leaders had not decided that a little food and a few hours' rest were absolutely necessary for the men. Instead of pushing forward direct to the chief town, the column, owing to the inexcusable weakness and the inexperience of the improvised general who commanded it, was wheeling round to the left, making a sort of wide détour which was destined to lead it to destruction. It was bound for the heights of Sainte-Roure, still about ten leagues distant, and in view of this long march it had been decided to pass through the town, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. It was then about half-past eleven.

When Monsieur Garçonnet knew that the band was in quest of provisions, he offered his services to procure them. This functionary displayed, under these difficult circumstances, a very intelligent appreciation of the situation. These three thousand starving men would have to be satisfied; it would never do for Plassans, on waking up, to still find them squatting on the pavements; if they withdrew before daybreak they would simply have passed through the slumbering town like an evil dream, like one of those nightmares which depart with the arrival of dawn. Although he remained a prisoner, Monsieur Garçonnet, followed by two guards, went about knocking at the bakers' doors, and caused all the provisions he could find to be distributed among the insurgents.

Towards one o'clock the three thousand men began to eat, squatting on the ground, with their weapons between their legs. The market-place and the neighbourhood of the Hôtel-de-Ville were transformed into vast refectories. In spite of the bitter cold, humorous and cheerful sallies were exchanged in the swarming multitude, the smallest groups of which were vividly delineated by the brilliancy of the moon. The poor famished fellows eagerly devoured their portions as they breathed on their fingers; and, from the depths of the adjoining streets, where one could distinguish confused black forms seated on the white thresholds of the houses, there came sudden bursts of laughter which emerged from the darkness and were lost amidst the turmoil. At the windows some emboldened, inquisitive old women, with silk handkerchiefs tied round their

heads, watched these terrible insurgents eating, these blood-drinkers going in turn to take a draught, in the hollow of their hands, from the pump in the market.

Whilst the Hôtel-de-Ville was being invaded, the quarters of the gendarmes, situated a few steps away, in the Rue Canquoin which leads to the market, also fell into the hands of the mob. The gendarmes were surprised in their beds and disarmed in a few minutes. The impetus of the crowd had carried Miette and Silvère along in that direction. The girl, who still clasped the staff of the banner to her breast, was pushed up against the wall of the barrack, while the young man, carried away by this human wave, penetrated into the interior, assisting his comrades to wrest from the gendarmes the carbines which they had hastily caught up. Silvère, becoming ferocious, intoxicated by the onslaught of the band, attacked a big devil of a gendarme named Rengade, with whom he struggled for a few moments. By a sudden movement, he succeeded in wresting his carbine from him. The barrel struck Rengade a violent blow in the face, which put his right eye out. Blood flowed, and, splashing Silvère's hands, quickly brought him to his senses. He looked at his hands and dropped the carbine; then he ran out, in a state of frenzy, shaking his fingers.

"You are wounded!" cried Miette.

"No, no," he replied in a stifled voice, "I've just killed a gendarme."

"Is he really dead?" asked Miette.

"I don't know," Silvère replied, "his face was all covered with blood. Come quickly."

He hurried the young girl away. Arrived in the market, he made her sit down on a stone bench and told her to wait there for him. He still looked at his hands, muttering something at the same time. Miette at last made out from his disjointed words that he wanted to go and kiss his grandmother before leaving.

"Well, go," she said; "don't trouble yourself about me. Wash your hands."

He went away quickly, keeping his fingers apart, without thinking of dipping them into the water which he passed. Since he had felt the warmth of Rengade's blood on his skin, he was impelled by one sole idea, to run to aunt Dide and dip his hands in the well-trough at the back of the little yard. There only, he thought, he would be able to wash off the blood.

All his calm, gentle childhood returned, he felt an irresistible longing to take refuge in his grandmother's skirts, if only for a minute. He arrived out of breath. Aunt Dide had not gone to bed, a circumstance which at any other time would have surprised Silvère. But on entering he did not even see his uncle Rougon, sitting in a corner on the old chest. He did not wait for the poor old woman's questions.

"Granny," he said quickly, "you must forgive me; I'm going to leave with the others. You see I've got blood on me. I believe I've killed a gendarme."

"You've killed a gendarme?" aunt Dide repeated in a strange voice.

Her eyes gleamed sharply as she fixed them on the red stains. Suddenly she turned towards the chimney-piece.

"You've taken the gun," she said; "where's the gun?"

Silvère, who had left the weapon with Miette, swore to her that it was quite safe. For the first time, Adélaïde made an allusion to the smuggler Macquart in her grandson's presence.

"You'll bring the gun back? You promise me!" she said with singular energy. "It's all I have left of him. You've killed a gendarme; ah, it was the gendarmes who killed him!"

She continued gazing fixedly at Silvère with an air of cruel satisfaction, apparently without thinking of detaining him. She never asked him for any explanation, nor wept like those good grandmothers who always imagine, at the least scratch, that their grandchildren are dying. All her nature strained towards one unique thought, to which she at last gave expression with an ardent curiosity:

"Did you kill the gendarme with the gun?"

No doubt Silvère either did not quite catch what she said, or else misunderstood her.

"Yes!" he replied. "I'm going to wash my hands."

It was only on returning from the well that he perceived his uncle. Pierre had turned pale as he heard the young man's words. Félicité was indeed right; his family took a pleasure in compromising him. Now one of his nephews had killed a gendarme! He would never get the post of receiver of taxes, if he did not prevent this mad fool from rejoining the insurgents. He planted himself in front of the door, determined not to let him go out.

"Listen," he said to Silvère, who was very surprised to find him there, "I am the head of the family, and I forbid you

leaving this house. You are risking your own honour and ours too. To-morrow I will try and assist you to reach the frontier."

Silvère shrugged his shoulders.

"Let me pass," he replied calmly. "I'm not a police-spy; I shall not reveal your hiding-place, never fear."

And as Rougon continued to speak of the family dignity and the authority with which his seniority invested him:

"Do I belong to your family?" the young man continued. "You have always disowned me. To-day, fear has driven you here, because you feel that the day of judgment has arrived. Come, make way! I don't hide myself; I have a duty to perform."

Rougon did not budge. Thereupon aunt Dide, who listened with a sort of delight to Silvère's vehement language, laid her withered hand on her son's arm.

"Get out of the way, Pierre," she said; "the lad must go."

The young man gave his uncle a slight shove, and dashed outside. Rougon, as he carefully shut the door again, said to his mother in an angry, threatening tone:

"If any mischief happens to him it will be your fault. You're an old madwoman; you don't know what you've just done."

Adélaïde, however, did not appear to hear him. She went and threw a log on to the fire which was going out, and murmured with a vague smile:

"I'm used to it. He would remain away for months together, and then come back to me much better."

No doubt she was speaking of Macquart.

In the meantime, Silvère hastily regained the market-place. As he approached the spot where he had left Miette, he heard a loud uproar of voices and saw a crowd which made him quicken his steps. A cruel scene had just occurred. Some onlookers were walking among the insurgents, while the latter were quietly occupied with their meal. Amongst these onlookers was Justin, Rébufat's son, a youth about twenty years old, a sickly, squint-eyed creature, who cherished an implacable hatred against his cousin Miette. At home he grudged her the bread she ate, and treated her like a beggar picked up in the gutter out of charity. It is probable that the young girl had rejected his advances. Lank and pale, with ill-proportioned limbs and face all awry, he revenged himself upon her for his own

ugliness, and the contempt which the handsome, vigorous girl must have evinced for him. He ardently longed to induce his father to send her about her business. He therefore kept an unremitting watch upon her. For some time past, he had become aware of her meetings with Silvère; he only awaited a decisive opportunity to betray everything to Rébufat.

On the evening in question, having seen her leave home at about eight o'clock, Justin's hatred overpowered him, and he could not keep quiet any longer. Rébufat, on hearing his story, fell into a terrible rage, and said he would kick the gadabout out of his house if she had the audacity to return. Justin went to bed, relishing beforehand the fine scene which would take place on the following day. Then he felt a burning desire to have a foretaste of his revenge immediately. He dressed himself again and went out. Perhaps he might meet Miette. He made up his mind to be very insolent. This is how he came to be present at the arrival of the insurgents, and followed them to the Hôtel-de-Ville with a vague presentiment that he would find the lovers there. He at last caught sight of his cousin on the seat where she was waiting for Silvère. Seeing her wrapped in her large pelisse, resting against one of the pillars of the market with the red flag at her side, he commenced to jeer at her with coarse jests. The young girl, amazed at seeing him, was unable to speak. She wept beneath his abuse, and whilst she was overcome by sobbing, bowing her head and hiding her face, Justin called her a convict's daughter and shouted that old Rébufat would give her a good thrashing if she dared to return to the Jas-Meiffren.

He kept her thus for a quarter of an hour, in a state of tremor and fright. Some people had gathered round, grinning stupidly at this painful scene. At last some of the insurgents interfered, and threatened to inflict exemplary chastisement on the young man if he did not leave Miette alone. Justin declared that he was not afraid of them, although he retreated a few steps. It was just at this moment that Silvère appeared. Young Rébufat, catching sight of him, made a sudden leap, as if to take flight; he was afraid of Silvère, knowing that he was much stronger than himself. He could not, however, resist the extreme pleasure of inflicting a parting insult on the girl before her lover.

"Ah! I knew very well," he cried, "that the wheelwright could not be far off! You left us to run after that crack-

brained fellow, eh? The wretched girl! she's not sixteen yet! When's the baptism to be?"

He retreated a few steps further on beholding Silvère clench his fists.

"And mind," he continued, with a vile sneer, "you don't come to our house for your confinement. You wouldn't require a midwife. My father would deliver you with kicks. Do you hear?"

He ran away howling, his face black and blue. Silvère at a bound had rushed upon him, and landed him a blow full in the face. He did not pursue him. When he returned to Miette he found her standing up, feverishly drying her tears with the palm of her hand. As he was gazing tenderly at her to console her, she made a sudden energetic movement.

"No," she said, "I'm not going to cry any more, you'll see. I'm very glad of it. I don't feel any regret now for leaving home. I am free."

She took up the banner and led Silvère back into the midst of the insurgents. It was then nearly two o'clock in the morning. The cold was becoming so intense that the republicans had risen and were finishing their bread as they tried to warm themselves by pacing to and fro. At last the chiefs gave the order to depart. The column formed again. The prisoners were placed in the middle; besides Monsieur Garçonnet and Commander Sicardot, the insurgents had arrested and led away Monsieur Peirotte, the receiver of taxes, and several other functionaries.

At this moment, Aristide was observed walking about among the groups. In the face of this formidable revolt, the dear fellow had thought it imprudent not to remain on friendly terms with the republicans; but as, on the other hand, he did not want to compromise himself with them too much, he came to bid them farewell with his arm in a sling, complaining bitterly of that accursed wound which prevented him carrying a weapon. He came across his brother Pascal in the crowd, provided with a case of surgical instruments and a medicine chest. The doctor informed him, in his quiet voice, that he was going to follow the insurgents. Aristide inwardly considered him a great fool. At last he slunk away, fearing lest they should entrust the care of the town to him, a post which he deemed exceptionally perilous.

The insurgents could never have thought of keeping Plassans

in their power. The town was animated by a much too reactionary spirit for them to endeavour even to establish a democratic commission there, as they had already done in other places. They would simply have gone away, if Macquart, prompted and emboldened by his own animosities, had not offered to keep Plassans in awe, on condition that they left behind twenty determined men under his orders. The twenty men were given to him, and he marched triumphantly at their head to occupy the Hôtel-de-Ville. During this time the column was wending its way along the Cours Sauvaire, and making its exit by the Grande Porte, leaving the streets, which it had traversed like a tempest, silent and deserted in its rear. The high road, whitened by the moonshine, stretched far into the distance. Miette had refused Silvère's arm; she marched along bravely, steady and upright, holding the red banner aloft with both hands, without complaining of the numbness which was turning her fingers blue.

CHAPTER V.

THE high roads, whitened by the moonshine, stretched far into the distance.

The insurrectionary band continued its heroic march through the cold, clear country. It was a mighty wave of enthusiasm. This thrill of patriotism, which carried Miette and Silvère away, big children that they were, all greedy of love and liberty, gleamed like a web of holiest purity athwart the sordid woof of the shameful saturnalia of the Macquarts and Rougons. The trumpet-voice of the people blared and drowned the prattle of the yellow drawing-room and the diatribes of uncle Antoine. All their vulgar, mean farce was being lost and forgotten in the great drama of history.

On quitting Plassans, the insurgents had taken the road to Orchères. They expected to reach that town at about six o'clock in the morning. The road rises again along the course of the Viorne, following half-way up the hill the windings of the hillocks, at the foot of which the torrent flows. On the left, the plain spreads out like an immense green carpet, spotted here and there with the grey patches of the villages. On the right, the chain of the Garrigues hills rears up its desolate peaks, its stony plains, its rusty boulders that look as though they had been reddened by the sun. The high road, forming a path along the river, passes in the midst of enormous rocks, between which glimpses of the valley are caught at every step. Nothing could be wilder or more strikingly grand than this road cut through the very bosom of the hills. At night time, especially, these spots inspire one with a feeling of deep awe. The insurgents advanced, under the pale light, along what seemed the chief street of a ruined town, bordered on either side with the débris of temples. Beneath the moon's pale glimmer every rock became a broken column, or a crumbling capital, or a stretch of wall opening out into mysterious arches. Up above, the mass of the Garrigues lay slumbering, blanched with a light milky tinge, like an immense Cyclopean city whose

towers, obelisks, and houses with high terraces, blotted out half the heavens; and the depths below, on the side of the plain, were flooded with a spreading ocean of diffused light, hazy and limitless, over which floated clouds of luminous mist. The insurrectionary band might well have thought they were following a gigantic causeway, a winding-road constructed on the shore of a phosphorescent sea, and circling some hitherto unknown Babel.

On the night in question, the Viorne hurried along with a hoarse roar at the foot of the rocks bordering the route. Through the continuous rumbling of the torrent, the insurgents caught sounds of the sharp, wailing notes of the tocsin. The villages which were scattered about the plain, on the other side of the river, were rising in revolt, sounding alarms and lighting signal-fires. The marching column, which the persistent tolling of a mournful knell seemed ever to pursue during the whole night, thus beheld the insurrection spreading along the valley, until daybreak, like a train of powder. The fires spotted the darkness with bloody specks; distant songs were wafted along on the gentle breeze. The whole vague distance, bathed in the whitish vapours of the moon, was in a state of confused agitation, breaking out into sharp spasms of anger. For many leagues similar scenes presented themselves to the observation of the column.

These men, marching under the blind impetus of the fever with which the events at Paris had inspired the hearts of the republicans, were elated at the spectacle of this long stretch of country quivering with revolt. Intoxicated with enthusiasm for the general insurrection of which they dreamed, they fancied that France was following them; they pictured to themselves endless files of men on the other side of the Viorne, in the vast ocean of diffused light, rushing like them to the defence of the Republic. Their rude imagination, with all the characteristic simplicity and delusion of a mob, dreamed of an easy and certain victory. They would have seized and shot as a traitor any one who had asserted, at that time, that they were the only ones who had the courage of their duty, while the rest of the country, overwhelmed with fright, was pusillanimously allowing itself to be trodden under foot.

They derived a continual inspiration of courage from the welcome accorded to them by the towns that lay along their route on the slopes of the Garrigues. The inhabitants rose in a

body at the first approach of the little army; the women ran to meet them, wishing them a speedy victory, while the men, half dressed and seizing the first weapons that fell into their hands, rushed to join the ranks. There was a fresh ovation at every village, with shouts of welcome and farewell many times reiterated.

Towards daybreak the moon disappeared behind the Garrigues, the insurgents continuing their rapid march through the thick darkness of a winter night. They were unable to distinguish the valley or the hills; they heard only the hoarse plaints of the bells, tolling through the deep obscurity like the beat of invisible drums, hidden they knew not where, and goading them on relentlessly with their despairing appeals.

Miette and Silvère were carried away by the enthusiasm of the detachment. Towards daybreak, the young girl was overcome by fatigue; she could only walk with short quick steps, and was unable to keep pace with the large strides of the men who surrounded her. But she strove courageously to suppress all complaints; it would have cost her too much to confess that she was not as strong as a boy. As they were traversing the first few leagues, Silvère gave her his arm; then, seeing that the standard was slipping gradually from her benumbed hands, he wanted to take it in order to relieve her; but she grew angry and would only allow him to hold the flag with one hand while she continued to carry it on her shoulder. She maintained this heroic attitude with childish obstinacy, smiling at the young man every time he cast a glance of loving anxiety upon her. But when the moon hid itself, she gave way under the shelter of darkness. Silvère felt her pressing more heavily on his arm. He had to carry the flag, and hold her round the waist to prevent her from stumbling.

"Are you very tired, poor Miette?" he asked his companion.

"Yes, a little tired," she replied in a weary tone.

"Would you like to rest a bit?"

She made no reply; he saw, however, that she was staggering. He thereupon handed the flag to one of the insurgents and quitted the ranks, almost carrying the girl off in his arms. She struggled a little, she was distressed at appearing such a mere child. But he calmed her, telling her that he knew a cross-road which shortened the distance by half. They would be able to take a good hour's rest and arrive at Orchères at the same time as the detachment.

It was then about six o'clock. There was a slight mist rising from the Viorne, and the darkness seemed to be growing denser. The young people groped their way along over the slopes of the Garrigues, until they came to a rock on which they sat down. Around them lay an abyss of darkness. They were stranded, as it were, on the point of some space-surrounded peak. Through the dark void, when the dull rumbling of the little army had died away, they heard nothing but two bells, the one clear-toned, ringing, no doubt, at their feet in some village built on the side of the road, the other far-off and faint, responding, as it were, with distant sobs to the feverish plaints of the first. One might have thought that these bells were relating to each other, through the empty waste, the dismal story of a perishing world.

Miette and Silvère, warmed by their quick run, did not feel the cold at first. They remained silent, listening, in great dejection, to the sounds of the tocsin with which the darkness throbbed. They could not even see one another. Miette felt afraid, and, groping for Silvère's hand, held it in her own. After the outburst of enthusiasm which for several hours had carried them away beside themselves and their minds, this sudden halt, this solitude, in which they found themselves side by side again, left them stunned and bewildered as though they had suddenly awoke from a wild dream. They felt as though a wave had cast them on the highway, and then had ebbed back and left them stranded. An irresistible reaction plunged them into a listless stupor; they forgot their enthusiasm; they thought no more of that band of men which they had to rejoin; they surrendered themselves to the melancholy sweetness of finding themselves alone, hand in hand, in the midst of all this wild darkness.

"You are not angry with me?" the young girl at length asked. "I could easily walk the whole night long with you; but they were running too quickly, I could hardly breathe."

"Why should I be angry with you?" the young man said.

"I don't know. I was afraid you might not love me any longer. I wish so much I could have taken long strides like you, and walked along without stopping. You will think I am a child."

Silvère smiled, and Miette, though the darkness prevented her seeing him, guessed he was doing so, and she continued in tones of steady determination:

"You must not always treat me like a sister. I want to be your wife."

And she clasped Silvère to her bosom.

She held him locked in her arms, murmuring:

"We shall grow so cold; let us warm ourselves like this."

Then they lapsed into silence. Until that troubled evening they had loved one another with the affection of brother and sister. In their ignorance they still mistook for a tender friendship the desire they felt to remain clasped in each other's embrace longer than brother and sister are wont to do. But beneath this guileless love surged more wildly every day the tempest of Miette's and Silvère's ardent blood. Age and experience would generate a violent passion of southern warmth from this idyll. Every girl who hangs on a youth's neck is already a woman, a woman unconsciously, whom a caress can awaken into conscious womanhood. When lovers kiss each other on the cheeks, it is because they are searching and feeling for the lips. A kiss makes lovers. It was in that dark and cold December night, amid the bitter lamentations of the tocsin, that Miette and Silvère exchanged one of those kisses that bring all the heart's blood to the lips.

They remained silent, closely locked together. Miette had said, "Let us warm ourselves like this," and they innocently waited till the warmth came. They soon felt a gentle glow striking through their clothes, and by degrees their embrace scorched them, and they found their breasts rising and falling with the same breath. A soft languor overcame them, and filled them with a feverish drowsiness. They were quite warm now, and lights seemed to be passing before their closed eyelids, while confused noises mounted to their brains. This state of painful happiness, which lasted some minutes, seemed endless to them. Then, in a kind of dream, their lips met. The kiss was long and greedy. It seemed to them as though they had never kissed before. It was fraught with pain to them, and they released their embrace. Then, when the chillness of the night had cooled their feverish heat, they remained in great confusion at some distance from each other.

All this time the bells kept up their ominous dialogue in the dark abyss which surrounded the young people. Miette, trembling with fear, did not dare to draw near to Silvère. Not hearing him move, she did not even know if he was still

alive. The stinging sweetness of their kiss still clung to their lips, to which passionate phrases surged up, and only a blushing shame at the joy that thrilled them kept them from thanking each other for the joy they felt and kissing once again, but their shyness made them prefer foregoing a repetition of their happiness rather than speak about it aloud. Had not their rapid walk warmed their blood, had not the darkness of the night lent its aid, they would, for a long time to come, have gone on kissing each other on the cheek like old playfellows. Miette felt ashamed. After Silvère's burning kiss, in this happy darkness in which her heart awoke, she remembered Justin's coarseness. A few hours before she had listened, without blushing, to this fellow who treated her as a shameless girl, asking when the baptism would take place, and shouting that his father would deliver her with kicks if ever she thought of returning to the Jas-Meiffren, and she had cried without understanding what he meant, she had cried because she guessed that all this must be base. Now that she was becoming a woman, she told herself, with a last trace of guilelessness, that the kiss, whose burning smart she still felt, was perhaps enough to cover her with the shame of which her cousin had accused her. Then she was seized with remorse, and broke out into sobs.

"What is the matter; what are you crying for?" asked Silvère in a troubled voice.

"Oh, leave me," she faltered, "I do not know."

Then in spite of herself, as it were, she cried out in the midst of her tears:

"Ah! I am a poor unfortunate creature. When I was ten years old they used to throw stones at me. To-day I am treated as the vilest of creatures. Justin was right to despise me before everybody. We have been doing wrong, Silvère."

The young man, dismayed, clasped her in his arms again, trying to console her.

"I love you," he whispered, "I am your brother. Why do you say that we have been doing wrong? We kissed each other because we were cold. You know very well that we used to kiss each other every evening before separating."

"Oh! not like just now," she said, in a subdued voice. "You must not do it again. It must not be, for a strange feeling came over me. People will now smile as I pass, and

they will be quite right to do so. I shall not be able to defend myself."

The young man remained silent, unable to find a single word to calm the agitated mind of this big child of thirteen years, trembling with agitation at her first kiss of love. He clasped her gently, imagining that he would calm her by renewing the warm languor of their embrace. She struggled, however, and continued:

"If you like, we will go away; we will leave the country. I can never return to Plassans; my uncle would beat me; the whole town would point their finger at me——"

Then, as if seized with a sudden irritation, she added:

"No; I am cursed. I forbid you to leave aunt Dide to follow me. You must leave me on the highway."

"Miette, Miette!" Silvère implored; "don't say that."

"Yes. I want to release you. Do be reasonable. They have turned me out like a vagabond. If I go back with you, you will always have to be fighting for my sake, and I don't want that."

The young man again imprinted a kiss upon her lips, murmuring:

"You shall be my wife, and nobody will then dare to hurt you."

"Oh! please!" she said, with a stifled cry; "don't kiss me so. You hurt me."

Then, after a short silence:

"You know quite well I cannot be your wife. We are too young. You would have to wait for me, and I should die of shame. You are wrong to join in the revolt; you will be forced to leave me in some corner."

Then Silvère, tired out, began to cry. A man's sobs have a heartrending hoarseness about them. Miette, frightened as she felt the poor fellow shaking in her arms, kissed him on the face, forgetting she was burning her lips. It was her fault. She was a little simpleton to let the stinging sweetness of a kiss so completely upset her. She did not know why she had thought of sad things, at the very moment when her lover was kissing her as he had never done before. And she clasped him to her bosom, to beg pardon for having pained him. These weeping children, locked in each other's anxious embrace, added another gloom to the dark December night. In the distance, the bells continued to complain unceasingly in a more hesitating voice.

"It is better to die," repeated Silvère, in the midst of his sobs; "it is better to die."

"Don't cry; forgive me," stammered Miette. "I will be brave; I will do all you wish."

When the young man had dried his tears:

"You are right," he said; "we cannot return to Plassans. But the time has not yet come for me to be a coward. If we come out of the struggle triumphant, I will go and find aunt Dide, and we will take her away ever so far with us. If we are beaten——"

He stopped.

"If we are beaten?" repeated Miette, softly.

"Then, in God's mercy!" continued Silvère, in a softer voice, "I shall most likely not be there. You will comfort the poor old woman. That would be better."

"Yes, that's what you said just now," the young girl murmured, "it would be better to die."

At this longing for death, they tightened their embrace. Miette thought to die with Silvère; the latter, however, had only spoken of himself, but she felt that he would gladly take her with him to earth. They would love each other there more freely than under the sun. Aunt Dide would die likewise and rejoin them there. It was, as it were, a rapid presentiment, a desire for a strange voluptuousness, to which Heaven, in the mournful tones of the tocsin, was promising an early gratification. Death! Death! The bells repeated this word with increasing passion, and the lovers abandoned themselves to these appeals in the dark; they fancied they were taking a foretaste of the last sleep, in that drowsiness in which they were plunged by the warmth of their limbs and the burning of their lips, which had met once more.

Miette ceased to resist. It was she, now, who pressed her lips to Silvère's, who sought with a mute ardour that joy, the stinging smart of which she had not been able to endure at first. The thought of an approaching death had excited her; she no longer felt herself blush as she hung upon her lover. She seemed as though she would drain to the dregs, before reposing in the earth, the cup of this new joy, at which she had barely moistened her lips, and which irritated her by reason of her inability to at once appreciate to the full all its unaccustomed sweetness. Beyond the kiss she seemed to divine something else, which frightened her while it attracted

her, amid the whirl of her awakened senses. She was succumbing; in her virginal naïvete she would have implored Silvère to tear down the veil. He, maddened by the caress she gave him, filled with supreme happiness, without strength, without other desires, seemed not even to believe in a higher degree of pleasure.

When Miette was out of breath and felt the pungent pleasure of the first embrace growing weaker, she resumed:

"I don't want to die unless you will love me. I want you to love me all the more."

Words failed her; not that she was conscious of any shame, but because she did not know what she desired. She was simply shaken by a vague inward paroxysm, by a boundless longing for fruition.

In her simplicity, she would have stamped her foot like a child clamouring for a bauble.

"I love you, I love you," Silvère repeated in a faltering voice.

Miette shook her head, she seemed to say it was not true, that the young man was concealing something from her. Her free and ardent nature had a secret instinct of the fecundity of life and rejected death, if she must die without realising it. This revolt of blood and nerves was naïvely revealed in the feverish wandering of her hands and in her stammering entreaties.

Then, growing calmer, she gently rested her head on the young man's shoulder, without uttering a word. Silvère bent down and kissed her. She drank in these kisses slowly, seeking their meaning, their hidden sweetness. She tasted them, and felt them course through her veins, as she asked herself if they were of love, of passion. A languor overcame her, she fell into a gentle slumber, without ceasing to taste Silvère's caresses in her sleep. The latter had enveloped her in her red pelisse, drawing the skirt round himself at the same time. They no longer felt cold. Silvère rejoiced to find, from the regularity of her respiration, that Miette was slumbering, as this sleep would enable them to proceed gaily on their way. He resolved to let her sleep for an hour. The sky was still black, and the approach of day was but faintly indicated by a whitish line in the east. There was a pine wood behind the lovers, and the young man heard it waking with the music of the morning breezes. The wailing of the bells resounded more

and more in the trembling atmosphere, lulling Miette's slumber as it had accompanied her amorous fever.

Until this troubled night the lives of these young people had formed one of those innocent idylls which are enacted in the midst of the working classes, among those outcasts, those simple-minded people, where one still finds sometimes the primitive passions of the ancient Greek romances.

Miette was scarcely nine years old when her father was sent to the galleys for shooting a gendarme. The trial of Chantegreil had remained a memorable case in the country. The poacher boldly confessed the murder, but he swore that the gendarme was himself taking aim at him. "I only anticipated him: I defended myself; it was a duel, not a murder." He never desisted from this line of argument. The President of the Assizes could not make him understand that, though a gendarme has the right to fire upon a poacher, a poacher has no right to fire upon a gendarme. Chantegreil escaped the guillotine, owing to his obvious complete belief in his own innocence, and his previous good character. The man wept like a child when his daughter was brought to him prior to his departure for Toulon. The little thing, who had lost her mother in her infancy, lived with her grandfather at Chavanoz, a village in the passes of the Seille. When the poacher was no longer there, the old man and the young girl lived on alms. The inhabitants of Chavanoz, all huntsmen, came to the assistance of the poor creatures whom the convict had left behind. After a while, the old man died of grief. Miette, left alone, would have begged on the high roads, if the neighbours had not remembered that she had an aunt at Plassans. A charitable soul was kind enough to take her to this aunt, who, however, did not receive her very kindly.

Eulalie Chantegreil, married to the *méger* Rébufat, was a big, dark, stubborn shrew, who ruled the roast at home. She led her husband by the nose, people used to say in the Faubourg. The truth was, Rébufat, with his avarice and greed for work and gain, felt a sort of respect for this big shrew, who combined an uncommon vigour with a strict sobriety and rare economy.

Thanks to her, the household thrived. The *méger* grumbled one evening when, on returning home from work, he found Miette installed there. But his wife closed his mouth by saying in her gruff voice:

"Bah! the little thing is strong and well made, she'll do for a servant; we will keep her and save paying wages."

This calculation pleased Rébufat. He went so far as to feel the little thing's arms, which, he declared with satisfaction, were very stout for her age. Miette was then nine years old. From the very next day he made use of her. The work of the peasant-women in the South is much lighter than in the North. One scarcely ever sees them employed in digging the ground, carrying loads, or doing men's work. They bind the sheaves, gather the olives and the mulberry leaves; their most laborious work is that of pulling up weeds. Miette worked willingly. Open-air life was her delight, her health. As long as her aunt lived she had nothing but smiles. The good woman, in spite of her roughness, loved her as her own child; she protected her from the hard work which her husband sometimes tried to impose upon her, saying to the latter:

"Ah! you're a clever fellow! You don't understand, fool, that if you tire her too much to-day, she won't be able to do anything to-morrow!"

This argument was decisive. Rébufat bowed his head, and carried the load which he wanted to put on the young girl's shoulders.

The latter would have lived perfectly happy under the secret protection of her aunt Eulalie, but for the teasing of her cousin, then sixteen years old, who employed his idleness in secretly hating and persecuting her. Justin's happiest moments were when he had succeeded in getting her scolded by means of some gross falsehoods. Whenever he could tread on her feet, or push her roughly, pretending not to have seen her, he smiled, delighting in that sly pleasure of persons who rejoice at other people's misfortunes. Miette would then stare at him with her large black childlike eyes, gleaming with anger and silent scorn, which checked the sneers of the cowardly rascal. In reality, he was terribly afraid of his cousin.

The young girl was just attaining her eleventh year when her aunt Eulalie died suddenly. From that day everything changed at the house. Rébufat gradually came to treat her like a farm-labourer. He tortured her with all sorts of rough work, and made use of her as a beast of burden. She never complained, thinking that she had a debt of gratitude to repay. In the evening, worn out with fatigue, she mourned for her aunt, that terrible woman, whose latent kindliness she now felt.

It was not the hard work, however, that distressed her, for she delighted in her strength, and took a pride in her brawny arms and broad shoulders. What broke her heart was her uncle's distrustful surveillance, his continual reproaches, his attitude of an irritated master. She became at that time a stranger in the house. Not even a stranger, however, would have been so badly treated as she. Rébufat took the most unscrupulous advantage of this poor little relative, whom he pretended he kept with him out of charity. She repaid this harsh hospitality ten times over with her work, and yet never a day passed but he grudged her the bread she ate. Justin especially excelled in wounding her. Since his mother had been dead, seeing her without a protector, he exercised all his evil ingenuity in trying to make the house intolerable to her. The most ingenious torture which he invented was to speak to Miette about her father. The poor girl, living away from the world, under the protection of her aunt who had forbidden any one ever to pronounce the words "galleys" or "convict" before her, never understood the meaning of these words. It was Justin who explained it to her by relating, in his own manner, the story of the murder of the gendarme, and of Chantegreil's conviction. He never wearied of relating the details: the convicts had to drag a cannon ball at their feet, they worked fifteen hours a day, and all died under their punishment; the convicts' prison was a frightful place, the horrors of which he described minutely. Miette listened to him, stupefied, her eyes bathed in tears. Sometimes she was roused to a sudden violence, and Justin quickly retired before her clenched fists. He took a savage delight in thus instructing her as to the nature of prison life. When his father fell into a rage with the child for the least negligence, he chimed in, glad to be able to insult her without danger. And if she attempted to defend herself he would say:

"Bah! bad blood always shows itself. You'll finish up with the galleys like your father."

Miette sobbed, stung to the heart, powerless and overwhelmed with shame.

At this time, Miette was already growing to womanhood. Of precocious puberty, she endured her martyrdom with extraordinary energy. She rarely gave way, excepting when her natural pride succumbed to her cousin's outrages. She soon came to bear, without a tear, the incessant insults of this

coward, who watched her as he spoke, fearing lest she should fly at his face. Then she learnt to silence him by staring at him fixedly. She had several times felt inclined to run away from the Jas-Meiffren. She did not do so, however, as her courage could not brook the idea of confessing herself vanquished by the persecution which she endured. She certainly earned her bread, she did not steal the hospitality of the Rébufats; this conviction satisfied her pride. She remained there to continue the struggle, bearing up against it, living in one perpetual thought of resistance. Her plan was to do her work in silence, and revenge herself for all harsh treatment by a mute contempt. She knew that her uncle derived too much advantage from her to listen readily to the insinuations of Justin, who longed to get her turned out of doors. She considered it a sort of defiance, therefore, not to go away of her own accord.

Her continued voluntary silence was full of strange fancies. Passing her days in the place, isolated from all the world, she grew up rebellious, and formed ideas for herself which would have strangely shocked the good people of the Faubourg. Her father's fate especially pre-occupied her. All Justin's abuse recurred to her. She at length accepted and extenuated the accusation of murder, by saying to herself that her father had done well to kill the gendarme who tried to kill him. She learnt the truth of the story from the mouth of a labourer who had worked in the Jas-Meiffren. From that moment, whenever she went out, which was very seldom, she did not turn round if the ragamuffins of the Faubourg followed her, crying:

"Eh! Chantegreil!"

She would hasten her steps homeward, her lips pressed together, her eyes looking black and fierce. When she had shut the gate, she would cast one long glance, before going in, at the gang of urchins. She would have become vicious, have lapsed into a fierce pariah savageness, if her childishness had not sometimes gained the mastery over her. Her extreme youth led her into little girlish weaknesses which relieved her. She would then cry with shame for herself and her father. She would run and hide herself in a stable and weep to her heart's content, knowing that, if they saw her crying, they would torment her all the more. And when she had wept sufficiently, she would go and bathe her eyes in the kitchen, and lapse again into her old uncomplaining silence. It was not interest

alone, however, which prompted her to hide herself; she carried her pride in her precocious strength so far that she was unwilling to appear a child. In time she would have become very unhappy. Fortunately she was saved by discovering the latent tenderness of her loving nature.

The well which was in the yard of the house occupied by aunt Dide and Silvère was a party-well. The wall of the Jas-Meiffren cut it in two. Formerly, before the Fouques' property was united to the large neighbouring estate, the market-gardeners used this well daily. But since the purchase of the plot, as it was some distance from the outhouses, the residents in the Jas, who had large reservoirs at their disposal, did not draw a pail of water from it in a month. On the other side, however, one could hear the grating of the pulley every morning—it was Silvère drawing the water for aunt Dide.

One day the pulley broke. The young wheelwright made a good strong pulley of oak, which he put up in the evening after his day's work. He had to climb on the wall. When he had finished the job he sat astride the coping to rest, and surveyed with curiosity the large expanse of the Jas-Meiffren. At last a peasant-girl, who was weeding the ground a few feet from him, attracted his attention. It was in July, the air was broiling, although the sun had already sunk to the edge of the horizon. The peasant-girl had taken off her cloak. In a white bodice, with a coloured neckerchief tied over her shoulders, and the sleeves of her chemise turned up as far as her elbows, she was squatting down amid the folds of her blue-cotton frock, which was suspended by a pair of braces crossed behind her back. She crawled on her knees as she set to work to pull up the tares, which she threw into a basket. The young man could only see her bare arms, tanned by the sun, stretching out right and left to seize some overlooked weed. He followed complacently this rapid play of the girl's arms, finding a singular pleasure in seeing them so firm and quick. She had raised herself slightly when she perceived he was not working, but had lowered her head again before he had succeeded in distinguishing her features. This timid movement kept him in suspense. He was interrogating himself with regard to this girl, like an inquisitive lad, whistling mechanically and keeping time with the chisel which he held, when the latter slipped out of his hand. The tool fell into the Jas-Meiffren,

on the curb of the well, and bounded a few feet from the wall. Silvère looked at it, leaning forward, hesitating to get over. But the peasant-girl must have been examining the young man out of the corner of her eye, for she jumped up without saying anything, and went to pick up the chisel, which she handed to Silvère, who then perceived that she was a mere child. He was surprised and rather frightened. The young girl raised herself towards him in the red glare of the sunset. The wall at this spot was low, but nevertheless too high for her to reach. Silvère bent over on the coping, while the little peasant-girl stood on tiptoe. They did not speak, they looked at each other with an air of smiling confusion. The young man would have liked, indeed, to keep the girl in that position. She was turning towards him a charming head, handsome black eyes, and red lips, which strangely astonished and affected him. He had never seen a girl so near; he did not know that lips and eyes could be so pleasant to look at. Everything seemed to possess such a strange fascination for him—the coloured neckerchief, the white bodice, the blue cotton frock suspended by the braces which stretched with the motion of the shoulders. His glance glided along the arm which was handing him the tool; as far as the elbow the arm was of a golden brown, as though clothed with sun-burn; but higher up, in the shadow of the tucked-up sleeve of the chemise, Silvère perceived a bare roundness as white as milk. He was confused; he bent further over, and at last managed to grasp the chisel. The little peasant-girl was becoming embarrassed. Then they remained still, smiling at each other, the child beneath with uplifted face, the young man half reclining on the coping of the wall. They could not part from each other. They had not exchanged a single word. Silvère forgot even to say "Thank you."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Marie," replied the peasant-girl; "but everybody calls me Miette."

She raised herself slightly, and in her clear voice:

"And yours?" she asked in her turn.

"My name is Silvère," the young workman replied.

A silence ensued, during which they seemed to be listening complacently to the music of their names.

"I'm fifteen years old," resumed Silvère. "And you?"

"I!" said Miette; "oh, I shall be eleven on All Saints' Day."

The young workman made a gesture of surprise.

"Ah! really!" he said, laughing, "and I took you for a woman! You've got big arms."

She also began to laugh, as she lowered her eyes to her arms. Then they ceased speaking. They remained for another moment gazing and smiling at each other. As Silvère did not seem to have any more questions to ask her, Miette quietly went away and commenced to pluck the weeds again, without raising her head. He remained on the wall for a while. The sun was setting; a stream of oblique rays poured over the yellow land of the Jas-Meiffren, which seemed to be all ablaze—one would have said it was a fire running along the ground—and, in the midst of the flaming sheet, Silvère gazed at the little peasant-girl squatting on the earth, whose bare arms had resumed their rapid motion. The blue cotton frock was becoming white; rays of light streamed over her copper-coloured arms. At last he felt somewhat ashamed of remaining there. He got off the wall.

In the evening Silvère, preoccupied with his adventure, endeavoured to question aunt Dide. Perhaps she would know who this Miette was who had such black eyes and such red lips. But, since she had lived in the house in the blind-alley, she had never once given a look behind the wall of the little yard. It was, to her, an impassable rampart, which blocked up her past. She did not know—she did not want to know—what there was now on the other side of that wall, in that old property of the Fouques, where she had interred her love, her heart, and her flesh. As soon as Silvère began to question her she looked at him with childish terror. Was he, then, going to stir up the ashes of those extinct days, and make her cry, like her son Antoine?

"I don't know," she said in a hasty voice, "I don't go out any more; I never see anybody."

Silvère awaited the morrow with considerable impatience. As soon as he got to his master's workshop, he drew his fellow-workmen into conversation. He did not say anything about his interview with Miette; he spoke vaguely of a girl whom he had seen from a distance in the Jas-Meiffren.

"Oh! that's Chantegreil!" cried one of the workmen.

There was no necessity for Silvère to question them, for his mates told him the story of the poacher Chantegreil and his daughter Miette, with that unreasoning spite which is

entertained by the mob against social outcasts. The girl, especially, they treated in a foul manner; and the insulting gibe of "daughter of a galley-slave" constantly rose to their lips as an incontestable reason for condemning the poor innocent creature to eternal disgrace.

The wheelwright Vian, an honest, worthy man, at last silenced them.

"Hold your tongues, foul mouths!" he said, as he let fall the shaft of a cart he was examining. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for being so hard upon the child. I've seen her, the little thing looks a very good girl. Besides, I'm told she doesn't mind work, and already does as much as any woman thirty years old. There are some lazy fellows here who aren't a match for her. I hope, later on, she'll get a good husband who'll stop this evil talk."

Silvère, who had been chilled by the workmen's jests and coarse insults, felt the tears rising to his eyes at this last sentence of Vian. He did not, however, open his lips. He took up his hammer, which he had laid down near him, and began to strike, with all his might, the nave of a wheel which he was binding with iron.

In the evening, as soon as he had returned home from the workshop, he ran to the wall and climbed upon it. He found Miette engaged upon the labour of the day before. He called her. She came to him, with her smile of embarrassment, with the charming shyness of a child brought up in tears.

"You're Chantegreil, aren't you?" he asked her, abruptly.

She recoiled, she ceased smiling, and her eyes turned scowling black, gleaming with defiance. This fellow was going to insult her, then, like the others! She was turning her back upon him, without replying, when Silvère, perplexed by her sudden change of countenance, hastened to add:

"Stay, I beg you—I don't want to pain you—I've got so many things to tell you!"

She turned round, still distrustful. Silvère, who had resolved to pour out his unburdened heart, remained speechless, not knowing how to continue, fearing lest he should commit a fresh blunder. His whole soul expressed itself in one phrase:

"Would you like me to be your friend?" he said, in a voice of emotion.

And as Miette, in surprise, raised her once more moist and smiling eyes to him, he continued with animation:

"I know that people try to vex you. It's time to put a stop to it. I will be your protector now. Shall I?"

The child beamed with delight. This proffered friendship released her from all her evil dreams of taciturn hatred. She shook her head and answered:

"No, I don't want you to fight on my account. You'd have too much to do. Besides which, there are persons from whom you cannot protect me."

Silvère would have declared that he would defend her against the whole world, but she closed his mouth with a coaxing gesture, as she added:

"I am satisfied to have you as a friend."

They then conversed for a few minutes, lowering their voices as much as possible. Miette spoke to Silvère of her uncle and her cousin. For all the world she would not have liked them to catch him sitting thus astride the coping of the wall. Justin would be implacable with such a weapon against her. She spoke of her misgivings with the fright of a schoolgirl meeting one of her friends with whom her mother has forbidden her to associate. Silvère merely understood that he would not be able to see Miette at his pleasure. This made him very sad. He promised, however, not to climb on the wall any more. They were both endeavouring to find some expedient for seeing each other again, when Miette begged him to go away; she had just caught sight of Justin, who was walking about the grounds, in the direction of the well. Silvère quickly descended. When he was in the little yard he stood at the foot of the wall to listen, irritated by this flight. After a few minutes he ventured to climb up again and cast a glance into the Jas-Meiffren, but he saw Justin speaking with Miette, and quickly withdrew his head. On the following day he could not see his friend, not even in the distance; she must have finished her work. A week passed thus, and the two friends could not get an opportunity of exchanging a single word. Silvère was in despair; he thought of going straight to the Rébufats to ask for Miette.

The party-well was a large one, but not very deep. On either side of the wall the curb formed a large semi-circle. The water was only ten or twelve feet down at most. This slumbering water reflected the two apertures of the well, two half moons which the shadow of the wall divided with a black streak. On leaning over, one would have fancied, in the shady

light, that there were two sheets of glass of singular clearness and brilliancy. Under the morning sunshine, when the dripping of the ropes did not disturb the surface of the water, these mirrors, these reflections of the firmament, cut out white patches on the green water, reproducing, with strange exactness, the leaves of the ivy which had spread along the wall above the well.

One morning, at an early hour, Silvère, as he came to draw water for aunt Dide, bent over the well mechanically, just as he was seizing the rope. He shuddered, and stood motionless as he leaned over. He fancied he could distinguish, at the bottom of the well, the head of a young girl who was looking at him with a smile; but he had shaken the rope, the troubled water became a confused mirror, no longer reflecting a clear image. He waited until the water became settled, not venturing to stir, his heart beating rapidly. As the ripples of the water gradually widened and died away, he perceived the image reappearing. It oscillated for a long time with a rocking motion, which lent a vague, unsubstantial grace to its features. At last it remained stationary. It was the smiling countenance of Miette, her head and shoulders, with her coloured neckerchief, her white bodice, her blue braces. Silvère then perceived his own image in the other mirror. Then, knowing that they could see each other, they nodded their heads. For the first moment, they did not even think of speaking. Then they exchanged a greeting.

"Good morning, Silvère."

"Good morning, Miette."

The strange sound of their voices surprised them. They had assumed a singular hollow sweetness in this damp hole. They seemed to come from a distance, with that soft music of voices heard of an evening in the country. They understood that it would suffice to speak in a whisper, in order to hear each other. The well echoed the faintest breath. Leaning over its brink, they conversed while gazing at each other. Miette said how sad she had been for the last week. She was working at the other end of the Jas, and could only get out early in the morning. As she said this she made an angry gesture, which Silvère distinguished perfectly, replying to it by nodding his head with an air of vexation. They were exchanging confidences, as though they were face to face, with those gestures and facial expressions produced by speech. They cared but little for the wall which separated them, now

that they could see each other down there in those hidden depths.

"I knew," continued Miette, with a knowing look, "that you came here to draw water every morning at the same hour. I can hear the grating of the pulley from the house. So I made an excuse, I pretended that the water in this well boiled the vegetables better. I intended to come here every morning to draw water at the same time as you, so that I could say good morning to you without any one suspecting it."

She smiled innocently as though applauding her trick, and ended by saying:

"But I did not imagine we should see each other in the water."

It was, in fact, this unhoped-for pleasure which delighted them. They only spoke to see their lips move, this new frolic afforded such amusement to the childishness still left in them. They resolved, therefore, to use all the means in their power to meet in this place every morning. When Miette had said to Silvère that she must go away, she told him he could draw his pail of water. But Silvère did not dare to shake the rope; Miette was leaning over, he could see her smiling face, and it was too painful to him to efface this smile. He shook the pail gently, the water murmured, Miette's smile faded away. He stopped, seized with a strange fear; he fancied he had vexed her and made her cry. But the child called to him, "Go! go!" with a laugh which was transmitted to him more prolonged and more sonorous by the echo. She herself noisily let fall a pail. There was a perfect tempest. Everything disappeared under the black water. Then Silvère made up his mind to fill his two pitchers, as he heard the retreating steps of Miette on the other side of the wall.

From that day, the young people never missed their meeting. The slumbering water, these white mirrors wherein they contemplated their images, added an infinite charm to their interviews which, for a long time, gratified their childish, playful imagination. They had no desire to see each other face to face, it seemed much more amusing to them to use the well as a mirror, and confide their morning greetings to its echo. They soon came to look upon the well as an old friend. They loved to bend over the dull motionless sheet resembling molten silver. A greenish glimmer hovered below, in a mysterious imperfect light, which seemed to change the damp hole into some hiding-

place in the depths of the copsewood. They saw each other thus in a sort of greenish nest bedecked with moss, in the midst of the fresh water and foliage. The strangeness of this deep spring, of this hollow tower over which they bent, trembling with fascination, added an unavowed delightful fear to their merry laughter. They conceived the foolish idea of going down and sitting on the row of large stones which formed a kind of circular bench, a few inches above the water. They would dip their feet in the water, converse there for hours and no one would think of coming to look for them in that place. But when they asked each other what might be down there, their vague fears returned, they thought it quite sufficient to let their reflected images descend to the bottom, in those green glimmers which watered the stones with strange lights, amongst those mysterious noises which rose from the dark corners. The sounds, issuing from some invisible source, made them particularly uneasy; they often fancied that voices were replying to theirs; then they would remain silent, hearing a thousand tiny plaints which they could not understand: secret travail of the moisture, sighs of the air, drops of water gliding over the stones, falling with the deep sonorousness of a sob. They would nod affectionately to each other to reassure themselves. This attraction, which kept them leaning over the brink thus, had its point of secret terror, like all poignant charms. But the well still remained their old friend. It was such an excellent pretext for their meeting! Justin, who watched Miette's every movement, never suspected her eagerness to go and draw water every morning. At times, he saw her from the distance leaning over, loitering. "Ah! the lazy thing!" he muttered, "how fond she is of dawdling about!" How should he suspect that, on the other side of the wall, there was a wooer contemplating the young girl's smile in the water, and saying to her: "If that red-haired donkey Justin ill-treats you, tell me of it, he shall hear from me!"

This amusement lasted for more than a month. It was in July; the mornings were sultry; the sun shone brightly, and it was quite a pleasure to run to this humid spot. It was delightful to receive the cold breath of the well on their faces, to make love by the side of this spring, while the skies were kindling their fires. Miette used to arrive out of breath after crossing the stubble fields; as she ran along, her hair fell

down over her forehead and temples; with flushed face and hair in disorder, she would lean over, shaking with laughter, almost before she had had time to set her pitcher down. Silvère, who was almost always the first at the well, felt, as he saw her smiling face hastily appear in the water, that acute joy which he would have experienced had she thrown herself suddenly into his arms at the bend of a pathway. Around them the radiant morning hummed with mirth, a wave of warm light, resounding with the buzzing of insects, beat against the old wall, the posts, and the curb-stone. They, however, heeded not the shower of morning sunshine, nor heard the thousand sounds rising from the ground; they were at the bottom of their green hiding-place, under the earth, in that hole shrouded with mystery and vague terror; trembling with delight, as they lost themselves in the enjoyment of its fresh coolness and dim light.

On some mornings, Miette, unable to maintain a contemplative attitude for long, began to tease; she would shake the rope, making drops of water fall purposely, in order to ripple the clear mirrors and deform the images. Silvère would entreat her to remain still; he, more fervid, more concentrated, knew no keener pleasure than to gaze at his love's image reflected distinctly in every feature. She would not listen to him, however; she would joke and speak in a rough, old bogey's voice, to which the echo added a hoarse melodiousness.

"No, no," she would chidingly say, "I don't love you today; I am making faces at you; see how ugly I am."

She amused herself by contemplating the fantastic form which their enlarged faces assumed as they danced upon the water.

One morning she got angry in earnest. She did not find Silvère at the trysting-place, and waited for him for nearly a quarter of an hour, vainly making the pulley grate. She was just about to depart in a rage when he arrived. As soon as she perceived him, she let loose a veritable tempest in the well; she shook the pail in an irritated manner, making the blackish water whirl with dull splashes against the stones. In vain Silvère tried to explain that aunt Dide had detained him. To all his excuses she replied:

"You've vexed me; I don't want to see you."

The poor lad, in despair, questioned that sombre hole, that was now so full of lamentable sounds, where, on other days,

such a bright vision awaited him, amid the silence of the stagnant water. He had to go away without seeing Miette. On the morrow, arriving before the time, he gazed sadly into the well, hearing nothing, thinking the obstinate girl would not come, when the child, who was already on the other side slyly watching his arrival, bent over suddenly with a burst of laughter. All was forgotten.

And so the story of their love went on in a series of little dramas and comedies, of which the well was the scene. These happy depths, with their gleaming mirrors and musical echoes, quickly ripened their love. They endowed them with such a full life of their own, and so permeated them with the association of their youthful love, that, long after they had ceased to come and lean over the brink, Silvère, as he drew water every morning, fancied he could see Miette's smiling face in the dim light of the well's depths, that still quivered and thrilled with the influences of their former happiness there.

That month of playful love rescued Miette from her mute despair. She felt the revival of her affections, of her happy childish carelessness, which had been crushed down by the hateful loneliness in which she lived. The certainty that she was loved by somebody, that she was no longer alone in the world, enabled her to endure the persecutions of Justin and the boys of the Faubourg. There was now in her heart a song of joy, whose glad notes drowned their hootings. She thought of her father with tender pity, and did not now so frequently give herself up to dreams of bitter vengeance. Her dawning love cooled her fevered broodings like the fresh breezes of the early morn. At the same time she acquired the natural sharpness of a young girl in love. She felt that she must maintain her old silently rebellious attitude if she wanted to escape exciting Justin's suspicions. But, in spite of her efforts, her eyes retained a sweet unruffled expression when the lad bullied her; she was no longer able to put on her old black look of indignant anger. One morning he heard her humming to herself at breakfast-time.

"You seem very gay, Chantegreil!" he said to her suspiciously, glancing keenly at her from his lowering eyes. "I bet you've been up to some of your tricks."

She shrugged her shoulders, though she trembled inwardly she did all she could to assume her old appearance of injured innocence. But though he suspected that somehow or

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other his victim was managing to be secretly happy, it was a long time before he was able to discover how she contrived to elude his prying observation.

Silvère, on his side, enjoyed the most profound happiness. His daily meetings with Miette made his idle hours pass pleasantly away. His solitary life, his long silent tête-à-tête with aunt Dide, were employed in recalling one by one his remembrances of the morning, in revelling in their most trifling details. From that time, he had such food for thought as reconciled him still more to the lonely and cheerless existence with his grandmother which he had adopted. He was naturally fond of hidden spots, of solitary retirement, where he could give himself up undisturbed to his thoughts. At this period, he had already begun to read with avidity all the old odd volumes which he had picked up at the brokers' shops in the Faubourg, and which were gradually opening out to him strange and wider views of religion and morality. His reading—ill-digested and lacking all solid foundation, gave him glimpses of the world's vanities and pleasures, especially as women were concerned in them, which would have seriously disquieted and troubled him if his heart had not been cooled and calmed by his love. When Miette came, he received her at first as a companion, then as the joy and ambition of his life. In the evening, when he had retired to the little den where he slept, and hung his lamp at the head of his strap-bedstead, he would be reminded of Miette in every page of the dusty old volume which he had taken at random from a shelf above his head and was reading devoutly. He never came across a young girl, a good and beautiful creature, in his reading, but he would immediately identify her with his sweetheart. He would intrude himself into the narrative as well. If he were reading a love story, it was he who married Miette at the end, or died with her. If, on the contrary, he were reading some political pamphlet, some grave dissertation on social economy, works which he preferred to romances, with that singular love of difficult subjects which characterises persons of imperfect scholarship, he still found some means of associating her with such tedious themes, which he very often could not even understand; and he tried to make himself believe that he was learning how to be good and kind to her when they were married. He associated her thus with all his visionary dreamings. Protected by the purity of his own affection against the obscenity

of certain tales of the eighteenth century which fell into his hands, he found especial pleasure in shutting himself up with her in those humanitarian Utopias of which some great minds of our own time, infatuated by visions of a universal happiness, have dreamed. Miette became in his mind quite essential to the abolition of pauperism and the definitive triumph of the revolution. During whole nights of feverish reading, when his racked brain was unable to tear itself from the volume, which he would lay down and take up at least twenty times, nights full of a voluptuous weariness in which, as though in some secret orgie, he revelled till the morning, his body cramped by the narrow walls of his tiny room, his eyes troubled by the flickering yellow light, he would abandon himself joyfully to his restless ardent imagination, constructing new social schemes of the most absurdly ingenuous nature, where woman, always in the person of Miette, was worshipped by nations on their knees. He was predisposed to Utopian ideas by certain hereditary influences; his grandmother's nervous disorders became in him a chronic enthusiasm, striving after everything that was grandiose and impossible. His solitary childhood, his imperfect education, had developed his natural tendencies in a singular manner. But he had not yet reached the age when the fixed idea plants itself in a man's mind. In the morning, after he had dipped his head in a bucket of water, he remembered but vaguely his thoughts and visions of the night, and nothing remained of his dreams but a child-like innocence that was full of trustful confidence and yearning tenderness. He felt like a child again. He ran to the well, desiring only to find his sweetheart's smile, and taste the delights of the radiant morning. And during the day, when thoughts of the future sometimes made him silent and dreamy, he would often, prompted by some sudden impulse, spring up and kiss aunt Dide on both cheeks, while the old woman would gaze anxiously at him, troubled to see his eyes so bright, and gleaming with a joy whose story she thought she could divine.

Miette and Silvère, however, began to find it a little monotonous never seeing anything more of each other than their reflections. They had worn out the novelty of it, and now began to dream of more exciting pleasures than the well could afford them. In this longing for reality which possessed them, they wished to see each other face to face, to run in the open fields, to return out of breath, their arms around each

other's waists, clinging closely together, to feel surer of each other's love. Silvère spoke one morning of climbing over the wall, and walking in the Jas with Miette. But the child implored him not to commit this folly, which would place her at Justin's mercy. He promised to seek some other means.

The wall which enclosed the well formed, a little further on, an abrupt angle which made a sort of recess, where the lovers would be free from observation, if they were to take shelter there. The question was how to reach this recess. Silvère could no longer entertain the idea of climbing over, as Miette had appeared so afraid. He secretly thought of another plan. The little door which Macquart and Adélaïde had made one night, had remained forgotten in this remote corner of the vast neighbouring property; they had not even thought of stopping it up. Blackened with the damp and greened with moss, the lock and hinges eaten away with rust, it looked like a part of the old wall. Doubtless the key was lost; the grass growing on the lower boards, against which slight mounds had formed, proved amply that no one had passed by there for many a long year. It was that lost key which Silvère reckoned on finding. He knew with what devotion his aunt Dide allowed the relics of the past to rot undisturbed where they lay. He searched the house for a week without any result. He went stealthily every night to see if he had at last put his hand on the right key during the day. He tried more than thirty in this way, which had doubtless come from the old property of the Fouques, and which he picked up all over the place, against the walls, on the floors, at the bottom of drawers. He was becoming disheartened, when he found the precious key at last. It was simply tied by a string to the latch-key of the street door, which always remained in the lock. It had hung there for nearly forty years. Every day aunt Dide must have touched it with her hand, without ever making up her mind to throw it away, although it could now only carry her back sorrowfully to her departed pleasures. When Silvère had convinced himself that it opened the little door, he awaited the next day, dreaming of the joyful surprise which he was preparing for Miette. He had not told her what he had been seeking out.

The next day, as soon as he heard the girl put her pitcher down, he opened the door gently, sweeping away, with a push, the tall weeds which covered the threshold. Stretching

out his head, he perceived Miette leaning over the brink, looking into the well, quite absorbed in expectation. Then, in a couple of strides, he reached the recess formed by the wall, and from there, he called "Miette! Miette!" in a soft voice, which made her tremble. She raised her head, thinking he was on the coping of the wall. Then, when she saw him in the Jas, a few steps from her, she gave a faint cry of surprise, and ran up to him. They took each other's hands, and looked at one another, delighted to be so near, thinking themselves handsomer like this, in the warm sunshine. It was the middle of August, the Feast of the Assumption. The bells were pealing in the distance, through the still, quiet air. On the great festivals, there is a feeling of joy and happiness in the very breezes themselves.

"Good morning, Silvère!"

"Good morning, Miette!"

The voice in which they exchanged this morning greeting sounded quite strange to them. They knew its sound only when muffled by the reverberations of the well. It seemed to them as clear as the song of a lark. Ah! how delightful it was in this warm corner, in this holiday air! They still held each other's hands, Silvère standing against the wall, Miette leaning slightly forward towards him. They were about to tell each other all those soft stories which they had not dared to confide to the dull echo of the well, when Silvère started at a slight noise, and, turning pale, dropped Miette's hands. He saw aunt Dide before him, standing motionless on the threshold of the door.

The grandmother had come by chance to the well. Perceiving, in the old black wall the white gap of the doorway which Silvère had left wide open, she felt a violent shock. That open gap seemed to her a gulf of light cruelly revealing her past. She saw herself once more, in the midst of the morning brightness, running up to the door and treading the threshold with all the transports of her nervous love.

And Macquart was there awaiting her. She was hanging on his neck, pressed against his bosom, whilst the rising sun, entering the yard with her through the door which she had been in too great a hurry to trouble to shut, bathed them in its slanting light. It was a sudden phantasm, which roused her cruelly from the slumber of her old age, like a supreme chastisement, awakening within her a crowd of bitter memories. Had

the well, had the entire wall, disappeared under the earth, it could not have more completely overset her. And, to her amazement was added a sullen feeling of resentment and anger against the sacrilegious hand that had violated this entrance, and had left that white opening space gaping like a tomb. She stepped forward, attracted by a kind of fascination. She halted when she arrived beneath the frame-work of the door.

Then she gazed out before her, with a feeling of pained surprise. She had been told, it is true, that the old property of the Fouques was joined to the Jas-Meiffren; but she would never have thought the associations of her youth could have vanished so completely. It seemed as though some violent gust of wind had carried off everything that her memory had cherished. The old dwelling, the large kitchen-garden, with its green vegetable beds, had disappeared. Not a stone, not a tree of former times remained. Instead of the scene in which she had grown up, and which she had seen but yesterday in her mind's eye, there lay a strip of barren soil, a large stubble-field, bare as a desert. Henceforward, when, on closing her eyes, she strove to recall the objects of the past, this stubble-field would always appear to her like a shroud of yellowish drugget spread over the earth where her youth lay buried. In the presence of all this sordid unloveliness, she felt her heart dying a second death. Now all was completely, finally ended. She was robbed even of her dreams of the past. Then she began to regret she had yielded to the fascination of that white opening, of that door gaping upon the days which were now for ever lost.

She was about to withdraw and close the accursed door, without even seeking to discover the hand which had violated it, when she perceived Miette and Silvère; but the sight of the two young lovers, who, with hanging heads, were nervously expecting every moment that her glance would fall upon them, struck her with a sudden paroxysm of pain, and glued her to the spot. She understood now. To the end, she was destined to see herself there, clasped in Macquart's arms in the bright sunshine. A second time the door lent itself as an accomplice. Where love had once passed, there was it passing again. It was a beginning without end, uniting present joys with future tears. Aunt Dide saw nothing but weeping, and she felt, as it were, a rapid presentiment which revealed the two children with their bleeding hearts stung to the quick. Overwhelmed by the recollection of a life's sorrow, which this spot had just

awakened within her, she grieved for her dear Silvère. She alone was guilty; if she had not originally pierced the wall Silvère would not now be in that spot, at the feet of a girl, intoxicating himself with a bliss which stings death into jealousy.

After a brief silence, she went up to the young man, and, without uttering a word, took him by the hand. She might, perhaps, have left them there, to chatter under the wall, had she not felt that she herself was, to some extent, an accomplice in this fatal love. As she walked along with Silvère, she turned round, hearing Miette's gentle foot-falls, who, quickly taking up her pitcher, was hastening across the stubble-field. She was running wildly, glad to escape so easily. Aunt Dide smiled involuntarily as she watched her bound over the ground like a runaway goat.

"She is very young," she murmured, "there is plenty of time."

No doubt she meant that Miette had yet time to suffer and weep. Then, turning her eyes upon Silvère, whose ecstatic gaze had followed the child as she ran off in the bright sunshine, she simply added:

"Take care, my boy; this sort of thing kills one sometimes."

She made no further reference to the incident which had awakened into life all the sorrows that lay slumbering in the depths of her being. Silence had become a veritable religion to her. When Silvère came in, she double-locked the door, and threw the key down the well. She felt sure that by doing this she could keep the door from compelling her to be an accomplice in the matter any more. She returned to examine it for a moment, glad to see it re-assume its gloomy and unchangeable appearance. The tomb was closed once more; the white gap was boarded up for ever with that damp-stained moss-greened timber, over which the snails had wept their silvery tears.

In the evening, aunt Dide had one of those nervous attacks which every now and then set her a-trembling. During these attacks, she would often talk aloud and ramble incoherently, as though she were suffering from nightmare. That evening, Silvère, who was holding her down on her bed, stirred with deep pity for her poor racked frame, heard her sigh out the words, "custom-house officer," "fire," "murder." Then she struggled, she begged for mercy, while she dreamed of

vengeance. As always happened when the attack was drawing to a close, she was overwhelmed with a violent panic, and shivered with fright to such an extent that her teeth chattered in her head as she partially raised herself up and cast a look of haggard surprise at the corners of the room, and then fell back upon the pillow, heaving deep sighs. She was, doubtless, the victim of some hallucination. Then she drew Silvère to her bosom, and seemed to begin to recognise him, though she confused him every moment with some other person.

"There they are!" she stammered. "Do you see? They are going to take you, they will kill you as well—I don't want them to—Send them away, tell them I won't; tell them they are hurting me, staring at me like that——"

And she turned to the wall, to avoid seeing the people of whom she was rambling. After an interval of silence:

"You are near me, my child, aren't you?" she continued. "You must not leave me. I thought I was going to die just now. We were wrong to make an opening in the wall. Ever since then I have been in pain. I was certain that that door would bring us further misfortune—Oh! the innocent darlings, what sorrow! They will kill them as well, they will be shot down like dogs."

She relapsed into an unconscious state; she was no longer even aware of Silvère's presence. Suddenly she sat up, and looked at the foot of her bed, with a fearful expression of terror.

"Why didn't you send them away?" she cried, hiding her white head on the young man's breast. "They are still there. The one with the gun is making signs that he is going to fire."

Shortly afterwards she fell into the heavy slumber that terminated these attacks. On the next day, she seemed to have forgotten everything. She never again spoke to Silvère of the morning on which she had found him with a sweetheart behind the wall.

The young people did not see each other for two days. When Miette ventured to return to the well, they resolved not to recommence the pranks of two days ago. But the meeting which had been so rudely interrupted had filled them with a keen desire to meet again by themselves, in some happy solitude. Weary of the joys afforded by the well, and unwilling to vex aunt Dide by seeing Miette again on the other side of the wall, Silvère begged the girl to meet him somewhere

else. She required but little pressing, and received the proposal with the willing smile of a frolicsome lass who has no thought of evil. What made her smile was the idea that she was going to outwit that spy of a Justin. When the lovers were agreed, they discussed for a long time the choice of a trysting-place. Silvère proposed the most impossible hiding places. He planned regular journeys, and even proposed to meet the young girl at midnight in the granaries of the Jas-Meiffren. Miette, who was much more practical, shrugged her shoulders, declaring she would try to think of some place. The next day, she only stopped a minute at the well, just time enough to smile at Silvère and tell him to be at the end of the Aire Saint-Mittre at about ten o'clock in the evening. You may be sure the young man was punctual. All day, Miette's choice had puzzled him. His curiosity increased when he found himself in the narrow lane formed by the piles of planks at the end of the plot of ground. "She will come this way," he said to himself, looking along the road to Nice. Then he heard a loud shaking of boughs behind the wall, and saw a laughing head, with hair disordered, appear above the coping, merrily crying to him:

"It's me!"

And it was, in fact, Miette, who had climbed like a lad up one of the mulberry trees, which to-day still border the boundary of the Jas-Meiffren. In a couple of leaps she reached the tombstone, half buried in the corner of the wall at the end of the lane. Silvère watched her descend with delight and surprise, without even thinking of helping her. He took both her hands in his, and said:

"How nimble you are; you climb better than I do."

It was thus that they met for the first time in that hidden corner where they were destined to pass such happy hours. After that evening, they saw each other there nearly every night. The well was only useful now to enable them to warn each other of unforeseen obstacles to their meetings, of a change of time, of all the trifling little news, important in their eyes, and allowing of no delay. It was sufficient for the one who had a communication to make to the other to put the pulley in motion, the creaking noise of which could be heard a long way off. But although, on some days, they called each other two or three times to speak of some trifles of an immense importance, it was only in the evening in that lonely little

passage that they tasted full happiness. Miette was exceptionally punctual. Fortunately she slept over the kitchen, in a room where the winter provisions had been kept before her arrival, and which was reached by a little private staircase. She could thus go out at all hours, without being seen by either Rébufat or Justin. She intended, moreover, if the latter ever saw her return, to tell him some tale, staring at him with that stern look which always reduced him to silence.

Ah! how happy those warm evenings were! It was then in the first days of September, a month of bright sunshine in Provence. The lovers could hardly join each other before nine o'clock. Miette arrived from over the wall. She soon acquired such dexterity in surmounting this obstacle that she was almost always on the old tombstone before Silvère had time to stretch out his arms to her. She would laugh at her own strength and agility, as she stood for a moment quite breathless, and her hair in disorder, while she tapped her skirt to make it fall down. Her sweetheart laughingly called her a "naughty tom-boy." He really much admired the girl's pluck. He watched her jump over the wall with the calmness of an elder brother assisting at the exercises of a younger one. There was yet much that was child-like in their growing love. On several occasions they planned a bird's-nesting expedition on the banks of the Viorne.

"You'll see how I can climb," said Miette proudly. "When I was at Chavanoz, I used to go right up to the top of old André's walnut trees. Have you ever taken a magpie's nest? It's very difficult!"

And then a discussion arose about the way to climb a poplar. Miette stated her opinions, with all a boy's confidence.

Then Silvère, clasping her round the knees, lifted her to the ground, and they walked side by side, their arms circling each other's waists. As they wrangled about the manner in which the feet and hands ought to be placed at the parting of the branches, they clasped each other more closely, and began to feel a warmth they had never felt before, a warmth which made them glow with a strange joy. They had never experienced such a feeling of joy at the well. They were but children, with their frolicsome games and conversations, yet they were enjoying the pleasures of love without even knowing how to speak of love, by simply touching each other with their fingers' ends. Impelled by an instinctive desire, they sought

the warmth of each other's hands, quite ignorant whither their feelings and their hearts were drifting. In those moments of happy innocence, they were not even conscious of the strange thrills which the slightest touch of each awoke in the other. Smiling, often wondering at the delightful sensations they felt as soon as they touched each other, they abandoned themselves unconsciously to the sweetness of their new feelings, talking all the while, like a couple of schoolboys, of the magpies' nests which are so difficult to reach.

They passed along the silent path, between the piles of planks and the wall of the Jas-Meiffren. They never went beyond the end of this narrow blind alley, retracing their steps each time. They were quite at home there. Miette, happy in the knowledge of their safe concealment, would often stop and congratulate herself on her discovery.

"Am I not lucky?" she would say, with glee. "We might walk a long way without finding such a good hiding place."

The thick grass muffled the noise of their footsteps. They were buried in a shadowy darkness, and shut in between two gloomy walls, through which only a strip of dark blue, spangled with stars, was visible above their heads. And as they stepped along over the billowing ground, as they paced this alley which resembled a stream of darkness flowing under the black star-sprent sky, they felt the thrill of an emotion they could not have defined, and lowered their voices, although there was nobody there to hear them. Letting themselves drift along, as it were, through the darkness on its silent waves, buoyant both in body and mind, they related to each other on those evenings, with lover's raptures, the thousand trifles of the day.

At other times, on bright nights, when the wall and the piles of planks cast clearly defined shadows in the moonlight, Miette and Silvère would romp about with all the carelessness of children. The alley stretched along, gaily lighted with white rays, retaining no suggestion of secrecy, and the two comrades laughed and chased each other like boys at play, venturing even to climb on to the piles of timber. Silvère was sometimes obliged to frighten Miette, telling her that Justin might be watching her behind the wall. Then, quite out of breath, they would walk side by side, and make plans to go one day for a scamper in the Sainte-Claire meadows, to see which of the two would catch the other the quicker.

Their growing love thus accommodated itself to the dark as well as to the clear nights. Their hearts were ever on the alert, and a little shade was sufficient to sweeten the pleasure of their embrace, and brighten the charm of their laughter. This beloved retreat, so gay in the moonshine, so strangely affected by the gloom, seemed the inexhaustible source of peals of laughter, and thrilling silences. They would remain there until mid-night, till the town had dropped off to sleep and the lights in the windows of the Faubourg had gone out one by one.

They were never disturbed in their solitude. At that late hour, children were no longer playing hide-and-seek behind the piles of planks. Occasionally, when the young couple heard sounds in the distance, workmen singing as they passed along the road, and voices coming from the neighbouring sidewalks, they cast stealthy glances out on the Aire Saint-Mittre. The timber-yard stretched out, empty of all, save here and there some falling shadows. On sultry evenings, they sometimes caught glimpses of loving couples there, and of old men sitting on the logs by the roadside. When the evenings grew colder, all they ever saw in the melancholy and deserted place was some gipsy fire, with large black shadows passing before it. Through the still night air words and faint sounds were wafted along to them, the good-night of a townsman shutting his door, the closing of a window-shutter, the deep striking of the clocks, all those expiring sounds of a provincial town retiring to rest. And when Plassans was slumbering, they still heard the quarrels of the gipsies, the crackling of their fires, in the midst of which suddenly rose the guttural voices of young girls singing in a strange tongue, full of rugged accents.

But the lovers did not concern themselves much with what went on in the Aire Saint-Mittre; they hastened back to their own little privacy, to walk again in their favourite spot, so hidden and retired. Little did they care for others, for the whole town! The few planks which separated them from the wicked world seemed to them, after a while, an insurmountable rampart. They were so secluded, so free in this nook, situated though it was in the very midst of the Faubourg, and only fifty steps from the Porte de Rome, that they sometimes fancied themselves far away in the remotest parts of some hollow of the Viorne, in the open country. Of all the noises which reached them, only one made them feel uneasy, that of the clocks striking slowly in the darkness. At

times, when the hour sounded, they pretended not to hear, and sometimes they stopped short as if to protest. However, they could not go on for ever taking just another ten minutes, and the time came when they were at last obliged to say good-night. They would have liked to continue chatting and walking arm-in-arm till the morning, in order that they might still experience that strange thrill whose unavowed sweetness filled them with continual surprise. Miette at last determined to remount the wall. But all was not at an end yet, and they lingered over their leave-taking for a good quarter of an hour. When the girl had mounted on to the top of the wall, she remained there with her elbows on the coping, and her feet supported by the branches of the mulberry tree, which served her as a ladder. Silvère, standing up on the tombstone, was able to take her hands again, and recommence their whispered conversation. They repeated "till to-morrow!" more than ten times, and always found something more to say. Silvère began to scold.

"Come, you must get down, it is past midnight."

But Miette, with a girl's waywardness, wished him to descend first; she wanted to see him go away. And as the young man held out, she ended by saying abruptly, in order to frighten him:

"Look! I am going to jump down."

And she jumped from the mulberry tree, to the great consternation of Silvère. He heard the dull thud of her fall, then, with a burst of laughter, she ran off, without choosing to reply to his last adieu. He remained several moments watching her vague shadow disappear in the darkness, then, slowly descending, he regained the Impasse Saint-Mittre.

They came there every day for two years. At the time of their first meetings, they enjoyed some beautiful warm nights. The lovers might almost have fancied themselves in the month of May, the month of the seething sap, when an agreeable odour of earth and fresh leaves pervades the warm air. This vernal season, this late spring was like a heaven's blessing upon them, and it allowed them to run freely about the alley and tighten the bonds of their friendship.

Then came rain, and snow, and frost. These ill-humours of the winter did not keep them away. Miette put on her large brown pelisse, and they both defied the bad weather. When the night was dry and clear, and gentle gusts of wind

raised beneath their footsteps a dust of hoar-frost, striking against their faces like blows from tiny drumsticks, they refrained from sitting down, walking quickly to and fro, wrapped round with the pelisse, their cheeks blue with cold, and their eyes watering; and, shaking with mirth and merry laughter, they walked on sharply in the freezing atmosphere. One snowy evening they amused themselves by making an enormous snowball, which they rolled into a corner. It remained there quite a month, which caused them fresh astonishment every time they met there. Nor did the rain frighten them. They came to see each other in the heaviest showers, though they got wet to the skin in doing so. Silvère would run out, saying to himself that Miette would not be mad enough to come; and when Miette arrived, in her turn, he could not find it in his heart to scold her. In reality he was expecting her. At last he sought some shelter against the inclement weather, knowing quite well that they would come out all the same, in spite of their mutual promise not to put foot out of doors while it rained. To find a shelter, he had only to disturb one of the piles of planks; he pulled out several pieces of wood from it, and arranged them so that they would move easily, in order to displace and replace them at pleasure.

From that time the lovers had at their disposal a sort of low and narrow sentry-box, a square hole, which was only big enough to hold them when squeezed closely together, sitting on the end of a joist they had left at the bottom of their little cell. When it rained the first-comer used to seek shelter there; and when they found themselves together again, they would listen with infinite pleasure to the rain beating on the piles of planks like the dull rolling of a drum. Before them, around them, in the inky blackness of the night, there was a sound of dripping water which they could not see, the continuous noise of which resembled the roar of a mob. They were nevertheless quite alone, as though they had been at the end of the world or at the bottom of the sea. They never felt so happy, so isolated, as in the midst of this deluge, in this pile of planks which the torrents from heaven threatened to carry away at every moment. Their bent knees were almost on a level with the opening, and they thrust themselves back as far as possible, their cheeks and hands bathed by the fine rain. Big drops, falling from the planks, splashed at regular intervals at their feet. The

brown pelisse kept them warm, the space was so limited that Miette was compelled to sit almost on Silvère's knees. They would chatter; then they would keep silent, overcome with languor, lulled by the warmth of their embrace and the monotonous beating of the shower. They would remain there for hours, with that same enjoyment of the rain which prompts little children to stroll along solemnly in stormy weather with open umbrellas in their hands. After a while they came to prefer the rainy evenings. Their parting, however, became more painful on those occasions. Miette was obliged to climb the wall in the driving rain, and cross the puddles of the Jas-Meiffren in perfect darkness. As soon as she left his arms, Silvère lost her amidst the gloom and noise of the water. In vain he listened, deafened, blinded. The anxiety caused by this cruel separation was an additional charm; until the morrow, each would be uneasy lest anything had befallen the other. In such weather, when it was too bad even to turn a dog out of doors, perchance one of them had slipped, or lost the way; mutual fears which tyrannically possessed them, and rendered their next interview more loving.

At last the fine days returned, April brought calm nights, the grass in the green alley grew wildly. In the stream of life flowing from heaven and rising from the earth, in the midst of the intoxication of the budding spring-time, the sweethearts sometimes regretted their winter solitude, the rainy evenings and the freezing nights, during which they were so isolated, so far from all human sounds. Now the day did not draw to a close quickly enough, they bitterly reproached the lagging twilights, and when the night had become dark enough for Miette to climb on to the wall without danger of being seen, and when they were at last gliding along their dear path, they no longer found there the solitude congenial to the wild nature of their childish love. People began to flock to the Aire Saint-Mittre, the urchins of the Faubourg remained there, romping about the beams, and shouting, till eleven o'clock at night. It even happened occasionally that one of them would go and hide behind the piles of timber, and assail Miette and Silvère with the impudent jeers of a little ten-year old rascal. The fear of being surprised, the general awakening, the sounds of life which increased around them as the season grew warmer rendered their meetings anxious and disturbed.

Then they began to feel stifled in the narrow lane. Never

had it seemed to throb with so warm an emotion; never had the ground, that soil in which the last bones of the former cemetery were mouldering, exhaled such an oppressive atmosphere. They were still too childish to appreciate the voluptuous charm of this waste spot, delirious with the fever of spring. The grass was growing up to their knees, they moved to and fro with difficulty, and when they crushed the young shoots, certain plants emitted a pungent odour which made them dizzy. Then, seized with a strange drowsiness and staggering with giddiness, their feet as though bound by the grass, they would lean against the wall, with half-closed eyes, unable to move a step. They felt as if all the soft languor of the skies were breathing itself into them.

With the petulance of beginners, impatient and irritated at these qualms of sudden faintness, they began to accuse their retreat of being too confined, and decided to take their loving rambles farther away in the open fields. Every evening there were fresh frolics. Miette came with her pelisse; they both wrapped themselves in the large garment, and then they darted along by the walls and reached the high-road and the open country, the broad fields where the wind rolled mightily, like the waves at high tide. There they no longer felt stifled; they recovered all their old youthfulness again, and felt no more the giddiness and intoxication which were caused by the rank weeds of the Aire Saint-Mittre.

They rambled about this part of the neighbourhood for two summers. Every rocky ledge, every bed of turf knew them well; and there was not a cluster of trees, a hedge, or a thicket, which did not become their friend. They realised their dreams: they chased each other wildly over the Sainte-Claire meadows, and Miette being a good runner, Silvère had to put his best foot forward to catch her. Sometimes they went to rob magpies' nests. Headstrong Miette, wishing to show how well she used to climb trees at Chavanoz, would tie up her skirts with a piece of string, and ascend the highest poplars; Silvère stood trembling beneath, with outstretched arms, to catch her if she slipped. These frolics so completely put into abeyance all feeling of passion that one evening they almost fought like a couple of lads coming out of school. In the open country they had no occasion to go lurking in secret hiding places, and as they rambled along they were continually shouting with laughter, pushing and teasing each other. They

covered miles and miles; sometimes they went as far as the chain of the Garrigues, following the narrowest paths and often cutting across the fields. The country belonged to them; they lived there as in a conquered territory, enjoying all that the earth and the sky could give them. Miette, with a woman's lack of scruple, did not hesitate to pluck a bunch of grapes, or a cluster of green almonds, from the vines and almond-trees which brushed her with their boughs as she passed; this vexed Silvère's upright ideas, although he did not venture to find fault with the girl, whose occasional sulkings distressed him. "Oh! the bad girl!" thought he, childishly exaggerating the matter, "she would make a thief of me." Then Miette would put his share of the stolen fruit into his mouth. The artifices he employed, holding her round the waist, avoiding the fruit trees, making her run after him when near the grape vines, to keep her out of the way of temptation, quickly exhausted his imagination. Then there was nothing to do but to make her sit down. It was then that they again began to feel the old stifling sensations. The gloom of the valley of the Viorne had an especially disturbing influence upon them. When weariness brought them to the banks of the torrent, all their childish gaiety seemed to disappear; grey shadows floated under the willows, like the scented crape of a woman's dress. The children felt this crape, perfumed and warm from the voluptuous shoulders of the night, kiss their temples and envelop them with an irresistible lassitude. In the distance, the crickets chirped in the meadows of Sainte-Claire, and at their feet the Viorne sounded like lovers' whispers and the soft cooings of humid lips. The stars rained down a gentle light from the slumbering heavens. And beneath the throbbing sky, surrounded by the murmurs of the waters and the darkness, the children, lying side by side on the grass, with beating breasts and eyes that wandered vaguely through the gloom, sought each other's hands and pressed them hastily.

Silvère, who vaguely understood the danger of these ecstasies, sometimes jumped up suddenly, proposing to cross over to one of the islets left by the low water in the middle of the river. Both ventured forth, with bare feet. Miette made light of the pebbles, refusing Silvère's help, and it happened once that she sat down right in the middle of the stream; there were not more than a few inches of water, however, and she got off with nothing worse than a wet petticoat. Then, having

reached the island, they threw themselves flat on the long neck of sand, their eyes on a level with the surface of the water, in which they saw afar, in the clear night, the quivering of silvery scales. Miette would declare that they were in a boat, and that the island was certainly floating; she was sure she felt it carrying her along. The dizziness caused by the rippling of the water which dazzled their eyes amused them, and made them linger for a while on the bank, singing in an undertone, like boatmen as they strike the water with their oars. At other times, when the edge of the island assumed the shape of a low bank, they sat there on a bed of verdure, and let their bare feet dangle in the stream. And for hours they chatted there, kicking their heels and splashing the water, and swinging their legs, taking pleasure in unchaining a tempest in the peaceful pool which cooled their fever with its freshness.

These footbaths suggested an idea to Miette's mind, which nearly put an end to their innocent affection. Nothing would satisfy her but a complete bath. A little above the bridge over the Viorne there was a very convenient hole, she said, barely three or four feet deep and quite safe; it was so warm, it would be so nice to have the water up to their necks; besides which, she had been dying to learn to swim for such a long time, and Silvère would be able to teach her. Silvère raised objections; it was not prudent at night time; they might be seen, very likely it would do them harm; but he did not tell her the real reason of his objection, which was that he felt very much disturbed at the idea of this new recreation, and asked himself how they would manage to undress, and how he was going to support Miette in the water with his naked arms. To Miette herself these difficulties did not appear to have suggested themselves.

One evening she brought a bathing costume which she had made out of an old dress. Silvère was obliged to go back to aunt Dide's to look for his bathing drawers. Their proceedings were characterised by great simplicity. Miette did not even go on one side; she undressed as though it were quite a matter of course, beneath the shade of a willow so thick that her childish body only appeared with indistinct whiteness for a few seconds. Silvère, with his brown skin, looked, in the gloom of the evening, like the dark stem of a young oak, whilst the young girl's legs and arms, naked and round, resembled the milky-white trunks of the birch trees on the bank. Then both of them, clothed with the dark shadows which the lofty foliage

cast around them, entered gaily into the water, forgetting their scruples, their unavowed shame, and secret modesty. They remained there quite an hour, splashing and throwing water into each other's faces; Miette now getting cross, now breaking out into laughter, while Silvère gave her her first lesson, dipping her head under from time to time, to accustom her to the water. As long as he held her by the waistband of her costume with one hand, placing the other under her, she threw her arms and legs about violently, thinking she was swimming; but, as soon as he let her go, she cried and struggled, striking the water with her outstretched hands, clutching at anything she could get hold of, the young man's waist or one of his wrists. She leant against him for an instant, resting herself, out of breath and dripping with water, while her wet costume delineated the graces of her virgin figure. Then she cried:

"Once more; but you do it on purpose, you don't hold me."

No thought of shame came to them as Silvère held her in his arms, or bent over her to support her, or at these desperate clutchings of Miette, as she hung on to the young man's neck. The coldness of the bath put them in a state of crystal purity. They were only two nude innocents laughing in the warm night, in the midst of the drooping foliage; Silvère after the first few baths, secretly reproached himself for having dreamt of evil. Miette undressed so quickly, was so cool in his arms, so full of laughter!

At the end of a fortnight, the girl was able to swim. With her limbs moving freely, rocked by the stream, and playing with it, she yielded herself up to the soft motions of the river, the silence of the heavens, and the dreams of the melancholy banks.

As they both swam noiselessly along, Miette seemed to see the foliage of both the banks thicken and hang over them, draping them round with an enormous curtain. When the moon shone, its rays glided between the trunks of the trees, and soft-toned apparitions seemed to her to be flitting along the river-side in white robes. She felt no nervousness, but only an indefinable emotion as she followed the play of the shadows. As she skimmed along with a slower movement, the calm water, which the moon converted into a bright mirror, rippled at her approach like a silver-broidered cloth; and the widening eddies lost themselves in the shadows of the banks, under the

hanging willow branches, from whence issued weird, plashing sounds. At every stroke, she seemed to perceive recesses full of sound, dark cavities which she hastened to pass by, clusters and rows of trees, whose sombre masses were continually changing form, stretching forward and apparently following her from the top of the bank. When she threw herself on her back, the depths of the heavens affected her still more. From the fields, from the distant horizon, which she could no longer see, she heard wafted towards her a solemn lingering strain, composed of all the sighs of the night.

She was not of a dreamy nature, she enjoyed, with her whole soul and body the sky, the river, the lights and shadows. The river, especially, with its flowing waters, filled her with ceaseless satisfaction. When she swam against the current, she experienced a great pleasure in feeling the stream flow rapidly against her bosom and limbs. It was a continuous gentle tickling, which did not force her into hysterical laughter. She plunged in deeper, with the water up to her lips, so that the stream passed over her shoulders, and enveloped her, from chin to feet, with its flying kisses. She floated, languid and quiescent, on the surface, whilst the ripples glided softly between her costume and her skin, bellying out the material of which the former was made; then she rolled herself over in the still pools like a cat on a carpet; she swam from luminous patches of water in which the moonbeams were bathing into dark water shaded by the foliage, shivering as though she had quitted a sunny plain and felt the cold from the boughs falling on her neck.

She had begun now to go some way off to undress, and to screen herself from observation. In the water, she remained quite silent and would not allow Silvère to touch her; she would glide softly along by his side, swimming with the light rustling of a bird traversing a copse in its flight; and sometimes she would circle round him, a prey to vague fears which she did not comprehend. He himself darted quickly away if he happened to brush against one of her limbs. The river was now only a source of enervating intoxication to them, a voluptuous languor, which disquieted them strangely. When they got out of their bath, they experienced a feeling of drowsiness and dizziness. They felt quite tired and weary. Miette took a good hour to dress. She only put on her chemise

and her skirt at first; then she threw herself down on the grass, complaining of fatigue, calling to Silvère who stood a few steps off, his head swimming and his limbs full of a strange and exciting lassitude. As they returned home, there was more ardour in their embrace, and their bodies felt more lithe and sinuous beneath their clothes after the refreshing influences of their bath; and every now and then they slackened their pace and sighed heavily. Miette's enormous coil of hair that was still damp, her neck, her shoulders all had a fresh pure odour about them which completely intoxicated the young man. Fortunately, the girl declared one evening that she would not bathe any more, as the cold water made the blood run to her head. And it was in all truth and innocence that she said this.

They recommenced their long conversations. The dangers into which innocent love had just been leading them had left no other trace in Silvère's mind than a great admiration for Miette's physical strength. She had learned to swim in a fortnight, and often, when they raced, he had seen her stem the current with a stroke as rapid as his own. He, who delighted in strength and bodily exercises, felt his heart moved in seeing her so strong, so brave, so physically active. He felt a singular admiration for her stout arms. One evening, after one of those early baths that left them so playful, they caught hold of each other round the waist on a neck of sand, and wrestled for several minutes, during which Silvère was unable to throw Miette; at last the young man lost his equilibrium, and the girl remained standing. Her sweetheart treated her like a boy, and it was these long rambles, these mad races across the meadows, these nests stolen from the tops of the trees, these struggles and violent games, which so long protected them and their love from all impurity. Beyond his admiration for his romping sweetheart, there was in Silvère's affection the tenderness which his kind heart felt for the unfortunate. He who could not see a forsaken creature, a poor man, or a child walking barefooted in the dusty roads, without feeling a throb of pity, loved Miette because nobody else loved her, because she led an outcast's hard existence. When he saw her smile, he was deeply moved by the joy he caused her. Moreover, the child was an outcast like himself, and they agreed with each other in their hatred of the gossips of the Faubourg. The dreams in which he indulged in the daytime,

as he nailed the tires round the cartwheels with his heavy hammer in his master's shop, were full of generous enthusiasm. He looked upon himself as Miette's redeemer. All his reading got into his head; he wished to marry his sweetheart one day, in order to raise her in the eyes of the world. He imposed upon himself the holy mission of regaining and redeeming the convict's daughter. And his head was so crammed with certain arguments, that he did not simply say these things to himself, he lost himself in a perfect social mysticism; he imagined a rehabilitating apotheosis for her, in which he saw Miette sitting on a throne, at the end of the Cours Sauvaire, and the whole town prostrating itself before her, asking her pardon and singing her praises. Happily he forgot all about these fine thoughts as soon as Miette jumped over the wall, and said to him on the high road:

"Let us have a race! I bet you won't catch me."

But if the young man dreamt when wide awake of the glorification of his sweetheart, he felt such a necessity for justice that he often made her cry by speaking to her about her father. In spite of the softening effect which Silvère's friendship had had upon her, she would still from time to time give way to angry outbreaks of temper; she had fits of moroseness, when the stubbornness and rebellion of her excitable nature still raged rampantly within her, as she glared with scowling eyes and tight-drawn lips. Then she would maintain that her father had done quite right in killing the gendarme, that the earth belongs to everybody, and that one has the right to fire a gun when one likes and where one likes. And Silvère, in a grave voice, explained the law to her as he understood it, with strange commentaries which would have startled the whole magistracy of Plassans. These discussions took place most often in some remote corner of the Sainte-Claire meadows. The grassy carpet of a dusky green hue stretched its immense extent further then they could see, undotted even by a single tree, and the sky seemed colossal, filling the bare roundness of the horizon with its stars. The young couple were being rocked, as it were, on a sea of verdure. Miette argued the point obstinately; she asked Silvère if her father should have allowed himself to be killed by the gendarme, and Silvère, after a momentary silence, said that, in such a case, it was better to be the victim than the murderer, and that it was a great misfortune for any one to kill a fellow

man, even in legitimate defence. The law was something holy to him, the judges were right to send Chantegreil to the galleys. The young girl grew angry, and almost struck her sweetheart, crying out that he was as heartless as the rest. And as he continued to firmly defend his ideas of justice, she finished by bursting into sobs, and stammering out that doubtless he was ashamed of her, since he was always reminding her of her father's crime. These discussions ended in tears, in a mutual emotion. But although the child cried and acknowledged that she was perhaps wrong, she still retained her wildness and her hot temper. Once she related, with hearty laughter, how a gendarme had broken his leg in falling off his horse in front of her. Moreover, Miette only lived for Silvère. When he asked her about her uncle and cousin, she replied "she did not know," and if he pressed her, fearing that they made her unhappy at the Jas-Meiffren, she said that she worked hard, that nothing had changed. She believed, too, that Justin had at last found out what made her sing in the morning, and filled her eyes with delight, But she added:

"What does it matter? If he ever comes disturbing us, we'll receive him, won't we, in such a way that he won't be in a hurry to meddle with our affairs again."

Nevertheless, the open country, and the long rambles in the fresh air, wearied them sometimes. They always came back to the Aire Saint-Mittre, to the narrow alley, whence they had been driven by the noisy summer evenings and the pungent scent of the trodden grass, and the warm and oppressive breezes. But on certain nights the alley was cooler, and the winds freshened it so that they could remain there without feeling faint. Then they enjoyed a sensation of delightful repose. Sitting on the tombstone, their ears deaf to the noise of the children and gipsies, they felt quite happy and undisturbed. Silvère had picked up, on various occasions, fragments of bones, pieces of skulls, and they loved to speak of the ancient burial ground. It seemed to them, in their lively fancies, that their love had shot up like some vigorous plant in this corner of the soil which dead men's bones had fertilised.

It had grown like those wild weeds, it had blossomed like those corn-poppies which sway on their stalks at the slightest breeze, like naked bleeding hearts. And they came to the conclusion that the warm breaths passing over their faces, the whisperings heard in the gloom, the long throbs which

thrilled the alley, were the dead folk sighing their departed passions in their faces, and telling them the stories of their wedding nights, as they turned restlessly in their graves, seized with a fierce longing to live and love again. These fragments of bone, they felt convinced, were full of affection for them; the shattered skulls grew warm again with their own youthful fire, the smallest particles breathed round them with a passionate whisper, an anxious solicitude, a throbbing watchfulness. And when they departed, the old burial ground seemed to groan. Those weeds, which entangled their feet on sultry nights and made them stumble, were fingers, tapered by the tomb, which sprang up from the earth to detain them and throw them into each other's arms. That pungent and penetrating odour exhaled by the broken stems was the fertilising perfume, the powerful quintessence of life slowly elaborated in the depths of the graves, which intoxicated the lovers with desire as they wandered in the solitude of the paths. The dead, the old departed dead, longed for the union of Miette and Silvère.

They were never afraid, The sympathy which they felt hovering around them thrilled them and made them love the invisible beings whose soft touch they often imagined they could feel, like a gentle flapping of wings. Sometimes they were saddened by a sweet melancholy, and could not understand what the dead desired of them. They continued to enjoy their innocent love, in the midst of this flood of sap, in this abandoned cemetery, where the rich earth teemed with life, and imperiously demanded their union. The buzzing voices which rang in their ears, the sudden flushes of heat which sent the blood flying to their faces, left them in doubt of their meaning. There were days when the clamour of the dead became so loud, that Miette, restless, languishing, half reclining on the tombstone, looked at Silvère with her swimming eyes, as if to say, "What do they want? Why do they breathe such a fever into my veins?" And Silvère, weary and enervated, dared not reply, dared not repeat the burning words which he thought he heard in the air, the mad advice which the tall weeds were giving him, the supplications of the entire alley, of the half-closed tombs burning to serve as a nuptial couch for the love of these two young people.

They often questioned each other about the remains which they discovered. Miette, after a woman's fashion, was addicted

to lugubrious subjects. For each new discovery she had suppositions without end. If the bone was small, she spoke of a beautiful young girl a prey to consumption, or carried off by fever on the eve of her marriage; if the bone was large, she thought of some big old man, a soldier or a judge, some one who had inspired terror. The tombstone, especially, engaged their attention for a long time. One fine moonlight night Miette had distinguished, on one of the faces, some half-obliterated characters. She made Silvère scrape away the moss with his knife. Then they read the mutilated inscription: "*Here lieth . . . Marie . . . died . . .*" And Miette, finding her name on the stone, was quite terror-stricken. Silvère called her a "great baby," but she could not restrain her tears. She had received, she said, a stab in the heart, she would soon die, and this stone was meant for her. The young man himself felt alarmed. However, he succeeded in shaming the child out of these thoughts. What! she so courageous, to dream about such trifles! They ended by laughing. Then they avoided speaking of it again. But in melancholy moments, when the cloudy sky saddened the alley, Miette could not help thinking of that dead one, that unknown Marie, whose tomb had so long facilitated their meetings.

The poor girl's bones were perhaps still lying there. One evening she had a strange whim, and asked Silvère to turn the stone up to see what was under. He refused as though it were a sacrilege, and this refusal strengthened Miette's fancies with regard to the dear phantom which bore her name. She positively insisted that the girl had died, young as she was, at thirteen years of age, and in the midst of her love. She felt a deep sympathy for the stone, that stone which she climbed so nimbly, which they had sat upon so often, frozen by death and warmed again with their love. She added:

"You will see, this tombstone will bring us misfortune. If you were to die, I should come and die here, and I should like to have this stone rolled on to my body."

Silvère, choking with emotion, scolded her for thinking of such mournful things.

Thus, for nearly two years, they courted in the narrow alley and in the open country. Equally through the frozen rains of December and the burning solicitations of July, their loving intimacy preserved itself free of all touch of what was shameful or ignoble, exhaling all the sweet charm of some old Greek

love-tale, and retaining all its pristine purity, while their bodies still throbbed and thrilled with an instinctive desire, whose meaning they were too innocent to understand. In vain did the long-departed dead whisper in their ears. They carried nothing away with them from the old cemetery but a chastened melancholy, a vague presentiment of a short life. A voice seemed to whisper to them that they would depart while their love was still virginal, and ere the marriage day should give them wholly to each other. It was there, on the tombstone and among the bones that lay hidden beneath the rank grass, that they had inhaled that longing for death, that eager desire to sleep together in the earth, that set them stammering and sighing by the side of the Orchères road, on that December night, while the two bells rang out to each other their dialogue of mournful warnings.

Miette was sleeping calmly, with her head resting on Silvère's chest while he mused upon their past meetings, upon those joyful years of unbroken happiness. At daybreak the girl awoke. The valley spread out clear before them under the bright sky. The sun was still behind the hills, while a stream of crystal light, limpid and cold as spring-water, flowed from the pale horizon. In the distance, the Viorne, like a white satin ribbon, disappeared among the red and yellow lands. It was a boundless vista, with grey seas of olive-trees and vineyards that looked like enormous pieces of striped cloth. The whole country was magnified by the clearness of the atmosphere and the stillness of the cold. The wind, which blew in short gusts, had chilled the children's faces. They got up quickly, cheered and gladdened at the sight of the clear morning. Their melancholy forebodings had vanished with the darkness, and they gazed with delight at the immense expanse of the plain, while they listened to the tolling of the two bells that now seemed to be joyfully ringing in the dawn of a holiday.

"Ah! I've had a good sleep!" Miette cried. "I dreamt you were kissing me. Tell me now, did you kiss me?"

"It's very possible," Silvère replied laughing. "I was not very warm. It is bitterly cold."

"I only feel cold in the feet," Miette rejoined.

"Well! let us have a run," said Silvère. "We have still two good leagues to go. You will get warm."

They descended the hill and ran until they reached the high road. When they were below they raised their heads as if to

bid adieu to that rock on which they had wept while their kisses burned their lips. But they never again spoke of that ardent embrace which had thrilled their love with a new, though scarcely intelligible desire, to which they had not dared to give expression. Under the pretext of being able to walk more quickly they did not even take each other's arm. Miette walked along merrily, feeling a slight confusion when they looked at each other, without knowing why. The day was breaking round them. The young man, who had sometimes been sent to Orchères by his master, knew all the shortest cuts. They walked for more than two leagues, along winding valleys and by the side of interminable hedges and walls. Miette accused Silvère of having taken her the wrong way. Often, for a quarter of an hour together, they lost all sight of the country, and could see nothing but long rows of almond-trees above the walls and hedges, whose delicate branches stood out in relief against the pale sky.

Suddenly they emerged just in front of Orchères. Loud cries of joy and shouts from the mob, sounding clear in the limpid air, reached their ears. The insurrectionary band was just entering the town. Miette and Silvère went in with the stragglers. Never had they seen such enthusiasm. To judge from the streets, one would have thought it was a procession day, when the windows are decked with the finest drapery to honour the passage of the Canopy. They welcomed the insurgents as though they were deliverers. The men embraced them, while the women brought them food. Old men were to be seen weeping at the doors. A purely Southern mirth this, pouring itself out in a clamorous fashion, singing, dancing and gesticulating. As Miette passed along she was carried away by an immense crowd executing a *farandole* * on the Grand' Place. Silvère followed her. His thoughts of death, of discouragement were far away at this moment. He wanted to fight, to sell his life dearly at least. The thoughts of the struggle intoxicated him afresh. He dreamed of victory, of a happy existence with Miette, in the peacefulness of the universal Republic.

This fraternal reception by the inhabitants of Orchères, completed the joy of the insurgents. They spent the day

* The Farandole is a kind of dance in vogue among the peasants of Provence.—*Translator.*

radiant with confidence and boundless hope. The prisoners, Commander Sicardot, Garçonnet, Peirotte and the others, who had been shut up in one of the rooms at the mayor's, the windows of which looked out upon the Grand' Place, watched these *farandoles* and enthusiastic outbursts with surprise and dismay.

"The villains!" muttered the commander, leaning upon a window-bar, as though he were bending over the velvet-covered balustrade of a box at the theatre; "and to think that there isn't a battery or two to make a clean sweep of all this rabble!"

Then he perceived Miette, and addressing himself to Monsieur Garçonnet, he added:

"Do you see, sir, that big girl in red over there? It's a disgrace. They've brought their mistresses with them. If this continues much longer we shall see some fine goings-on."

Monsieur Garçonnet shook his head, saying something about "passions unloosed," and "the most evil days of our history." Monsieur Peirotte, as white as a sheet, remained silent; he only opened his lips once, to say to Sicardot, who continued to rail bitterly:

"Not so loud, sir! you will get us all massacred."

As a matter of fact, the insurgents treated these gentlemen with the greatest kindness. They even had an excellent dinner provided for them in the evening. Such attentions, however, were terrifying to quakers like the receiver of taxes; the insurgents would not treat them so well unless they wished to make them fat and tender for the day when they would devour them.

At dusk, Silvère came face to face with his cousin Pascal, the doctor. The surgeon had followed the band on foot, chatting with the workmen, who held him in the greatest respect. At first he had striven to dissuade them from the struggle; then he seemed to be convinced by their arguments, and said to them with his kindly, indifferent smile:

"Perhaps you are right, my friends; fight if you like, I am here to patch up your arms and legs."

In the morning he started off quietly to gather pebbles and plants along the high road. He regretted that he had not brought his geologist's hammer and botanical wallet with him. His pockets were now so full of stones that they were almost bursting, while bundles of long herbs peered forth from his surgeon's case which he carried under his arm.

"Hullo! you here, my boy?" he cried as he noticed

Silvère. "I thought I was the only member of the family here."

He pronounced the last words with some irony, with a sly hit at the intrigues of his father and his uncle Antoine. Silvère was very glad to meet his cousin; the doctor was the only one of the Rougons who shook hands with him in the street, and he showed a sincere friendship for him. Seeing him, therefore, still covered with dust from the roads, the young man thought he was gained over to the republican cause and was very delighted. He talked to him of the people's rights, of their holy cause, of their assured triumph, with a youthful magniloquence. Pascal smiled as he listened to him, he watched his gestures, the ardent play of his features with curiosity, as if he were studying a subject, or analysing an enthusiasm, to ascertain what was at the bottom of this ingenuous fever.

"How you run on! how you run on! Ah! you are a true grandson of your grandmother!"

And, in a whisper, he added, with the tone of a chemist taking notes:

"Hysteria or enthusiasm, disgraceful madness or sublime madness. Always those terrible nerves!"

Then he added aloud, completing his reflections: "The family is now complete. It will have a hero."

Silvère did not hear him. He was still talking of his dear Republic. Miette had stopped a short distance off; she was still wrapped in her large red pelisse; she had kept close to Silvère, and they had traversed the town arm-in-arm. This tall red girl at last puzzled Pascal; he interrupted his cousin suddenly and asked him:

"Who is this child with you?"

"She is my wife," Silvère gravely replied.

The doctor opened his eyes wide. He did not understand. He was very shy with women, and raised his hat to Miette as he went away.

The night was an anxious one. A foreboding of misfortune swept over the insurgents. The enthusiasm and confidence of the previous evening seemed to die away in the darkness. In the morning there were gloomy faces, sad looks, and a long discouraging silence. Terrifying rumours were circulating; the bad news, which the leaders had managed to conceal since the previous evening, had now spread abroad without a word from anybody, blown by that invisible mouth which, with a

single breath, throws a mob into a panic. Some reports declared that Paris was subdued, that the country had submitted; and it was added that a large band of troops had left Marseilles under the command of Colonel Masson and Monsieur de Blériot, the prefect of the department, and were advancing by forced marches to disperse the insurrectionary bands. This news came like a thunderbolt, and speedily filled them with rage and despair. These men, burning with patriotic fever on the previous evening, now shuddered beneath the icy cold of a submissive and shamefully prostrate France. They alone, then, had had the courage of their duty! They were now to be left to perish amidst the general panic and death-like silence of the country; they had become mere rebels, who would be hunted down like wild beasts; they, who had dreamed of a great war, of a people in revolt, of the glorious conquest of right! So, miserably baffled and betrayed, this handful of men began to bewail their dead faith and their vanished dreams of justice. There were some who, while taunting France with her cowardice, threw away their arms, went and sat down on the roadside, and declared that there they would await the bullets of the troops and show how republicans could die.

Although these men had now nothing but death or exile before them, there were very few desertions. A wonderful solidarity kept them together. Their indignation turned chiefly against the leaders, who were really incapable. Irreparable mistakes had been committed; and now the insurgents, without order or discipline, barely protected by a few sentinels, and under the command of irresolute men, found themselves at the mercy of the first soldiers that might arrive.

They spent two more days at Orchères, Tuesday and Wednesday, losing time and aggravating the situation. The general, the man with the sabre, whom Silvère had pointed out to Miette on the Plassans road, vacillated and hesitated under the terrible responsibility that weighed upon him. On Thursday he came to the conclusion that the position of Orchères was a decidedly dangerous one. Towards one o'clock he gave the order to march, and led his little army to the heights of Sainte-Roure. That was, indeed, an impregnable position for any one who knew how to defend it. The houses of Sainte-Roure are built in tiers along the side of a

hill; behind the town all approach is shut off by enormous boulders of rock, so that this kind of citadel can only be reached by the Nores plain, which stretches at the foot of the plateau. An esplanade, converted into a public promenade planted with magnificent elms, overlooks the plain. It was on this esplanade that the insurgents encamped. The hostages were imprisoned in the Hôtel de la Mule-Blanche, situated in the middle of the promenade. The night passed away heavy and black. The insurgents spoke of treachery. As soon as it was morning, the man with the sabre, who had neglected to take the simplest precautions, reviewed the troops. The contingents were drawn up in line with their backs turned to the plain. They presented a wonderful mixture of costume, brown jackets, dark greatcoats, and blue blouses encircled with red sashes; their arms were an equally odd collection: there were newly sharpened scythes, large navvies' spades and burnished barrels of sportsmen's guns glittering in the bright sunshine. Just as the improvised general was riding past the little army, a sentinel, who had been forgotten in an olive-plantation, ran up gesticulating and shouting:

"The soldiers! the soldiers!"

This caused an indescribable commotion. At first, they thought it was a false alarm. The insurgents, forgetting all discipline, rushed forward, running to the end of the esplanade in order to see the soldiers. The ranks were broken, and as the dark lines of the troops appeared, marching in perfect order with the long glitter of bayonets, behind the greyish curtain of olive trees, there was a hasty and confused retreat which spread a trembling panic throughout the length and breadth of the plateau.

In the meantime, the contingents of La Palud and Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx had formed in line again in the middle of the promenade, where they presented a bold, determined front. A wood-cutter, who was a head taller than any of his companions, shouted, as he waved his red neckerchief: "To arms, Chavanoz, Graille, Poujols, Saint-Eutrope! to arms, Les Tulettes! to arms, Plassans!"

Crowds streamed across the esplanade. The man with the sabre, surrounded by the men from Faverolles, marched out with several of the country contingents, Vernoux, Corbière, Marsanne, Pruinas, to turn the enemy and attack him on the flank. Other contingents from Valqueyras, Nazère, Castel-le-Vieux,

Roches-Noires, and Murdaran, dashed to the left, scattering themselves in skirmishing parties over the Nores plain.

While the promenade was becoming empty, the men of the towns and villages which the wood-cutter had called to his aid, mustered together, forming a dark mass under the elms; they were grouped in an irregular manner, contrary to all the rules of strategy, rolled there like a rock, as it were, to bar the way or die. Plassans stood in the middle of this heroic battalion. Amid the grey tint of the blouses and jackets, and the bluish glitter of the arms, the pelisse of Miette, who was holding the banner with both hands, looked like a large red spot, like a fresh bleeding wound.

Suddenly all was silent. The pale face of Monsieur Peirotte appeared at one of the windows of the Hôtel de la Mule-Blanche. He began to speak, gesticulating with his hands.

"Go in, close the shutters," the insurgents shouted furiously; "you'll get yourself killed."

The shutters were quickly closed, and nothing was now heard save the regular step of the soldiers who were drawing near.

A minute, that seemed an age, went by. The troops had disappeared, hidden by an undulation of the ground; but the insurgents soon perceived towards the plain the bayonets shooting up, one after another, level with the ground, like a field of steel-cared corn under the rising sun. At that moment Silvère, burning with feverish agitation, fancied he saw passing before him the image of the gendarme whose blood had stained his hands; he knew, from the accounts of his companions, that Rengade was not dead, that he had only lost an eye; and he clearly distinguished him, with his empty socket bleeding horribly. The keen recollection of this man, to whom he had given no thought since his departure from Plassans, was terrible to him. He was afraid his fear might get the better of him, and he tightened his grasp of his carbine, while his eyes were clouded by a mist, as he felt a longing to discharge his gun and fire at the image of this one-eyed man. The bayonets were still slowly ascending.

When the heads of the soldiers appeared at the edge of the esplanade, Silvère instinctively turned to Miette. She was there, bolt upright with her rosy cheeks, wrapped in the folds of the red banner; she was standing on tip-toe in order to see the

troops; a nervous expectation made her nostrils quiver, and revealed her white teeth gleaming through her red lips. Silvère smiled at her. He had scarcely turned his head when a fusillade burst out. The soldiers, who were still only visible from their shoulders upwards, had just fired their first volley. It seemed as though an immense gust of wind was passing over his head, while a shower of leaves, lopped off by the balls, fell from the elms. A sharp sound, like the snapping of a dead branch, made him look to his right. He saw the big woodcutter on the ground, he who was a head taller than the others, with a little black hole in the middle of his forehead. Thereupon he discharged his rifle straight before him, without taking aim, reloaded it and fired again like a madman or a wild beast, thinking of nothing, in haste only to kill. He could not even distinguish the soldiers now; clouds of smoke were floating under the elms, resembling strips of grey muslin. The leaves continued to rain upon the insurgents; the troops were firing too high. Every now and then, through the fierce crackling of the fusillade, the young man heard a sigh or a dull rattle, and a rush was made among the band as if to make room for some poor wretch clutching hold of his neighbours as he fell. The firing lasted for ten minutes.

Between two volleys some one exclaimed in a voice of terror: "Every man for himself!" This roused shouts and murmurs of rage, and cries of "The cowards! Oh! the cowards!" Sinister rumours were circulating: the general had fled; the cavalry were sabring the skirmishers in the Nores plain. The firing still continued, the guns going off irregularly, piercing the clouds of smoke with sudden bursts of flame. A gruff voice was protesting that they must die there. But a wild voice, a voice of terror, shouted louder: "Every man for himself! Every man for himself!" Some men took to flight, throwing down their weapons, leaping over the dead. Others closed the ranks. There were only about ten insurgents left. Two more took to flight, and of the remaining eight three were killed at one discharge.

The two children remained there mechanically, understanding nothing of what was happening. As the battalion diminished in numbers, Miette raised the banner still higher in the air; she held it in front of her with clenched fists like a huge taper. It was completely riddled by bullets. When Silvère had no more cartridges in his pocket, he ceased firing, and

gazed at his carbine with a stupefied air. It was then that a shadow passed over his face, as though a colossal bird, flapping its wings, had grazed his forehead. Raising his eyes he saw the banner fall from Miette's grasp. The child, her hands clasped to her breast, her head thrown back, and wearing an expression of excruciating suffering, reeled and staggered. She did not utter a single cry, and sank back on the red banner.

"Get up; come quickly," Silvère said, in despair, as he held out his hand to her.

But she lay on the ground without uttering a word, her eyes wide open. He understood, and knelt down beside her.

"You are wounded, tell me? Where are you wounded?"

She did not utter a word; she was choking as she gazed at him out of her large eyes, agitated and trembling. Then he pulled away her hands.

"It's there, isn't it? it's there."

And he tore open her bodice, and laid bare her bosom. He searched, but saw nothing. His eyes were brimming with tears. At last he perceived a small rose-coloured hole under the left breast; a single drop of blood spotted the wound.

"It's nothing," he whispered; "I'll go and find Pascal, he'll put you all right again. If you could just get up. Can't you move?"

The soldiers were not firing now; they had dashed to the left in pursuit of the contingents led away by the man with the sabre. In the esplanade there was no one but Silvère kneeling beside Miette's body. With the stubbornness of despair, he had taken her in his arms. He wanted to set her on her feet, but it caused the girl such pain that he laid her down again, and implored her:

"Speak to me, pray. Why don't you say something to me?"

She could not, she shook her hand with a gentle, slow movement, to say that it was not her fault. Her pressed lips were already contracting beneath the finger of death. Her hair was falling loosely about her, and her head was wrapped in the blood-stained folds of the banner; her eyes alone still seemed to live, those black eyes of hers, which glittered in her pale white face. Silvère sobbed. The glance of those big sorrowful eyes filled him with pain. He read in them one long last regret for life. Miette was telling him that she was going away alone, and before their marriage day; that she was leaving him ere she

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had become his wife. She was telling him, too, that it was he who had willed it should be so, that he should have loved her as other lovers love their sweethearts. In the hour of her agony, in that stern conflict between death and her vigorous nature, she was bewailing her virginity. Silvère, as he bent over her, understood the bitter sobbing of her hot-blooded flesh. He heard the far-away solicitations of the mouldering bones, he recalled those caresses in the darkness of the night which had burned their lips by the roadside: she had hung round his neck, and had yearned for his love, but he had not understood, and now he was letting her go from him in all her maidenhood, sick at heart that she had never sipped at the cup of life's pleasures. Bitterly grieved at the thought that she should carry away with her no recollection of him, save as a playfellow, he kissed her virgin bosom, that pure, chaste breast which he had just stripped bare. His tears fell wet upon her lips. He pressed his sobbing mouth to the girl's flesh. These kisses of love lighted Miette's eyes with a last gleam of joy. They loved each other, and death was the conclusion of their love-story.

But he could not believe she was dying. He said:

"No, you will see it will turn out to be only a trifle. Don't speak if it hurts you. Wait, I will raise your head and then will warm you; your hands are quite frozen."

The fusillade recommenced on the left, in the olive plantations. The dull sound of the galloping cavalry rose from the plain. At times there were loud cries, as of men being slaughtered. Thick clouds of smoke hung about the elms in the esplanade. But Silvère no longer heard or saw anything. Pascal, who came running down in the direction of the plain, beheld him stretched out on the ground, and hastened towards him, thinking he was wounded. As soon as the young man saw him, he clutched hold of him and pointed to Miette.

"Look," he said, "she's wounded, there, under the breast. Ah! how good of you to come; you will save her."

Just then, the dying girl was shaken with a slight convulsion. A mournful shadow passed over her face, and a faint sigh escaped from her contracted lips as they parted. Her eyes, still wide open, gazed fixedly at the young man.

Pascal, who had stooped down, said in a hushed voice as he rose:

"She is dead."

Dead! Silvère reeled at the sound of the word. He had resumed his kneeling posture, but now fell back, as though thrown down by Miette's last faint sigh.

"Dead! dead!" he repeated, "it is not true, she is looking at me. See how she is looking at me."

He seized the doctor by his coat, entreating him not to go away, assuring him that he was mistaken, that she was not dead, that he could save her if he would. Pascal resisted gently, saying in his kindly voice:

"I can do nothing for her, others are waiting for me. Let go, my child; she is quite dead."

He released his hold and fell back. Dead! dead! still that word, which rang like a knell in his dazed brain. When he was alone he crept up close to the corpse. Miette still seemed to be looking at him. He threw himself upon her, laid his head upon her bare breast, and bathed her flesh with his tears. He was beside himself with grief. He pressed his lips wildly to her bosom, and breathed out all his passion, all his soul upon her in one long kiss, as though he hoped it might bring her to life again. But the girl was turning cold under his caresses. He felt her body lying lifeless and nerveless beneath his touch. He was seized with terror, and, with panic-stricken face and hands hanging listlessly by his side, he crouched down, and remained there in a state of stupor, as he repeated constantly:

"She is dead, yet she is looking at me; she does not close her eyes, she sees me still."

He seemed to derive some consolation from this thought, and remained there perfectly still. He exchanged one long look with Miette, and seemed still to read in those eyes, deepened by death, the girl's last regrets as she bewailed her virginity.

In the meantime, the cavalry were still sabring the fugitives over the Nores plain; the cries of the wounded and the galloping of the horses were dying away in the distance, like music wafted from afar through the clear air. Silvère was no longer conscious of the fighting, and he did not see his cousin as he mounted up the slope again and crossed the promenade. As he passed along, Pascal picked up Macquart's carbine which Silvère had thrown down; he knew it, as he had seen it hanging over aunt Dide's chimney-piece and thought he might as well save it from the hands of the victors. He had scarcely entered the Hôtel de la Mule-Blanche inn, where a large number of the wounded had been taken, when a band of insurgents, hunted down by the

soldiers like a troop of wild beasts, rushed into the esplanade. The man with the sabre had fled; it was the last of the contingents from the country who were being exterminated. A fearful slaughter took place. In vain did Colonel Masson and the prefect, Monsieur de Blériot, overcome by pity, order a retreat. The infuriated soldiers continued to fire upon the mass, and to nail the fugitives to the walls with their bayonets. When they had no more enemies before them, they riddled the façade of the Mule-Blanche with balls. The shutters flew into splinters; a window left half-open was torn out, with a loud smash of broken glass. Pitiful voices were crying out from within: "The prisoners! the prisoners!" But the troops did not hear; they continued firing. Commander Sicardot, growing exasperated, appeared at the door and waved his arms as he endeavoured to speak Monsieur Peirotte, the receiver of taxes, with his slim body and scared face, stood by his side. Another volley was fired, and Monsieur Peirotte fell face foremost, with a heavy thud, to the ground.

Silvère and Miette were still looking at each other. Silvère had remained by the corpse, through all the fusillade and the agonising cries, without even turning his head. He was conscious only of some men around him, and, seized with a feeling of shame, he drew the red banner over Miette's naked breast. Then their eyes still continued to gaze at each other.

The conflict, however, was now at an end. The death of the receiver of taxes had satiated the soldiers. The men ran about, scouring every corner of the esplanade, to prevent the escape of a single insurgent. A gendarme who perceived Silvère under the trees, ran up to him, and seeing it was a lad he had to deal with:

"What are you doing there, you rascal?" he asked him.

Silvère, his eyes still fixed on those of Miette, made no reply.

"Ah! the bandit, his hands are black with powder," the man exclaimed as he stooped down. "Come, get up, you scoundrel! You know what you've got to expect."

But Silvère only smiled vaguely and did not attempt to move, whereupon the man noticed that the corpse that lay wrapped round with the banner was that of a woman.

"A fine girl! what a pity!" he muttered. "Your mistress, eh? you rascal!"

Then he added, with his rough gendarme's laugh:

"Come, get up!—She's dead now; so you can't sleep with her any more."

He made a violent grab at Silvère, and setting him on his feet led him away like a dog dragged along by its leg. Silvère submitted without a word, and allowed himself to be hauled along as quietly as a child. He turned round to give another glance at Miette. He was sorely grieved to leave her alone under the trees. He looked at her from afar, for the last time. She was still there in all her purity, wrapped in the red banner, with her head slightly bent forward and her big eyes turned towards heaven.

CHAPTER VI.

ROUGON, at about five o'clock in the morning, at last ventured to leave his mother's house. The old woman had gone to sleep on a chair. He crept stealthily to the end of the Impasse Saint-Mittre. There was not a sound, not a shadow. He pushed on as far as the Porte de Rome. The gates were lying wide open in the darkness that enveloped the slumbering town. Plassans was sleeping as sound as a top, quite unconscious, apparently, of the risk it was running in allowing the gates to remain unsecured. It seemed like a city of the dead. Rougon, taking courage, made his way into the Rue de Nice. He scanned at a distance the corners of the lanes; he trembled at every door, fearing lest he should see a band of insurgents rush out upon him. But he reached the Cours Sauvaire without any mishap. The insurgents seemed to have vanished in the darkness like a nightmare.

Pierre then stood still a moment on the deserted pavement, heaving a deep sigh of relief and triumph. Those republican rascals had indeed abandoned Plassans to him. The town belonged to him now; it was as sound asleep as a drunkard: there it lay, dark and tranquil, silent and confident, and he had only to stretch out his hand to take possession of it. This brief halt, this supercilious glance which he cast over the drowsy chief town, thrilled him with an unspeakable delight. He stood there alone in the darkness, and crossed his arms, like a great general on the eve of a victory. He could hear nothing in the distance but the murmur of the fountains in the promenade, whose jets of water were falling into the basins with a musical plashing.

Then he began to feel a little uneasy. What if the Empire should have been established without his aid? What if Sicardot, Garçonnet, Peirotte, instead of being arrested and led away by the insurrectionary band, had shut up the rebels in the prison of the town? A cold perspiration broke out over him, and he resumed his steps again, hoping that Félicité would give

him some accurate information. He pushed on very rapidly, and was passing along the houses of the Rue de la Banne, when a strange spectacle, which caught his eyes as he raised his head, riveted him to the ground. One of the windows of the yellow drawing-room was brilliantly illuminated, and, in the glare, he saw a dark form, which he recognised as that of his wife, bending forward, and shaking its arms in a violent manner. He asked himself what it could mean, but, unable to conceive any explanation, was beginning to feel seriously alarmed when some hard object struck the pavement at his feet. Félicité had thrown him the key of the cart-house where he had concealed a supply of muskets. This key clearly signified that he must arm himself. He turned away again, unable to comprehend why his wife had prevented him going upstairs, and imagining the most horrible things.

He went straight to Roudier, whom he found dressed and ready to march, but completely ignorant of the events of the previous evening. Roudier lived at the extremity of the new town, like in a desert, whither no tidings of the insurgents' movements had penetrated. Pierre proposed to him to go and find Granoux, whose house was situated at one of the corners of the Place des Récollets, and under whose windows the insurgent contingent must have passed. The municipal councillor's servant stood talking a long time before admitting them, and they heard the trembling voice of the poor man, shouting from the first floor:

"Don't open the door, Catherine! The streets are full of bandits."

He was in his bedroom, in the dark. When he recognised his two faithful friends he was relieved; but he would not let the maid bring a lamp, fearing that the light might draw down a bullet. He seemed to think that the town was still full of insurgents. Lying back on an arm-chair near the window, in his drawers, and with a silk handkerchief round his head, he moaned:

"Ah! my friends, if you only knew!—I tried to go to bed, but they were making such a disturbance! At last I lay down in my arm-chair here. I've seen it all, everything. Such awful looking men; a band of escaped convicts! Then they passed by again, dragging away with them the brave Commander Sicardot, worthy Monsieur Garçonnet, the postmaster, and others, howling the while like cannibals!"

Rougon felt a thrill of joy. He made Granoux tell him over again how he had seen the mayor and the others surrounded by the savage scoundrels.

"I saw it all!" the poor man cried. "I was standing behind the blind. They had just seized Monsieur Peirotte, and I heard him saying as he passed under my window: 'Gentlemen, don't hurt me!' They were certainly maltreating him. It's abominable, scandalous!"

Roudier calmed Granoux by assuring him that the town was free. The worthy gentleman began to feel quite a glow of martial ardour when Pierre informed him that he came to find him for the purpose of saving Plassans. The three saviours took counsel together. They each resolved to go and rouse their friends, and appoint a meeting for them in the cart-shed, the secret arsenal of the reactionary party. Rougon bethought himself constantly of Félicité's wild gestures, which seemed to betoken danger somewhere. Granoux, assuredly the most foolish of the three, was the first to suggest that there must be some republicans still in the town. This was a flash of light, and Rougon, with a feeling of conviction, said to himself:

"There are some of Macquart's lot down there."

At the end of an hour they met again in the cart-shed, which was situated in a very lonely spot. They had glided stealthily on from door to door, knocking and ringing as quietly as possible, and picking up all the men they could. But they only succeeded in collecting about forty, who arrived there one after the other, creeping along in the dark, without neckcloths, and with the pale and drowsy countenances of men who had been violently startled from their sleep. The cart-shed, let to a cooper, was encumbered with old hoops and broken casks, with which every corner was full. The guns were stored in the middle, in three long boxes. A taper, stuck on a piece of wood, illumined this strange scene with the glimmer of a flickering night-lamp. When Rougon had taken off the covers of the three boxes, the spectacle became one of weird grotesqueness. Above the guns, whose barrels shone with a bluish, phosphorescent glitter, necks were stretched out, heads were bent over with a sort of secret fear, while the yellow glimmer of the taper cast shadows of immense noses, and locks of stiffened hair upon the walls.

In the meantime, the reactionary band counted their num-

bers, the smallness of which filled them with hesitation. They were only thirty-nine, and it would be certain death for them. A father of a family spoke of his children; others, without troubling themselves about excuses, turned towards the door. Then two fresh conspirators arrived, who lived in the neighbourhood of the town-hall, and knew for certain that there were not more than about twenty republicans still at the mayor's. They deliberated afresh. Forty-one against twenty seemed practicable conditions. The arms were served out amid a little trembling and perturbation. Rougon was the person who took them out of the boxes, and each one, as he received his gun, the barrel of which on that December night was icy cold, felt struck with a chilling shock that seemed to freeze him to his very bones. The shadows on the walls looked like the clumsy shapes of bewildered conscripts stretching out their ten fingers. Pierre closed the boxes with regret, he left there a hundred and nine guns which he would willingly have distributed; he then proceeded to divide the cartridges. There were two large barrels in the furthest corner of the cart-shed full to the brim, sufficient to defend Plassans against an army. And as this corner was dark, one of the gentlemen brought the taper, whereupon another of the conspirators—a burly pork-butcher, with immense fists—got angry, saying it was very imprudent to take a light so near. They were all strongly of the same opinion. The cartridges were distributed in the dark. They filled their pockets with them, till they nearly burst. Then, when they were ready, and had loaded their guns with endless precautions, they stood still for a moment, looking at each other with lowering eyes, and exchanged glances in which cowardly ferocity was mingled with an expression of stupidity.

In the streets, they stepped along close to the houses, silently and in single file, like savages on the war-path. Rougon had insisted upon having the honour of marching at the head; the time had come when he must be content to run some risk, if he wanted to see his schemes successful. Drops of perspiration poured down his forehead in spite of the cold, but he preserved a very martial bearing. Roudier and Granoux came immediately behind him. Twice the column stopped short; they fancied they had heard the distant sound of fighting; but it was only the little brass shaving-dishes suspended by little chains, which are used as signs by the barbers in the

South, which were gently shaking to and fro in the breeze. After each halt, the saviours of Plassans continued their stealthy march in the dark, with their nervous assumption of valour. In this manner they reached the town-hall. There they formed a group round Rougon, and took counsel once more. In the black façade of the building in front of them, only one window was lighted. It was nearly seven o'clock, and the dawn was approaching.

After a good ten minutes' discussion, it was decided to advance as far as the door, to try and find out what might be the meaning of this disquieting darkness and silence. The door was half open. One of the conspirators put his head in and quickly withdrew it, announcing that there was a man under the porch, sitting against the wall fast asleep, with a gun between his legs. Rougon, seeing a chance of commencing with a deed of valour, entered first, and, seizing the man, held him down while Roudier gagged him. This first triumph, gained in silence, singularly emboldened the little troop, who had dreamed of a murderous fusillade. Rougon made imperious signs to restrain the soldiers from indulging in a too boisterous mirth.

They continued their advance on tip-toe. Then on the left, in the police guard-room which was situated there, they saw some fifteen men lying on a camp-bed snoring, in the dim glimmer of a lantern hung up on the wall. Rougon, who was decidedly becoming a great general, left half of his men in front of the guard-room with orders not to rouse the sleepers, but to watch them and make them prisoners if they stirred. He was uneasy, however, about the window in which they had seen a light from the Place. He smelt Macquart in the business, and, as he felt that he would first have to make prisoners of those who were keeping guard upstairs, he was not sorry to be able to operate by surprise before the noise of a conflict should lead them to barricade themselves. He went up quietly, followed by the twenty heroes whom he still had at his disposal. Roudier commanded the detachment remaining in the courtyard.

Macquart, in fact, was comfortably installed upstairs in the mayor's office, sitting in an arm-chair with his elbows on the writing-table. After the departure of the insurgents, with the characteristic confidence of a man of coarse intellect absorbed by his one fixed idea and bent upon his own triumph, he

imagined that Plassans was at his complete disposal, and that he was going to act there like a conqueror. In his opinion that body of three thousand men who had just passed through Plassans was an invincible army, whose proximity alone would suffice to keep the citizens humble and docile in his hands. The insurgents had shut the gendarmes up in their barracks, the National Guard was already dismembered, the nobility must be quaking with terror, the retired citizens of the new town had certainly never handled a gun in their lives. Moreover, there were no arms any more than soldiers. He did not even take the precaution to have the gates shut. His men carried their confidence still further by falling asleep, while he calmly awaited the day which he thought would rally round him all the republicans in the country.

He was already meditating important revolutionary measures: the nomination of a Commune of which he would be the chief, the imprisonment of all bad patriots, and particularly of those persons who had incurred his displeasure. The thought of the baffled Rougons, of the deserted drawing-room, of all that clique asking pardon, thrilled him with a sweet pleasure. In order to while away the time he had resolved to issue a proclamation to the inhabitants of Plassans. Four of them had set to work to draw up this proclamation. When it was finished Macquart, posing himself in a dignified manner in the mayor's arm-chair, had it read to him before sending it to the printing office of the "Indépendant," on whose patriotism he reckoned. One of the writers was commencing grandiloquently: "Inhabitants of Plassans, the hour of independence has struck, the reign of justice has begun——" when a noise was heard at the door of the office, which was slowly pushed open.

"Is it you, Cassoute?" Macquart asked, interrupting the reading.

Nobody answered; the door continued to open.

"Come in, do!" he continued, impatiently. "Is my brigand of a brother at home?"

Then, suddenly, the two leaves of the door were pushed violently back and slammed against the walls, and a crowd of armed men, in the midst of whom marched Rougon, with his face very red and his eyes starting out of their sockets, swarmed into the office, brandishing their guns like sticks.

"Ah! the blackguards, they're armed!" Macquart shouted.

He was about to seize a pair of pistols which were lying on the writing table, when five men caught hold of him by the throat and held him down. The four authors of the proclamation struggled for an instant. There was a good deal of scuffling and heavy stamping, and noise of persons falling. The combatants were very much hampered by their guns, which they would not lay aside, although they were of no use to them. In the struggle, Rougon's gun, which an insurgent had tried to wrest from him, went off of itself with a frightful explosion, filling the room with smoke; the ball shattered a magnificent mirror that reached from the mantelpiece to the ceiling, and was reputed to be one of the finest mirrors in the town. This shot, fired no one knew why, deafened everybody, and put an end to the battle.

Then, while the gentlemen were panting and puffing, three reports were heard out in the courtyard. Granoux rushed to one of the windows of the room. Their faces lengthened uneasily as they anxiously leaned out, and waited, feeling no eagerness to recommence a fresh struggle with the men in the guard-room, whom they had forgotten in the midst of their triumph. But Roudier's voice cried out that all was right. Granoux shut the window again, beaming with joy. The fact of the matter was, Rougon's shot had roused the sleepers, who had surrendered, seeing that resistance was impossible. In their blind haste to get the business over, however, three of Roudier's men had discharged their fire-arms in the air, as a sort of answer to the report above, without knowing quite why they did so. It frequently happens that guns go off of their own accord, when in the hands of cowards.

In the meantime, Rougon ordered Macquart's hands to be bound with the loops of the large green curtains in the room. The latter broke out into scornful jeers, and was quite mad with rage.

"All right; go on," he muttered. "This evening or to-morrow, when the others return, we'll settle accounts!"

This allusion to the insurrectionary band sent a shudder to the very marrow of the victors; Rougon, particularly, felt an uncomfortable choking sensation. His brother, who was exasperated at having been surprised like a child by these terrified citizens, whom, old soldier that he was, he looked upon as good-for-nothing civilians, glared at him, and defied him with eyes that glistened with hatred.

"Ah! I can tell some pretty stories about you, very pretty ones!" he continued, without removing his eyes from him. "Just send me before the Court of Assizes, so that I can tell the judges a few tales that will make them laugh."

Rougon turned pale. He was terribly afraid lest Macquart should blab, and ruin him in the esteem of the gentlemen who had just been assisting him to save Plassans. Moreover, these gentlemen, quite stunned by the dramatic encounter between the two brothers, had retired to a corner of the office, seeing that a stormy passage was about to take place. Rougon formed a heroic resolution. He advanced towards the group and said in a very noble tone of voice:

"We will keep this man here. When he has reflected on his position he will be able to give us some useful information."

Then in a still more dignified voice he went on:

"I will discharge my duty, gentlemen. I have sworn to save the town from anarchy, and I will save it, should I even have to be the executioner of my nearest relative."

He might have been an old Roman sacrificing his family on the altar of his country. Granoux, deeply moved, came to press his hand with a tearful countenance, which seemed to say: "I understand you; you are sublime!" He did him the kindness to take everybody away, under the pretext of conducting the four prisoners into the courtyard.

When Pierre was alone with his brother, he felt all his self-possession return to him. He resumed:

"You hardly expected me, did you? I understand now; you have been laying plots against me. Miserable wretch! see what your vice and licentiousness have brought you to!"

Macquart shrugged his shoulders.

"Shut up," he replied; "go to the devil. You're an old rogue. He laughs best who laughs last."

Rougon, who had formed no definite plan with regard to him, thrust him into a dressing-room where Monsieur Garçonnet used to go sometimes to lie down. This room, lighted from above, had no other exit but by the door. It was furnished with a few arm-chairs, a sofa, and a marble wash-stand. Pierre double-locked the door, after having partially unbound his brother's hands. They could hear the latter throw himself on the sofa, as he trolled out in a loud voice the "Ça ira!" as though he were trying to sing himself to sleep.

Rougon, alone at last, sat down in his turn in the mayor's

arm-chair. He heaved a sigh as he wiped his brow. How hard, indeed, it was to win fortune and honours! However, he was nearing the end at last. He felt the soft arm-chair shaping itself to his pressure, and with a mechanical movement he caressed the mahogany writing-table with his hands, seeming to find it silky and delicate as the skin of a beautiful woman. He strutted about, and assumed the dignified attitude which Macquart was previously affecting as he sat listening to the proclamation. Around him, the silence of the room seemed full of a religious solemnity which inspired his soul with a feeling of sacred joy. Everything, even the dust and the old documents lying in the corners, seemed to exhale an odour of incense, which was grateful and soothing to his dilated nostrils. This room, with its faded hangings and atmosphere of commonplace routine, with all the trivial worries of a third-rate municipality, became a temple of which he was the god. He was entering upon some sacred spot. He who, in reality, was not fond of priests, recalled the delightful sensation of his first communion, when he had partaken of the body of the Saviour.

But, in his raptures, he felt a slight nervous shock at every shout from Macquart. The words aristocrat, lamp-post, the threats of hanging, sounded through the door in angry bursts, and interrupted his triumphant dream in a disagreeable manner. Always that man! And his dream, in which he saw Plassans at his feet, ended with the sudden vision of the Court of Assizes, of the judges, of the jury and the public, listening to Macquart's disgraceful revelations, the story of the fifty thousand francs, and other unpleasant matters; or else, while enjoying the softness of Monsieur Garçonnet's arm-chair, he saw himself suddenly suspended to a lamp-post in the Rue de La Banne. Who would rid him of this wretched fellow? At last Antoine fell asleep, and Pierre enjoyed ten good minutes' pure ecstasy.

Roudier and Granoux came to rouse him from this state of beatitude. They had just returned from the prison, whither they had taken the insurgents. Day was coming on apace, the town would soon be awake, and it was necessary to take some decisive step. Roudier declared that it would be best, before doing anything else, to issue a proclamation to the inhabitants. Pierre was, at that very moment, reading the one the insurgents had left behind on the table.

"Why," he cried, "this will suit us admirably. There are only just a few words to be altered."

And, in fact, a quarter of an hour sufficed for the necessary changes, after which Granoux read out, in an earnest voice:

"Inhabitants of Plassans, the hour of resistance has struck, the reign of order has returned——"

It was decided that the proclamation should be printed at the office of the "Gazette," and posted at all the street corners.

"Now listen," said Rougon, "we'll go home to my house; during that time Monsieur Granoux will assemble here the members of the municipal council who have not been arrested, and relate to them the terrible events of the night."

Then he added, with majesty:

"I am quite prepared to accept the responsibility of my acts. If what I have already done appears a satisfactory pledge of my desire for order, I am willing to place myself at the head of a municipal commission, until such time as the regular authorities can be reinstated. But, that no one may accuse me of ambitious designs, I will not re-enter this building unless called here by the voice of my fellow-citizens."

Granoux and Roudier exclaimed that Plassans would not be ungrateful. Their friend had indeed saved the town. And they recalled all that he had done for the cause of order: the yellow drawing-room always open to the friends of authority, his services as spokesman in the three quarters, the store of arms which was his idea, and especially that memorable night, that night of prudence and heroism, in which he had rendered himself illustrious for ever. Granoux added that he was sure, beforehand, of the admiration and recognition of the municipal councillors. He concluded by saying:

"Don't move out of your house; I will come and fetch you to lead you back in triumph."

Roudier added that he quite understood the tact and modesty of their friend, and approved it. Nobody, certainly, would think of accusing him of ambition, but they would appreciate the delicacy which prompted him to desire no honours but those conferred upon him by the common consent of his fellow-citizens. That was very dignified, very noble, quite sublime.

Under this shower of eulogies, Rougon humbly bowed his head. He murmured, "No, no; you go too far," with the

voluptuous thrillings of exquisite pleasure. Every sentence of the retired hosier and the old almond-merchant, who stood on his right and left respectively, fell sweetly on his ears; and, lying back in the mayor's arm-chair, bathed in the official odour which pervaded the room, he bowed to the right and to the left, like a royal pretender whom a coup d'état is about to convert into an emperor.

When they were tired of belauding each other, they went downstairs. Granoux went away to call the Municipal Council together. Roudier told Rougon to go on in front, saying he would rejoin him at his house, after having given the necessary orders for guarding the mayor's. Day was breaking; Pierre gained the Rue de la Banne, stamping his heels in a martial manner on the still deserted pavement. He carried his hat in his hand in spite of the bitter cold; puffs of pride sent all his blood into his face.

At the bottom of the stairs he found Cassoute. The navvy had not stirred, having seen nobody enter. He sat there, on the first step, resting his big head in his hands, gazing fixedly in front of him, with the vacant stare and mute stubbornness of a faithful dog.

"You were waiting for me, weren't you?" Pierre said to him, taking in the situation at a glance, as soon as he saw him. "Well! go and tell Monsieur Macquart that I've come home. Go and ask for him at the mayor's."

Cassoute got up and withdrew, with an awkward bow. He was going to get himself arrested like a lamb, to the great delight of Pierre, who laughed as he went upstairs, asking himself, with a feeling of vague surprise: "I have certainly plenty of courage; shall I turn out as good a diplomatist, I wonder?"

Félicité had not gone to bed. He found her dressed in her Sunday clothes, wearing a cap with lemon-coloured ribbons, like a lady expecting visitors. She had sat at the window in vain; she had heard nothing, and was dying with curiosity.

"Well?" she asked, rushing to meet her husband.

The latter hastened breathlessly into the yellow drawing-room, whither she followed him, carefully closing the door behind her. He sank into an arm-chair and said, in a gasping voice:

"It's done, we shall get the receivership."

She fell on his neck and kissed him.

"Really? really?" she cried. "But I haven't heard anything. Oh, my darling husband, do tell me; tell me all."

She felt fifteen years old again, and began to coax him and whirl round him with the quick circlings of a moth fascinated by the light and heat. And Pierre, in the effusion of his triumph, poured out his heart to her. He did not omit a single detail. He even explained his future projects, forgetting that, according to him, wives were no good for anything, and that his must be kept in complete ignorance if he wished to remain master. Félicité leant over him, and drank in his words. She made him tell her certain parts of his story over again, declaring she had not heard; in fact, her delight bewildered her so much that at times she seemed to become quite deaf, her mind being quite dazed with joy. When Pierre related the events at the mayor's, she burst out into a fit of laughter, changed her chair three times, and knocked the furniture about, quite unable to sit still. After forty years of continuous struggle, fortune had at last surrendered itself to them. She was going so mad over it that she forgot all prudence.

"It's to me you owe all this!" she said in an outburst of triumph. "If I hadn't looked after you, you would have been nicely taken in by the insurgents. You booby, it was Garçonnet, Sicardot, and the others, that had got to be thrown to these wild beasts."

Then showing her teeth, loosened by age, she added, with a girlish smile:

"The Republic for ever! It has removed all difficulties and made everything smooth."

But Pierre had turned cross.

"That's just like you! he muttered," you always fancy you've foreseen everything. It was I who had the idea of hiding myself. As though women understood anything about politics! Bah, woman, if you were to steer the bark we should very soon be shipwrecked."

Félicité bit her lips. She had gone too far and forgotten her rôle of the good, silent fairy. But she was seized with that wild exasperation which she felt when her husband tried to crush her with his superiority. She again promised herself, when the time had arrived, some exquisite revenge which would deliver the man into her power, bound hand and foot.

"Ah! I was forgetting!" resumed Rougon, "Monsieur

Peirotte is amongst them. Granoux saw him struggling in the hands of the insurgents."

Félicité gave a start. She was just at that moment standing at the window, looking with longing eyes at the windows of the receiver of taxes. She had felt a desire to have another look at them, for the idea of a triumph was associated in her mind with the envy of this fine house, the furniture of which she had been using in imagination for such a long time.

She turned round, and said in a strange tone:

"Monsieur Peirotte is arrested!"

She smiled complacently; then a crimson blush rushed to her face. She had just been formulating this murderous reflection in her secret heart: "If the insurgents would only kill him!" Pierre, no doubt, read this thought in her eyes.

"Faith! if some ball were to hit him," he muttered, "that would settle our business. There would be no necessity to supersede him then, eh? and it would be no fault of ours."

But Félicité shuddered. She felt that she had just condemned a man to death. Now, if Monsieur Peirotte were killed, she would see his phantom at night time. He would come and haunt her. She only ventured now to cast furtive glances, full of fearful delight, at the windows opposite. Henceforward these enjoyments had an edge of guilty terror which rendered them the more acute.

Moreover, Pierre, having poured out his soul, now perceived the black side of the situation. He mentioned Macquart. How could they get rid of this vagabond? But Félicité, fired again by the enthusiasm of their triumph, exclaimed:

"One can't do everything at once. Zounds! we'll gag him. We'll soon find means——"

She walked to and fro, putting the arm-chairs in order, dusting their backs. Suddenly, she stopped in the middle of the room, and cast a long look on the faded furniture.

"Good heavens!" she said, "how ugly it is here! And we shall have everybody coming to call upon us!"

"Bah!" replied Pierre, with supreme indifference, "we'll alter all that."

He who, the night before, had entertained a religious veneration for the arm-chairs and the sofa, would have jumped on them now. Félicité, feeling the same disdain, even went so

far as to upset an arm-chair which was short of a castor and did not yield to her quickly enough.

It was at this moment that Roudier entered. The old woman thought he was become much more polite. The "Monsieur" and "Madame" rolled out with a delightful music. Moreover, their friends were gradually arriving. The drawing-room was getting full. Nobody knew yet any detailed particulars of the events of the night, and all came in haste, with their eyes starting out of their heads and a smile on their lips, urged by the rumours which were now being circulated in the town. These gentlemen who, on the previous evening, had left the drawing-room with such precipitation at the news of the insurgents' approach, came back, buzzing, curious and importunate, like a swarm of flies which a gust of wind would have dispersed. Some of them had not even taken time to put their braces on. They were very impatient, but it was evident that Rougon was waiting for some one before speaking. At every minute, he turned an anxious look towards the door. For an hour there was nothing but significant shakes of the hand, vague congratulations, admiring whisperings, and suppressed joy of uncertain origin, which only awaited a single word to be converted into enthusiasm.

At last Granoux appeared. He lingered for a moment by the door, with his right hand in his buttoned frock-coat; his large pale face beaming with delight, endeavouring in vain to conceal his emotion under a dignified demeanour. On his appearance they were all silent; they felt that something extraordinary was about to take place. Granoux walked straight up to Rougon, through a crowd of visitors, and held out his hand to him.

"My friend," he said, "I bring you the homage of the Municipal Council. They call you to their head, until our mayor has been restored to us. You have saved Plassans. In the terrible crisis through which we are passing we want men who unite your intelligence with your courage. Come——"

Granoux, who was reciting a little speech which he had taken great trouble to prepare on his way from the mayor's office to the Rue de la Banne, felt his memory becoming confused. But Rougon, overwhelmed with emotion, interrupted him, shaking his hands as he repeated:

"Thank you, my dear Granoux; I thank you very much."

He could not find anything else to say. Then followed a

deafening outburst of voices. Every one rushed, held out his hand to him, showered praises and compliments upon him, and eagerly questioned him. But he, with already all an official's dignity, begged for a few minutes in order to confer with Messrs. Granoux and Roudier. Business before everything. The town was in such a critical situation! They all three retired to a corner of the drawing-room, and there, in an undertone, they divided the power amongst themselves, while the rest of the visitors, a few feet away, tried to look very wise and cast furtive glances of mingled admiration and curiosity at them. Rougon was to take the title of president of the Municipal Commission; Granoux was to be secretary; as for Roudier, he became commander-in-chief of the re-organised National Guard. These gentlemen swore to give each other a mutual support against all opposition.

Félicité, who had approached them, asked abruptly:

"And Vuillet?"

They looked at each other. Nobody had seen Vuillet. Rougon looked somewhat uneasy.

"Perhaps they've taken him away with the others," he said, to ease his mind.

But Félicité shook her head. Vuillet was not the man to let himself be arrested. From the moment that nobody saw or heard him, it was certain he was doing something wrong.

Suddenly the door opened and Vuillet entered, bowing humbly, with his blinking eyes and his stiff sacristan's smile. Then he held out his moist hand to Rougon and the two others. Vuillet had managed his little affairs alone. He had cut his own slice out of the cake, as Félicité would have said. He had seen through the ventilator of his cellar the insurgents come and arrest the post-master, whose offices were near his book-shop. At daybreak, therefore, at the time when Rougon was comfortably seated in the mayor's arm-chair, he had gone and quietly installed himself in the post-master's office. He knew the clerks; he had received them on their arrival, telling them that he would replace their chief until his return, and that they need not be at all uneasy. Then he ransacked the morning mail with an ill-concealed curiosity. He examined the letters, and seemed to be seeking a particular one. No doubt his new berth quite fell in with and suited his secret plans, for he went so far, in his satisfaction, as to give a copy of the "Œuvres Badines de Piron" to one of the clerks. Vuillet had a miscel-

laneous collection of obscene books, which he kept concealed in a large drawer, under a lot of beads and holy images; it was he who inundated the town with indecent photographs and engravings, without the least prejudice to the sale of his prayer-books. He probably felt some slight qualms, however, at the free and easy manner in which he had taken possession of the post-office, and recognising the desirability of getting his usurpation confirmed as far as possible, he had hastened to Rougon's house, as he was decidedly a very important personage.

"Where did you get to?" Félicité asked in a distrustful manner.

Then he related his story with embellishments. According to his own account he had saved the post-office from pillage.

"All right! that's settled! Stay on there!" said Pierre, after a moment's reflection. "Make yourself useful."

This last sentence breathed out the one great fear of the Rougons. They were alarmed lest any one else should turn out more useful than themselves, and prove of greater service to the town. But Pierre saw no serious danger in leaving Vuillet interim post-master; and it was a convenient means of getting rid of him. Félicité made a sharp gesture of opposition.

The consultation ended, the gentlemen went to mingle with the various groups that filled the drawing-room. They at last were obliged to satisfy the general curiosity, and were compelled to relate in detail the events of the morning. Rougon was magnificent. He exaggerated, embellished, and dramatised the story which he had related to his wife. The distribution of the guns and cartridges made everybody hold their breath. But it was the march through the deserted streets and the seizure of the mayor's offices that struck these citizens dumb. At every fresh detail there was an interruption.

"And you were only forty-one; it's marvellous!"

"Ah, indeed! it must have been frightfully dark!"

"No; I confess I should never have dared it!"

"Then you seized him, like this, by the throat!"

"And the insurgents, what did they say?"

But these short sentences only incited Rougon's heated imagination all the more. He replied to everybody. He mimicked the action. This stout man, in the admiration of his own achievements, became as nimble as a school-boy; he recommenced and repeated himself amidst cross conversations,

exclamations of surprise, and individual discussions which arose suddenly about the most trifling detail. And thus he continued swelling himself out, carried away by his heroic excitement. Granoux and Roudier stood by his side, whispering to him and reminding him of little trifling matters which he omitted. They were burning also to put in a word themselves, to relate some episode; occasionally they could not restrain themselves from breaking in, and all three went on talking together. But when, in order to keep the episode of the broken mirror for the denouement, for a crowning glory, Rougon began to describe what took place downstairs in the courtyard, after the arrest of the guard, Roudier accused him of spoiling the narrative by changing the order of events. They wrangled about it for an instant or two somewhat sharply. Then Roudier, seeing a good opportunity for himself, promptly exclaimed:

"Very well, let it be so. But you weren't there. Let me tell it."

He thereupon explained at great length how the insurgents had woke up, and how the muskets had been levelled at them to reduce them to impotence. He added that, fortunately, no blood had been shed. This last sentence disappointed the audience, who counted upon one corpse at least.

"But I thought you fired," Félicité interrupted, recognising that the story was miserably wanting in dramatic interest.

"Yes, yes, three shots," resumed the old hosier. "The pork-butcher Dubruel, Monsieur Liévin, and Monsieur Massicot discharged their guns with a really culpable alacrity."

And as there were some murmurs at this remark:

"Culpable, I repeat the word," he continued. "War has quite enough necessary cruelties without uselessly shedding blood. Besides, these gentlemen swore to me that it was not their fault: they can't understand how it was their guns went off. However, a spent ball, after having made a ricochet, grazed the cheek of one of the insurgents."

This graze, this unexpected wound, satisfied the audience. On which cheek was the graze, and how could a ball, a spent one even, strike a cheek without piercing it? This supplied material for some long discussions.

"Upstairs," continued Rougon at the top of his voice, without giving time for the excitement to abate; "upstairs we had plenty to do. The struggle was very desperate."

And he described, at great length, the arrest of his brother and the four other insurgents, without naming Macquart, whom he called "the leader." The words, "the mayor's office," "the arm-chair," "the mayor's writing table," rose to his lips at every instant, and, in the ears of his audience, lent a marvellous grandeur to this terrible scene. It was not at the porter's lodge now that the fight was being waged, but in the room of the chief magistrate of the town. Roudier was put in the back-ground and Rougon at last came to the episode which he had been keeping in reserve from the commencement, and which would certainly exalt him to the dignity of a hero.

"Thereupon," he said, "an insurgent rushes upon me. I push the mayor's arm-chair away, and seize the man by the throat. I hold him tight, you may be sure! But my gun was in my way. I didn't want to let it drop; a man always sticks to his gun. I held it, like this, under the left arm. All of a sudden, it went off——"

The whole audience hung on Rougon's lips. Granoux, who was opening his mouth wide with a violent itching to say something, shouted:

"No, no, that isn't right. You were not in a position to see, my friend; you were fighting like a lion. But I saw everything, as I was helping to bind one of the prisoners. The man tried to murder you; it was he who discharged the gun; I saw him distinctly slip his black fingers under your arm."

"Really?" said Rougon, turning quite pale.

He did not know he had been in such danger, and the account of the old almond-merchant chilled him with fright. Granoux, as a rule, did not lie; but, on a day of battle, it is surely allowable to view things dramatically.

"I tell you the man tried to murder you," he repeated, with conviction.

"Ah," said Rougon in an audible voice, "that's how it is I heard the ball whiz past my ear!"

A violent emotion seized the audience, who seemed overawed before this hero. He had heard a ball whiz past his ear! Certainly, none of the citizens who were there could say as much. Félicité felt bound to rush into her husband's arms, to work up the emotion of the assembly to boiling point. But Rougon immediately freed himself, and concluded his narrative with this heroic sentence, which has become famous at Plassans;

"The shot goes off; I hear the ball whiz past my ear; and, whish! the ball smashes the mayor's mirror."

This caused a complete consternation. Such a magnificent mirror, too! it was scarcely credible! The havoc wrought in the room almost out-balanced Rougon's heroism in the estimation of the company. The mirror became an object of absorbing interest, and they talked about it for a quarter of an hour, with many exclamations and expressions of pity and effusions of regret, as though it had been some dear friend that had been stricken to the heart. This was the culminating point that Rougon aimed at, the denouement of that wonderful Odyssey of his. A loud hubbub of voices filled the yellow drawing-room. They were repeating to each other what they had just heard, and every now and then some one left one of the groups to go and ask the three heroes the exact version of some contested incident. The heroes set the matter straight with a scrupulous minuteness, for they felt that they were speaking for history.

In the meantime, Rougon and his two lieutenants announced that they were expected at the mayor's. A respectful silence was restored, and the company smiled at each other discreetly. Granoux was swelling with importance. He was the only one who had seen the insurgent pull the trigger and smash the mirror; that magnified him, and made him almost burst out of his skin. On leaving the drawing-room, he took Roudier's arm, with the air of a great general broken down with fatigue, murmuring at the same time:

"I've been up for thirty-six hours, and God knows when I shall get to bed!"

Rougon, as he left, took Vuillet aside and told him that the peace party relied more than ever on him and the "Gazette;" he would have to publish a good article to reassure the inhabitants and treat that band of villains who had passed through Plassans as it deserved.

"Don't be uneasy!" Vuillet replied. "The 'Gazette' ought not in the ordinary course to appear till to-morrow morning, but I'll issue it this very evening."

When they had left, the rest of the visitors in the yellow drawing-room remained there for a moment, chattering like old women gathered together on the pavement to watch an escaped canary. These retired tradesmen, oil dealers, and hatters, felt themselves in a sort of fairyland. Never had

they experienced such thrilling excitement before. They could not get over their surprise at discovering that such heroes as Rougon, Granoux, and Roudier had proved themselves to be had been living amongst them. At last, half stifled, and tired of telling each other the same things, they felt an eager longing to go and spread abroad the momentous news. They glided away one by one, each anxious to have the glory of being the first to tell the wonderful story, and Félicité, left alone, saw them, as she leaned out of the window, hurrying along the Rue de la Banne, waving their arms in an excited manner as they puffed and panted off to the four corners of the town.

It was ten o'clock, and all Plassans, roused from its sleep, was running about in the streets, wildly excited by the reports which were circulating. Those who had seen or heard the insurrectionary band, related the most tedious stories, contradicting each other, and indulging in the wildest suppositions. The majority, however, knew nothing at all about the matter; they lived at the further end of the town, and hearkened with gaping mouths, like children listening to a nursery tale, to the story of several thousand bandits invading the streets, and vanishing before daylight like an army of phantoms. A few of the most sceptical said: "Nonsense!" Some of the details, however, were very precise. Plassans was at last convinced that a frightful danger had passed over it, while it was asleep, without touching it. The gloom of the night, and the various contradictory reports concerning what had happened, invested the matter with a character of mystery and an indefinable terror, which made the most courageous persons shudder. Whose hand had diverted the thunderbolt from them? There seemed to be something quite miraculous about it. There were rumours of unknown deliveries, of a handful of brave men who had cut off the hydra's head; but no one seemed to know any details, and the whole story appeared scarcely credible, until the company from the yellow drawing-room began to bustle about the streets, relating the events of the night to every one they met.

It was like a train of powder. In a few minutes the story had spread from one end of the town to the other. Rougon's name flew from mouth to mouth, with exclamations of surprise in the new town, and eulogistic cries in the old quarter. The idea of being without a sub-prefect, a mayor, a post-master, a

receiver of taxes, or authorities of any kind, at first threw the inhabitants into consternation. They were stupefied at having been able to sleep through the night and get up as usual, in the absence of any settled government. Their first stupor over, they threw themselves recklessly into the arms of the liberators. The few republicans shrugged their shoulders, but the little retail shopkeepers, the small householders, the conservatives of all shades, invoked blessings on those modest heroes whose achievements had been performed in the obscurity of the night. When it was known that Rougon had arrested his own brother, the popular admiration knew no bounds. They talked of Brutus, and the indiscretion, which had made him rather anxious, really redounded to his glory. While their terror still hovered over them, they were unanimous in their gratitude. Rougon was accepted as their saviour without a show of opposition.

"Just think!" the scared folks said, "there were only forty-one of them!"

This number of forty-one was a standing wonder to the whole town, and this was the origin of the Plassans legend of forty-one citizens having made three thousand insurgents bite the dust. It was only a few envious spirits of the new town, lawyers without work and retired military men, ashamed of having slept inglorious through that memorable night, who raised any doubts. The insurgents, these sceptics hinted, no doubt left the town of their own accord. There were no indications of a combat, no corpse, no blood-stains. These gentlemen had certainly had a very easy task.

"But the mirror, the mirror!" repeated the enthusiasts. "You can't deny that the mayor's mirror has been smashed; go and see it for yourselves."

And, in fact, until night-time, there was quite a stream of the town's-people flocking, under one pretext or another, into the office, the door of which Rougon left wide open. They planted themselves in front of the mirror, which a bullet had pierced and starred, and they all gave vent to the same exclamation:

"By Jove! the ball must have gone with terrible force!"

They then departed quite convinced.

Félicité, at her window, listened with delight to all the rumours and laudatory and grateful remarks which were bandied about the town. At that moment all Plassans was

talking of her husband. She felt a quiver run through the two districts that lay beneath her, and which wafted her the hope of an approaching triumph. Ah! how she would crush down that town which she had been so long in getting beneath her foot! All her grievances crowded back to her memory, and her past disappointments redoubled her appetite for immediate enjoyment.

She left the window, and walked slowly round the drawing-room. It was there that, a few minutes previously, everybody had held out their hands to her and her husband. They had conquered; the citizens were at their feet. The yellow drawing-room seemed to her a holy place. The dilapidated furniture, the frayed velvet, the lustres all soiled with fly-specks, all those poor wrecks of their former selves shone in her eyes with all the glory of the bullet-riddled debris of a field of battle. The plain of Austerlitz would not have stirred her to deeper emotion.

When she returned to the window, she perceived Aristide wandering about the Place of the Sub-Prefecture, with his nose in the air. She beckoned to him to come up. He seemed to be only waiting for this invitation.

"Come in," his mother said to him on the landing, seeing that he hesitated. "Your father is not here."

Aristide manifested all the shyness of a prodigal about returning home. He had not been inside the yellow drawing-room for nearly four years. He still carried his arm in a sling.

"Does your hand still pain you?" his mother asked him, ironically.

He blushed as he answered with some embarrassment:

"Oh! it's getting better; it's nearly well again now."

He lingered there, loitering about and not knowing what to say. Félicité came to the rescue.

"I suppose you've heard them talking about your father's noble conduct?" she resumed.

He replied that the whole town was talking of it. But as he regained his self-possession, he paid his mother back in her own coin for her raillery, and looked at her full in the face as he added:

"I came to see if father was wounded."

"Come, don't play the fool!" cried Félicité, petulantly. "If I were you I would put myself right at once. You must confess that you made a false move in joining those

good-for-nothing republicans. You would be very glad now, I'm sure, to be well rid of them, and to return to us, who are the stronger party. Well, the house is open to you!"

But Aristide protested. The Republic was a grand idea. Moreover, the insurgents might still carry the day.

"Don't talk your nonsense to me!" the old woman continued, with some irritation. "You're afraid your father won't have a very warm welcome for you. I'll see to that. Listen to me: go back to your newspaper, and, between this and to-morrow, prepare a number strongly favouring the Coup d'État; to-morrow evening, when this number has appeared, come back here and you will be received with open arms."

But seeing the young man remained silent:

"Do you hear?" she added, in a lower and more eager tone; "it is necessary for our sake, and for your own, too, that it should be done. Don't let us have any more of your nonsense and folly. You've already compromised yourself enough in that way."

The young man made a gesture—the gesture of a Cæsar passing the Rubicon—and by doing so escaped entering into any verbal engagement. As he was about to withdraw, his mother, looking for the knot in his sling, added:

"And, first of all, you must let me take off this rag. It's getting a little ridiculous, you know!"

Aristide let her remove it. When the silk handkerchief was untied, he folded it neatly and put it in his pocket. Then he said, as he kissed his mother:

"To-morrow, then!"

During this time, Rougon was taking official possession of the mayor's offices. There were only eight municipal councillors left; the others were in the hands of the insurgents, as well as the mayor and the two deputies. These eight gentlemen, who were all about on a par with Granoux, perspired with fright when the latter explained to them the critical situation of the town. It requires an intimate knowledge of the kind of men who compose the municipal councils of some of the smaller towns, in order to form an idea of the terror with which these timid folk hastened to throw themselves into Rougon's arms. At Plassans, the mayor had the most incredible blockheads under him, without any ideas of their own, and accustomed to the most passive obedience. Consequently, as Monsieur Garçonnet was no longer there, the municipal machine was bound to

get out of order, and to fall completely under the control of the man who knew how to pull the strings. The sub-prefect being at that moment absent from the country, Rougon naturally became sole and absolute master of the town; and thus, in a most extraordinary way, the chief administrative authority fell into the hands of a man of bad repute, whom, on the previous evening, not one of his fellow-citizens would have trusted with a hundred francs.

Pierre's first act was to declare the Provisional Commission permanent. Then he gave his attention to the re-organisation of the national guard, and succeeded in raising three hundred men; the hundred and nine guns left in the cart-shed were distributed, thereby bringing up the number of men armed by the reactionary party to one hundred and fifty; the remaining one hundred and fifty national guards consisted of well-affected citizens and some of Sicardot's soldiers. When Commander Roudier reviewed the little army in front of the town-hall, he was annoyed to see the market-people smiling in their sleeves; his men had not all got uniforms, and some of them looked very droll with their black hats, frock-coats, and muskets. But, at any rate, they meant well. A guard was left at the mayor's. The rest of the little army was despatched in groups to the different gates of the town. Roudier reserved to himself the command of the guard stationed at the Grand' Porte, which was more open to attack than the others.

Rougon, who now felt very conscious of his power, went in person to the Rue Canquoin to beg the gendarmes to remain at home and not interfere with anything. Moreover, he had the doors of the gendarmerie opened, the keys of which had been carried off by the insurgents. But he wanted to triumph alone, and had no intention of letting the gendarmes rob him of any part of his glory. If he should really stand in need of them he could always send for them. He explained to them that their presence might tend to irritate the working-men and would only aggravate the situation. The sergeant complimented him on his prudence. When he was informed that there was a wounded man in the barracks, Rougon, with a view to gaining popularity, asked to see him. He found Rengade in bed, with his eye bandaged, and his big moustache just peeping from under the linen. With some high-sounding words about duty, he endeavoured to comfort the fellow who, blind in one eye, was swearing and blowing with exasperation at his wound,

which would compel him to quit the service. He promised to send the doctor to him.

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Rengade replied; "but, you know, what would do me more good than any quantity of doctor's stuff would be to wring the neck of the villain who has put my eye out. Oh! I shall know him again; he's a little thin, palish, young man——"

Pierre bethought himself of the blood which covered Silvère's hand. He stepped back a little, as though he was afraid that Rengade would fly at his throat, and cry: "It is your nephew who has blinded me; and you will have to pay for it." And whilst he was cursing his disreputable family in his own mind, he solemnly declared that if the guilty person were found he should be punished with all the rigour of the law.

"No, no, it isn't worth all that trouble," the one-eyed man replied; "I'll just wring his neck for him when I catch him."

Rougon hastened back to the mayor's. The afternoon was employed in taking various measures. The proclamation, posted up at about one o'clock, produced an excellent impression. It ended by an appeal to the good sense of the citizens, and gave a firm assurance that order would not again be disturbed. Until dusk, in fact, the streets presented a picture of general relief and perfect confidence. On the pavements, the groups who were reading the proclamation exclaimed:

"It's all finished now; we shall soon see the troops who have been sent in pursuit of the insurgents."

This belief that the soldiers were approaching was so general that the idlers of the Cours Sauvaire repaired to the Nice road, in order to meet the band. They returned at night disappointed, having seen nothing; and a feeling of vague alarm began to disturb the townspeople.

At the mayor's, the Provisional Commission had talked so much, without coming to any conclusion, that the members, whose stomachs were quite empty, frightened themselves by their own eloquence, and began to feel quite alarmed again. Rougon dismissed them to dine, convoking them afresh for nine o'clock in the evening. He was just about to leave the room himself, when Macquart woke up and began to hammer violently against the door of his prison. He said he was hungry, then he asked what time it was, and when his brother told him it was five o'clock, he pretended to be very much astonished, and muttered, with sly malice, that the

insurgents had promised to return much earlier, and that they were very slow about coming to let him out. Rougon, having ordered some food to be taken to him, went downstairs, quite worried by the earnestness with which Macquart spoke of the return of the insurgents.

When he got into the street, his disquietude was increased. The town seemed to him quite altered. It wore a strange aspect; shadows were gliding along the footpaths, which were growing deserted and silent, while, with the approaching dusk, a sense of gloomy fear seemed to be slowly but persistently mantling round the mournful-looking houses, like a misty rain. The babbling confidence of the day was terminating miserably in groundless apprehensions, and in increasing alarms as the night came on; the inhabitants were so weary and worn out with their triumph that they had no strength left, and could think of nothing but a terrible retaliation on the part of the insurgents. Rougon shuddered as he passed through this wave of terror. He hastened his steps with a heavy heart. As he passed in front of the café in the Place des Récollets, where the lamps had just been lit, and where the small householders of the new town were assembled, he heard a few words which terrified him very much.

"Well! Monsieur Picou," said a thick voice, "you've heard the news? The regiment that was expected has not arrived."

"But nobody expected any regiment, Monsieur Touche," a shrill voice replied.

"I beg your pardon. You haven't read the proclamation, then?"

"Oh yes, it's true the placards declare that order will be maintained by force, if necessary."

"You see, then, there's force mentioned; that means armed force, of course."

"What do they say?"

"Well, you know, folks are beginning to feel rather frightened; they say that this delay on the part of the soldiers is very extraordinary, and that it's very possible the insurgents have slaughtered them."

There was a cry of horror in the café. Rougon was inclined to go in and tell the citizens that the proclamation had never announced the arrival of a regiment, that they had no right to force the text to such a degree, nor to spread about such foolish theories. But he himself, in the flutter of mind

into which he was quickly falling, was not quite sure he had not counted upon a despatch of troops, and he did, in fact, consider it strange that not a single soldier had made his appearance. He went home in a very uneasy state of mind. Félicité, petulant and enthusiastic, got quite angry at seeing him upset by such silly trifles. Over the dessert she comforted him.

"Well, you great simpleton," she said, "so much the better, if the prefect does forget us! We shall save the town by ourselves. For my part, I should like to see the insurgents return, so that we might receive them with bullets and cover ourselves with glory. Listen to me, go and have the gates closed, and don't go to bed; bustle about all night; it will all be taken into account later on."

Pierre returned to the mayor's in rather more cheerful spirits. He required some courage to remain firm amidst the woeful maunderings of his colleagues. The very clothes of the members of the Provisional Commission seemed to reek with panic, just as they did with the smell of damp in the rainy season. They all professed to have counted upon the despatch of a regiment, and began to exclaim that brave citizens ought not to be abandoned in such a manner to the fury of the rabble. Pierre, to preserve peace, almost promised they should have a regiment on the morrow. Then he announced, in a solemn manner, that he was going to have the gates closed. This was a relief. Parties of the national guards were ordered to repair immediately to each gate and double-lock it. When they had returned, several members confessed that they really felt more comfortable; and when Pierre said that the critical situation of the town imposed upon them the duty of remaining at their posts, some of them made their little arrangements with the view of passing the night in an arm-chair. Granoux put on a black silk cap which he had brought with him by way of precaution. Towards eleven o'clock, half of these gentlemen were sleeping round Monsieur Garçonnet's writing-table. Those who still managed to keep their eyes open were dreaming, as they listened to the measured tramp of the national guards in the courtyard, that they were heroes receiving decorations. A large lamp, placed on the writing-table, illumined this strange armed vigil. Rougon, who seemed to be slumbering, jumped up all of a sudden and sent for Vuillet. He had just remembered that he had not received the "Gazette."

The bookseller made his appearance in an arrogant and very bad humour.

"Well!" Rougon asked him as he took him aside, "what about the article you promised me? I haven't seen the paper."

"Is that what you disturbed me for?" Vuillet angrily retorted. "The 'Gazette' has not been issued; I've no desire to get myself murdered to-morrow, should the insurgents come back."

Rougon tried to smile as he declared that, thank God, nobody would be murdered. It was precisely because false and disquieting rumours were running about that the article in question would have rendered a great service to the good cause.

"Possibly," Vuillet resumed, "but the best of causes at the present time is to keep one's head on one's shoulders."

And he added, with pointed maliciousness:

"And I was under the impression you had killed all the insurgents! You've left too many of them for me to run any risk."

Rougon, when he was alone again, felt amazed at this mutiny of a man usually so meek and mild. Vuillet's conduct appeared to him suspicious. But he had no time to seek an explanation; he had scarcely stretched himself out afresh in his arm-chair, when Roudier entered, with a sabre, which he had attached to his belt, clattering noisily against his legs. The sleepers woke up in a fright. Granoux thought it was a call to arms.

"Hullo there! What's the matter?" he asked, as he hastily put his black silk cap into his pocket.

"Gentlemen," said Roudier, out of breath, without thinking of taking any oratorical precaution, "I believe a band of insurgents is approaching the town."

These words were received with a terrified silence. Rougon alone had the strength to say:

"Have you seen them?"

"No," the retired hosier replied; "but we hear strange noises out in the country; one of my men assured me that he had seen fires along the slope of the Garrigues."

And, as all these gentlemen, white and speechless, stared at each other:

"I'll return to my post," he continued. "I fear an attack. You had better take precautions."

Rougon would have followed him, to obtain some further

particulars, but he was already too far away. The Commission was by no means inclined to go to sleep again. Strange noises! Fires! An attack! And that in the middle of the night, too! It was very easy to talk of taking precautions, but what were they to do? Granoux was very near advising the tactics which had been so successful the previous evening: to hide themselves, wait till the insurgents had passed through Plassans, and then pass in triumph through the deserted streets. Pierre, fortunately remembering his wife's advice, said that Roudier might have made a mistake, and that the best thing would be to go and see for themselves. Some of the members made a wry face; but when it had been agreed that an armed escort should accompany the Commission, they all descended very courageously. They only left a few men down-stairs, surrounding themselves with about thirty of the national guards; then they ventured into the slumbering town. The moon creeping over the roofs cast lengthened shadows. They went along the ramparts, from one gate to the other, seeing nothing on the obstructed horizon, and hearing nothing. The national guards at the various posts told them that peculiar sounds reached them from the country through the closed gates. They strained their ears but caught nothing but a distant roar, which Granoux said was merely the noise of the Viorne.

In the meantime, they were very uneasy. As they were about to return to the mayor's very much pre-occupied, though they made a show at the same time of shrugging their shoulders and of treating Roudier as a poltroon and a dreamer, Rougon, who was very anxious to fully reassure his friends, was struck with the idea of showing them the plain at several leagues distance. He led the little company to the Saint-Marc quarter and knocked at the door of the Valqueyras mansion.

The count, since the commencement of the disturbance, had left for his château at Corbière. There was no one but the Marquis de Carnavant in the house. Since the previous evening he had prudently kept himself aloof; not that he was afraid, but because he did not care to be seen plotting with the Rougons at the critical moment. As a matter of fact, he was burning with curiosity. He had been compelled to shut himself up to resist the temptation of running to look at the wonderful intrigues of the yellow drawing-room. When the footman came to tell him, in the middle of the night, that there were some gentlemen below asking for him, he could not pre-

serve his prudence any longer; he got up and went downstairs in great haste.

"My dear marquis," said Rougon, as he introduced the members of the Municipal Commission to him, "we want to ask you a favour. Will you allow us to go into the garden of the mansion?"

"By all means," replied the marquis, astonished, "and I will conduct you there myself."

On the way there he ascertained what their object was. At the end of the garden there was a terrace which overlooked the plain; in this spot, a large piece of the ramparts had tumbled in, leaving a boundless horizon open to view. Rougon had understood that that would serve as an excellent post of observation. While they were conversing, the members of the Commission leaned over the parapet. The strange spectacle that opened out before them struck them dumb. In the distance, in the valley of the Viorne, in the immense hollow which sank down into the west, between the chain of the Garrigues and the mountains of the Seille, the rays of the moon flowed like a stream of pale light. The clusters of trees, the gloomy rocks, looked, here and there, like islets and tongues of land, emerging from the luminous sea; and where the Viorne formed angles, one could distinguish detached portions of the river which, glittering like armour, peered through the fine, silvery dust falling from the firmament. It looked like an ocean, a world, boundlessly magnified by the darkness, the cold, and their own secret fears. At first the gentlemen could neither hear nor see anything. The quivering light and the distant sounds blinded their eyes and confused their ears. Granoux, who was not naturally poetic, overwhelmed by the calm serenity of this winter night, murmured:

"What a beautiful night, gentlemen!"

"Roudier was certainly dreaming," Rougon said, rather disdainfully.

But the marquis strained his delicate ears.

"Ah!" he observed in his clear voice, "I hear the tocsin."

They all bent over the parapet, holding their breath. And light and pure as crystal rose from the plain the distant tolling of a bell. The gentlemen could not deny it. It was indeed the tocsin. Rougon pretended that he recognised it as the bell of Béage, a village fully a league from Plassans. He said that in order to reassure his colleagues.

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"Listen, listen," the marquis interrupted: "this time it is the bell of Saint-Maur."

And he indicated another point of the horizon to them. There was, in fact, a second bell wailing through the clear night. There were very soon ten bells, twenty bells, the despairing tollings of which were caught by their ears, which had by this time grown accustomed to the quivering of the vast expanse of darkness. Ominous calls rose from all sides, faint and like the rattles of a dying man. Soon the whole plain seemed to be wailing. The gentlemen no longer jeered at Roudier. The marquis, who took a malicious delight in terrifying them, was kind enough to explain the cause of all this bell-ringing.

"It is the neighbouring villages," he said to Rougon, "banding together to attack Plassans at daybreak."

Granoux opened his eyes wide.

"You don't see anything over there?" he asked all of a sudden.

Nobody looked; the gentlemen closed their eyes in order to hear better.

"Ah! look!" he resumed after a short silence. "Beyond the Viorne, near that black mass."

"Yes, I see," replied Rougon, disheartened; "it's a fire they're kindling."

Another fire was lit almost immediately in front of the first, then a third, and a fourth. Red spots appeared thus throughout the whole length of the valley, at nearly equal distances, resembling the lamps of a gigantic avenue. The moon, which half eclipsed them, made them look like pools of blood. This melancholy illumination completed the consternation of the Municipal Commission.

"By Jove!" the marquis muttered, with his bitterest sneer, "these brigands are signalling to each other." And he counted the fires complacently, to get some idea, he said, as to how many men "the brave National Guard of Plassans" would have to deal with. Rougon endeavoured to raise doubts by saying the villages were taking up arms in order to join the army of the insurgents, and not for the purpose of attacking the town. The gentlemen, by their silent consternation, made it clear that they had formed their own opinion, and were not to be consoled.

"I can hear the 'Marseillaise' now," Granoux said in a hushed voice.

It was indeed true. A detachment was following the course of the Viorne and was passing, at that moment, just under the town. The cry, "Then up, and form your ranks!" reached them on the breeze with vibrating distinctness. It was an agonising night. The gentlemen spent it reclining on the parapet of the terrace, frozen by the terrible cold, quite unable to tear themselves away from gazing upon the plain that resounded with the tocsin and the "Marseillaise," and was all ablaze with the illumination of the signal-fires. They feasted their eyes upon this sea of light, all flecked with blood-red flames; and they strained their ears in order to listen to the confused clamour, till at last their senses began to deceive them, and they saw and heard the most frightful things. Nothing in the world would have induced them to leave the place. If they had turned their backs, they would have fancied that a whole army was at their heels. After the manner of a certain class of cowards, they wanted to see the approach of the danger, that they might take flight at the right moment. Towards morning, when the moon had set and they could see nothing in front of them but the dark chasm, they were in a terrible fright. They fancied they were surrounded by invisible enemies, who were crawling along in the darkness, ready to fly at their throats. At the least noise they imagined there were enemies deliberating beneath the terrace, previous to scaling it. Yet there was nothing, nothing but darkness in which they fixed their eyes distractedly. The marquis, as if to console them, said in his ironical voice:

"Don't be at all uneasy! They will wait till daybreak."

Rougon cursed and swore. He felt himself again giving way to fear. Granoux's hair turned completely white. At last the dawn appeared with weary slowness. It was still a terribly anxious moment. The gentlemen, at the first ray of light, expected to see an army drawn up in line before the town. On this particular morning the dawn lingered and dallied on the edge of the horizon. With outstretched neck and fixed gaze they peered anxiously into the white misty expanse. In the dim and uncertain light they caught glimpses of colossal profiles, and the plain seemed to be transformed into a lake of blood, while the rocks looked like corpses floating on its surface, and the clusters of trees took the forms of battalions drawn up for an attack. When the growing daylight had at last dispersed these phantoms, the morning broke

so pale, so mournful, so melancholy, that even the marquis's spirits sank. Not a single insurgent was to be seen, and the high roads were free; but the grey valley wore a gruesomely sad and deserted aspect. The fires were extinguished, but the bells still rang out. Towards eight o'clock, Rougon observed only a small troop of men who were moving off along the Viorne.

The gentlemen were dead with cold and fatigue. Seeing no immediate danger, they determined to go and take a few hours' rest. A national guard was left on the terrace as sentinel, with orders to run and inform Roudier if he should perceive any band in the distance. Granoux and Rougon, quite worn out by the emotions of the night, repaired to their homes, which were in the neighbourhood, mutually encouraging each other.

Félicité put her husband to bed with every care. She called him "poor dear," and repeatedly told him that he ought not to give way to such imaginations of evil, and that all would end well. But he shook his head; he felt grave apprehensions. She let him sleep till eleven o'clock. Then, after he had had something to eat, she gently dismissed him, making him understand that he must go through with the matter to the end. At the mayor's, Rougon found only four members of the Commission; the others sent excuses; they were really ill. An increased feeling of fear had been pervading the town with growing strength since the morning. The gentlemen had not been able to keep secret the history of the memorable night they had passed on the terrace of the Valqueyras mansion. Their servants had hastened to spread the news, embellishing it with various dramatic details. By this time it had already become matter of history that there had been seen in the country, from the heights of Plassans, troops of cannibals dancing as they devoured their prisoners, and bands of witches circling round their cauldrons in which they were boiling children, as well as endless files of bandits whose weapons glittered in the moonlight. People spoke of bells that sounded the tocsin of their own accord through the desolate air, and asserted that the insurgents had set fire to the neighbouring forests, and that the whole country was in flames.

It was Tuesday, the market-day at Plassans, and Roudier had thought it necessary to have the gates opened wide in order to admit the few peasants who brought vegetables,

butter, and eggs. As soon as it had assembled, the Municipal Commission, composed of five members only, including the president, declared that this was an unpardonable imprudence. Even though the sentinel stationed at the Valqueyras mansion had seen nothing, the town should have been kept closed. Then Rougon decided that the public crier, accompanied by a drum, should go the round of the streets, proclaim a state of siege, and announce to the inhabitants that whoever went out would not be allowed to return. The gates were officially closed at noon. This measure, adopted in order to reassure the inhabitants, raised the scare to its highest pitch. There could scarcely have been a more curious sight than this city, padlocking and bolting itself up beneath the mid-day sun, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

When Plassans had buckled and tightened its belt of dilapidated ramparts, and had bolted itself in like a besieged fortress at the approach of an assault, a mortal panic passed over the mournful houses. At every moment, in the centre of the town, people fancied they heard a discharge of musketry in the Faubourg. They no longer received any news; they were, so to speak, at the bottom of a cellar, in a walled hole, where they were anxiously awaiting their deliverance or the finishing stroke. For the last two days the insurgents, who were scouring the country, had cut off all communication. Plassans, shut up in the corner in which it is built, found itself completely isolated from the rest of France. It felt itself in the midst of a country in open rebellion, where the tocsin was ever ringing and the "Marseillaise" was ever roaring with the clamour of a river overflowing its banks. The town, abandoned and panic-stricken, felt that it was destined to be the prey of the victors, while the people on the promenades momentarily alternated between fear and hope, as they thought they perceived, at the Grand' Porte, the blouses of insurgents or the uniforms of soldiers. Never had a chief town, with its tumble-down walls, been the scene of more agonising torture.

Towards two o'clock it was rumoured that the Coup d'État had failed; that the prince-president was imprisoned at Vincennes, and that Paris was in the hands of the most advanced demagogy. It was reported that Marseilles, Toulon, Draguignan, the entire South, belonged to the victorious insurrectionary army. The insurgents would arrive in the evening and put Plassans to the sword.

A deputation then repaired to the mayor's to expostulate with the Municipal Commission for closing the gates, whereby they would only irritate the insurgents. Rougon, who was losing his head, defended his order with his last strength. This locking of the gates seemed to him one of the most ingenious acts of his administration; he advanced the most convincing arguments in its justification. But they embarrassed him by their questions, asking him where were the soldiers and the regiment which he had promised. Then he began to lie, and told them flatly that he had promised nothing at all. The non-appearance of this legendary regiment, which the inhabitants longed for with such eagerness as to dream of its arrival, was the chief cause of the panic. The well-informed people even indicated the exact spot in the high road where the soldiers had been butchered. At four o'clock, Rougon, followed by Granoux, repaired to the Valqueyras mansion. Small bands, on their way to join the insurgents at Orchères, still continued to pass along in the distance, through the valley of the Viorne. Throughout the day the urchins climbed on to the ramparts, and the citizens came to look through the loopholes. These volunteer sentinels kept the town in a state of terror as they counted aloud the marching bands, which were taken for so many strong battalions. The timorous population fancied it was viewing from the battlements the preparations for some universal massacre. At dusk, as on the previous evening, the panic grew stronger.

On returning to the mayor's, Rougon and his inseparable companion, Granoux, recognised that the situation was becoming intolerable. During their absence another member of the Commission had disappeared. They were not more than four now. They felt that they were making themselves ridiculous by staying there for hours looking at each other's pale countenances, without saying a word. Moreover, they were terribly afraid to spend a second night on the terrace of the Valqueyras mansion.

Rougon gravely declared that, the situation of affairs being unchanged, there was no need for them to continue to remain there. If anything serious occurred, information would be sent to them. And, by a decision duly taken in council, he deputed to Roudier the carrying on of the administration. Poor Roudier, who bore in mind that he had served as a national guard in Paris under Louis-Philippe, kept a conscientious watch at the Grand' Porte.

Rougon went home looking very downcast, creeping along under the shadows of the houses. He felt that Plassans was becoming hostile to him. He heard his name bandied about amongst the groups, amidst expressions of anger and contempt. He walked upstairs, reeling and perspiring. Félicité received him with speechless consternation. She, too, was beginning to despair. Their dreams were being completely shattered. They stood silently there, face to face, in the yellow drawing-room. The day was drawing to a close, a murky winter day which gave a muddy tint to the orange-coloured paper with its large flower patterns; never had the room looked more faded, more mean, more shabby. And at this hour they were alone; they no longer had, as on the previous evening, a crowd of courtiers congratulating them. A single day had sufficed to topple them over, at the very moment when they were proclaiming their victory. If the situation did not change on the morrow their game was lost. Félicité who, when gazing on the previous evening at the ruins of the yellow drawing-room, thought of the plains of Austerlitz, now recalled the accursed field of Waterloo as she observed the mournful and deserted aspect of the room.

Then, as her husband said nothing, she went mechanically to the window—to that window where she had inhaled with delight the incense of the entire town. She perceived numerous groups below in the Place, but she closed the blinds as she saw some heads turned towards their house, fearing she would be hooted. She felt quite sure that they were speaking about them.

Voices rose through the twilight. A lawyer was clamouring in the tone of a triumphant pleader.

"That's just what I said; the insurgents left of their own accord, and they will not ask the permission of the forty-one to return. The forty-one indeed! a fine farce! Why, I believe there were at least two hundred."

"No, indeed," said a burly trader, an oil-dealer and a great politician, "there were probably not even ten. There was no fighting, else we should have seen blood in the morning. I went to the mayor's myself to see; the courtyard was as clean as my hand."

A workman, who stepped timidly up to the group, added:

"There was no need of any violence to seize the building; the door was not even shut."

This speech was received with laughter, and the workman, finding himself encouraged, continued:

"As for those Rougons, everybody knows they aren't up to much."

This insult pierced Félicité to the heart. The ingratitude of the people was heartrending to her, for she herself was at last coming to believe in the mission of the Rougons. She called to her husband. She wanted him to take a lesson from the fickleness of the people.

"It's all of a piece with their mirror," continued the lawyer. "What a fuss they made about that broken glass! You know that Rougon is quite capable of having fired a gun at it to make believe there was a battle going on."

Pierre suppressed a cry of pain. What! they did not even believe in his mirror now! They would very soon go so far as to assert that he had not heard a ball whiz past his ear. The legend of the Rougons would be effaced; nothing would remain of their glory. But his torture was not at an end yet. The groups manifested their hostility as heartily as they had displayed their approval on the previous evening. A retired hatter, an old man seventy years of age, whose factory was formerly in the Faubourg, ferreted out the Rougons' past history. He spoke vaguely, with the hesitation of a wandering memory, of the Fouques' property, of Adélaïde, and of her amours with a smuggler. He said just enough to give a fresh start to the gossip. The tattlers drew near; the words "rogues," "thieves," "shameless intriguers," ascended to the shutter behind which Pierre and Félicité were perspiring with fear and indignation. They went so far as to even pity Macquart. This was the final blow. Yesterday Rougon was a Brutus, a stoic soul sacrificing his own affections to his country; to-day he was nothing but an ambitious villain, who felled his brother to the ground and made use of him as a stepping-stone to fortune.

"Listen, listen," Pierre murmured in a stifled voice. "Ah! the scoundrels, they are killing us; we shall never retrieve ourselves."

Félicité, enraged, beat a tattoo with her shrivelled fingers as she replied:

"Let them talk. If we again get the upper hand, they shall see what stuff I'm made of. I know where the blow comes from. The new town hates us."

She guessed right. The sudden unpopularity of the Rougons was the work of a group of lawyers who were very much annoyed at the importance acquired by an old illiterate oil-dealer, whose house had been on the verge of bankruptcy. The Saint-Marc quarter had shown no sign of life for the last two days. The inhabitants of the old quarter and the new town were alone visible. The latter had taken advantage of the panic to injure the yellow drawing-room in the minds of the tradespeople and working-men. Roudier and Granoux, they said, were excellent men, honourable citizens, who were being led away by the Rougons' intrigues. Their eyes should be opened to the fact. Ought not Monsieur Isidore Granoux to be seated in the mayor's arm-chair, in the place of that big barrel-bellied beggar who had not a sou to bless himself with? The envious folk took this as a point of departure to reproach Rougon for all the acts of his administration, which only dated from the previous evening. He had no right to preserve the former Municipal Council; he had committed a grave folly in ordering the gates to be closed; it was through his stupidity that five members had contracted an inflammation of the lungs on the terrace of the Valqueyras mansion. There was no end to his faults. The republicans likewise raised their heads. They talked of a possible sudden attack upon the town-hall by the workmen of the Faubourg. The reaction was in its death-agony.

Pierre, in this overthrow of all his hopes, began to turn over in his mind upon what support he could still reckon if occasion should require.

"Wasn't Aristide to come this evening," he asked, "to make it up with us?"

"Yes," Félicité answered. "He promised me a good article. The 'Indépendant' has not appeared yet——"

But her husband interrupted her, crying:

"See! isn't it he who is just going out of the Sub-Prefecture?"

The old woman glanced in that direction.

"He's got his arm in a sling again!" she cried.

Aristide had indeed got his hand wrapped up in his silk handkerchief again. The Empire was breaking up, but the Republic was not yet triumphant, and he judged it prudent to resume the rôle of a disabled man. He crossed the Place stealthily, without raising his head, when, hearing unmistak-

ably dangerous and compromising words among the groups, he quickly disappeared at the corner of the Rue de la Banne.

"Bah! he won't come up," Félicité said, bitterly. "It's all up with us. Even our children forsake us!"

She shut the window violently, in order not to see or hear anything more. When she had lit the lamp, they sat down to dine, disheartened and without appetite, leaving the food on their plates. They only had a few hours to settle upon a decisive step. It was absolutely indispensable that before daybreak Plassans should be at their feet beseeching forgiveness, if they did not want to entirely renounce the fortune for which they had dreamed of. The total absence of any reliable news was the sole cause of their anxious indecision. Félicité, with her clear intellect, quickly perceived the difficulties in their way. If they had been able to learn the result of the Coup d'État, they would have faced it out and still pursued their rôle of deliverers, or they would have made haste to wipe out all recollection of their miserable campaign. But they had no precise information; they were losing their heads; the thought that they were thus risking their fortune on a throw, in complete ignorance of events, brought a cold perspiration to their brows.

"And why the devil doesn't Eugène write to me?" Rougon cried, in an outburst of despair, forgetting that he was betraying the secret of his correspondence to his wife.

But Félicité pretended not to have heard. Her husband's exclamation had profoundly affected her. Why, indeed, did Eugène not write to his father? After having kept him so accurately informed of the successes of the Bonapartist cause, he should at least have hastened to announce the triumph or defeat of Prince Louis to them. Mere prudence would have counselled the communication of such a piece of information. If he was silent, it must certainly be owing to the fact that the victorious Republic had sent him to join the pretender in the dungeons of Vincennes. Félicité felt herself chilled to the marrow; her son's silence destroyed her last hopes.

At that moment somebody brought up the "Gazette," which had only just appeared.

"Ah!" said Pierre, with surprise, "Vuillet has issued his paper!"

He tore off the wrapper, read the leading article, and finished it as white as a sheet, almost falling off his chair.

"Here, read," he resumed, handing the paper to Félicité.

It was a magnificent article, attacking the insurgents with tremendous violence. Never had such stinging bitterness, so many falsehoods, such bigoted abuse flowed from pen before. Vuillet commenced by narrating the entry of the contingent into Plassans. The description was a perfect masterpiece. He spoke of "those bandits, those hang-dog looking countenances, that scum of the galleys," invading the town, "intoxicated with brandy, lust, and pillage." Then he exhibited them "parading their cynicism in the streets, terrifying the populace with their savage cries, seeking only violence and murder." Further on the scene at the town-hall and the arrest of the authorities were turned into a drama of hideous cruelty: "Then they seized the most respectable people by the throat; and the mayor, the brave commander of the national guard, the postmaster, that kindly functionary, were crowned with thorns, like Jesus, by those wretches, who spat in their faces." The passage devoted to Miette and her red pelisse seemed positively inspired, Vuillet had seen ten, twenty girls steeped in blood: "And who had not seen, in the midst of these monsters, some infamous creatures clothed in red, who had bathed themselves in the blood of the martyrs murdered by these brigands along the high roads? They were brandishing banners, abandoning themselves, in the open cross-ways, to the vile caresses of the entire horde." And Vuillet added, with Biblical magniloquence, "The Republic ever marches between prostitution and murder." That was only the first part of the article; the narrative brought to a close, the editor asked, in a virulent peroration, if the country would permit any longer "the shamelessness of those wild beasts, who respected neither property nor person." It made an appeal to all valorous citizens, declaring that to tolerate such things any longer would be to encourage them, and that the insurgents would then come and snatch "the daughter from her mother's arms, the wife from her husband's embraces." At last, after a pious sentence in which he declared that God willed the extermination of the wicked, he concluded with this trumpet-blast: "It is asserted that these wretches are once more at our gates; well, let each one of us take a gun and shoot them like dogs. I shall be seen in the front rank, happy to rid the earth of such vermin."

This article, in which the dulness of provincial journalism was interspersed with a string of periphrastic abuse, quite

terrified Rougon, who muttered, as Félicité placed the "Gazette" on the table:

"Ah! the wretch! he is giving us the last blow; people will believe that I have inspired this diatribe."

"But," his wife remarked, pensively, "did you not this morning tell me that he absolutely refused to write against the republicans? The news, you said, had terrified him, and you told me that he was as pale as death."

"Yes! yes! I can't understand it at all. When I insisted, he went so far as to reproach me for not having killed all the insurgents. It was yesterday that he ought to have written his article; to-day, he'll get us all butchered!"

Félicité was completely lost in amazement. What had prompted Vuillet? The image of this wretched individual, gun in hand, firing on the ramparts of Plassans, seemed to her one of the most ridiculous things imaginable. There was certainly some determining cause underlying this which escaped her. Vuillet was too impudent in his abuse, too ready with his valour, for the insurrectionary band to be really so near the gates of the town.

"He's a spiteful fellow, I always said so," Rougon resumed, after reading the article over again. "He has only been waiting for an opportunity to do us this injury. What a fool I was to leave him in charge of the post-office!"

This was a flash of light. Félicité started up quickly, as though enlightened by a sudden thought; she put on a cap and threw a shawl over her shoulders.

"Where are you going, pray?" her husband asked with surprise. "It's past nine o'clock."

"You go to bed," she replied rather brusquely. "You're not well; go and rest yourself. Sleep on till I come back; I'll wake you if necessary, and then we can talk the matter over."

She went out with her nimble gait, ran to the post-office, and abruptly entered the office where Vuillet was still at work. On her appearance he made a hasty gesture of vexation.

Never in his life had Vuillet been so happy. Since he had been able to slip his little fingers into the correspondence, he enjoyed the most exquisite pleasure, the pleasure of an inquisitive priest preparing to relish the confessions of his penitents. All the sneaking indiscretions, all the confused prattle of the vestries, sung in his ears. He dived his long, pale nose into the letters,

gazed amorously at the superscriptions with his squinting eyes, he sounded the envelopes, like the little abbés examine the souls of maidens. They were never-ending pleasures, sweet enticing temptations for him. The thousand secrets of Plassans lay there. He held in his hand the honour of the women, the fortunes of the men, and he had only to break a seal to know as much about it as the vicar at the grand cathedral, the confidant of all the better people of the town. Vuillet was one of those terribly bitter and reserved gossips, who know everything and worm out everything, without ever repeating what they hear, except when the chance of dealing a mortal blow offers itself. He had, consequently, often longed to dip his arm elbow deep into the public letter-box. Since the previous evening the post-master's office had become, for him, a big confessional full of darkness and sacred mystery, in which he grew faint as he inhaled the hushed murmurs and the trembling confessions which the letters seemed to exhale. Moreover, the bookseller carried on his work with consummate impudence. The crisis through which the country was passing secured him perfect impunity. If some letters were delayed, or others miscarried altogether, it would be the fault of those republican villains, who were scouring the country and interrupting all communication. The closing of the gates had vexed him at first; but he had come to an understanding with Roudier, whereby the couriers were allowed to enter and bring the mails direct to him, without passing by the mayor's.

As a matter of fact he had only opened a few letters, the important ones, those in which his keen sexton's scent had discovered some information which it would be useful for him to know before anybody else. He then contented himself by locking up in a drawer, for delivery later on, such letters as might give information and rob him of the merit of his valour at a time when the whole town was trembling with fear. This pious personage, in selecting the management of the post-office, displayed a singular appreciation of the situation.

When Madame Rougon entered, he was taking his choice of a heap of letters and papers, under the pretext of classifying them. He rose, with his humble smile, and offered her a seat; his reddened eyes blinked rather uneasily. But Félicité did not sit down; she said roughly:

"I want the letter."

Vuillet opened his eyes wide, with an air of perfect innocence.

"What letter, madame?" he asked.

"The letter you received this morning for my husband. Come, Monsieur Vuillet, I'm in a hurry."

And as he stammered that he did not know, that he had not seen anything, that it was very strange, Félicité continued, in a low, menacing voice:

"A letter from Paris, from my son Eugène; you know what I mean, don't you? I'll look for it myself."

She pretended to dip her hand into the various packets which encumbered the writing table. Thereupon he bestirred himself, and said he would go and see. The service was necessarily in great disorder! Perhaps, indeed, there might be a letter. In that case they would find it. But, as far as he was concerned, he swore he had not seen it. As he was speaking he moved about the office turning over all the papers. Then he opened the drawers and the portfolios. Félicité waited, quite calm and collected.

"Yes, indeed, you're right, here's a letter for you," he cried at last, as he took out several papers from a portfolio. "Ah! these confounded clerks, they take advantage of the situation to do nothing in the proper way."

Félicité took the letter and examined the seal attentively, apparently quite regardless of the fact that such scrutiny might wound Vuillet's susceptibilities. She clearly perceived that somebody must have opened the envelope; the bookseller, in his unskilfulness, had used some sealing wax of a darker colour to fasten it up again, She took care to tear the envelope open in such a manner as to preserve the seal intact, to serve as a proof at the proper time. Eugène announced in a few words the complete success of the Coup d'État, and proclaimed a victory. Paris was subdued, the provinces were quiescent, and he counselled his parents to maintain a very firm attitude in the face of the partial insurrection which was agitating the South. He told them, in conclusion, that the foundation of their fortune was laid, if they did not give way to weakness.

Madame Rougon put the letter in her pocket, and sat down slowly, looking into Vuillet's face. The latter, as though very busy, had resumed his sorting in a feverish manner.

"Listen to me, Monsieur Vuillet," she said to him.

And when he had raised his head:

"Let us play our cards openly; you are wrong to betray

us; some misfortune may befall you. If, instead of unsealing our letters——"

He protested, and pretended to be indignant. But she continued calmly:

"I know, I know your school, you never confess. Come, don't let us waste any more words, what interest have you in favouring the Coup d'État?"

And, as he continued to assert his perfect honesty, she at last lost her patience.

"You take me for a fool!" she cried. "I've read your article. You would do much better to act in concert with us."

Thereupon, without avowing anything, he flatly admitted that he wanted to have the custom of the college. Formerly it was he who supplied the establishment with classical books. But it had become known that he sold obscene literature clandestinely to the pupils in such a large quantity that the desks were full of indecent pictures and books. For that reason he was very near being brought up for misdemeanour. Since that time, he had longed with a jealous passion to secure the good-will of the directors again.

Félicité was surprised at his modest ambition, and told him so. To open letters and risk the galleys just for the sake of selling a few dictionaries!

"Eh!" he said in a shrill voice, "it's an assured sale of four or five thousand francs a year. I don't aspire to impossibilities like some people."

She did not take any notice of what he said. No more was said about his opening the letters. A treaty of alliance was concluded, by which Vuillet engaged not to circulate any news nor take any step in advance, on condition that the Rougons should secure him the custom of the college. As she was leaving, Félicité advised him not to compromise himself any further. It would be sufficient if he detained the letters and did not distribute them till the day after the morrow.

"What a knave!" she muttered, when she was in the street, forgetting that she herself had just laid an interdict upon the mail.

She went home slowly, wrapped in thought. She even went out of her way, passing along the Cours Sauvaire, as if to gain time and ease for reflection before going in. Under the trees of the promenade she met Monsieur de Carnavant, who was taking advantage of the night to ferret about the town without com-

promising himself. The clergy of Plassans, to whom energetic action was distasteful, had, since the commencement of the Coup d'État, preserved an absolute neutrality. For them the Empire was established, and they awaited the opportunity of resuming in some new direction their secular intrigues. The marquis, henceforth a useless agent, had only one curiosity—to know how the affray would terminate, and in what manner the Rougons would carry their rôle through to the end.

"Is it you, little one?" he said, as he recognised Félicité. "I wanted to go and see you; your affairs are becoming embroiled."

"Oh, no, everything is going on all right," she replied, somewhat preoccupied.

"So much the better. You'll tell me all about it, won't you? Ah! I must confess I frightened your husband and his colleagues terribly the other night. You should have seen how comic they looked on the terrace, while I was pointing out to them a band of insurgents in every cluster of trees in the valley! You forgive me?"

"I'm much obliged to you," Félicité said, pertly. "You should have made them die of fright. My husband is so awfully jealous. Come and see me some morning, when I am alone."

She stole off, walking rapidly, as though her encounter with the marquis had determined her. All her little figure betokened an implacable resolution. At last she was going to revenge herself for Pierre's little mysteries, to have him under her heel, and secure, once for all, her omnipotence at home. There would be a fine scene, quite a comedy, indeed, whose points she was already enjoying in anticipation, while she worked out its details with all the elaboration of an injured woman.

She found Pierre in bed, sleeping heavily; she brought the candle near for an instant, and gazed, with an air of pity, at his big face, disturbed now and again by slight twitches; then she sat down at the head of the bed, took off her cap, let her hair fall loose, assumed the appearance of one in despair, and commenced to sob quite loudly.

"Hallo! what's the matter? What are you crying for?" Pierre asked, waking up suddenly.

She did not reply, but cried more bitterly.

"I say, do answer," continued her husband, frightened by

this mute despair. "Where have you been? Have you seen the insurgents?"

She made a negative sign: then, in a hushed voice:

"I've just come from the Valqueyras mansion," she murmured. "I wanted to ask Monsieur de Carnavant's advice. Ah! my dear, all is lost."

Pierre sat up in bed, very pale. His bull neck, which his unbuttoned night-shirt exposed to view, and his soft skin, were puckered with terror. He sank back, pale and weeping, in the middle of the untidy bed, looking like a grotesque Chinese figure.

"The marquis," Félicité continued, "thinks that Prince Louis has succumbed. We are ruined; we shall never get a sou."

Thereupon, as often happens with cowards, Pierre flew into a rage. It was the fault of the marquis, it was his wife's fault, the fault of all his family. Did he ever think of politics at all, until Monsieur de Carnavant and Félicité had driven him to these follies?

"I wash my hands of it altogether," he cried. "It's you two who have committed this error. Wasn't it better to go on living on our little savings in peace and quietness? But you were always determined to have your own way. You see what it has brought us to."

He was losing his head completely, and forgot that he had shown himself as eager as his wife. He felt only a great desire to find a vent for his anger, by laying the blame of his ruin upon others.

"And, moreover," he continued, "could we ever have succeeded with children like ours? Eugène abandons us just at the critical moment; Aristide has dragged us through the mire, and even that big simpleton Pascal is compromising us with his philanthropic practising among the insurgents. And to think that we have brought ourselves to poverty in order to give them an opportunity of airing their humanity!"

In his exasperation, he employed words which he had never used before. Félicité, seeing that he was taking breath, said to him softly:

"You are forgetting Macquart."

"Ah! yes; I am forgetting him," he resumed more violently; "there's another of them, the thought of whom makes me lose my temper! But that's not all; you know

little Silvère. I saw him at my mother's the other evening with his hands covered with blood. He has put some gendarme's eye out. I did not tell you anything about it, in order not to frighten you. You'll see one of my nephews in the Assize Court. Ah! what a family! As for Macquart, he has annoyed us to such an extent that I felt inclined to break his head for him the other day when I had my gun. Yes, I had a mind to do it."

Félicité let the storm pass over. She had received her husband's reproaches with an angelic sweetness, bowing her head like a culprit, whereby she was able to smile in her sleeve. Her demeanour provoked and maddened Pierre. When speech failed the poor man, she heaved deep sighs, feigning repentance. Then she repeated in a disconsolate voice:

"Whatever shall we do! whatever shall we do! We are over head and ears in debt."

"It's your fault!" Pierre cried, with his last remaining strength.

The Rougons, in fact, owed money on all sides. The hope of an approaching success had made them neglect all prudence. Since the beginning of 1851, they had gone so far as to hand round, every evening, to the frequenters of the yellow drawing-room, glasses of syrup and punch, little cakes, complete collations in fact, during which they drank to the death of the Republic. Besides this, Pierre had placed a quarter of his capital at the disposal of the reactionary party, to contribute towards the purchase of guns and cartridges.

"The pastry-cook's bill is more than a thousand francs," Félicité resumed, in her sweetest tone, "and we owe probably twice as much to the liqueur-dealer. Then there's the butcher, the baker, the greengrocer——"

Pierre was in agony. Félicité struck him the last blow by adding:

"I say nothing of the ten thousand francs you gave for the arms."

"I, I!" he faltered, "but I was deceived, I was robbed! It's that idiot Sicardot who put me in for that, swearing that the Napoleonists would be triumphant. I thought I was only making an advance. But this old dolt will have to repay me my money."

"Ah! you won't get anything back," his wife said, shrugging her shoulders. "We shall suffer the fate of war. When

we have paid off everything, we shall not have enough to buy bread with. Ah! it's been a fine campaign. We can now go and live in some hovel in the old quarter."

This last phrase had a mournful sound. It seemed to ring out the knell of their existence. Pierre saw the hovel in the old quarter, the vision of which had just been conjured up by Félicité. There, then, he would have to go and die on a pallet, after having striven all his life for the enjoyment of ease and luxury. In vain had he robbed his mother, steeped his hands in the foulest intrigues, and lied for many a long year. The Empire would not pay his debts—that Empire which alone could save him. He jumped out of bed in his night-shirt, crying:

"No; I'll take my gun; I would rather let the insurgents kill me."

"Well!" Félicité rejoined, with great composure, "you can have that done to-morrow or the day after; the republicans are not very far. That way will do as well as anything to make an end of matters."

Pierre felt a cold chill run through him. It seemed as if, all of a sudden, some one had poured a large pail of cold water over his shoulders. He got into bed again slowly, and when he was warmly wrapped up in the sheets, he began to cry. This stout man easily burst into tears—gently flowing, inexhaustible tears—which streamed out of his eyes without any effort. There was a terrible reaction going on within him. His wrath threw him into a state of forlornness, in which he cried like a child. Félicité, who was waiting for this crisis, was delighted to see him so tractable, so resourceless, and so humbled before her. She preserved her silent attitude, and her appearance of distressed humility. After a long pause, this resignation, the spectacle of this woman plunged into silent dejection, deepened Pierre's grief.

"But do say something!" he implored; "let us consider affairs together. Is there really no hope left to us?"

"None, you know very well," she replied; "you explained the situation yourself just now; we have no help to expect from any one; even our children have betrayed us."

"Let us fly, then. Shall we leave Plassans to-night, immediately?"

"Fly! why, my dear, to-morrow we should be the talk of

the whole town. Don't you remember, too, that you have had the gates closed?"

There was a violent struggle going on within Pierre. His mind was wrought up to an extraordinary pitch; at last, as though he felt himself vanquished, he murmured, in supplicating tones:

"I beseech you, do try to think of something; you haven't said anything yet."

Félicité raised her head, feigning surprise; and with a gesture of profound impotence:

"I am a fool in these matters," she said; "I don't understand anything about politics, you've told me so a hundred times."

And then, as her husband held his tongue in his embarrassment, and lowered his eyes, she continued slowly, but not reproachfully:

"You have not kept me informed of your affairs, have you? I know nothing at all about them, I can't even give you any advice. It was quite right of you, though; women chatter sometimes, and it is a thousand times better for the men to steer the ship alone."

She said this with such refined irony that her husband did not perceive the bitterness of her raillery. He simply felt a great remorse. And, all of a sudden, he burst out into a confession. He spoke of Eugène's letters, explained his plans, his conduct, with all the loquacity of a man who is examining his conscience and imploring a saviour. At every moment he interrupted himself to ask: "What would you have done in my place?" or else he cried, "Isn't it so? I was right, I could not act otherwise." Félicité did not even deign to make a sign. She listened with the cold reserve of a judge. In reality she was enjoying the most exquisite pleasure; she had got him fast at last, this cunning fellow; she played with him like a cat playing with a ball of paper, while he held out his hands to be manacled by her.

"But wait," he said, jumping out of bed quickly, "I'll give you Eugène's correspondence to read. You can judge the situation better then."

She tried in vain to hold him back by his night-shirt. He spread out the letters on the table by the bed-side and then got into bed again, and read whole pages of them and compelled her to go through them herself. She suppressed a smile, and commenced to feel pity for the poor man.

"Well," he said anxiously, when he had finished, "now you know everything. Do you see any means of saving us from ruin?"

She still gave no answer. She appeared to be pondering deeply.

"You are an intelligent woman," he continued, in order to flatter her, "I was wrong to keep any secret from you, I see it now."

"Let us say nothing more about that," she replied. "In my opinion, if you had enough courage——"

And as he looked at her eagerly, she interrupted herself, and said, with a smile:

"But you promise not to distrust me any more? You will tell me everything? You will do nothing without consulting me?"

He swore and accepted the most rigid conditions. Félicité then got into bed; she felt cold and drew near him; and in a whisper, as if somebody might hear them, she explained at length the plan of her campaign. In her opinion the town must be allowed to fall into a still deeper state of panic, while Pierre was to maintain an heroic attitude in the midst of the terrified inhabitants. A secret presentiment, she said, warned her that the insurgents were still at a distance. Moreover, sooner or later, the party of order would carry the day, and the Rougons would be rewarded. After the rôle of saviour, that of martyr was not to be despised. She argued so well, she spoke with such conviction, that her husband, surprised at first at the simplicity of her plans, which consisted in facing it out, saw at last that it was a marvellous scheme, and promised to conform to it with the greatest possible courage.

"And don't forget that it is I who am saving you," the old woman murmured in a coaxing tone. "Will you be nice to me?"

They kissed each other and said good-night. It was a resuscitation for these two old people, parched and dried up with covetousness. But neither of them slept; after a quarter of an hour Pierre, who was gazing at the round reflection of the night-lamp on the ceiling, turned round, and in a faint whisper told his wife of an idea that had just occurred to him.

"Oh! no, no," Félicité murmured, with a shudder. "That would be too cruel."

"But," he resumed, "what you want is to spread conster-

nation among the inhabitants! They would take me seriously, if what I told you should occur."

Then, completing his scheme, he cried:

"We might employ Macquart. That would be a means of getting rid of him."

Félicité seemed to be struck with this idea. She reflected, seemed to hesitate, and then, in a tone of distress, she faltered out:

"Perhaps you are right. We must see. After all, we should be very stupid to be too scrupulous; it's a matter of life and death with us. Let me do it. I'll go to-morrow to Macquart, and see if we can come to an understanding with him. You would only wrangle and spoil all. Good night; sleep well, my poor dear. Our troubles will soon be ended, you'll see."

They kissed each other again and went to sleep. On the ceiling the patch of light seemed to be assuming the shape of a terrified eye, that stared wildly and fixedly on these pale, slumbering folk, who were reeking with crime beneath their very sheets, and who saw in their dreams a rain of blood falling in the room, whose big drops turned into golden pieces as they plashed upon the floor.

On the morrow, before daylight, Félicité went to the mayor's, armed with instructions from Pierre, to seek an interview with Macquart. She took with her, wrapped up in a towel, her husband's national guard uniform. She only saw a few men fast asleep in the guard-house. The door-keeper, who was ordered to supply Macquart with food, went upstairs with her to open the door of the dressing-room, which had been made to do duty as a cell. Then he went down again quietly.

Macquart had been shut up in the room for two days and two nights. He had had time to indulge in lengthy reflections. After his sleep, the first hours were given up to anger and impotent rage. He felt a great longing to break the door open, as he thought of his brother strutting about in the adjoining apartment. He resolved to strangle him with his own hands, as soon as the insurgents returned and released him. But in the evening, at twilight, he calmed down, and gave over striding furiously round the little room. He inhaled a sweet odour there, a feeling of comfort which relaxed his nerves. Monsieur Garçonnet, who was very rich, fastidious, and vain, had had this little room arranged in a very elegant

fashion; the sofa was soft and warm; scents, pomades, and soaps adorned the marble washhand-stand, and the pale light fell from the ceiling with a soft glow, like the light of a lamp suspended in an alcove. Macquart, in the midst of that perfumed atmosphere, close and soporific, which pervades a dressing-room, fell asleep, thinking that these rich scoundrels "were very fortunate, all the same." He had covered himself with a blanket which had been given to him. He stretched himself out on the couch until morning, with his head and back and arms reposing on the cushions. When he opened his eyes, a streamlet of sunshine glided through the opening. He did not leave the sofa. He felt warm, and lay thinking as he gazed around him. He bethought himself that he would never again have such a place to wash in. The washhand-stand particularly interested him. It was not so bad after all, he thought, to trim oneself up with so many pots and phials. It made him think bitterly of his own life of privation. The idea occurred to him that perhaps he had been on the wrong track. There is nothing to be gained by associating with beggars. He ought not to have played the scamp; he should have acted in concert with the Rougons.

Then he rejected this thought. The Rougons were villains who had robbed him. But the warmth, the softness of the sofa, continued to soften his feelings, and to fill him with vague regrets. After all, the insurgents were abandoning him; they were allowing themselves to be beaten like idiots. He at last came to the conclusion that the Republic was a delusion. Those Rougons were lucky. And he recalled his bootless wickedness, his underhand intrigues. Not one member of the family had ever been on his side; neither Aristide, nor Silvère's brother, nor Silvère himself, who was a fool to enter so enthusiastically into the cause of the republicans, and would never do any good for himself. Now his wife was dead, his children had left him, and he would die alone like a dog in some miserable corner, without a sou to bless himself with. Decidedly, he ought to have sold himself to the reactionary party. As he reflected thus, he eyed the washhand-stand, feeling a strong inclination to go and wash his hands with a certain kind of soap contained in a glass case. Macquart, like all lazy fellows who live upon their wives or children, had foppish tastes. Although he wore patched trousers, he liked to inundate himself with aromatic

oil. He spent hours with his barber, who talked politics, and began a fresh discussion after every stroke of the comb. The temptation was becoming too strong, and Macquart got up and stood before the washhand-stand. He washed his hands and face, dressed his hair, perfumed himself, and went through a complete toilet. He used all the bottles, all the soap and powders; but his greatest pleasure was to dry his hands with the mayor's towels, they were so soft and thick. He buried his wet face into them, and inhaled, with delight, all the odour of wealth. Then, when he had pomaded himself, and felt refreshed from head to toe, he went back and stretched himself on the sofa, feeling quite youthful again, and disposed to conciliatory thoughts. He felt greater contempt for the Republic since he had dipped his nose into Monsieur Garçonnet's phials. The idea occurred to him that there was, perhaps, still time to make peace with his brother. He reflected what he could ask in return for playing traitor. His rancour against the Rougons still gnawed at his heart; but he was in one of those moods when, lying on one's back in silence, one is apt to admit stern realities, and scold oneself for neglecting to feather a comfortable nest wherein to wallow in slothful ease of mind and body, even at the cost of giving up one's most cherished animosities. Towards evening, Antoine determined to send for his brother on the following day. But when he saw Félicité enter in the morning he understood that his aid was wanted, so he stood on his guard.

The negotiation was long, full of treachery, and conducted with infinite skill. At first they indulged in vague complaints, then Félicité, who was surprised to find Macquart almost polite, after the violent manner in which he had behaved at her house on the Sunday evening, assumed a tone of gentle reproach towards him. She deplored the hatred which severed their families. But, in truth, he had so calumniated his brother, and manifested towards him such a bitter animosity that he had made poor Rougon quite lose his head.

"Zounds! my brother has never behaved like a brother to me," Macquart said, with suppressed violence. "Has he ever given me any assistance? He would have let me die in my hovel. When he was kind towards me, you remember, at the time he gave me two hundred francs, I am sure no one can reproach me with having said a single unpleasant word about him. I said everywhere that he was a very good-hearted fellow."

This clearly signified:

"If you had continued to supply me with money, I should have been very pleasant towards you, I would have helped you, instead of fighting against you. It's your own fault. You ought to have bought me."

Félicité understood him so well that she replied:

"I know you have accused us of being hard upon you, because people imagine we are in comfortable circumstances; but they are mistaken, my dear brother: we are poor people; we have never been able to act towards you as our heart would have desired."

She hesitated a moment and then continued:

"If it were absolutely necessary in some serious contingency, we might be able to make a sacrifice; but, truly, we are very poor, very poor!"

Macquart pricked up his ears. "I have them!" he thought. Then, without appearing to understand his sister-in-law's indirect offer, he detailed the wretchedness of his life in a doleful manner, and spoke of the death of his wife and his children's flight. Félicité, on her side, referred to the crisis through which the country was passing, and declared that the Republic had completely ruined them. Then she went on to bemoan the exigencies of a situation which compelled one brother to imprison another. How their hearts would bleed if justice would not release its prey! And she let slip the word "galleys!"

"Bah! I defy you," Macquart said calmly.

But she exclaimed:

"I would rather reedem the honour of the family with my own blood. I tell you all this to show you that we shall not abandon you. I come to give you the means of effecting your escape, my dear Antoine."

They gazed at each other for a moment, sounding each other with a look, before engaging in the contest.

"Unconditionally?" he asked at length.

"Without any condition," she replied.

She sat down beside him on the sofa, and continued in a determined voice:

"And even, before passing the frontier, if you want to earn a thousand-franc note, I can put you in the way of doing so."

There was another silence.

"If it's all above board I shall have no objection," Antoine

muttered, apparently reflecting. "You know I don't want to mix myself up with your underhand dealings."

"But there are no underhand dealings about it," Félicité resumed, smiling at the old rascal's scruples. "Nothing can be simpler: you will leave this room presently, and go and conceal yourself in your mother's house, and this evening you can assemble your friends and come and seize the mayor's office again."

Macquart could not conceal his extreme surprise. He did not understand it at all.

"I thought," he said, "that you were victorious."

"Oh! I haven't got time now to tell you all about it," the old woman replied, somewhat impatiently. "Do you accept or not?"

"Well, no, I don't accept—I want to consider. For a thousand francs I should be very stupid to risk a possible fortune."

Félicité rose.

"Just as you like, my dear fellow," she said, coldly. "You don't seem to realise the position you are in. You came to my house and treated me as though I were a mere outcast; and then when I am kind enough to hold out a hand to you in the hole into which you have been stupid enough to let yourself fall, you stand on ceremony, and refuse to be rescued. Well then, stay here, wait till the authorities come back. As for me, I wash my hands of the whole business."

She had reached the door.

"But," he implored, "give me some explanations. I can't strike a bargain with you in perfect ignorance. For two days past I have been quite in the dark as to what's going on. How do I know that you are not cheating me?"

"Bah! you're a simpleton," replied Félicité, who had retraced her steps at Antoine's doleful appeal. "You are very foolish not to trust yourself implicitly to us. A thousand francs! that's a fine sum, a sum that one would only risk in a winning cause. I advise you to accept."

He still hesitated.

"But when we want to seize this place, shall we be allowed to enter quietly?"

"Ah! I don't know," she said with a smile. "There will perhaps be a shot or two fired."

He looked at her fixedly.

"Well, but tell me now, little woman," he resumed in a hoarse voice, "you don't intend, do you, to have a ball lodged in my head?"

Félicité blushed. She was, in fact, just thinking that, during the attack on the building, it would be possible for a bullet to render them a great service in ridding them of Antoine. It would be a gain of a thousand francs, too. She got angry as she muttered:

"What an idea! Really, it's abominable to think such things!"

Then suddenly calming down, she added:

"Do you accept? You understand now, don't you?"

Macquart had understood perfectly. It was an ambush that they were proposing to him. He did not perceive the reasons nor the consequences of it, and that was what induced him to haggle. After having spoken of the Republic as though it were a mistress he could not forsake without a keen pang of grief, he brought forward the risks which he would have to run, and finished by asking for two thousand francs. But Félicité stuck to her original offer. They debated until she promised to procure him, on his return to France, a place where he would have nothing to do, and which would pay him well. The bargain was then concluded. She made him don the uniform of a national guard which she had brought with her. He was to betake himself quietly to aunt Dide's, and afterwards, towards midnight, he was to assemble in the neighbourhood of the town-hall all the republicans he should meet, telling them that the mayor's office was unguarded and that they had only got to push open the door to take possession of it. Antoine demanded earnest money, and received two hundred francs. She undertook to pay him the remaining eight hundred francs on the following day. The Rougons were risking the last sous they had at their disposal.

When Félicité had gone downstairs, she remained in the Place for a moment to watch Macquart go out. He passed the guard-house quietly, blowing his nose. He had broken the skylight in the room, to make it appear that he had escaped that way.

"It's all arranged," Félicité said to her husband, when she went home. "It will be at midnight. It doesn't matter to me at all now. I should like to see them all shot. How they slandered us yesterday in the street!"

"It was very good of you to hesitate," replied Pierre, who was shaving. "Every one would do the same in our place."

On that morning—it was Wednesday—he was particularly careful about his toilet. His wife combed his hair and tied his cravat. She turned him about like a child going to a distribution of prizes. Then, when he was ready, she examined him, declared he looked very nice, and that he would make a very good figure in the midst of the serious events that were preparing. His big pale face wore an air of grave dignity and heroic determination. She accompanied him to the first landing, giving him her last recommendations: he was not to abandon his courageous attitude, however great the panic should be; he was to close the gates more hermetically than ever, leave the town in agonies of terror within its ramparts; and it would be excellent if he were to appear the only one willing to die for the cause of order.

What a day! The Rougons still speak of it as though it were a glorious and decisive battle. Pierre went straight to the mayor's, heedless of the looks or words which he encountered on his way. He installed himself there magisterially, like a man who does not intend to quit the place again. He simply sent a note to Roudier, to advise him that he was resuming authority.

"Keep watch at the gates," he said, knowing that these lines might become public: "I myself shall watch over the interior, and maintain the security of life and property. It is just at the moment when evil passions reappear and prevail that good citizens should endeavour to stifle them, even at the peril of their lives." The style and the very errors of expression, combined with its antique laconism, gave to this note an appearance of greater heroism. Not one of the gentlemen of the Provisional Commission put in an appearance. The two who were the last to waver in their fidelity, Granoux himself even, prudently remained at home.

Rougon was the only member of the Commission who remained at his post, in his presidential arm-chair, while all the others had vanished as the panic spread with greater violence. He did not even deign to issue an order summoning them to attend. He was there, and that was sufficient. A sublime spectacle, which a local journal depicted later on in a word: "courage giving the hand to duty."

During the whole morning Pierre was seen animating the

building with his goings and comings. He was absolutely alone in this large, empty place, whose lofty halls re-echoed with the noise of his heels. All the doors were left open. He made an ostentatious show of his presidency over a non-existent council in the middle of this desert, and appeared so deeply impressed with the responsibility of his mission that the door-keeper, meeting him two or three times in the passages, bowed to him with an air of mingled surprise and respect. He was seen at every window, and, in spite of the bitter cold, he appeared several times on the balcony with bundles of papers in his hand, like a busy man attending to important despatches.

Then towards mid-day he passed through the town; he visited the guard-houses, speaking of a possible attack, and letting it be understood that the insurgents were not far off; but he relied, he said, on the courage of the brave national guards. If necessary they should be ready to die to the last man for the defence of the good cause. When he returned from this round, slowly and solemnly, after the manner of a hero who has set the affairs of his country in order, and now only awaits death, he observed signs of a complete stupor along his path; the people promenading in the Cours, the incorrigible little householders, whom no catastrophe would have prevented from coming at certain hours to bask in the sun, looked at him as he passed with an air of amazement, as if they did not recognize him, and could not believe that one of their own set, a former oil-dealer, should have the boldness to face a whole army.

In the town the anxiety was at its height. The band of insurrectionists was expected every moment. The rumour of Macquart's escape was commented upon in a most alarming manner. It was asserted that he had been rescued by his friends the reds, and that he was awaiting night-fall in some lurking-place in order to fall upon the inhabitants and set fire to the four corners of the town. Plassans, closed in and terror-stricken, was gnawing at its own vitals within its walled prison, and was at a loss what else to imagine to frighten itself still more. The republicans, in the face of Rougon's bold attitude, felt a passing distrust. As for the new town, the lawyers and retired tradespeople who had spoken against the yellow drawing-room on the previous evening were so surprised that they did not again dare to openly attack such a brave man. They contented themselves with saying "it was

madness to brave victorious insurgents like that, and this useless heroism would bring the greatest misfortune upon Plassans." Then, at about three o'clock, they organised a deputation. Pierre, who was burning with a desire to make a display of his devotion before his fellow-citizens, had not, however, ventured to reckon upon such a fine opportunity.

He spoke sublimely. It was in the mayor's office that the president of the Provisional Commission received the deputation from the new town. These gentlemen, after paying homage to his patriotism, besought him not to think any longer of resistance. But he, in a loud voice, talked of duty, of his country, of order, of liberty, and various other things. Moreover, he did not wish to compel any one to imitate him; he was simply discharging a duty which his conscience and his heart dictated to him.

"You see, gentlemen, I am alone," he said in conclusion. "I will take all the responsibility, so that nobody but myself may be compromised. And if a victim is required I willingly offer myself; I wish to sacrifice my own life for the safety of the inhabitants."

A notary, the wiseacre of the party, remarked that he was running to certain death.

"I know it," he resumed solemnly. "I am prepared!"

The gentlemen looked at each other. That "I am prepared!" rivetted them with admiration. Decidedly this man was a brave fellow. The notary conjured him to call in the aid of the gendarmes; but he replied that the blood of those soldiers was precious, and he would not have it shed, except in the last extremity. The deputation withdrew slowly, deeply moved. An hour afterwards, Plassans was treating Rougon like a hero; the most cowardly called him "an old fool."

Towards evening, Rougon was much surprised to see Garnoux hastening to him. The old almond-dealer threw himself in his arms, calling him "noble man," and declaring he would die with him. The "I am prepared!" which had just been reported to him by his maid-servant, who heard it at the greengrocer's, had made him quite enthusiastic. There was a charming naïveté beneath his grotesque timorousness. Pierre kept him there, thinking that he would not be of much consequence. He was even touched by the poor man's devotion; he resolved to have him publicly complimented by the prefect, in order to rouse the envy of the other citizens who had so

cowardly abandoned him. And both of them awaited the night in the deserted building.

At the same time Aristide was striding about at home in an uneasy manner. Vuillet's article had astonished him. His father's attitude stupefied him. He had just caught sight of him at the window, in a white cravat and black frock-coat, so calm at the approach of danger that his ideas were all upset. Yet the insurgents were coming back triumphant, that was the belief of the whole town. But he felt some doubts. He had suspicions of some lugubrious farce. As he did not dare to present himself at his parents' house, he had sent his wife there. When Angèle returned, she said to him in her drawling voice:

"Your mother expects you: she is not angry at all, she seems rather to be making fun of you. She reiterated to me several times that you could just put your sling back in your pocket."

Aristide was terribly put out. He ran to the Rue de la Banne, however, prepared to make the most humble submission. His mother contented herself by receiving him with scornful smiles.

"Ah! my poor fellow," she said as she perceived him, "you're certainly not very shrewd."

"What can one do in a hole like Plassans!" he angrily cried. "On my word of honour, I am getting stupid here. No news, and everybody shivering. That's what it is to be shut up in these villanous ramparts. Ah! if I had only followed Eugène to Paris."

Then, seeing that his mother was still smiling, he added bitterly:

"You haven't been very kind to me, mother. I know many things, come now. My brother kept you informed of what was going on, and you have never given me the least indication that might be useful."

"How do you know that?" Félicité asked, becoming serious and distrustful. "Well, you're not so foolish, then, as I thought. Do you open letters like some one of my acquaintance?"

"No, but I listen at doors," Aristide replied, with great assurance.

This frankness was not displeasing to the old woman. She began to smile again, and asked more softly:

"Well, then, you blockhead, how is it you didn't rally sooner?"

"Ah! that's where it is," the young man said with embarrassment. "I didn't have much confidence in you. You received such idiots: my-father-in-law, Granoux, and the others, and then, I didn't want to go too far."

He listened, and then resumed with some uneasiness:

"To-day, at least, you are quite sure of the success of the Coup d'État."

"I!" Felicite cried, wounded by her son's doubts; "no, I'm not sure of anything."

"And yet you sent word to say that I was to take off my sling!"

"Yes, because all the gentlemen are laughing at you."

Aristide stood rivetted there, his eyes wandering and apparently contemplating one of the flowers of the orange-coloured paper. His mother was seized with a sudden impatience as she saw him hesitating thus.

"Ah yes," she said, "I come back again to my former opinion: you're not very shrewd. And you think you ought to have had Eugène's letters to read? Why, my poor fellow, you would have spoilt all, with your continual vacillation. You never can make up your mind."

"I hesitate?" he interrupted, glaring at his mother coldly. "Ah! well, you don't know me. I would set the whole town on fire if I wanted to warm my feet. But, understand me, I've no desire to take the wrong road! I'm tired of eating my hard-earned bread, and intend to play fortune a trick. But I only play for certainties."

He pronounced these words so sharply that his mother recognised, in their burning passion for success, the cry of her own blood. She whispered:

"Your father is very brave."

"Yes, I've seen him," he resumed, with a sneer. "He's a simpleton. He reminded me of Leonidas at Thermopylæ. Is it you, mother, who have made him cut such a figure?"

And, he added cheerfully, with a gesture of determination:

"So much the worse! I'm a Bonapartist! Father is not the man to risk the chance of being killed unless it pays him well."

"And you're quite right," his mother said; "I mustn't say anything, but to-morrow you'll see."

He did not press her, but swore that she would soon have reason to be proud of him; he then departed, while Félicité,

feeling her old preference awakening, said to herself at the window, as she watched him going away, that he had the devil's spirit and his own too, that she would never have had the courage to let him leave without setting him in the right path.

For the third time night fell upon Plassans, a night full of anguish. The town was sounding almost its last death-rattle. The citizens went home quickly, the doors were barricaded with a great noise of iron bolts and bars. The general feeling seemed to be that, by the morrow, Plassans would no longer exist, that it would be swallowed up by the earth or evaporate to the heavens. When Rougon went home to dine, he found the streets completely deserted. This desolation made him sad and melancholy. He consequently felt a slight misgiving when he had finished his meal, and asked his wife if it were necessary to follow up the insurrection that Macquart was preparing.

"Nobody will run us down now," he said. "You should have seen those gentlemen of the new town, how they bowed to me! It seems to me quite unnecessary now to kill anybody—hey! What do you think? We shall feather our nest without that."

"Ah! what a shallow fellow you are," Félicité cried angrily. "It was your own idea to do it, and now you hold back! I tell you you'll never do anything without me! Go then, go your own way. Do you think the republicans will spare you if they get hold of you?"

Rougon, as soon as he was back at the mayor's, prepared the ambush. Granoux was very useful to him. He despatched him with orders to the different posts who were guarding the ramparts. The national guards were to repair to the town-hall in small groups, as secretly as possible. Roudier, that misguided provincial Parisian who would have spoilt the whole affair with his humanitarian preaching, was not even informed of it. Towards eleven o'clock, the court-yard was full of national guards. Rougon frightened them; he told them that the republicans still remaining in Plassans were about to attempt a desperate *coup de main*, and plumed himself on having been warned in time by his secret police. When he had pictured the bloody massacre which would overtake the town, if these wretches were to get the upper hand, he ordered them to cease speaking and extinguish all lights. He took a gun

himself. Since the morning he had been marching about as though in a dream; he did not recognise himself in the matter any longer; he felt Félicité behind him; the crisis of the previous night had thrown him into her hands, and he would have allowed himself to be seized, saying: "It does not matter, my wife will come and rescue me." To augment the tumult, and heighten the terror which pervaded the slumbering town, he begged Granoux to repair to the cathedral and have the tocsin rung at the first shots. The marquis's name would open the beadle's door. And, in the darkness, amid the dismal silence of the court, the national guards waited in a terrible state of anxiety, their eyes fixed on the porch, eager to fire, as though they were lying in wait for a troop of wolves.

In the meantime, Macquart had passed the day in aunt Dide's house. He had stretched himself on the old coffer, lamenting the loss of Monsieur Garçonnet's sofa. Several times he felt a mad inclination to break into his two hundred francs at some neighbouring café: this money was burning a hole in his waistcoat pocket; he whiled away his time by spending it in imagination. His mother moved about, with her stiff, automatic motion, apparently not even aware of his presence. Her children had been running rather frequently to her during the last few days, in a state of pallor and desperation, but she did not relinquish her taciturnity, nor lose her deathly immobility. She knew nothing of the fears that were upsetting the incarcerated town; she was a thousand leagues away from Plassans, floating in that one constant fixed idea which kept her eyes open, devoid of all other thoughts. At this time, however, an uneasiness, a human anxiety made her eyes twitch. Antoine, unable to resist the temptation of having something nice to eat, sent her to get a roast chicken from an eating-house in the Faubourg. When it was set on the table:

"Hey!" he said to her, "you don't often eat chickens, do you? It's only for those who work, and know how to manage their affairs. As for you, you have always squandered everything. I bet you're giving all your savings to that demure hypocrite, Silvère. He's got a mistress, the sly fellow. If you've got a hoard of money hidden in some corner, he'll ease you of it nicely some day."

He was in a jesting mood, burning with wild exultation. The money he had in his pocket, the treachery he was preparing, the conviction that he had sold himself at a good price,

filled him with the self satisfaction characteristic of vicious people who are naturally merry and scornful in the midst of their evil practices. Aunt Dide only heard Silvère's name.

"Have you seen him?" she asked, opening her lips at last.

"Who? Silvère?" Antoine replied. "He was walking about among the insurgents with a tall red girl on his arm. It will serve him right if he gets into trouble."

The grandmother looked at him fixedly, then, in a solemn voice:

"Why?" she said simply.

"Eh! Why, he shouldn't be so stupid," he resumed, somewhat embarrassed. "People don't risk their neck for the sake of ideas. I've settled my little business. I'm no fool."

But aunt Dide was no longer listening to him. She was murmuring:

"He had his hands covered with blood. They'll kill him for me like the other one. His uncles will send the gendarmes after him."

"What are you muttering about there?" her son said, as he was finishing the bones of the chicken. "You know I like people to accuse me to my face. If I have sometimes talked to the little fellow about the Republic, it was only to bring him round to a more reasonable way of thinking. He was touched. I love liberty myself, but it mustn't degenerate into licentiousness. And as for Rougon, I esteem him. He's a man of courage and common-sense."

"He had the gun, hadn't he?" interrupted aunt Dide, whose wandering mind seemed to be following Silvère far away on the high road.

"The gun? Ah! yes; Macquart's carbine," Antoine continued, after casting a glance at the mantel-shelf, where the fire-arm was ordinarily hung. "I fancy I saw it in his hands. A fine instrument to scour the country with, with a girl on his arm. What a fool!"

And he thought he might as well make a few obscene jokes. Aunt Dide had commenced to bustle about the room again. She did not say a word. Towards the evening, Antoine went out, after putting on a blouse and pulling over his eyes a cap which his mother had bought for him. He re-entered the town in the same manner as he had quitted it, by relating a little story to the national guards who were guarding the

Porte de Rome. Then he gained the old quarter, where he crept from house to house in a mysterious manner. All the elated republicans, all the members of the brotherhood who had not followed the band, met in an obscure inn, where Macquart had made an appointment with them. When about fifty persons had assembled, he made a speech, in the course of which he spoke of a personal vengeance to be gratified, of a victory to be gained, of a disgraceful yoke to be thrown off, and ended by undertaking to deliver the mayor's office over to them in ten minutes. He had just left it, it was quite unguarded, he said, and the red flag would float over it that very night if they wished it. The workmen deliberated. At that moment the reaction was in its death throes. The insurgents were at the gates. It would be preferable and more honourable to make some efforts to regain power without awaiting their return, so that they might be able to receive them as brothers, with the gates wide open, and the streets and squares adorned with flags. Moreover, none of them distrusted Macquart. His hatred against the Rougons, the personal vengeance of which he spoke, answered for his loyalty. It was arranged that all those who were sportsmen and had a gun at home should go and fetch it, and that at midnight the band should assemble in the neighbourhood of the town-hall. A question of detail very nearly put an end to their plans—they had no bullets; but they decided that their weapons should be loaded with small shot; and even that was unnecessary, as they were certain not to meet with any resistance.

Once more Plassans beheld a band of armed men filing along close to the houses, in the tranquil moonlight. When the band was assembled in front of the town-hall, Macquart boldly advanced, keeping a sharp look-out at the same time. He knocked, and when the door-keeper, who had learnt his lesson, asked what was wanted, he uttered such terrible menaces, that the man, feigning fright, made haste to open the door. The two leaves of the door swung back slowly, and the porch gaped open and empty before them. Then Macquart shouted in a loud voice:

"Come, my friends!"

That was the signal. He himself jumped aside quickly; and as the republicans rushed in there issued, from the darkness of the court-yard, a fiery stream and a shower of bullets, which passed under the gaping porch like the rolling of thunder.

The door vomited death. The national guards, exasperated at having to wait so long, and eager to relieve themselves of the incubus which was weighing upon them in this dismal court-yard, had all fired at once with feverish haste. The flash was so bright, that Macquart distinctly saw, through the yellow light of the powder, Rougon taking aim. He fancied he saw the barrel of the gun directed towards him, he recalled Félicité's blush, and made his escape, muttering:

"No tricks! The rascal would kill me. He owes me eight hundred francs."

In the meantime, shrieks and howls were rising amid the darkness. The surprised republicans, shouting treachery, had fired in their turn. A national guard fell under the porch. The republicans, after leaving three dead, took to flight, stumbling over the corpses, stricken with panic and shouting through the quiet lanes: "They're murdering our brethren!" in a despairing voice, which found no echo. The defenders of order, having had time to reload their weapons, rushed furiously upon the empty Place, sending bullets to all the street corners, and wherever the darkness of a door, or the shadow of a lamp-post, or the jutting of a stone made them fancy they saw an insurgent. They remained there ten minutes, firing their guns into space.

The ambush had burst over the slumbering town like a thunderbolt. The inhabitants in the neighbouring streets, roused from their sleep by the noise of this terrible fusillade, sat up in bed, their teeth chattering with fright. They would not have ventured to put their noses out of the window for all the world. And, slowly, in the air rent asunder by the shots, one of the cathedral bells sounded the tocsin with a rhythm so irregular, so strange, that one would have said it was the hammering of an anvil or the echo of a colossal kettle struck by the arm of a child in a fit of passion. This howling bell, which the citizens did not recognise, terrified them more than the reports of the guns; and there were some who thought that what they heard was the noise of an endless train of artillery rumbling over the paving-stones. They lay down again and buried themselves beneath their blankets, imagining that they were running into danger by continuing to sit up in bed in their closely-fastened rooms. They drew the sheets up to their chins, held their breath, and huddled themselves into as small a space as possible, with the ends of their silk handkerchiefs falling in their eyes,

while their wives, by their side, almost fainted with terror as they buried their heads among the pillows.

The national guards who had remained at the ramparts also heard the shots. They ran up helter-skelter, in groups of five or six, thinking that the insurgents had entered by means of some subterranean passage, disturbing the silence of the streets with the tumult of their excited rush. Roudier was one of the first to arrive. But Rougon sent them back to their posts, reprimanding them severely for abandoning the gates of the town. Thrown into consternation by this reproach—for in their panic, they had, in fact, left the gates absolutely defenceless—they resumed their gallop, and passed through the streets again with a still more frightful uproar. Plassans might well have thought that an infuriated army was running about it in all directions. The fusillade, the tocsin, the marches and countermarches of the national guards, their arms which they dragged along like clubs, their terrified cries in the darkness, produced a deafening tumult; just like a town taken by assault and given over to plunder. This was the final blow for the unfortunate inhabitants; they had indeed said that it would be their last night, that before daybreak Plassans would be swallowed up in the earth, or would evaporate into smoke; and lying in their beds, they awaited the catastrophe, quite stupefied, and fancying at times that their houses were already tottering.

Granoux continued to ring the tocsin. When silence had again fallen upon the town, the bell sounded very mournfully. Rougon, who was burning with fever, was exasperated by its distant wailing. He hastened to the cathedral and found the door open. The beadle was on the threshold.

"Ah! that's quite enough!" he shouted to the man; "anybody would think there was some one crying; it's quite unnerving."

"But it isn't me, sir," the beadle replied in a distressed manner. "It's Monsieur Granoux, he's gone up into the steeple. I must tell you that I took out the clapper of the bell, by the priest's order, just to prevent the tocsin being sounded. Monsieur Granoux wouldn't listen to reason. He climbed up, notwithstanding. I don't know what he can be making that noise with."

Rougon hastily ascended the staircase which led to the bells, shouting:

"That will do! that will do! for goodness sake leave off!"

When he had reached the top of the staircase he caught sight of Granoux, by the light of the moon which entered through the embrasure of an ogive; he was standing there, without a hat, striking furiously with a heavy hammer. He was setting to with a right good will. He threw himself back, took a spring, and fell upon the sonorous bronze as if he wanted to crack it. He drew his fat person together, and rushed upon the big immovable bell, the vibration of which drove him back, only to return to the attack with renewed violence. One would have thought he was a blacksmith striking a hot iron; but a blacksmith in a frockcoat, short and bald, working in awkward and wild attitudes.

Surprise kept Rougon motionless for a moment at the sight of this frantic citizen belabouring the bell in the moonlight. Then he understood what was the meaning of those kettle sounds which this strange ringer was pouring out over the town. He shouted to him to stop, but Granoux did not hear. He was obliged to take hold of his frockcoat, whereupon Granoux, recognising him, exclaimed in a triumphant voice:—"Ah! you've heard it. At first I tried to knock the bell with my fists, but that hurt me. Fortunately I found this hammer. A few more blows, eh?"

But Rougon dragged him away. Granoux was radiant. He wiped his forehead, and made his companion promise he would let it be well known in the morning that he had produced all that noise with nothing but a hammer. What an achievement, what importance this furious ringing would confer upon him!

Towards morning, Rougon bethought himself of going to reassure Félicité. In accordance with his orders, the national guards had shut themselves up at the mayor's. He had forbidden them to remove the dead, under the pretext that it was necessary to give the populace of the old quarter a lesson. And as he was passing along the Place, on which the moon was no longer shining, in order to reach the Rue de la Banne, he stepped on the hand of one of the corpses that lay clenched on the edge of the footpath. He almost fell. This soft hand, crushed by his heel, caused him an indefinable sensation of disgust and horror. He ran along the deserted streets with rapid strides, fancying he could feel behind his back a bloody hand pursuing him.

ROUGON STEPPING INVOLUNTARILY ON THE DEAD INSURGENT'S HAND.
p. 294.

"There are four of them on the ground," he said, as he entered his house.

They looked at each other as though they were themselves astonished at what was their own crime.

The lamp gave a hue like yellow wax to their pale faces.

"Have you left them there?" Félicité asked; "they must be found there."

"Zounds! I didn't pick them up. They are lying on their backs. I stepped on something soft——"

He looked at his shoe. The heel was covered with blood. While he was putting on another pair of shoes, Félicité resumed:

"Well, well! so much the better! It's all over now. They won't say any more that you only fire at mirrors."

The fusillade which the Rougons had planned in order to definitively secure their recognition as the saviours of Plassans, brought the whole town with fear and gratitude to their feet. The day broke mournfully with the grey melancholy of a winter morning. The inhabitants, hearing nothing, ventured forth, weary of trembling beneath their sheets. They came out ten or fifteen at a time. Later on, when a rumour was spread about that the insurgents had taken flight, leaving their dead lying in every gutter, Plassans rose in a body and descended upon the town-hall. During the whole morning the people marched curiously round the four corpses. They were horribly mutilated, particularly one which had three bullets in the head. The upturned skull exposed the bare brain to view. But the most terrible of the four was the national guard who had fallen under the porch; he had received a charge of the small shot, which was used by the republicans for want of bullets, full in the face. His torn and riddled countenance was oozing with blood. The crowd feasted their eyes with this horror, gazing long at it, with that avidity for revolting spectacles which is characteristic of cowards. They recognised the national guard; it was the pork-butcher Dubruel, he whom Roudier had accused on the Monday morning of having fired with culpable eagerness. Of the three other corpses, two were journeymen hatters; the third was unknown. Gaping groups were shuddering in front of the red pools which stained the pavement, looking behind them with an air of mistrust, as though that summary justice which had restored order during the night by force of arms were watching them,

and spying their movements and their words, ready to shoot them in their turn, unless they kissed with enthusiasm the hand of him who had just rescued them from the demagogy.

The panic of the night further augmented the terrible effect produced in the morning by the sight of the four corpses. The true history of this fusillade was never known. The firing of the combatants, Granoux's hammering, the helter-skelter flight of the national guards through the streets, had filled their ears with such terrifying sounds that most of them dreamed of a gigantic battle fought with a countless mass of enemies. When the victors, magnifying the number of their adversaries with an instinctive bashfulness, spoke of about five hundred men, everybody protested against such a low calculation. Some of the citizens asserted that they had looked out and seen an immense stream of fugitives passing by for more than an hour, and everybody had heard the bandits running under their windows. Five hundred men would never have been able to rouse a whole town. It must have been an army, and a fine big army too, which the brave militia of Plassans had driven back into the ground. This phrase of their having been driven back into the ground. which was used by Rougon, struck the people as being singularly applicable, for the guards who were charged with the defence of the ramparts swore by all that was holy that not a single man had entered or quitted the town, and this circumstance tinged what had happened with an air of mystery, suggesting the idea of horned demons destroyed by the flames, and filled the people's imagination with the wildest theories. It is true the guards avoided all mention of their mad gallops; and so even the most rational citizens were inclined to believe that a band of insurgents had really entered either by a breach in the wall or through some other channel. Later on, rumours of treachery were spread abroad, and people talked of an ambush. The cruel truth could no longer be concealed by the men led to slaughter by Macquart; but there was so much terror still about, and the sight of blood had thrown so many cowards into the arms of the reactionary party, that these rumours were attributed to the rage of the vanquished republicans. It was asserted, on the other hand, that Macquart had been made prisoner by Rougon, who kept him in a damp cell, where he was letting him die of slow starvation. This horrible tale procured the most humble homage for Rougon.

Thus it was that this grotesque person, this pale, flabby, tun-bellied citizen became, in one night, a terrible gentleman, whom nobody dared to ridicule any more. He had steeped his foot in blood. The inhabitants of the old quarter stood dumb with fright before the corpses. But towards ten o'clock, when the respectable people of the new town arrived, the place was filled with hushed conversations and stifled exclamations. They spoke of the other attack, of the seizure of the mayor's office, in which a mirror only had been wounded; but this time they were not jesting with Rougon, they spoke of him with respectful dismay; he was indeed a hero, a deliverer. The corpses, with their eyes open, were staring at these gentlemen, the lawyers and the householders, who shuddered as they murmured that civil war had many cruel necessities. The notary, the chief of the deputation sent to the mayor's on the previous evening, went from group to group, recalling the "I am prepared!" of the energetic man to whom the town owed its safety. There was a general humiliation. Those who had railed most cruelly against the forty-one, those, especially, who had treated the Rougons as intriguers and cowards firing shots in the air, were the first to decree a crown of laurels "to the noble citizen of whom Plassans would be for ever proud." For the pools of blood were drying on the pavement, and the corpses, through their wounds, were declaring to what a degree of audacity the party of disorder, pillage, and murder had gone, and what an iron hand had been required to put down the insurrection.

Granoux was receiving congratulations and hand-shakings from the crowd. The story of the hammer had become known. By an innocent falsehood, however, of which he himself soon became unconscious, he asserted that, having been the first to see the insurgents, he had set about striking the bell, in order to sound the alarm, and, but for him, the national guards had been massacred. This doubled his importance. His achievement was declared prodigious. They spoke of him now as "Monsieur Isidore, don't you know? the gentleman who sounded the tocsin with a hammer!" Although the sentence was somewhat lengthy Granoux would willingly have accepted it as a title of nobility; and, henceforward, he never heard the word "hammer" pronounced, but he imagined it some delicate flattery.

As the corpses were being removed, Aristide came to look at them. He examined them on all sides, sniffing the air, while

he looked inquisitively at their faces. His countenance and bright eyes wore a dissatisfied look. He lifted up the blouse of one of the corpses with his hand, which, previously suspended in a sling, was now free, in order to see the wound better. This examination seemed to convince him and remove a doubt from his mind. He bit his lips, stood there a moment in silence, and then went away for the purpose of hastening on the issue of the "Indépendant," for which he had written a grand article. As he was passing along by the houses, he recalled his mother's words: "You will see to-morrow!" He had seen, it was very clever; it even frightened him somewhat.

In the meantime, Rougon was commencing to be embarrassed by his triumph. Alone in Monsieur Garçonnet's office, hearing the rumbling noise of the crowd, he was conscious of a strange feeling, which prevented him from showing himself on the balcony. That blood, in which he had stepped, seemed to have made his legs rigid. He bethought himself what he should do until the evening. His poor empty head, upset by the crisis of the previous night, was seeking desperately for some occupation, some order to give, or some measure to be taken, which might afford him some distraction. But he could think about nothing clearly. Whither was Félicité leading him? Was it all finished now, or would he still have to kill somebody else? Fear again assailed him, terrible doubts arose in his mind, and he saw the enceinte of the ramparts broken down on all sides by the avenging army of the republicans, when a loud shout: "The insurgents! the insurgents!" burst out under the windows of the room. He jumped up, and, raising a curtain, saw the crowd rushing about the Place in despair. At this thunderbolt, he foresaw himself, in less than a second, ruined, pillaged, and murdered; he cursed his wife, he cursed the whole town. Then, as he looked behind him in a suspicious manner, seeking some means of escape, he heard the mob break out into applause, uttering shouts of joy, and making the glass shake with their wild delight. He returned to the window; the women were waving their handkerchiefs, and the men were embracing each other. There were some among them who joined hands and began to dance. He stood there stupefied, unable to comprehend it, and feeling his head swimming round. The big building surrounding him, all deserted and silent, frightened him.

Rougon, when he related his feelings to Félicité, was unable

to say how long his torture had lasted. He only remembered that the noise of footsteps, echoing in the vast halls, had roused him from his stupor. He expected to see men in blouses, armed with scythes and clubs, whereas it was the Municipal Commission who entered, quite orderly and in evening dress, with their countenances beaming. Not a single member was absent. A piece of good news had completely cured all these gentlemen at once. Granoux rushed into the arms of his dear president.

"The soldiers!" he stammered, "the soldiers!"

A regiment had, in fact, just arrived, under the command of Colonel Masson and Monsieur de Blériot, prefect of the department. The guns which had been observed from the ramparts, far away in the plain, had at first suggested the approach of the insurgents. Rougon was so deeply moved that two big tears rolled down his cheeks. He was weeping, the great citizen! The Municipal Commission watched these big tears fall with a respectful admiration. But Granoux again threw himself on his friend's neck, crying:

"Ah! how glad I am! You know I'm a straightforward man. Well, we were all of us afraid; is it not so, gentlemen? You alone were great, brave, sublime! What energy you must have had! I was just now saying to my wife: 'Rougon is a great man; he deserves to be decorated.'"

Then these gentlemen proposed to go and meet the prefect. Rougon felt quite stunned and suffocated; he was unable to believe in this sudden triumph, and stammered like a child. He drew his breath, and went downstairs quietly, with a dignity suited to the solemnity of the occasion. But the enthusiasm which greeted the Commission and its president outside the town-hall almost upset anew his magisterial gravity. His name ran about the crowd, accompanied this time with the warmest eulogies. He heard the entire people repeat Granoux's avowal, and treat him as a hero who had stood firm and resolute amid the universal panic. And, as far as the Sub-Prefecture, where the Commission met the prefect, he drank in his popularity and his glory with the voluptuous thrillings of a love-sick woman who has at last attained the gratification of her desires.

Monsieur de Blériot and Colonel Masson entered the town alone, leaving their troops encamped on the Lyons road. They had lost a considerable amount of time through a misunder-

standing as to the direction taken by the insurgents. Now, however, they knew they were at Orchères; and it would only be necessary to stop an hour at Plassans, just sufficient time to reassure the population and publish the cruel ordinances which decreed the sequestration of the insurgents' property, and death to every individual taken with arms in his hands. Colonel Masson smiled when the commander of the national guards had the bolts of the Porte de Rome drawn, with a great noise of old rusty iron. The detachment accompanied the prefect and the colonel as a guard of honour. As they traversed the Cours Sauvaire, Roudier related Rougon's epic to these gentlemen—the three days of panic, terminating with the brilliant victory of the previous night. When the two processions came face to face, therefore, Monsieur de Blériot advanced quickly towards the president of the Commission, shook hands with him, congratulated him, and begged him to continue to watch over the town until the return of the authorities. Rougon bowed, while the prefect, having reached the door of the Sub-Prefecture, where he wanted to rest for a moment, proclaimed in a loud voice that he would not forget to mention his brave and noble conduct in his report.

In the meantime, in spite of the bitter cold, everybody had come to the windows. Félicité, leaning forward at the risk of falling out, was quite pale with joy. Aristide had just arrived with a number of the "Indépendant," in which he had openly declared himself in favour of the Coup d'État, which he welcomed "as the aurora of liberty in order and of order in liberty." He had also made a delicate allusion to the yellow drawing-room, acknowledging his errors, declaring that "youth is presumptuous," and that "great citizens say nothing, reflect in silence, and let insults pass by, in order to stand firm in their heroism when the struggle comes." He was especially pleased with this sentence. His mother thought the article very well written. She kissed her dear child, and placed him on her right hand. The Marquis de Carnavant, weary of incarcerating himself, and seized with eager curiosity, had likewise come to see her, and stood on her left, leaning on the window-rail.

When Monsieur de Blériot held out his hand to Rougon in the Place, Félicité wept.

"Oh! see, see," she said to Aristide. "He has shaken hands with him. Look! he is doing it again!"

And casting a glance at the windows, where groups of heads were congregated, she added:

"How wild they must be! Look at Monsieur Peirotte's wife, she's biting her handkerchief. And over there, the notary's daughter, and Madame Massicot, and the Brunet family, what faces, eh? how angry they look! Ah! indeed, it's our turn now."

She followed the scene which was being enacted at the door of the Sub-Prefecture with a thrilling delight, which shook her ardent, grasshopper-like body. She interpreted the slightest gesture, invented words which she was unable to catch, and said that Pierre made a very good bow. She was a little vexed when the prefect deigned to speak to that poor Granoux who was hovering about him fishing for a word of praise. No doubt Monsieur de Blériot already knew the story of the hammer, for the retired almond-dealer turned as red as a young girl, and seemed to be saying that he had only done his duty. But that which angered her still more was her husband's excessive amiability in presenting Vuillet to these gentlemen. Vuillet, it is true, pushed himself forward amongst them, and Rougon was compelled to mention him.

"What a schemer!" Félicité muttered. "He intrudes himself everywhere. How confused my poor dear husband must be! See, there's the colonel speaking to him. What can he be saying to him?"

"Ah! little one," the marquis replied with a touch of irony, "he is complimenting him for having closed the gates so carefully."

"My father has saved the town," Aristide said in a curt tone of voice. "Have you seen the corpses, sir?"

Monsieur de Carnavant did not answer. He withdrew from the window, and sat down in an arm-chair, gently shaking his head with an air of disgust. At that moment, the prefect having taken his departure, Rougon ran up and threw himself upon his wife's neck.

"Ah! my dear!" he broke out.

He was unable to say more. Félicité made him kiss Aristide also, telling him of the superb article in the "Indépendant." Pierre would have kissed the marquis as well, he was so affected. But his wife took him aside, and gave him Eugène's letter which she had put in an envelope again. She pretended that it had just been delivered. Pierre triumphantly held it out to her after reading it.

"You are a sorceress," he said to her laughing. "You guessed everything. What folly I should have committed without you! We'll manage our little affairs together now. Kiss me, you're a clever woman."

He clasped her in his arms, while she exchanged a knowing smile with the marquis.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was not until Sunday, the day after the massacre at Sainte-Roure, that the troops passed through Plassans again. The prefect and the colonel, whom Monsieur Garçonnet had invited to dinner, entered the town alone. The soldiers went round the ramparts and encamped in the Faubourg, on the Nice road. Night was falling; the sky, overcast since the morning, wore a strange yellow tint, which illumined the town with murky light, similar to the copper-coloured glimmerings in stormy weather. The reception of the troops by the inhabitants was timid; these soldiers, with their wounds still fresh, who were passing, weary and silent, through the yellow twilight, were distasteful and unwelcome to the little well-to-do citizens on the Cours, who whispered to each other, as they stepped out of the way, terrifying stories of fusillades and revengeful reprisals which still live in the recollection of the country. A terror, consequent upon the Coup d'État, was beginning to make itself felt, an overwhelming and crushing terror which kept the South in a state of tremor for many a long month. Plassans, in its fear and hatred of the insurgents, had welcomed the troops on their first arrival with shouts of enthusiasm; but now, at the appearance of this gloomy-looking regiment, who would fire at a word from their chief, the retired merchants and even the notaries of the new town anxiously questioned each other, asking if they had not committed some political peccadilloes which might be thought deserving of a bullet.

The authorities had returned since the previous evening in a couple of carts hired at Sainte-Roure. Their unexpected entry was devoid of all triumphal display. Rougon surrendered the mayor's arm-chair without much regret. The game had been played; and he awaited from Paris, with feverish longing, the recompense for his devotion. On the Sunday—he had not hoped for it until the following day—he received a letter from Eugène. Félicité had taken care, since Thursday, to send her son the numbers of the "Gazette" and "Indépendant"

which, in a second edition, had narrated the battle of the night and the arrival of the prefect. Eugène replied by return of post that the nomination of his father to a receivership was about to be signed; but, he said, he wanted to give them some good news immediately. He had just obtained the ribbon of the Legion of Honour for him. Félicité wept. Her husband decorated! her proud dream had never gone as far as that. Rougon, pale with joy, said they must give a grand dinner that very evening. He no longer thought of expense; he would have thrown his last fifty francs out of the drawing-room windows to the people in order to celebrate this glorious day.

"Listen," he said to his wife; "you must invite Sicardot: he has annoyed me with that rosette of his for a long time! Then Granoux and Roudier; I shouldn't be at all sorry to make them feel that it is not their heavy purses that will ever gain the cross for them. Vuillet is a skinflint, but the triumph ought to be complete; invite him as well as all the small fry. I was forgetting: you must go and call on the marquis in person; we will put him on your right; he'll look very well at our table. You know Monsieur Garçonnet is entertaining the colonel and the prefect. That is to make me understand that I am nobody now. I can afford to laugh at his mayoralty; it doesn't bring him in a sou! He has invited me, but I shall tell him that I also have some people coming. They will laugh on the wrong side of their mouths to-morrow. Make great preparations. Have everything brought from the Hôtel de Provence. We must outdo the mayor's dinner."

Félicité set to work. Pierre still felt a vague uneasiness in the midst of his raptures. The Coup d'État was going to pay his debts, his son Aristide had repented of his faults, and he was at last releasing himself from Macquart; still he feared some folly on Pascal's part, and was especially uneasy about the lot reserved for Silvère. Not that he felt the least pity for him; he was simply afraid that the matter of the gendarme might come before the Court of Assizes. Ah! if only some discriminating bullet had managed to rid him of that young scoundrel! As his wife had pointed out to him in the morning, all obstacles had fallen away before him: that family which was dishonouring him had, at the last moment, worked for his elevation; his sons Eugène and Aristide, those spendthrifts whose college career he regretted so bitterly, were at last

paying the interest on the capital laid out for their instruction. And yet the thought of that wretched Silvère must come to trouble his hour of triumph!

While Félicité was running about to prepare the dinner for the evening, Pierre heard of the arrival of the troops and determined to go and make inquiries. Sicardot, whom he had questioned on his return, knew nothing; Pascal must have remained to look after the wounded; as for Silvère, he had not even been seen by the commander, who scarcely knew him. Rougon then repaired to the Faubourg, intending to pay Macquart, at the same time, the eight hundred francs which he had only just succeeded in raising with great difficulty. But when he was in the crowd of the encampment, and saw the prisoners from a distance sitting in long files on the beams in the Aire Saint-Mittre, and guarded by soldiers gun in hand, he was afraid of compromising himself, and slunk off to his mother's house, with the intention of sending the old woman out to pick up some information.

When he entered the hovel it was almost night. He only saw Macquart at first, smoking and drinking brandy.

"Is that you? I'm glad of it," muttered Antoine, who was on friendly terms with his brother again. "I'm growing deuced old here. Have you got the money?"

But Pierre did not reply. He had just perceived his son Pascal leaning over the bed. He questioned him eagerly. The doctor, surprised at his uneasiness, which he had attributed at first to his paternal affection, told him that the soldiers had taken him and would have shot him, had it not been for the intervention of some honest fellow whom he did not know. Saved by his quality of surgeon, he had returned with the troops. This was a great relief to Rougon. It made still another one who would not compromise him. He was evincing his delight by repeated hand-shakings, when Pascal concluded by saying in a sorrowful voice:

"Don't make yourself so merry. I have just found my poor grandmother in a very dangerous condition. I was bringing her back this carbine, which she values very much; I found her lying there, and she has not moved since."

Pierre's eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. In the fast fading light he saw aunt Dide stretched, rigid and lifeless, upon the bed. Her miserable body, shattered by neurosis from her cradle, was at length laid prostrate by a

supreme shock. Her nerves had, as it were, devoured her blood; the weary travail of her ardent flesh, that was wearing itself out and consuming itself in a tardy chastity, was drawing to a close, converting the miserable creature into a mere corpse which ever and anon some shock seemed to galvanise into life At that moment, a cruel grief seemed to have accelerated the slow wasting away of her life. Her pale nun-like face, drawn and enervated by gloom and a life of cloister-like self-denial, was stained with red patches. Her features were convulsed, her eyes glared terribly, and her hands were twisted and clenched, as she lay at full length in her skirts, which accentuated the sharp outlines of her scranny limbs. Her lips were closely pressed, as she lay in that dim room in all the horror of a mute death-agony.

Rougon made a gesture of vexation. This heart-rending spectacle was very disagreeable to him. He had company coming to dinner in the evening, and it would be extremely inconvenient for him to have to appear mournful. His mother was always doing something to bother him. She might just as well have chosen another day; and he put on an appearance of perfect easiness, as he said:

"Bah! it's nothing. I've seen her like that a hundred times. You must let her lie still; it's the only thing that does her any good."

Pascal shook his head.

"No, this fit is not like the others," he whispered. "I have often studied her, and have never observed such symptoms before. Just look at her eyes: they have a peculiar fluidity, a pale brightness about them which causes me considerable uneasiness. And her face, what a frightful contortion of all the muscles!"

Then, bending further over to observe her features more closely, he continued in a whisper, as though speaking to himself:

"I have never seen such a face, excepting in people who have been murdered or have died from fright. She must have suffered some terrible shock."

"But how did the attack commence?" Rougon asked impatiently, not being able to hit upon any excuse for leaving the room.

Pascal did not know. Macquart, as he poured himself out another glass, explained that he had felt an inclination to drink

a little brandy, and had sent her to fetch a bottle. She was not out very long. But as she entered she fell rigid on the ground without uttering a word. Macquart had had to carry her to the bed.

"What surprises me," he said, by way of conclusion, "is, that she did not break the bottle."

The young doctor reflected. After a short silence he resumed:

"I heard two shots as I came here. Perhaps those wretches have been shooting some more prisoners. If she was passing through the ranks of the soldiers at that moment, the sight of blood might have thrown her into this fit. She must have had some dreadful shock."

Fortunately he had with him the little medicine-chest which he had been carrying about since the departure of the insurgents. He tried to introduce a few drops of reddish liquid through aunt Dide's closely-set teeth. During this time Macquart again asked his brother:

"Have you got the money?"

"Yes, I've brought it; we'll settle now," Rougon replied, glad of this diversion.

Thereupon Macquart, seeing that he was going to be paid, began to moan. He had only learnt the consequence of his treachery when it was too late; otherwise he would have demanded twice or thrice as much. Then he began to complain. Really, a thousand francs, it was not enough. His children had forsaken him, he was all alone in the world, and obliged to quit France. He was very near crying as he spoke of his exile.

"Come now, will you have the eight hundred francs?" said Rougon, who was in haste to be off.

"No, certainly not; double the sum. Your wife cheated me. If she had told me distinctly what it was she expected of me, I would never have compromised myself for such a trifle."

Rougon laid out the eight hundred francs on the table.

"I swear I haven't got any more," he resumed. "I will think of you later. But do, for mercy's sake, get away this evening."

Macquart, cursing and mouthing muttered protests, carried the table to the window, and commenced to count the gold in the fading twilight. The coins tickled the tips of his fingers

very pleasantly as he let them fall, while their tinkling filled the darkness with a clear music. He interrupted himself for a moment to say:

"You promised to get me a berth, you remember. I want to return to France. The post of rural guard in some pleasant neighbourhood which I could mention, would just suit me."

"Very well, I'll see about it." Rougon replied. "Have you got the eight hundred francs?"

Macquart resumed his counting. The last coins were just chinking when a burst of laughter made them turn their heads. Aunt Dide was standing up in front of the bed, with her bodice unfastened, her white hair hanging loose, and her pale face stained with red spots. Pascal had in vain endeavoured to hold her down. Trembling all over, and with her arms outstretched, she was shaking her head deliriously.

"The blood-money! the blood-money!" she repeated several times. "I heard the gold. And it is they, they who sold him. Ah! the murderers! They are a pack of wolves."

She pushed her hair back, and passed her hand over her forehead, as though she were collecting her thoughts. Then she continued:

"For a long time I have seen him with his forehead pierced by a bullet. I always imagined that there were people lying in wait for him with guns. They used to sign to me that they were going to fire. It's terrible! I feel some one breaking my bones and battering out my brains. Oh! mercy! mercy! I beseech you; he shall not see her any more—never, never! I will shut him up. I will prevent him walking with her. Mercy! mercy! don't fire. It is not my fault. If you knew——"

She had almost fallen on her knees, and was weeping and praying while she stretched out her poor trembling hands to some horrible vision which she saw in the darkness. Then she suddenly sat upright, and her eyes opened still more widely as her convulsed throat uttered a terrible cry, as though some awful sight, visible to her alone, had filled her with a mad terror.

"Oh, the gendarme!" she said, choking and falling backwards upon the bed, where she rolled about, breaking out into long and noisy bursts of insane laughter.

Pascal followed the attack attentively. The two brothers, who were very frightened, catching only incoherent phrases, had taken refuge in a corner of the room. When Rougon heard the word gendarme, he thought he understood; since the murder of her lover on the frontier aunt Dide cherished a deep hatred against the gendarmes and custom-house officers, whom she mingled together in one common longing for vengeance.

"Why, it's the story of the poacher that she's telling us," he whispered.

Pascal made a sign to him to keep quiet. The dying woman raised herself up painfully. She looked around her, with a stupefied glance. She remained silent for a moment, endeavouring to recognise the objects around her, as though she were in some strange place. Then, with a sudden expression of anxiety, she asked:

"Where is the gun?"

The doctor put the carbine into her hands. She broke out into a gentle cry of joy, and gazed at it for a long time, saying in a whisper, in the soft voice of a little girl:

"That is it, oh! I recognise it! It is all stained with blood. The stains are quite fresh to-day. His red hands have left marks of blood on the butt-end. Ah! poor, poor aunt Dide!"

Her poor head became dizzy again, and she lapsed into silent thought.

"The gendarme was dead," she murmured, "but I have seen him again, he has come back. They never die, those blackguards!"

She was again seized with a gloomy fury, and, shaking the carbine, she advanced towards her two sons who, speechless with fright, were crouching in a corner. Her loosened skirts trailed along the ground, as she drew up her twisted body, half naked and terribly sunken from old age.

"It's you who fired!" she cried. "I heard the gold. Wretched woman that I am! I have brought nothing but wolves into the world—a whole family—a whole litter of wolves. There was only one poor lad, and they have devoured him; they have all had a bite at him, and their lips are covered with blood. Ah! the villains! they have robbed, they have murdered. And they live like gentlemen. Villains! accursed villains!"

She sang, and laughed, and cried, as she repeated "accursed villains!" in strangely sonorous tones, like the crushing sound of a fusillade. Pascal, with tears in his eyes, took her in his arms and laid her on the bed again. She submitted like a child. She continued her wailing cries, bringing out the words in quicker succession, and beating time on the sheet with her withered hands.

"That's just what I was afraid of," the doctor said; "she is mad. The blow has been too heavy for a poor creature already subject, as she is, to acute neurosis. She will die in a lunatic asylum like her father."

"But what could she have seen?" Rougon asked, venturing at last to quit the corner where he was crouching.

"I have a terrible suspicion," Pascal replied. "I was going to speak to you about Silvère when you came in. He is a prisoner. You must endeavour to obtain his release from the prefect, if there is still time."

The old oil-dealer turned pale as he looked at his son. Then, in a rapid voice, he continued:

"Listen to me; you stay here and watch her. I'm too busy this evening, We will see about conveying her to-morrow to the lunatic asylum at Les Tulettes. As for you, Macquart, you must leave this very night. Swear to me that you will! I'm going to find Monsieur de Blériot."

He stammered as he spoke, and longed to get out into the fresh air of the street. Pascal fixed a penetrating look on the madwoman, and then on his father and uncle. His professional instinct was getting the better of him, and he was studying the mother and the sons, with the keenness of a naturalist observing the metamorphoses of an insect. He was pondering over the offshoots of that family, over the different branches which had grown out of one parent stock, whose pungent sap carried the same germs to the most remote stems, which twisted themselves in various directions according to the sunshine or shade in which they had lived. For a moment he thought he could catch a glimpse of the future of the Rougon-Macquart family, a pack of unbridled, insatiate appetites, lit up, for a moment, by a lightning-like blaze of gold and blood.

Aunt Dide had ceased her wailing chant at the mention of Silvère's name. She listened anxiously for a moment. Then she broke out into terrible shrieks. Night had now completely fallen, and the room, wrapped in black gloom, seemed horribly

empty. The shrieks of the madwoman, who was no longer visible, broke through the darkness as from a grave. Rougon, losing his head, took flight, pursued by those woeful cries of reproach, which sounded more agonising as they burst through the gloomy darkness.

As he was emerging from the Impasse Saint-Mittre, with hesitating steps, asking himself whether it would not be dangerous to solicit Silvère's pardon from the prefect, he saw Aristide prowling about the timber-yard. The latter, recognising his father, ran up to him with an expression of anxiety and said a few words in his ear. Pierre turned pale; he cast a look of alarm towards the end of the yard, through the darkness that was broken only by the red light of a gipsy fire. Then they both disappeared down the Rue de Rome, quickening their steps as though they had committed a murder, and turning up their coat-collars in order not to be seen.

"That saves me an errand," Rougon whispered. "Let us go to dinner. They are waiting for us."

When they arrived, the yellow drawing-room was resplendent. Félicité was all over the place. Everybody was there; Sicardot, Granoux, Roudier, Vuillet, the oil-dealers, the almond-dealers, the whole set. The marquis, however, had excused himself on account of his rheumatism; and, besides, he said that he was about to leave for a short trip. These blood-stained citizens disgusted his delicacy, and his relative, the Count de Valqueyras, had begged him to withdraw himself from public notice for some time, and to retire to the Corbière estate. Monsieur de Carnavant's refusal vexed the Rougons. Félicité consoled herself, however, by resolving to make a more profuse display of luxury. She hired two candelabra and ordered several additional dishes as a kind of substitute for the marquis. The table was laid in the yellow drawing-room, in order to lend additional impressiveness to the occasion. The Hôtel de Provence had supplied the silver, the china, and the glass. The cloth had been laid since five o'clock, in order that the guests as they arrived might feast their eyes upon it. At either end of the table, on the white cloth, there were two bouquets of artificial roses, in gilded porcelain vases painted with flowers.

The habitual guests of the yellow drawing-room, when they were assembled, could not conceal their admiration of the spectacle. These gentlemen smiled with an air of embarrass-

ment as they exchanged furtive glances, which clearly signified, "These Rougons are fools; they are throwing their money out of the window." The truth was, Félicité, as she went round to invite the guests, was unable to hold her tongue. Everybody knew that Pierre had been decorated, and that he was about to be nominated to some post; this irritated them very much, as the old woman said. Roudier indeed observed, "That little black woman was puffing herself out too much." On the day of recompense, this band of citizens, who had rushed upon the expiring Republic—each one keeping an eye upon the other, and glorying in giving a deeper bite than his neighbour—did not think it just that their hosts should have all the laurels of the battle. Those who had howled by instinct, demanding no recompense from the rising Empire, were greatly annoyed to see that, thanks to them, the poorest, the most disreputable of them all, should be decorated with the red ribbon. The whole yellow drawing-room ought to have been decorated!

"Not that I value the decoration," Roudier said to Granoux, whom he had dragged into the embrasure of a window. "I refused it in the time of Louis-Philippe, when I was purveyor to the court. Ah! Louis-Philippe was a good king. France will never find his equal!"

Roudier was becoming Orleanist again. Then he added, with the cunning hypocrisy of an old hosier from the Rue Saint-Honoré:

"But you, my dear Granoux; don't you think the ribbon would look well in your button-hole? After all, you did as much to save the town as Rougon. Yesterday I was calling upon some very distinguished persons, and they could scarcely believe that you could have made so much noise with a hammer."

Granoux stammered some thanks, and, blushing like a maiden at her first confession of love, whispered in Roudier's ear:

"Don't say anything about it, but I have reason to believe that Rougon will ask the ribbon for me. He's a good sort of fellow."

The old hosier thereupon became grave, and assumed a very affable manner. When Vuillet came and spoke to him of the well-deserved reward their friend had just received, he replied in a loud voice, in order to be heard by Félicité, who was sit-

ting a little way off, that "men like Rougon were an ornament to the Legion of Honour." The bookseller joined in the chorus; he had that morning received a formal assurance that the custom of the college would be restored to him. As for Sicardot, at first he felt somewhat annoyed to find himself no longer the only one of the set who was decorated. According to him, no one but soldiers had a right to the ribbon. Pierre's valour surprised him. But, being a good-natured man at heart, he grew warm in Pierre's favour, and ended by saying that the Napoleons knew how to distinguish men of spirit and energy.

Rougon and Aristide consequently had an enthusiastic reception; all hands were held out to them. Some of the guests went so far as to kiss them. Angèle was on the sofa, by the side of her mother-in-law, very happy, gazing at the table with the astonishment of a gourmand who has never seen so many dishes at once. As Aristide approached, Sicardot came to compliment his son-in-law upon his superb article in the "Indépendant." He restored his friendship to him. The young man, in answer to the paternal questions Sicardot addressed to him, replied that he was anxious to leave with his young family for Paris, where his brother Eugène would push him forward; but he was in want of five hundred francs. Sicardot promised him the money, already foreseeing his daughter received at the Tuileries by Napoleon III.

In the meantime, Félicité had made a sign to her husband. Pierre, surrounded by everybody and questioned anxiously about his paleness, could only escape for a minute. He was just able to whisper in his wife's ear that he had found Pascal, and that Macquart would leave that night. He lowered his voice as he told her of his mother's insanity, placing his finger on her lips, as if to say: "Not a word; that would spoil the whole evening." Félicité bit her lips. They exchanged a look in which they read their common thoughts: now, the old woman would not trouble them any more; the poacher's hovel would be razed to the ground, as the walls of the Fouques' property had been demolished; and they would for ever enjoy the respect and consideration of Plassans.

But the guests were looking at the table. Félicité showed the gentlemen their seats. It was a perfect bliss. As each one was taking his spoon, Sicardot, by a gesture, begged a moment's delay. He rose and said gravely:

"Gentlemen, on behalf of society, I wish to express to our

host how pleased we are at the reward which his courage and patriotism have procured for him. I see now that he must have acted upon a heaven-sent inspiration in remaining here, while those beggars were dragging us along the high roads. Therefore, I applaud the determination of the government. Let me finish, you can then congratulate our friend. Know, then, that our friend, besides being made chevalier of the Legion of Honour, is going to be appointed to a receivership."

There was a cry of surprise. They expected a small post. Some of them tried to force a smile; but, aided by the sight of the table, the compliments again poured out profusely.

Sicardot once more begged for silence.

"Wait one moment," he resumed; "I have not finished. Just one word. It is probable that our friend will remain among us, owing to the death of Monsieur Peirotte."

Whilst the guests burst out into exclamations, Félicité felt a shooting pain through her heart. Sicardot had already told her of the receiver's death; but, recalled to her mind at the commencement of this triumphal dinner, this sudden and shocking death affected her like a chilling wind. She remembered her wish; it was she who had killed this man. The guests were celebrating the banquet with the tinkling music of the silver. In the provinces, people eat very much and very noisily. After the speech, the gentlemen all talked at once; they showered kicks upon the vanquished, flattered each other, and made disparaging comments upon the absence of the marquis. It was impossible, they said, to maintain intercourse with the nobility. Roudier even gave out that the marquis had begged to be excused because the fear of the insurgents had given him the jaundice. At the second course they all scrambled like hounds at the quarry. The oil-dealers and almond-dealers were now saving France. They clinked glasses to the glory of the Rougons. Granoux, very red, commenced to stammer, and Vuillet very pale, was quite drunk; but Sicardot continued filling his glass, while Angèle, who had already eaten too much, was preparing some sugar and water for herself. The gentlemen were so delighted at being rescued from their panic, and were so glad to find themselves assembled together again in the yellow drawing-room, round a good table, in the bright light of the two candelabra and the lustre—which they now saw for the first time without its fly-specked cover—that they gave way to an exuberance of folly and broad, coarse enjoy-

ment. Their voices rose in the warm atmosphere, more thick and eulogistic at every dish, embracing each other in the middle of their compliments, going so far as to say—it was an old retired master-tanner who hit upon this fine phrase—that the dinner was a "veritable feast of Lucullus."

Pierre was radiant, and his big pale face perspired with triumph. Félicité, already disciplined to her new station in life, said that they would probably rent poor Monsieur Peirotte's house until they could purchase one of their own in the new town, and she was already placing her future furniture in the receiver's rooms. She was entering into possession of her Tuileries. At one moment she seemed to be seized by a sudden recollection; she rose and went to whisper in Aristide's ear:

"And Silvère?" she inquired.

The young man started with surprise at the question.

"He is dead," he replied in a whisper. "I was there when the gendarme blew his brains out with a pistol."

Félicité slightly shuddered in her turn. She was just opening her mouth to ask her son why he had not prevented this murder by claiming the child; but she said nothing, she stood there speechless. Aristide, who had read the question on her quivering lips, whispered:

"You understand, I said nothing—so much the worse for him! I did quite right. It's a good riddance."

This brutal frankness displeased Félicité. Aristide had his skeleton, then, like his father and mother. He would certainly not have confessed so openly that he was strolling about the Faubourg and had allowed his cousin to be shot, had not the wine from the Hôtel de Provence and the dreams he was building upon his approaching arrival in Paris, made him forget his habitual cunning. The words once spoken, he swung himself to and fro on his chair. Pierre, who followed the conversation between his wife and son from a distance, understood and exchanged a glance of complicity to implore silence. It was the last blast of terror, as it were, which blew over the Rougons, in the midst of the splendour and enthusiastic merriment of the table. On going to resume her seat, Félicité observed a taper burning behind a window on the other side of the street. Some one was watching the body of Monsieur Peirotte, which had been brought back in the morning from Sainte-Roure. She sat down, feeling the taper behind her hot against her back. But the gaiety and mirth were increasing,

and the yellow drawing-room was filled with a shout of joy when the dessert appeared.

At that moment, the Faubourg was still shuddering at the drama which had just stained the Aire Saint-Mittre with blood. The return of the troops, after the carnage in the plain of the Nores, was marked by the most cruel reprisals. Men were felled behind a bit of a wall with the butt-ends of rifles, others had their brains blown out at the bottom of a ravine by a gendarme's pistol. In order that terror might impose silence, the soldiers strewed the dead along the high road. One might have followed them by the red trace which they left behind. It was one long butchery. At every halting-place, a few insurgents were massacred. Two of them were killed at Sainte-Roure, three at Orchères, one at Béage. When the troops were encamped at Plassans, on the Nice road, it was decided that one more of the prisoners, the most guilty, should be shot. The victors judged it wise to leave this fresh corpse behind, in order to inspire the town with respect for the new-born Empire. But the soldiers were weary of killing; no one offered himself for the fatal task. The prisoners, thrown down on the beams in the timber-yard as though on a camp bed, bound two and two together by the hands, listened and waited in a state of weary, resigned stupor.

At that moment the gendarme Rengade roughly opened a way through the crowd of curious idlers. As soon as he had learned that the troops were returning with several hundred insurgents, he got out of bed, shivering with fever, and risking his life in the cold, black December night. Outside, his wound re-opened, the bandage which covered his eyeless socket was stained with blood, and red streams flowed over his cheek and moustache. He looked frightful in his dumb fury, his pale face enveloped in a blood-stained bandage, as he ran along closely scrutinising the face of each of the prisoners. He followed the beams thus, bending down, going to and fro, making the most stoical persons shudder at his abrupt appearance. And, all on a sudden:

"Ah! the bandit, I've got him!" he cried.

He had just laid his hand on Silvère's shoulder. Silvère, crouching down on a beam, with lifeless and expressionless face, was looking straight before him into the pale twilight, with a calm, stupefied air. Since his departure from Sainte-Roure, he had worn this vacant stare. Along the high road,

for many a league, whenever the soldiers urged on the march of the convoy with the butt-ends of their rifles, he had been as gentle as a child. Covered with dust, and dying with thirst and fatigue, he trudged onward without saying a word, like one of those docile animals driven in flocks by the cowherd's whip. He was thinking of Miette. He saw her laid out on the banner, under the trees, her eyes turned upwards. For three days past he saw nothing but her. At this moment, in the midst of the growing darkness, he still saw her.

Rengade turned towards the officer, who had not been able to find among the soldiers the requisite men for an execution.

"This villain put my eye out," he said, pointing to Silvère. "Hand him over to me. It's as good as done for you."

The officer, without replying, drew back with an air of indifference, making a vague gesture. The gendarme understood that the man was surrendered to him.

"Come, get up!" he resumed, as he shook him.

Silvère, like all the other prisoners, had a man chained to him. He was fastened by the arm to a peasant of Poujols named Mourgue, a man about fifty years old, transformed into a brute by the scorching suns and the hard labour of tilling the ground. Crook-backed already, his hands hardened, his face coarse and heavy, he blinked his eyes in a stupid manner, with the stubborn, distrustful expression of an animal under the lash. He had set out armed with a pitchfork, because all his village were leaving; but he could not have explained what had thus set him adrift on the high roads. Since he had been made prisoner, he understood it still less. He had some vague idea that they were conveying him home. His amazement at finding himself bound, the sight of all the people staring at him, stunned and stupefied him still more. As he only spoke and understood a patois, he could not imagine what the gendarme wanted. He raised his coarse, heavy face towards him with an effort; then, fancying he was being asked the name of his country, he said in his hoarse voice:

"I come from Poujols."

A burst of laughter ran through the crowd, and some voices cried:

"Release the peasant."

"Bah!" Rengade replied; "the more of this vermin crushed the better. As they're together, they can both go."

There was a murmur.

The gendarme turned his terrible blood-stained face round, and the busybodies slunk off. A little delicate gentleman went away, declaring that if he remained any longer it would spoil his appetite for dinner. Some boys recognising Silvère, began to speak of the red girl. Thereupon the little gentleman retraced his steps, in order to see the lover of the female standard-bearer, of that creature who had been mentioned in the "Gazette."

Silvère neither saw nor heard anything; Rengade had to seize him by the collar. Thereupon he got up, forcing Mourgue to rise also.

"Come," said the gendarme. "It won't take long."

Silvère recognised the one-eyed man. He smiled. He must have understood. Then he turned his head away. The sight of the one-eyed man, of his moustache which the congealed blood had stiffened as with an evil-looking rime, caused him a profound grief. He would have wished to die in perfect tranquillity. He avoided the gaze of Rengade's one eye, which glared from beneath the whiteness of the bandage. Of his own accord, the young man proceeded to the end of the Aire Saint-Mittre, to the narrow lane hidden by the piles of planks. Mourgue followed him.

The deserted place stretched out under the sallow sky, from which the copper-coloured clouds shed a murky light. Never had this bare expanse—this wood-yard with its slumbering timber, looking stiff and rigid in the cold—worn such a melancholy aspect in the sad, lingering twilight. Along the high road, the prisoners, the soldiers, and the mob disappeared amid the darkness of the trees. But this piece of ground, with its joists and piles of planks, grew pale under the fading light, assuming a muddy tint that vaguely resembled a dried-up torrent. The sawyers' trestles, profiling their meagre framework in a corner, took the form of a gallows, or of the upright beams of a guillotine. There was not a living soul excepting three gipsies who showed their affrighted heads at the door of their van—an old man and woman, and a big girl with woolly hair, whose eyes gleamed like those of wolves.

Before gaining the alley, Silvère looked round him. He bethought himself of a far away Sunday when he had passed through the wood-yard in the bright moonlight. How calm and soft it was!—how slowly the pale rays passed over the joists! A supreme silence flowed down from the frozen

sky. Amid this silence, the woolly-haired gipsy girl was singing low in an unknown tongue. Then Silvère remembered that that far-off Sunday was only eight days old. Eight days ago he had come to bid adieu to Miette. How long it seemed! He felt as though he had not set foot in the wood-yard for years. But when he reached the narrow alley, his heart failed him. He recognised the odour of the grass, the shadows of the planks, the holes in the wall. A bewailing voice rose from all these objects. The alley stretched out sad and lonely; it seemed even longer to him; he felt a cold wind blowing there. This spot had aged cruelly. He saw the wall eaten into by moss, the verdant carpet dried up by the frost, the piles of timber rotted by the rain. It was a perfect devastation. The yellow twilight fell like a fine dust upon these ruins of all that was most dear to him. He was obliged to close his eyes, and he again beheld the green lane, while his happy hours opened to his view. He was racing with Miette in the warm air. Then the cruel December rains fell unceasingly, but they still came there, sheltering themselves beneath the planks, as they listened with rapture to the plashing of the shower. His whole life—all his happiness—passed before him like a flash of lightning. Miette was climbing over the wall, running to him, shaking with ringing laughter. She was there; he could see her, gleaming white through the darkness, with her coquettish cap and her ink-black hair. She was talking about magpies' nests, which are so difficult to steal, as she dragged him along. Then he heard the gentle murmurs of the Viorne in the distance, the chirping of the belated grasshoppers, and the wind blowing among the poplars in the meadows of Saint-Claire. And how they used to run, too! How well he remembered it! She had learnt to swim in a fortnight. She was a plucky girl. She had only one great fault: she was too much inclined to pilfering. But he would have cured her of that. The thought of their first embraces brought him back to the narrow alley. They were always pleased with this nook. He fancied he caught the dying song of the gipsy girl, the creaking of the last shutters, the solemn stroke from the clocks. Then the hour of separation was ringing, and Miette was remounting the wall, throwing him a kiss. And he saw her no more. A terrible choking seized him by the throat: he would never see her again—never.

"When you're ready," jeered the one-eyed man; "come, choose your place."

Silvère went a few steps further. He was approaching the end of the alley, and could see nothing but a strip of sky where the rust-coloured light was fading away. There he had passed his life for two years. The slow approach of death added an ineffable charm to this path which had served so long for a lovers' walk. He loitered, bidding a long and lingering adieu to all he loved; the grass, the pieces of wood, the stones of the old wall, those things into which Miette had breathed life. Again his thoughts wandered. They were waiting till they were old enough to be married. Aunt Dide would remain with them! Ah! if they had fled far away, very far away, to some unknown village, where the scamps of the Faubourg would no longer have been able to come and cast Chantegreil's crime in his daughter's face! What peaceful bliss! they would have opened a wheelwright's work-shop on the side of some high road. Indeed, he cared very little for his ambitions now; he longed no more for coachmaking, for those carriages with large varnished panels as glossy as mirrors. In the stupor of his despair he could not remember why his dream of bliss could never be realised. Why did he not go away with Miette and aunt Dide? As he racked his memory, he heard the sound of a sharp fusillade; he saw a standard fall before him, the staff broken and the banner drooping like the wing of a bird brought down by a shot. It was the Republic falling into a sleep with Miette under a fold of the red banner. Ah, misery! they were both dead with bleeding wounds in their breasts. It was that which barred the path of his life—the corpses of his two loves. He had no longer anything left, and now he could die. These were the thoughts that had made him so gentle, so listless, so rambling on the way from Sainte-Roure. The soldiers might have struck him, and he would not have felt it. His spirit was no longer inhabiting his body. It was far away under the trees, kneeling beside the lifeless objects of his love, in the midst of the pungent smoke of the gunpowder.

The one-eyed man was growing impatient; he pushed Mourgue, who was lagging behind, and growled:

"Get along, do; I don't want to be here all night."

Silvère stumbled. He looked at his feet. A fragment of a skull lay white in the grass. He thought he heard voices whispering in the alley. The dead were calling him, those

long departed ones, whose warm breath had so strangely perturbed him and his sweetheart during the July evenings. He recognised their hushed whispers. They were rejoicing, they were calling to him to come, and promising to restore Miette to him beneath the earth, in some retreat still more quiet and sequestered even than this old trysting-place of theirs. The cemetery, whose oppressive odours and blackened vegetation had breathed an eager desire into the children's hearts, as it alluringly spread out its couches of lush grass, powerless to drive them into each other's arms, was now longing to drink in Silvère's warm blood. For two summers it had been expecting the young lovers.

"Is it here?" the one-eyed man asked.

The young man looked in front of him. He had reached the end of the alley. He started as his eyes encountered the tombstone. Miette was right, that stone was for her. "*Here lieth . . . Marie . . . died . . .*" She was dead, the mass was rolled over her. His strength failing him, he leant against the frozen stone. How warm it used to be, as they sat on a corner of it, chatting for many a long evening! She used to come that way, stepping on a corner of the stone in order to get off the wall. There was still some lingering trace of her left by the touch of her lissom figure. It seemed to him that there were signs of fatalism in all these objects, and that the stone was there that he might come back to die where he had loved.

The one-eyed man cocked his pistols.

Death! death! this thought fascinated Silvère. It was to this place, then, that they were conducting him, by that long white road which descends from Sainte-Roure to Plassans. If he had known it, he would have hastened on more quickly to die on that stone, at the end of the narrow alley, in that atmosphere where he could still feel Miette's breath! Never had he hoped for such consolation in his grief. Heaven was merciful. He waited, a vague smile playing on his face.

Mourgue, in the meantime, had caught sight of the pistols. Hitherto he had allowed himself to be dragged along stupidly. But fear now seized him. He repeated, in a tone of despair:

"I come from Poujols, I come from Poujols!"

He threw himself on the ground, rolling at the gendarme's feet, breaking out into prayers for mercy, and imagining that he was being mistaken for some one else.

"What does it matter to me that you come from Poujols?" Rengade muttered.

And as the wretched man, shivering and crying with terror, and quite unable to understand why he was going to die, held out his trembling hands—his deformed, hardened labourer's hands—exclaiming in his patois that he had done nothing and ought to be pardoned, the one-eyed man grew quite exasperated at being unable to put the pistol to his temple through his moving so much.

"Will you hold your tongue!" he shouted.

Thereupon Mourgue, mad with fright and unwilling to die, began to howl like a beast, like a pig that is being slaughtered.

"Hold your tongue, you scoundrel!" the gendarme repeated.

And he blew his brains out. The peasant fell with a thud. His body rolled to the foot of a pile of planks, where it remained doubled up. The violence of the shock had broken the rope which fastened him to his companion. Silvère fell on his knees before the tombstone.

With a refinement of vengeance, Rengade had killed Mourgue first. He played with his second pistol, raising it slowly in order to relish Silvère's agony. The latter looked at him calmly. The sight of the man, whose fierce eye scorched him, made him feel uneasy. He turned his gaze away, fearing that he might die cowardly if he continued to see this man who was shaking with fever, with his blood-stained bandage and bleeding moustache. As he raised his eyes, he perceived Justin's head on the top of the wall, at the spot where Miette used to leap over.

Justin was at the Porte de Rome, among the crowd, when the gendarme had led the prisoners away. He had set off to run as fast as he could, going round by way of the Jas-Meiffren, eager to witness the spectacle of the execution. The thought that he alone, of all the Faubourg scamps, would see the drama at his ease, as from a balcony, made him run so quickly that he fell down twice. In spite of his wild chase, he arrived too late to witness the first shot. He climbed up the mulberry tree in despair; but he smiled when he saw that Silvère still remained. The soldiers had informed him of his cousin's death, the murder of the wheelwright completed his happiness. He awaited the shot with that delight which the sufferings of others afforded him, a delight not unmixed with an

exquisite fear, but increased tenfold by the horror of the scene.

Silvère, on recognising that head all by itself on the top of the wall, that vile blackguard, with his pale grinning face, his hair standing on end above his forehead, felt a fierce rage, a desire to live. It was the last revolt of his blood, a momentary mutiny. He sank down again on his knees, gazing straight before him. A last vision passed before him in the melancholy twilight. At the end of the alley, at the entrance of the Impasse Saint-Mittre, he thought he perceived aunt Dide standing erect, white and rigid as a saint in stone, witnessing his agony from the distance.

At that moment he felt the cold pistol on his temple. Justin's pale face was smiling. Silvère, closing his eyes, heard the long-departed dead wildly calling him. In the darkness, he saw nothing save Miette, wrapped round with the banner, under the trees, her eyes turned towards heaven. Then the one-eyed man fired, and all was over; the lad's skull burst open like a ripe pomegranate; his face fell upon the stone, with his lips glued to the spot that Miette's feet had used to tread, that warm spot which still retained a trace of his dead love.

And in the evening, at the Rougons' house, bursts of laughter rose with the reek from the table, still warm with the remains of the dinner. At last they were nibbling at the pleasures of the wealthy! Their appetites, sharpened by thirty years of restrained desires, now fell to with wolfish teeth. These fierce insatiate gluttons, scarce let loose upon indulgence, were exulting in the birth of the Empire, and the commencement of the reign of the greedy victors. The Coup d'État, which retrieved the fortune of the Bonapartes, laid the foundation for that of the Rougons.

Pierre stood up and held out his glass as he said:

"I drink to Prince Louis, to the emperor!"

The gentlemen, who had drowned their jealousies in champagne, rose in a body and clinked glasses with deafening shouts. It was a fine spectacle. The well-to-do citizens of Plassans, Roudier, Granoux, Vuillet, and the others, wept and embraced each other over the scarce cold corpse of the Republic. But Sicardot conceived a crowning triumph. He took from Félicité's hair a pink satin bow, which she had placed over her right ear in honour of the occasion, cut off a piece of

the satin with his dessert knife, and fastened it solemnly to Rougon's button-hole. The latter feigned modesty. His face beamed with joy, as he pretended to resist, and he murmured:

"No, I beg you, it is too soon. We must wait until the issue of the decree."

"Zounds!" Sicardot exclaimed, "will you be good enough to keep that! It's an old soldier of Napoleon who décorates you!"

The yellow drawing-room burst into applause. Félicité was half swooning with delight. Silent Granoux jumped on a chair in his enthusiasm, waving his napkin and making a speech which was lost amid the uproar. The yellow drawing-room was wild with triumph.

The strip of pink satin fastened to Pierre's button-hole was not the only red spot in the Rougons' triumph. A shoe, with a bloodstained heel, still lay forgotten under the bedstead in the adjoining room. The taper burning at Monsieur Peirotte's bedside, over the way, gleamed with a lurid redness in the midst of the night, like a gaping wound. And, far away, in the depths of the Aire Saint-Mittre, a pool of blood was congealing upon the tombstone.

THE END.

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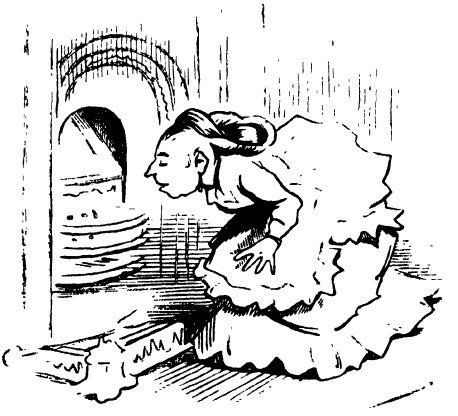

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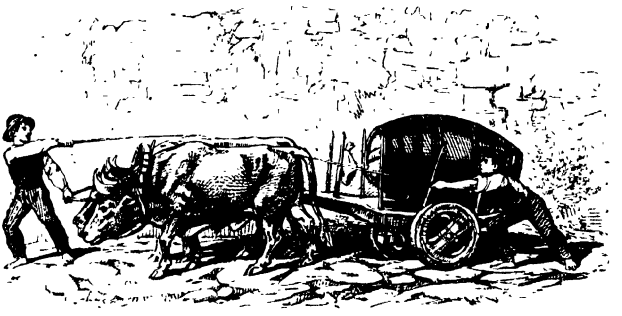

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