CHARLES BLANCHARD

Charles-Louis Philippe

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PREFACE

by Léon-Paul Fargue

PREFACE

Philippe wrote, in a letter: "I am working on a new book which will be about my father. I had not yet told you. Besides, it is only at the beginning. I follow his life step by step; it seems to me that I am accompanying him; I rediscover his ideas, his ways of seeing things. He serves as my guide; I remember all that he used to tell me. One is not entirely dead when one has left such memories to one's own..."

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It was most often after lunch, under the fire of the pipe and the black eye of the coffee, in the small room, clean and not very well lit, at Cerilly, that Philippe's father would tell him stories... This bothered Madame Philippe somewhat, who would have liked to clear her

table and who kept turning and returning.... "That's enough. Leave us a moment longer," Philippe would say.

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Carlyle writes somewhere: "The fact alone matters. John Lackland passed this way. That is what is admirable. That is a reality for which I would give all the theories in the world." Poincare adds: "A physicist would say: 'John Lackland passed this way; that matters nothing to me, since he will not pass again.'" If Philippe adored facts and stories, his mother, with that faculty of renewal which belongs to women, their practical sense and their instinct for facing the present, perhaps did not much like hearing again of the bad days. Besides, one has the sense that his father closed himself off, whether from simplicity, or from pride, or from instinctive distrust, if not from a worker's aversion who ploughs his furrow each day for all that paperwork, as soon as he knew that his Louis wanted to make a book about him. Other letters of Philippe make this quite clear. He writes to Mile:

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"My father says there is no book to be made about him. People would say: 'This is not interesting. It is the story of a man who works. Nothing extraordinary has happened to him. It is the story of a man who has only done his duty...'"

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And to his mother: "You tell me, my dear mother, that my father did not want me to make a book about him. This book, I had already begun it before his death, and it was not quite what my father might have believed. I draw from his life the fine example he gave me. My father could not prevent me from thinking that he had always done his duty, and from expressing it in my own way. I am quite certain besides that he would have accepted with pride and with joy the homage I would have paid him, and the thing above all that would have struck him is that he would have understood that I had made this book because I loved him with all my heart. I would like this book to be a fine book and for it to teach those who read it that a loyal and courageous man who was my father lived a life of work..."

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And to Mile again: "My father does not tell me much, always because there is nothing to write about him. And then, he does not wish to occupy people..."

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But Philippe knew enough. The contour of Charles Blanchard traced itself sufficiently from these tales for him to be able to fill it with his imagination, with his tenderness and with the memories of his own childhood,

which had been spent at Cerilly, like that of his father. He forgot nothing of his childhood. He knew well that we live a long while on those first contacts. How many times we went back together, step by step, to wake all that slept of ourselves, behind us, at the roadside. Our questions multiplied... The old echoes rushed forward, from the depths of evening, at their call...

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...Memory, memory, what do you want of me? Autumn...

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We would have wished to flush from their finest folds our most distant memories. We entered the houses that had watched us live and depart, one day, at the end of some horizon of France, or in a town, at the end of a street... We found again in their drawers those shafts of light, those revelations, those keen keys which had once opened for us the chambers of Mystery, of art, of sorrow and of love. What a book one might write of it. One would try there to unfold well, to spread out well these sensations and these memories, with the humblest scruple, with the patience and the minuteness of a naturalist who prepares an insect, with the application of a child who writes a birthday greeting while sticking out his tongue. One would go back up through the old days, helping oneself with the smallest things, groping, as one

finds with one's foot, while searching for them, the roughnesses of a wall to climb it... One would repeat one's childhood, like a class... One would disentangle all the threads, with one's naivete of old become almost a learned thing. One would soon reach the moment when one becomes conscious of the existence of one's parents, of their ways of moving against one another, of their cares, of their tuggings and their truces, of their relations with the child that you are, of all that they open for you, of the clearings and the vistas where they limit you. And then, there is the time of the first spectacles which mark you... The senses exercise themselves and exalt themselves. The brain takes in things well and controls. One grasps the first relations. One already has memories, at various planes, with their magic, their music and their odour. I, I would tell him how one day I had been troubled by the aspect of a locksmith's shop before which I passed every day with my mother, and which threw at us, through its blue door, the brief sign of a fire that thrust out its tongue when the great bellows breathed, the smell of its filings and the owl-body of its anvil... A herbalist's shop, further on, caressed you with its smell of nocturnal wood, of mulberries and of seeds... More than one thing in this world thus called to a certain child who was named Charles Blanchard, and of whom Philippe already spoke with the greatest insistence. When Galand, the blacksmith of his small town, in the company of his workman, beat the red iron, a rain of sparks would leap forth and radiate so beautifully that one rejoiced at having lived long enough to be able to

contemplate it. -- The Chinese kiosk in the garden of Monsieur Tardy was capped with a roof of six angles at each of which was suspended a little bell, and when the wind blew, six little bells would ring. Through an open window one perceived the drawing-room of Madame Bonnet who was a very rich woman. Charles Blanchard had received from it something like a blow! He had been truly struck in the face by silk curtains, by carpets, by sofas, by vases and by lamps with copper columns which seemed to him to number at least fifty. There was also the house of Madame Emile Giron: its courtyard, its steps, its gate. And even, one day, he had climbed the steps!

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Later, there was also the market of the small town: "He had a whole revelation. It was as if a new sense were making a place for itself among those he already used to appreciate the Universe. There occurred a phenomenon comparable to a landslide; a part of himself collapsed and left in the very middle of his body, in his belly, an enormous void. -- It seemed for a long while to Charles Blanchard that he saw more things still than are contained in a single market, that he even saw things that one does not see at the market."

. . .

-- But these were separate organs, which did not live, anatomical pieces. They were elements too pure still, isolated, unarmed, and which had not enough force to break the moorings of his soul and carry it off -- as by a ravishment... The spectacle of the wooden horses of the fete of his small town composed the first great ensemble, the first multiple body where several organs help each other to live, and, if I may write this word, the first symbiotic association, the first chemical phenomenon, the first mordant which made effervescence with that soul: It was chained to the leaf of a door, like Andromeda to her rock. But the wooden horses arrived in great heroism, like Perseus on his hippogriff... Charles Blanchard was profoundly shaken by it, intoxicated, converted, saved, as at the height of a high mass... And his soul was delivered!

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Charles-Louis Philippe as a child received the same revelation, in the same square, at Cerilly, when he saw later, in his turn, the wooden horses of the same fete... He told me of his enthusiasm and his fever for a whole day. And we would speak again of the fetes of the Centre of France, of the "assemblies" of Berry and of the Bourbonnais, of their feastings and their weddings. I see him so well, small but stocky, the chest broad, the head strong, with its clear planes, raising his good face to meet the confidence, with his pince-nez, which had noth-

ing of the bureaucratic, seated cross-legged on his well-open nose -- and walking with a short, neat step!

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Here then is the first tangent by which Mystery grazed the mind of Charles Blanchard, as by a gust of wind sowing its seed: an image. It germinates and grows. There will come from it later a flower, a kind of passion-flower, the wooden horses of a small fete, in the midst of the pages of a book...

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As soon as he had set himself to write it, Philippe suffered from an unease. He had told me of the bitter pleasure that filled him in painting the life of a child in his small town, his first thoughts, his first outings, his first happinesses and his discoveries; of a child very delicate of soul and of body; of a child traversed, transfixed by life as by an arrow of implacable sunlight; of a child whom the light dissolves, whom the air suffocates, and whom work threatens -- but whom work will save! Work, the double-edged weapon which kills you and which makes you live. He read to us one day, to Jehl and to me, what he had written of that first chapter of Charles Blanchard which he began again so many times since: It is a primitive's painting, with all its faith, its raw conscience, its planes and its backgrounds richly peopled,

its fine care for exactitude. One thinks of the account of the first man's day, by Buffon.

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Never had Philippe the need to say all, to forget nothing, as in "Charles Blanchard". But this very need embarrasses him, delays him and harasses him with scruples.

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From the outset, everything becomes complicated.

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He feels it by turns, and with equal certainty, in major and in minor. The light changes endlessly on his landscape. The choice of states, of "motifs" and of phenomena troubles him.

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Is he going to let himself be intimidated? Is he going to mark the tendency, or submit to all that presents itself and let the planes people themselves as they will?

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The "general book" and the particular: The story of Charles Blanchard; the Book of the Poor -- dispute over Philippe.

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His taste for "experimentation without preconceived idea" struggles with his Vision of the world...

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The multiplicity of points of view troubles him: Philippe has the scientific spirit. He cannot see a phenomenon begin without pursuing it.

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He is muddled by reasoning. Each time he fixes on his problem, so many solutions propose themselves. As soon as he presses one, the others rush forward to deliver it!

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He who believed there was nothing to do but follow, he sees too many paths forming beneath his steps. They branch off ceaselessly onto the two great lines: A natural road -- a strategic road. The realist line, and the other. -- On which, and how far will he follow his father? How to bring him to work? By the path of schoolchildren, or of martyrs?...

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He will say later: "Shall we write Charles Blanchard, the child of misfortune, or Charles Blanchard the consoling young man?"

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All the facts carry him off to their law. All the states raise him to their paroxysm. If there is a "hierarchy of facts," Philippe is constantly borne from secondary facts to facts of great yield. We shall see him tugged without respite from the state of emotion to the state of observation, from the sentimental state to the state of definition or hypothesis... A repressing and reducing Philippe struggles with the other...

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We are going to witness once more an episode of this multiple struggle between the need for generalisation and experience, the "dogmatic and the historical", nature and intelligence.

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He must follow and mark first that the wooden horses signify something quite other than a single bouquet and a single cake for a whole arid and sickly childhood, and that this "fete cake" is poisoned: Charles Blanchard bites into it and his teeth are bruised on the

bean: a hard truth: "One evening, I seated Beauty on my knees and I found her bitter." -- The poison will remain in all our veins... Philippe, this time, paints his wooden horses like an extraordinary sunflower and like a new wonder of the world, but like a terrible discovery, with all its consequences. The aspect of the market of his small town makes Charles Blanchard understand that he is hollow and that he is hungry. The wooden horses make him understand that he is poor. He runs to ask his mother for a sou! This sou, a screwdriver, would open the door that separates you from the other classes. -- As in the day of the first man, he then becomes conscious of the limits of his existence: Where the goat is tied, there it must browse, and: When one has not what one loves, one must love what one has. There he is, cast back by the wooden horses into his class and into his house: "It is thus that houses are powerful, that things are greedy, that a great communion has been established in the world, that all things draw together, that he who can yield must yield, and that he who can yield yields with such weakness that one feels that God has willed it. Unable to conform their soul to ours, the objects that surround us conform our soul to theirs." It is then that Charles Blanchard, fallen back into his house, pushed back near the friends from whom his heart had strayed, looks a little better at what he had seen so ill and makes a fuller acquaintance with Bread: It is tender, then stale, then sandy. His mother makes an economy of it. She mounts guard around its crumbs. But there is also the Rent, which is an intimate enemy, and the expenses,

with which one cannot help but exchange a few words, and the clothes, which must be renewed because one has grown. But if one grows, it is by Bread? Bread itself makes war on Bread! Solange, in vain, seeks work, makes false calculations and tries to cheat with bread. Vanquished and weary, she weeps over her defeat and resolves to beg.

. . .

It is that Philippe, when he goes back up the course of his youth, when he thinks of the life of his father, of all that he has heard said of it, of all that he has heard him tell of his pain, of the continuity of his effort, and from whatever side he turns and walks, strikes against days of stone, against winter sonorities... Someone relates that Flaubert worked sometimes under the impression of a certain colour, and pressed the material until he made it suggest the idea of that colour: "Thus, in Salammbo, I wanted to make a yellow thing." Philippe, thus, found himself little by little led to make, by amalgamating what he knew of the youth of his father with his own memories, with all the phantoms, with all the poor elements which fluttered, like Saint Elmo's fires, around his characters, a poor thing, a thing more and more poor; the Book of the Poor. The further he advanced into Charles Blanchard, the more he found himself drawn far, into regions more and more cold and sombre, and as into the limbo where live the larvae and the tadpoles of Misery... He was passing from Poverty into Misery. He

told me of the torment that dwelt in him to make something horribly arid and desert-like. He sought to make his characters stand on the weakest possible bases, and which should be just exactly sufficient to keep one's balance there. He wanted to show from as close as possible that the Blanchards are aided only by the smallest number of foreign forces that can assist a being, and that they have around their sad bodies only just what is needed of external matter to prop up, to drag along, to prolong the poor life one has received. It is a little earth, a pot too narrow for its plant, a twig where an insect crawls at the edge of an abyss. And it is the Interior where the two Blanchards keep themselves, these two fakirs of misery, like two bodies one might come to see, petrified by some eruption, in the posture where death would have surprised them. -- Everything there smells of the odour of poor country interiors, the smell of clay, the smell of ink of the extinguished hearth, the smell of mouldy shadow of the open and empty chest. Philippe wants one to touch there the bottom of Misery, but of that immobile misery, fascinated and fatalist, where one soaks as in a bath, and which cools by degrees until the heat of the body can no longer even maintain itself there; of that misery where one lies as in a provisional vault, just above one's tomb. Everything there seems always within two fingers of death. Everything there gives the impression of an unstable equilibrium impossible to maintain, and not of an approaching fall, but of a consumption which drags itself along, and of a night-light in

which there is no more oil and which never finishes going out...

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"The four walls watched over the room, full of rough stones, with nothing to soften their hardness, in a terrible vis-a-vis, in an implacable severity, four walls between which the black floor was bare. The shadow they poured, troubled by the greenish daylight of a low window, had withdrawn into the corners waiting for its hour. When evening comes here, one will be quite alone in a very hard world. There still remained a table, three chairs, the bed and the bread-bin. One of the chairs was crippled. The other furniture had departed long since.

. . .

"One still had at one's disposal all that one can draw from oneself: There is Boredom which yawns and enters your mouth where it meets Hunger which rises, and which the prisoner seeks to appease by the infinitely slow and concentrated study of his dungeon. One also possesses tears. One can occupy oneself in weeping them, as a spider secretes its web. And the Cold still provides you with occupations: To know one's body, to lose it and to find it again: 'I no longer feel my feet,' said Solange. One can work at not being cold. Feed a thin fire with stones. And there is still Bread, with which one can make a thousand experiments. With such poor materi-

als, one is quite forced to remake and to rediscover the World. Solange, one day, is reduced to discovering her own child!"

. . .

No. Never had Philippe the need to say all, to bring out all, and, to use a military expression, to "install" as in Charles Blanchard. He hungers there, more than ever, for total sincerity and absolute exactitude. The words there burst with meaning. The thoughts are rigorous. He will not forget a single one of all the ways the poor man invents of using the bread that remains to him. This idea of Misery, which, despite all, remains abstract for some of the best and boldest among men, for those very ones who emerge from their ivory shell, but who have never thought that they might descend one day into its Cellar, it does not suffice for him to make them pass it, feel it, smell it, in an irresistible concrete vision, and to push them brusquely into its intimacy, right up against its Face, as through a door open onto the cold night. He wants still to make them know it as a condemned man knows his cell. He wants to make of Charles Blanchard the depositary of a knowledge he possesses as a specialist and which makes of him one of the representative men among whom humanity chooses its heroes: The stone he brings to the great human knowledge, it is the knowledge of Poverty, of poverty unto Misery, unto asphyxiation by misery -- and unto Work, which opens the window! He turns and returns his character. He complic-

ates him, he develops him, he simplifies him in every direction. He models him and he presses him like a terrible statuette. He makes him leave his hovel to beg his bread with his mother, and he drags him through the landscape, until he makes him surpass and dominate that landscape after having subordinated him to it... Without respite, he rolls him and plunges him into his misery, from the day when the wooden horses made him become conscious of it, until the day when he makes him discover, at the clog-maker's, the trick: lever, jack and master-key -- which makes you get out of it! Principle of perpetual motion, talisman, Aladdin's lamp which can make a fortune spring forth, unit of life: Work! With the joy of one who finally finds his balance; with the joy of someone who thinks for the first time in a foreign language; with the joy of a child who sees for the first time the movement of a watch; with the joy of one who knows how to swim! -- For I know nothing which pours a light as joyful as that little phrase which triggers itself all alone, one day, like a ripe fruit, from the mind of Charles Blanchard: "Uncle, would you like me to try to split your wood?"

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Philippe thus writes Charles Blanchard like a book of object lessons, of impassioned object lessons "on some faculties of the soul." One has by turns the impression of a travel account in a mortal country by its explorer, of a sort of popularising course given by a technician, of a

sort of "anatomy lesson" of the poor, of a sort of Francinet of the poor. But from the particular case which occupies him, from the detail where he leans, where he sinks, where he lies down, where he takes his scrupulous observation, his atrocious and clear-sighted enthusiasm, his terrible curiosity of a sick doctor who treats himself and makes his own observation, his desperate conscience which tortures itself and turns the iron in its own wound, his morose delectation in depicting all -- he is sent back, as by a spring, to the General... And he strikes there with all his strength until the lightning leaps from it and his lyricism, long brooded over by the vigilant examination of facts, takes its flight and carries him off to the sanctification of misery and of work!

. . .

But this very need for exactitude and sincerity labours Philippe in every direction. It often tears him away from his Poor Man. It makes him come back meanwhile from his typical Charles Blanchard. He sees another quite steady, the senses attentive, and who has nothing in common with the first, the tadpole... He walks in his small town where the work is gay, the life easy, and which represents the whole world. Hours of happiness file past in the sun and in joy. But the weather darkens. The sea of Misery swells and rises. The old wounds reopen. The other time, you saw a sensitive child before a merry-go-round, at a small fete; now you see a poor child before the wheel of Fortune. The most beautiful im-

age of happiness serves only to make us understand that this happiness is not for us. Philippe thinks again and begins anew...

. . .

And each time he begins anew, one sees well that he feels once more the sense of a false start. His hole fills up as fast as he digs at it.

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His uncertainty does nothing but grow as he feels a tendency of Charles Blanchard take shape.

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He feels it swell, enrich itself with a thousand tributaries, rise in him like a wave and murmur with a suppliant voice.

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He is led further and further by a vein, towed further and further by his instinct for direction.

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The material has tired itself on the space where he works. The line bites only to the side, further, always further.

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We see successively weigh themselves in his mind: The life of Charles Blanchard, the life of a poor child, the life of a man who emerges from poverty through work, the book of the poor, the book of misery, a sort of critical poem on the sanctification of misery. And there will be Charles Blanchard as there will have been Caesar and Julien Sorel...

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This book evolves like an organ, alters itself, entangles itself, heals itself, deduces itself from its own substance and multiplies itself by itself from day to day. One sees no progress in it, but new parallels which form there. No boring so deep, nothing so hollowed out, so hard, in any literature.

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From a deep-seated horror of playing at facility, from ambition of conscience and of scruple, for wanting to make too many things fit there and to realise too subtle an equilibrium, he ends by abandoning it. To take it up again later, say some. Philippe judged that the hardest part was done and that he had to let it rest. Definitively, say others. Charles Blanchard, in Philippe's eyes, emerges from his "developer" at the very moment when he emerges from poverty by the discovery of work.

What remains to him? Years of apprenticeship and a man's life. And Philippe has described or indicated them everywhere else. -- But what must one think of this sentence: "It is here that 'the grandfather' ended his sad days"?...

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The chapters we publish of the unfinished Charles Blanchard are not therefore "studies" which he made for a painting, but this painting itself, which he began again as many times as he believed he saw it in the conditions necessary for its definitive completion, and perhaps as the events of his own life became clogged or untied, and as his thoughts darkened or lightened... Such is the terrain, such are the reasons where these variants and these repetitions are played out. We had therefore to publish them as they are, one upon another and in their successive states, as one superimposes the portraits of the same family to obtain from them a sort of type. And I hold that on no battlefield has one seen so clearly in conflict, a will and events; feeling and critical sense; instinct and scruple; intelligence and nature; a great writer and his work...

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Here is a variant where it is no longer Charles Blanchard who runs to find his mother to ask her for the sou which would open to him the enchanted garden. It is she

who goes to see him at the fete, as one would go to see an ascetic in ecstasy, and makes him fall from his dream, as one wakes a sleepwalker: "He turned around: It was only she!" In another, it is not the lack of a sou which casts Charles Blanchard back into his class. He has no need of this proof to let himself fall back there. For he feels, simply, the disproportion which exists between the life of the wooden horses and their guests, and his own. He would have it, his sou, and he would not even dare use it! From the pocket, poverty passes into the heart, with time. Besides, he is conscious of having already taken more than his share of the fete: He has dared to slip into this tournament of nobles, to run all around, and to touch a great red horse! -- Elsewhere, the wooden horses help him above all to classify men. He only finally understands these, whom he had seen badly until then, by their conjunction with those. Charles Blanchard takes the measure of his own means and of his Destiny by the aspect of the means of others, and he perceives what he cannot do by seeing them do what they do. -- In yet another, Charles Blanchard weeps over himself or over his interior brother, who can do nothing for him. (Like Charles Blanchard, I remember having wept, long ago, before a painting which represented a fortified castle with its towers under a stormy sky, and before a great heap of sand where rich children dug canals full of running water and tunnels -- in the feeling of my powerlessness to possess them or to remake them...) Charles Blanchard experiences yet again, elsewhere, that feeling that he is extra, that he is too many,

that he has no right, not even a niche, and that it is not only the wooden horses which are forbidden him, but all the life which begins at the edge of his waiting: No place has been reserved for him. He must therefore constantly profit from the movement to plug one, as in the game of four corners. Charles Blanchard will always be like those who enter by fraud into a theatre, and who, everywhere they slip in, suffer from the anguish of being chased by those who will come to occupy their place. -- A repetition completes by some details and on certain points the first chapter of Charles Blanchard which appeared in the Nouvelle Revue Francaise. Philippe there somewhat harshly specifies the bent, folded, huddled attitude on her chair, of Solange Blanchard. And this time, it is she who tastes her tears and no longer Charles. And this time, Charles is motionless: "Who then said that Charles Blanchard would go to see the kiosk of Monsieur Tardy?" There is a version of the interior of the clog-maker where a little girl appears, with her own way of seeing Charles Blanchard and of being afraid of this fearful one... It is the chapter of the bad welcome, as there is another of the good welcome. (At the end of this variant, one reads: "It was here that Charles Blanchard ended his life." Lower, in pencil: "The grandfather (and it is a nickname that had been given to Charles Blanchard) lived there the last days of his life. It seemed that he had forever left the place where he led an active life. He had come there to take his retirement.") -- There is yet another portrait of the little girl, as a little housewife, where there is not yet any question of her being afraid of Charles Blan-

chard. -- There is also a vigorous description, and a description in a note of gentle, passive, somewhat weak well-being, of the clog-maker's house. -- In a third, he no longer works in the intoxication of a healthy struggle, but with the hatred and the cruelty of an angry beast...

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A small study completes the Market with new touches. Charles Blanchard is hungry. He awaits a miracle! At home, in the dirty light, he had the nausea of cheese. But, in the brightness of the clear market, he would go so far as to eat some! Notes where Philippe speaks of himself and of his childhood memories go back to the earliest origins of the book. Others reinforce the portrait of Charles Blanchard, or contain village sayings or accessory remarks.

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Not one of these states, not one of these variants is lit by the same light nor at the same angle as the others. An always new design emerges from it, an always significant detail stands out in relief. And many are contradictory. "Shall we write Charles Blanchard, the child of misfortune, or Charles Blanchard the consoling young man?" If Philippe still oscillates between the two faces, it is because he is, more than ever, at one with his book, with the "fundamental plurality" of the Self, now master of his maladies and his fevers, now dominated by them...

And it is when it concerns ourselves that we see most distinctly that there is no entire character, but nothing but scattered traits of character, interchangeable, and whose proportion ceaselessly varies... Happy? Unhappy? All is perhaps a question of point of departure. And then, one is so all at once, or by turns, and it is covered wills and forces which decide it and which strike the dominant. "The brain of man is a theatre where several different plays are performed at once on several planes of which only one is in the light."

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One may well paint oneself in several manners, or subordinate one to the other, or make them all march abreast without ceasing to be truthful... Mallarme dreamed of a book where two different stories would pursue each other, as in hide-and-seek, one on the recto, the other on the verso. But if the man moves, all mingles, and the light plays tricks with the shadow. Thus Philippe turns with his book, as at the foot of a tree, his shadow.

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He stops there in the midst of the struggle, exhausted from pushing into it all the sincerity of his heart. Everywhere else, he has succeeded in projecting his characters outside himself, he gives them nothing more than his gaze, he follows their actions and runs after them, and plays with them as at pass-the-slipper. But

Charles Blanchard still possesses him. He gnaws at his belly, like the Spartan's fox. He shakes him with his starts and his rages. They sink and rise together. -- One sees him struggle with himself. It is no longer a question of "choosing". And then, when one is Philippe, one chooses with difficulty within oneself, one does not conjure away oneself. -- The thing must be said: this new child of his flesh cannot come out, because the term has not come...

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The struggle is dear to me above all others where I see pass so many signs of that immense duality which turns in us all like a lighthouse, for as little as we may be sensitive and sincere. Parallelly, says Verlaine. But I have never followed it better than in the life and in the work of Philippe. It went in him as far as conflict, for he did nothing without flame. We have the need for bias and the gift of good faith; the desire to explain all and that of trusting to our instinct; the mystical and the sceptical; the feeling for the sacrifices it is necessary to make to the whole and the taste for the passionately equitable and careful examination of all that presents itself; the care for composition and the pleasure of seeing things grow and compose themselves, in the course of time and of function; the taste for the exceptional a la Dostoevsky, but often the need to envisage all from a point of view of western justice somewhat morose; the balance of the Right and the Duty of man, the "I prefer an in-

justice to a disorder," of Goethe, and the most precious respect for the individual; the appetite for pleasure and the torment of keeping oneself short; the mania for liberty and the itch for discipline; the profound knowledge of our weakness and the pretension of proving to ourselves our strength. Whatever may be said of that Truth of which Monos and Una speak; of that truth of which one is so hungry and which one is so strongly pressed to know, when certain signs warn you and the Unknown breathes its breath, of that truth which still raises on his pallet the dying man of Death and Transfiguration, Philippe sought it passionately. Now that he has been reabsorbed into immense love, that he has risen again, "at last", that he is on the side where it is true, no doubt, that he knows and that he holds the keys of the Portals and that he has ceased to live in order to be, does he touch a little of that truth, does he touch a little of its immense body? And can that console us for no longer being able to clasp him in our arms?

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LEON-PAUL FARGUE.

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CHARLES BLANCHARD

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EDITORIAL NOTE

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This edition of Charles Blanchard comprises two parts:

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The first is formed of two chapters: I. The Cold -- and II. The Clog-Maker's House, considered by Charles-Louis Philippe as ready for publication. The first was published in his lifetime, the second after his death. Both in the Nouvelle Revue Francaise (January and February 1910).

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The second is composed of a supplement to the first version: Solange Blanchard sends Charles Blanchard to beg at funerals, which appeared in the Nouvelle Revue Francaise (April 1913) -- of a second version: Bread, which appeared in the Grande Revue (June 1910) -- of a third version: Charles Blanchard happy... etc. which appeared in the Nouvelle Revue Francaise (15 February 1910) and of Variants 1) of Charles Blanchard of which one: The Clog-Maker's House, III appeared in the Cahiers Nivernais et du Centre (February-March 1910). 2) of the different versions, of which two: Words of Solange and Wooden Horses, II appeared in the first number of the Cahiers d'aujourd'hui and of which the others are unpublished.

CHAPTER I

THE COLD

. . .

One cannot even say that the house of Charles Blanchard was the last house in the town. She occupied a place apart. The other houses seemed to maintain among themselves relations of friendship; they were one beside the other; as they resembled one another, they had gathered together and gave reason to believe they were family. They looked upon the houses across the way which had ranged themselves on the other side of the street, as when one faces one's partner in a pleasure party. There had to be a first, there had to be a last. The last like the first belonged to the group and received in the manner of the other houses that joy which small towns have come seeking in the countryside.

. . .

The house of Charles Blanchard had not mingled with those others. To the right, going up, in a little street, quite set apart, one saw her; she was capped with a very low thatched roof, she made one think of an old woman who had sat down at a certain distance from the road and who, over her eyes, had drawn down her hood because she no longer took interest in what might pass.

. . .

By dint of bowing her head, she had bent at the shoulder; her walls leaned, she was misshapen, she was a little broken.

. . .

Houses resemble us. One might have believed that a great sorrow she had conceived because she was thus made had led her to withdraw from men and to seek a corner where nothing could tear her from her destiny.

. . .

When one opened the door and entered the single room, one perceived first of all everything she did not contain. There was not that peace which makes it so that after work, one comes home, one sits down, and one feels removed from cares. There were not those souvenirs of victory that furniture is, that everyday objects ranged in good order are, beside which one rests with pride thinking: I have had much trouble, but all that surrounds me, I have conquered it. There was not that light which seems to belong to you, which is that of your house and resembles not the light of neighbouring houses. It illuminates, it embraces things in the manner in which your soul illuminates them, embraces them, understands them. One thought quite quickly: Here is a house I could not inhabit!

. . .

Four walls watched over the room, full of rough stones, with nothing to soften their hardness, in a terrible vis-a-vis, in an implacable severity, four walls between which the black floor was bare. The shadow they poured forth, troubled by the greenish daylight of a low window, had withdrawn into the corners awaiting its hour. When evening comes here, one will be quite alone, in a world quite hard.

. . .

Those companions of our life that furniture is: a clock, an armoire, a sideboard, one after another had fled, and if there still remained a table, three chairs, the bed and the bread-bin, they scarcely consoled you, for they reminded you ceaselessly that only they remained. One of the chairs was even beginning to depart. She had collapsed, her rungs had been gathered together so that she might still make a figure, but the legs and the back leaned and showed plainly that one must not count upon their support.

. . .

Such was the house of Charles Blanchard. It was here, at the age of seven, when it seems that in the soul of a child a hundred souls of children stir and wish to escape, it was here that Charles Blanchard came to take

his place. Certainly, he wished to go elsewhere. More than one thing in this world called to him with great insistence. When Galand the blacksmith, in company with his workman, beat the red iron, a rain of sparks leapt forth and radiated, so beautiful that one rejoiced to have lived long enough to be able to contemplate it. The Chinese kiosk in the garden of Monsieur Tardy was capped with a roof of six angles, from each of which was suspended a little bell, and when the wind blew, six little bells tinkled. The sun, the azure of the sky, the trees, the meadows, the birds, the dogs, the cats, the horses, all things, all creatures upon the Earth existed with a joy, with a force that he admired in his heart. He would have departed as children depart: their eyes shine, it seems their eyes precede them upon the road.

. . .

Charles Blanchard rose each day a little before seven in the morning. His mother woke him:

. . .

"Get up quickly, my little boy. I must go to do my housework."

. . .

He did not make her wait. When she had made the bed, she left. She never forgot to say:

. . .

"Sit on your chair, stay there quietly. You will rest until I return."

. . .

When she had said that, she was still a little afraid, and she developed her thoughts in a sort of little speech:

. . .

"Above all, do not go into the street, my Charles. You would run, you would catch a heat. Remember always what I told you of your poor father. He had gone into the countryside and he came home all in a sweat. When he wished to rest, he caught cold and he died of pneumonia in six days."

. . .

From seven o'clock to nine o'clock, it did not seem to the child that he was alone, because his mother's words lived in his head and drew his ideas into their movement. He followed them and was not bored. He sat down; a little later they subsided a little, but he gathered them up, he kept them, he pressed them to his heart, they did him good. He understood them. He thought:

. . .

"I must not go out because I would catch pneumonia and I would die in six days."

. . .

At nine o'clock, the mother, having finished her first housework, returned to the house to eat her piece of bread. She ate it very quickly, then she left to go do the housework of Monsieur Lhotte, the clerk of the justice of the peace. She had just time enough to say:

. . .

"Have you been good, my little one? Eat your piece of bread slowly, it will occupy you."

. . .

He ate his piece of bread slowly. He thought while eating each of his mouthfuls to make them last longer. His mother had left to go to the clerk's. He knew that it is cats one calls clerks. He believed his mother had gone to do the housework for a big cat. That lasted well until half past nine; sometimes, on his good days, he had a little longer, but at ten o'clock at the latest all was used up of what his mother had left him that morning. He had upon all things singular conceptions. He knew there existed in the world a woman who loved him, he believed there existed others, that other mothers would come open the door and say to him: My little boy, I have come to keep you company. He awaited them with patience

and since he was all alone, he made use of the time to prepare to receive them.

. . .

At five past ten, they were not there, at ten past ten, he was surprised, at quarter past ten, life was no doubt not made as he had believed. He was not astonished by this, for he was very small. He held himself on his chair and, not without curiosity, watched how life could possibly be made.

. . .

How was life made? He did not miss a glance. He looked in the four corners, but they were too dark for him to discover it if it had been there. He raised his head afterwards to see well the beams of the ceiling, but they were too low and must prevent it from being able to fit in the room. He looked at the floor at his feet; he scratched it a little with the tip of his clog to see if it might not appear. He knew well it was not outside, there where his father had caught a malady whose name he had forgotten and which he did not remember very well whether it was held in the chest or in the stomach. Life was nowhere, it had no doubt not arrived. He awaited it, he stayed on his chair, he made not a gesture for he might have frightened it, he opened his eyes wide so that it might not come without his seeing it, he gathered all his limbs together to be ready to accompany it when

it came. Each day it was long in coming, it was long in coming until noon. How was it made? As soon as it brushed the door he rose from his chair, he ran to be at once beside her. His mother entered. He understood then that life was made like his mother.

. . .

On arriving she said:

. . .

"My little one, we shall have to eat."

. . .

He obeyed her, setting himself at the table.

. . .

Eating was not for them one of those complicated operations which take certain persons an hour and a half. Their meal was composed of a piece of bread and a piece of cheese. It offered nonetheless certain difficulties. Each day the mother said to the child:

. . .

"Come, try to eat some cheese. It will do you no harm: I eat it well enough!"

. . .

Never was he able to eat cheese. Sometimes he made an act of good will: he cut a piece. But as soon as he had it in his mouth, a feeling of horror took hold of him entirely, he was afraid. He closed his eyes so as to see nothing, then suddenly, while there was still time, he spat out his mouthful of cheese. He spat again several times all the saliva he could gather to wash well from an infamous contact his tongue and his palate. His mother had nothing left but to resign herself and say:

. . .

"It is a great misfortune, my little one, not to like cheese."

. . .

One cannot absolutely say he ate his bread dry. He had realised a sort of invention. He set apart from his slice of bread a very small piece. He said to himself: There, that will be my fare, that will be what I eat with my bread. He bit with full teeth into the slice and took from his fare a crumb which he added to his mouthful of bread. Sometimes he imagined it was sausage, sometimes half a pear, sometimes jam. Certain days even he said to himself:

. . .

"Today it is butter. It is quite fresh."

. . .

Charles Blanchard always felt a great relief when he had finished his meal. He said:

. . .

"There it is, mama, I am no longer hungry."

. . .

He did not know very well what was going to happen next. He rose, to be ready to leave. He understood now why no one had come in the morning: they had waited until he had eaten, so he remained standing. His mother ended by remarking upon it:

. . .

"Will you not sit down, my Charles. You stand there all upright."

. . .

He could sit down indeed. For a long time he consoled himself with the thought that he sat only for an instant.

. . .

Charles Blanchard became accustomed early to the idea that each day, when one o'clock strikes, all the women of France have a duty to mend their skirts.

. . .

It happens sometimes that it is at the knee; other times at the hip, or in the hem: in the hem in front, in the hem behind, or in the hem at the sides. But it always happens that at the last moment they say:

. . .

"Well, I give up. I do not know why I try. It is better to give it up."

. . .

They have besides troubles with the colour of the wool.

. . .

It had happened once to the mother of Charles Blanchard, at Rondreux the grocer's, to discover a ball of wool that had done nicely for her: it was a ball that had remained in the window in the sun during a whole summer.

. . .

Charles Blanchard came to know that little children should come right after their mother's skirt and that they would need like her to be followed, to be seen closely, to be repaired a little, because something is no longer in its place in their heads. As for him, he waited until the skirt hour was entirely passed, but he said then:

. . .

"Mama, I am bored."

. . .

His mother was a good mother. She gave him counsel:

. . .

"You must not be bored, my little one. See then, stay on your chair, watch me, it will distract you."

. . .

He did all he could not to be bored. He watched her. She was called Solange, Solange Blanchard. When she had done with her skirt, she had not done with all her occupations.

. . .

She looked around her first of all to see what she had to do. She looked everywhere for fear of forgetting something. She looked straight ahead to begin. She saw the wall opposite. Charles Blanchard did not know well what it is to read: he had once seen people who were reading a poster placed beside the door of the town hall: they had planted themselves, they had looked at the wall for a long time, he believed his mother too was reading a poster he could not see, but which was placed on the wall of her house. She looked afterwards into the corners and it was no doubt to know more. She did not stop there, for the ceiling would then have escaped her attention.

. . .

When she had looked at it for a moment, it seemed the ceiling lowered a little, put itself within her reach to make itself better known. After that she was ignorant of only one thing and she passed it in her study. She had to learn what the floor of a house teaches you when you have long scratched it with the corner of your clog.

. . .

There arrived a moment when Solange Blanchard had finished this first part of her task. First of all she remained absolutely still. There is reason to believe she did not wish to hasten and that before drawing profit from them she was gathering, grouping the observa-

tions she had made. Her face expressed calm, reflection, wisdom; each of her features was well in its place; her eyes did not shine like the eyes of enthusiastic children, but a measured flame testified to the good order that reigned in her mind. When later, a man studies the life of his own and seeks there the essential traits, when later Charles Blanchard remembered his mother, and wished to represent her to himself, he chose the expression of face she had in those moments. It seemed then she bore her whole soul, one saw it.

. . .

It was with certainty that she acted afterwards. She arrived at such a result because it was at such a result one must arrive. She did such a thing because it was such a thing one must do, and he who had been at her side would have watched her with great attention so that she might teach him a truth he had no doubt not fathomed as she had.

. . .

Her eyes widened first of all, she possessed what she had sought, her eyes were bathed in it, her gaze itself was caught, and upon her pupil something had settled which seemed to have a certain weight. It grew larger, then at a given moment, no effort could have retained it, it detached itself. One perceived then upon the cheek of Solange a heavy tear, round, which rolled and came to

flatten itself upon the cloth of her dress. It was the first, but the others came after it. Soon one had to give up seeing them one by one. The poor woman recalled those orators who are full of their subject, and as they speak, she wept in abundance.

. . .

Charles Blanchard wept first because he saw his mother weep. His first tear too was heavy, was round, his first tear was followed by all the others, he had no wrinkle that could impose upon them a direction, they flowed a little at random, but for those which made their way to the corner of his lips, he did not cheat with them, he received them in his mouth and used all his conscience to appreciate well the taste. He did not fall behind, he did not take out his handkerchief to wipe them, those that wished to go into his neck went into his neck; they went further still, upon his little chest of a thin child. Some fell upon his smock, some fell upon his trousers. He would have been quite unhappy if they had failed him. He feared not having enough of them. He looked at his mother once more to imitate her still better. He would have been sad if she had stopped, for he still had the strength to weep.

. . .

Charles Blanchard ate at seven o'clock, each day, a bowl of onion soup. He was in bed, occupying the place

at the back, by quarter past seven and fell asleep quite quickly, being very tired.

. . .

When he was eight years old, it happened to him several times to leave the house. This took place ordinarily toward two o'clock in the afternoon, that is to say at the moment when, in company with his mother, he was about to begin weeping. Solange had even already begun the preparatory work which consisted of looking around her and thinking about what she had seen. She rose suddenly, she gave a brusque movement, it seemed she detached herself violently from her chair and that following a quarrel she had decided to quit her surroundings. She said then:

. . .

"My little one, you must come."

. . .

He rose, he did not yet know where he was, when he found himself already outside. Solange barely took time to lock her door with a double turn. She set off and took the road that leads into open country.

. . .

The first impression that, upon this road, Charles Blanchard felt was that of a world to which he was not accustomed. Space was so vast, the sky was so high, the light was so pure that he could not believe such a thing existed. He was intimidated, he would not have dared advance toward what he saw. He waited for his mother to invite him to follow.

. . .

The trees were green, the earth was white, birds alighted among the leaves, and as they sang, he did not doubt they were those one calls nightingales. What would he not have wished! He would have wished to be the nightingale. But the entire Universe was too beautiful for one to accept it at first stroke. He did not know it well enough; the world could mock men, Charles Blanchard mistrusted it, and feared it might conceal some trap.

. . .

He did not take long to perceive he was right to think thus. The four steps barely taken which brought him to the main road, one had to begin walking. His mother carried a basket on her left arm, he took the right. She held herself a little bent when she climbed the hills, he understood one must hold oneself a little bent when one climbs a hill. They were roads without end, after the climbs there were the descents, in nature only the roads

counted. His mother lowered her head, they were two to lower their heads. After a little while they were two to know that what is on each side of the road was not made for them. They looked at nothing for fear of losing their time seeing useless things. The child did not know where the roads lead; he had seen how vast space is, the roads are meant to traverse it; at each step he believed one would have to walk forever. He could not help complaining. Sometimes he said:

. . .

"Mama, I am weary."

. . .

A summer sun, that which lights the fine days and which makes it that at their last hour even the men who, beyond death, believe they will find Heaven leave the earth only weeping, a beautiful sun embraced the entire countryside and loved it as a father loves the best of his children. Beautiful vapours of a blue colour rose toward it, the countryside seemed to answer it with a gentle feeling, the child of the sun repaid it in return. Of all this Charles Blanchard knew but one thing. He said:

. . .

"Mama, I am hot."

. . .

By dint of being hot, by dint of being weary and having left the main road for those country paths where the rocks, the stones, the earth hollowed by the wide wheels of ox-carts are personal enemies for those who travel them, they perceived at last some farm whose courtyard was immense and at the entrance of which watched two jealous dogs who did not wait until they had entered to declare war upon them. There was one for the mother and one for the child. The dogs seemed rather to push them than to follow them. They obeyed them, they traversed the whole extent of the courtyard, they were led to the master who, on the threshold of the house, squinted his eyes to see them better and who, when they arrived at his height, went away, perhaps for fear of having to pardon them the audacity they had shown in entering his domain.

. . .

It was before the women that Solange explained herself. She was capped with a capeline, she drew it down over her face while climbing the steps that led to the kitchen, then, as she entered, she inclined her head to the right and began to weep. She could say nothing. The women were not cruel. They addressed no reproach to her. They took possession of her basket, passed into the room beside, left them alone a moment, then brought back the basket saying:

. . .

"Will that not be too heavy for you, my Solange?"

. . .

They returned during the rest of the afternoon carrying their basket. It was four o'clock: the world and life were what they had been all day, walking was that attentive movement which takes you entirely, quite small, upon roads without limit, Nature was that great expanse in which one walks carrying a basket. They ended by yielding to it, they felt a sort of discouragement before the distance that separated them from their house, and cost what it may, the mother, the basket, the child, on the edge of a ditch... but they scarcely dared rest because they were not at home. One does not know what they feared. They held themselves very straight so the master of the countryside might find nothing to reproach in their bearing. After a moment, Solange took a little assurance and cast a glance about to see if anyone was coming, then, hastily, furtively, afraid of being seen, she looked at what her basket contained. It contained bread, a cheese, some pears.

. . .

They set off at once, one would have said they were fleeing.

. . .

Spending great courage, they ended by arriving home. By good fortune, the house had not changed during their absence. They entered as one enters, they sat down, their chair was their friend, they rested. Solange was first to emerge from the torpor in which they were plunged. She rose, she suddenly remembered that on the table she had placed a basket, she suddenly remembered that during the afternoon of the day that had passed, she had made a strange voyage; she rose to find the sad souvenir of it. Everything was there, it was not a dream. She placed upon the table the cheese and the pears, she took hold of the bread. It was seven o'clock, the hour at which they usually ate. She could not bring herself to place the bread simply, among the pears, beside the cheese. She went to the window, she looked at it, she brought it close to her eyes, she felt it, she touched it successively with each of the five fingers of her right hand, then she smelled it. She smelled the crumb, she smelled the crust, she returned upon her first impression to smell it again; when she had smelled it well, she reflected for a time to be quite sure she had not been mistaken.

. . .

She said afterwards:

. . .

"It is good bread, but I have not the heart to eat it."

. . .

The child might perhaps have let himself go to joy, because of the pears, but he dared not have other feelings than those his mother showed him. Certainly he ate since he was hungry, but he was a little ashamed to be hungry, he tried not to make noise swallowing the mouthfuls which, timidly, he brought to his mouth. When he had finished his first piece of bread, for all the world he would not have accepted a second. There came to him upon life extraordinary ideas, perhaps they came from having walked all day and from having seen more things than a child should see. He who never spoke, it seemed delirium was about to take him, he spoke:

. . .

"Is what we did today called seeking one's bread, mama?"

. . .

One did not know where he could have taken those words. She answered him while putting him to bed. He was quite happy to fall asleep, it seemed to him he had something to forget.

. . .

Such was the life which, all around Charles Blanchard, reigned in the world when he was seven, when he was

eight and when he turned nine. Perhaps, against it, there is much to say, but for many days the child did not open his mouth. If it was thus made, it was because it had the right to be so. He received it with submission, he sat because one must not be absent at its coming. He made not a single gesture afterwards, for it had not commanded him to; he took not a step, for fear that in its thought it had decided he must remain seated.

. . .

He received it. Ceaselessly there detached themselves from it those minutes which fall with a light sound, which slowly cover your head, your shoulders, your limbs and which, when evening comes, make you feel you carry a burden.

. . .

From eight to nine years old, he made several voyages into the countryside and they were like his first voyage. He had not reached the point where one perceives that others are not ourselves and that their life is not like ours; it was much later he reached the age of reason, that he could make comparisons, know the place he occupied in this world and say to himself seeing certain persons: I do things they do not do, I perform functions foreign to them, I belong to a class that is not theirs. At eight years old he did not even make the difference between those who give bread and those who

receive it, he judged human activity by his own actions alone and believed all men, like his mother and him, traversed the roads, head bowed, with this fatigue, to go seek in certain depots bread, cheese and pears.

. . .

He believed still and above all that fathers are dead, that mothers each morning do housework, that children await them and that the afternoon and the evening pass in dark houses where time watches you and does not leave until the hour you go to bed. His life was life, he was bored because one must be bored; when he ate dry bread, it was because the Earth produced only dry bread. He did not imagine there existed other things that could be eaten, and unless one lived on the Moon where, within reach of the hand, one has the blue of the sky and the clouds that cover it and where there are perhaps pears every day in every house, Charles Blanchard reckoned his lot was the common lot and that he could not desire more.

. . .

Each second in falling drove him further into these feelings, it seemed each hour gave the order to the hour that followed it and that the days pursued a goal which was to smother him beneath that sediment each of them deposited upon his head before withdrawing. There came even heavier ones, thicker ones than those

he had received at the age of seven, there came ones which, by their weight, bent him like an old man and drove him to believe he could not carry them long.

. . .

There came winter days. When Charles Blanchard was seven, it did not seem to him he had crossed a single winter, at the end of each year he had noticed but one thing: that a very long year had just departed. At the age of nine, perhaps he was weary of having carried so many days, it seemed to him his burden grew heavier and that upon his shoulders there settled still a thing called winter.

. . .

Winter was first and foremost a season during which it is cold. Winter was so cold it was necessary to light a fire. Solange Blanchard waited until the last moment, she resisted for a week, for one day more, she did not wish to believe in the bad season, she said:

. . .

"We are only at the beginning of November. It is not possible the good season is finished."

. . .

A morning arrived at last when, after a quarter hour of waiting, she had to admit it: the fine weather was not returning! She assembled in the hearth two or three little pieces of wood, she had still to spend an entire match.

. . .

On leaving, she arranged beside the hearth a provision of wood for the child. She said:

. . .

"Do not make bad use of it. If you are cold, instead of putting on a piece, come closer to the fire."

. . .

She was not an imprudent mother when she said these words. There was no fear indeed that the child might fall into the fire, first because he was very calm and measured his movements, and then if he had fallen into the fire, it is not the fire that would have destroyed Charles Blanchard, but Charles Blanchard who would have destroyed the fire.

. . .

He broke each piece of wood in two to have twice as much. They were little pieces of dry wood, little pieces of faggot, they burned quite quickly. He placed himself full in the hearth, a foot on each side of the fire and did not

need for this, moreover, to spread his legs very far, he leaned a little, he put his head just above the flame, and although he was not very tall, never did it succeed in reaching him. In the early times, when the wood burned well, when for example there were three pieces, it was so good he had a headache from it. But soon winter became so cold, he never again had the headache and it would have been necessary even that he be small as an ember and crouched in the middle of the flames to be able to feel the warmth.

. . .

Charles Blanchard had many occupations during winter. His whole morning was taken. His back occupied him, his hips occupied him, his hands occupied him, and as for his feet, he had once heard his mother say: I can no longer feel my feet; he did not succeed in gathering the exact terms she had used but he reconstituted the same thought in these terms:

. . .

"I have lost my feet."

. . .

All morning he strove to find what he had lost. When he found his feet again, he was missing something in the shoulders, a little later he was at his hands, then he felt at the tip of his nose the ridiculous sensation of a great

void. Never did he succeed in gathering himself entirely. He imagined singular poses: in a half-circle, with the fire in the middle, but he arrived at no decisive result, for if his chest was presented to the warmth, to the cold his back was offered. Other times he crouched, he made himself as small as one can be: head between legs, knees at ears, hands at feet, but he tired quite quickly, and then he was not the personage he should have been. He should have been Charles Blanchard standing, head high, limbs free, heart beating, Charles Blanchard upright and living at his ease.

. . .

It was during the afternoons he learned things more grave still. On arriving, Solange said:

. . .

"What am I to do? Here we are going to burn wood until seven or eight o'clock. At the tax collector's I have four francs, at Monsieur Lhotte's I have six. Ten francs a month, that makes us six sous a day, my little one, and I have thirty francs of rent, which is to say that each morning when I rise I have already spent two sous. I assure you with the four sous we have left we cannot go very far. So, do your best not to be cold, you see how I must calculate when I put a piece of wood on the fire."

. . .

For a long time, Charles Blanchard did his best not to be cold. For a long time he warmed himself, as they say, with the warmth of his thoughts. He had no notion of the length of winter, so each evening on going to bed, he oriented his thoughts in the best direction so they might give him pleasure at their ease. He set himself to believe that the next day, on waking, the good season would have come while he slept. He said:

. . .

"It will be warm tomorrow, will it not, mama?"

. . .

It was never warm the next day. There were days of snow which were not the hardest, even with their dampness, for there were days of frost when the cold entered under the door like a torrent and would have swept away a warmth much stronger than that of the hearth of Solange Blanchard. Winter swept all before its passage, and gathering up the feelings with which each one strove to surround his heart, winter carried them off like down and left you a soul quite naked upon which it reigned with fury. One thing alone existed: it was called suffering. It was indisputable that it was there, the child shivered, and in the position he had adopted, astride the fire, as his mother said, he felt it pass through him like a current of cold water and freeze that confidence he had until then placed in living.

. . .

He did not know how long winter lasted. Winter was a season from which one did not succeed in escaping. Each day, toward four o'clock in the afternoon, a powerful shadow, through the window, entered the room, and slowly, sure of victory, with a force, with a weight, advanced toward the woman and the child and imposed upon them its presence.

. . .

That was all that was missing! They did not know if it was black or if it was yellow. They fixed their eyes upon it, they felt it; they made with their arms the gesture of pushing it back, it was thick and resistant.

. . .

And at the moment they feared it most, it seemed it knew no halt in its march, that it crossed the doors of their senses and entered into them to make them know that odour of damp earth, that odour of cemetery that winter nights carry with them. It was too powerful for day ever to vanquish it. It seemed a new season began, more terrible still than winter. A thing existed, beside which the cold scarcely counted. The child did not think to approach that fire which, in the darkness, pierced a poor hole the width of an ember, he thought to guard

against the shadow he felt invading him a little heart of nine years which was dying in his breast.

. . .

A new season began, which one might have called the season of the end of life. How slow the hours were, how long the hours were, how heavy the hours were! And then, sometimes, it seemed to the child he was quite weary. He had seen so many pass! He had seen pass the file of the morning hours, he had seen pass the afternoon hours which go one by one and which give you the ridiculous sensation that one must yawn, that one must open one's mouth, one's throat and one's chest so they may enter and make their way through your body. The hours of night were so numerous one did not confront them, there was but one course of conduct toward them: to lie down, to sleep, to leave them the time, the life and the space. How long had this lasted? If Charles Blanchard had known how to count, he would have reckoned it had lasted a hundred years. He would have lacked the strength already to continue living as he had lived. But before the new hours, he had nothing left but to let himself be done with. It seemed to him, in the midst of a yawn, he could never open his mouth wide enough for them to enter. Old age was producing its first effects: the hinges of his jaws were no longer supple enough, the movement of his blood no longer quick enough, a great cold he felt was not the cold of winter, the shadow that surrounded him was not that of night. Yes, that was it:

he was very old, the time had come when he must abandon himself to death.

CHAPTER II

THE CLOG-MAKER'S HOUSE

. . .

A surprising thing came to pass: after twelve years of such an existence, Charles Blanchard did not figure among the dead.

. . .

"I shall never die," he would say later. "If I had been meant to die, I would have died in my childhood."

. . .

But if he did not figure among the dead, he cut a sorry figure among the living. When he stood upright, it seemed he was incapable of bearing the weight of life. The weight of his head upon legs without strength, he swayed in every direction, as though he were hesitating a moment before deciding which way to let himself fall.

. . .

"Why do you rock like that," his mother said to him.

. . .

He gave no more answer than one gives to certain ridiculous questions that children ask. He simply went and sat down.

. . .

One understood, looking at him, that there exist men who are not our fellows. He barely had our form. His arms were too long, his neck too thin, and two spindly legs that climbed all the way to his chest gave the impression there was no room in him for a belly. His eyes were too large, his eyes were too blue, and whoever might have wished to describe their expression would have tried in vain for a long time. One could only have compared them to the eyes of madmen in whose minds such strange things occur that they have had to be put away.

. . .

Beneath his transparent cheeks, his colourless flesh seemed mixed with water. One must not say his skin was moist: his skin was damp. Sometimes his mother wiped his face; a moment later it would have to be done again. It was not even enough to say his skin was damp. No doubt some singular phenomenon had occurred in the deep layers of his body; his veins were fragile, one of

them had ruptured; he was draining away; a horrible liquid was seeping through his skin.

. . .

"But it is a haemorrhage," Solange thought.

. . .

Indeed one had to expect his blood to be that colour.

. . .

One knew nothing of his feelings. During those long afternoons in the course of which his mother received the destiny of widows and he the destiny of fatherless children, he kept a tranquil stillness in his chair. He placed both hands flat upon his knees, and breathing the air that surrounded him, in the midst of misfortune, he kept silent in so strange a fashion that one wondered what he had to be silent about. His mother had not been able to lose the habit of weeping. He would turn a little in her direction, would perceive her no doubt, then, resuming his posture, would go on living as if there had been no tears beside him.

. . .

In the early days, she did not yet know. She would ask:

. . .

"Are you ill, my little one?"

. . .

It seemed he had not heard, or rather it seemed he was occupied elsewhere.

. . .

He inhabited a world that is not ours, nothing could draw him out of it; a great principle of silence commanded his ways, he was not its master: one sensed he was watched, one saw him obey. If sometimes, in one of those unconscious movements we all have, he made a gesture, it was as though he then perceived he had just failed in his duty. He seemed to hide himself in order to return to repose, then he would pass his hand over the limb that had made the gesture, as though he wished to efface its trace.

. . .

One no longer understood anything of human nature when one examined him. How did he live? But what on earth did he do? Certainly, with the breath of his respiration, his chest rose and fell like ours, but that was the only point by which he resembled us. One could not imagine the ideas that might grow in his head. One knew no one to whom he might be compared. Old men make

more noise, grown men are less grave, animals mingle with us more. Sometimes it seemed the pallor and dampness of his face ought to furnish some indication. Yes... It was not even in the animal kingdom that one might have found his like. When one saw him motionless and cold on his chair in the darker corner of his sombre house, one told oneself that unsuspected phenomena take place sheltered from the light of the sun and that strange moulds have been able to develop in a frozen shadow. Some monstrous mushroom, on the floor of one of those rooms that make one think of cellars, had grown during days and days: chance had given it the form of a child.

. . .

Solange had always lived in the hope that one day her son would be twelve years old. He was still quite small, there lay before her days so thick she did not know how to get through them, years of misery seemed like walls placed across her life, no matter! She had a sister whose husband was a clog-maker. One day her son would be twelve years old. She would have a sister whose husband would be a clog-maker.

. . .

Baptiste Dumont, her brother-in-law, lived in a small village called Champvallon that was situated four leagues from the small town. It was not very far. The

small town was situated four leagues from a great hope, happiness would come at the first call, she would say to him exactly these words:

. . .

"There. My little one is twelve years old. I entrust him to you so that you may teach him your trade. You cannot refuse me since you are my brother-in-law."

. . .

It is at that moment he would say yes. She would only have to add:

. . .

"He will know how to work. Each evening, he will have earned his day. He will be happy when he is grown. He will not be like his mother."

. . .

Certainly, she was sad because each day she took comfort in her sorrow; she was sad because she did not know how one could do otherwise, but her sadness did not go very far. She wept for today, she did not weep for tomorrow. There was always in her heart a small corner ready for repose within sorrow. At the time of the great events of her life, on the anniversary of her son's birth, for example, she always had in reserve a very gentle

thought. When he was eight years old, she would tell herself:

. . .

"There are only four years left to wait."

. . .

When he turned eleven, she could not keep her joy to herself and began to say to him:

. . .

"My little one, in a year, you will be twelve years old."

. . .

She possessed the mystical number, she knew how to calculate the times, she prophesied like Daniel the epoch of the coming of the Messiah. She did not even need to see what would happen when the Messiah had come. She did not say there would still be many battles to endure before the day of his glory. The new order was going to be established; one would only have to receive it, a great silence was going to reign over the world and it would be that of Peace.

. . .

"My little one is going to begin his apprenticeship. He will know how to work. Each evening he will have earned his day..."

. . .

The twelfth year was long in coming. Never did Solange lose courage. She closed both eyes to be alone with her faith. Each morning in her body she felt a movement more easy, in her heart she heard a clearer sound; each evening, the day in departing had relieved her of all the weight of one day of her past life. The twelfth year advanced slowly, for happiness is our master and takes its time, but she knew one could count on it. Besides, it had already set out upon the road.

. . .

It was a fine morning, that on which she looked around her. Twelve years earlier she had brought a child into the world. She did not know then that she would be so unhappy. Each day, with a horrible fidelity, had been one of the days of a desolate life. She did not foresee then that one day she would be so happy. When she rose, on the morning of the twelfth year, she would gladly have cried out:

. . .

"A great joy, this morning, has risen upon the world."

. . .

As the child made his way towards his chair and was about to sit down as usual, she advanced quickly to prevent him. Something had changed upon the Earth, he was going to fail to notice. She cried out to him:

. . .

"My little one, you are twelve years old!"

. . .

Then she looked to see what was going to happen.

. . .

One does not know if Charles Blanchard was twelve years old. He did not even glance, he did not even trouble to learn whether, as he was being told, a great event had just occurred. He turned past his mother, as one turns past an obstacle, regained his corner, and he seemed to have found there the only event that might ever interest him: that which consisted in the persistence of a life without warmth, without light, and without sound.

. . .

Solange Blanchard felt a sentiment such as mothers have never felt. Certainly, she had more than once

glanced at her son, but it was then as we ordinarily do with persons we believe we know, in order to place upon his head one of the ideas she had formed about him. This time she gave a true glance, she chased away all her thoughts so they might not trouble her, she armed herself with all her lucidity to make a precise observation. Now then, what was happening? Why had the child not answered? She looked. One does not know what she saw.

. . .

What she saw stopped dead in her body the life she had led until now. She felt it all at once. Already an enormous ball in her stomach could no longer pass. The hiccups came and seized her and for a good while did not release her. One heard their sound in her: Ouakka! as if a new voice had taken the place of her absent voice. She was before what she saw less than a dog, less than a fly, less than a louse. All she could do was want to leave and begin to tremble. A base fear, sly, unworthy of a mother, made itself a place in her soul, the first thought she found was this:

. . .

"Can you catch it?"

. . .

A little later she rose, she went gently towards the door and before fleeing she turned to see if the horrible thing was not following her into the street.

. . .

She walked upon the roads, she walked so long that the hour of her first household was past by a good half hour and still she walked. When she noticed, she continued walking. She went away from her son, she went away from her house, she went away even from the small town that contained her house. She crossed a village she did not know, around her spread a country she had never seen, and even that did not make her stop.

. . .

It was only much later that she could gather in her head some of her thoughts. They were very ill. Solange noticed however that she was on the road to Champvallon, the village where her sister lived. She had instinctively thrown herself, in the midst of danger, towards the side where she might expect some help. She walked to the end.

. . .

Champvallon was situated in a hollow, there was a main street, and lanes that crossed it. She asked a passer-by to show her her brother-in-law's house. Ten o'clock was striking at the church steeple. She opened the door

that had been pointed out to her. Baptiste Dumont was alone in the shop and was working at his clogs.

. . .

She did not even take the time to sit down before saying to him:

. . .

"Baptiste, you must come fetch the little one."

. . .

It was only afterwards that she fainted.

. . .

The house of Baptiste Dumont and of his wife who was called Rose was, in the village of Champvallon, a workman's house. She was situated in the main street, between the house of the wheelwright and that of the joiner. She was situated in the street of work beside the houses of the workers. More activity is expended in villages than the people of Paris who pass through them by carriage ordinarily believe. Certainly, silence reigns the whole length of the street, as far as one can see; the hens and cats are peaceful inhabitants; barely does a woman sew in a chair before her door, surrounded by little girls who are learning to sew like her, but in the shadow of the shops, workers who make only a dark

stain to the eyes of the passer-by obey life with courage, and, clog-makers, joiners, wheelwrights, make all the clogs, all the furniture, all the carts that men need within a league's radius.

. . .

As soon as one crossed the threshold of Baptiste's house, one forgot everything one might have seen before entering. One no longer thought of the old church which, placed in the midst of the houses, watches over them as a mother hen watches over her chicks who are not yet very big. One no longer thought of those countrysides of France in which happy villages have been placed in the right spot as if by children who have emptied the contents of their toy box in a great meadow. As soon as one crossed the threshold of Baptiste's house, one thought of quite another thing.

. . .

The house of Baptiste Dumont was full of clogs. She contained so many that one quickly understood she could contain nothing else. Some, hung on the four walls by nails, occupied their entire surface. They were there: there were clogs on the walls, they had taken so much room that one was not certain any remained for the walls behind the clogs. The others hung in rows from ropes stretched across the room a little higher than your head, and between each row there was enough space to

perceive, suspended from ropes stretched a little higher than the first, a second layer of clogs. What one saw gave one to foresee that there was a third layer still, and as one could not see the ceiling, one did not think of it, and one told oneself that four, that five, that fifty layers, that a pyramid of clogs filled up to the roof an attic situated above the house. After having believed in those of the attic, one was quickly led to believe in those of the cellar. As part of the shop floor was occupied by clogs that had been placed on the tiles, the imagination enlarged by the sight of so many of these objects was not satisfied with so simple a truth, and one naturally came to think that a mass of clogs deposited in the cellar had risen, pushed by the irresistible force of number, or better still, that a volcano of clogs sprung from the bowels of the earth had burst through the floor and spread through the house like lava its invading torrent.

. . .

Such was the shop in which Baptiste Dumont lived.

. . .

"There will soon be no more room," one sometimes said to him.

. . .

He answered:

. . .

"I shall put them outside, I shall pave the roads with them."

. . .

And in the middle of the shop, in a space he had reserved for himself, surrounded by his materials, his tools, and his quarters of wood, with a courage he never let diminish, he was making more clogs.

. . .

Clogs do not make themselves. Wood is harder than stones, one would say it resists the worker and strives to make his life difficult. Baptiste attacked it like an enemy. With a terrible arm, when he had succeeded in driving the iron wedges into his piece, he raised his mallet, and when he brought it down, it seemed in a hand-to-hand struggle he was hurling himself upon the wood at the same time. One of the two had to yield, either the wedges would enter to the end in the split fibre, or the man, defeated by the resistance, would split apart in the wood's stead. The man did not split apart: he remained alive to continue the fight. After setting down the mallet and the wedges, he seized a hatchet. The battle was fierce, the tools made one think of weapons. They were called an asciot, a paroir, an auger, a spoon-bit, a butoir, a gouge. To describe them is impossible, so complicated

is woodwork. Each had its use, each its moment, everything had been foreseen: after the hatchet one passed to the asciot.

. . .

One had to be a skilled man and of a fierce conscience to bring the clogs to completion. The wood, as we have seen, can only be attacked with great blows. In a continual surge, carried away by a kind of warlike fury, it was as though Baptiste hurled himself, his tool in one hand, upon the quarter of wood he held with the other, and that, dealing it straight blows, this time at last, he had his revenge. He did not retreat. It was to be feared that in the intoxication of combat he would lose all measure and that, driven by a single rage, he would turn it upon himself as well. Baptiste, one day, at the age of nineteen, no longer calculating his movements, had blown off the thumb of his left hand. Other times it was as if, suddenly changing tactics, he were going to take the wood crosswise. He would fix it first, pierce it, hollow it out with method, then, having introduced a tool that he braced against his shoulder and that was called a spoon-bit, from all sides he would tear away and knock out whatever presented itself to his blows, as though, despairing of achieving his ends, incapable of subduing it, he were going to destroy an enemy who prevented him from living. To be a clog-maker, one must be angry. One expected the worst disasters, one was already astonished not to have seen blood flow. Sometimes,

thrusting his face towards his piece of wood with violence, his mouth, his maw open, it seemed he finally perceived he possessed a jaw like the beasts; he had waited too long: now he was going to bite. One waited with anxiety for the moment when, mad with impotence, he would quit everything, and turning his rage towards all humanity, rush into the street and spring at the throats of passers-by as though they had been the cause of his misfortune.

. . .

Perhaps, for that matter, that is what would have happened if the struggle had been too long. But soon one saw him take four steps backward. What he held between his hands was no longer that shapeless quarter of wood that had given him such trouble. Two clogs making a pair, of veined wood, with a fine curve, smooth, hollow, rounded, with their heels well defined, were the fruit of his labour. They were perfect as though they had come directly from the hands of the Creator. He examined them on both sides with pride, knocked them against each other; they gave a clear and full sound, comparable to the sound a fine piece of silver gives. Once more, man had won a great victory. Matter was vanquished; Nature was no match. He pushed aside with his foot to make room the splinters of wood that littered the floor on all sides. A child would have gathered them up thinking them toys.

. . .

Was the house of Baptiste Dumont situated in one of those villages far from towns, which give you to think that life, like a person, has left them to come taste, in the midst of the fields, fine simple sentiments? Certainly, for whoever does not know what a clog-maker is, the house of Baptiste was the shelter of those clogs worn by country folk and which, made from the wood of their walnut trees, are also children of the village.

. . .

They inhabited her like humble inhabitants, in truth, without complication, and gave her what clogs can give. They gave her the smell of their wood. The house had that dry and somehow resigned smell of felled trees, she had that precious smell which seems to be that of their soul and which gives you to think that trees after their death keep an odour of sanctity. She smelled of leaves, she smelled of walnuts, she smelled of earth. The house was then but one of the gentlest houses of the village of Champvallon.

. . .

But for whoever had once seen Baptiste work, the house was situated in quite another country. It was not the restful and somewhat sad atmosphere of central France that seduces you at a certain age and seems to

offer itself to you. She was situated in an active world; one thought of those furious cities in which iron struck by steam hammers makes a noise beside which one no longer hears the sound our feelings make in our soul. One thought of those mines where, in the black galleries, a whole people, pick in hand, striking the wall with great blows, accomplishes its duty with as much courage as if space and light did not exist. Sometimes it seemed a great wind was blowing. It advanced from all sides, and seizing the four corners of the house, lifted her whole; it was as though Baptiste were struggling to defend himself against it. One thought of the sea, upon which the fisherman has set out with his boat. When one watched Baptiste work, one thought of many things one did not see. The house was situated in the country of human activity, there where man, the hero of the world, heeding only his courage, takes on God himself and gives life a form it seemed He had not willed. Was one at a clog-maker's? Yes, but one was elsewhere besides. One was among those who work the wood and who not only make clogs, but also frames for houses, among those who forge iron, among those who build houses, among all those who, in the noisy city, occupied with the labours of industry, make for us a life better than the one we had received. And one may say the air one breathed there was not that of Champvallon. One breathed the air breathed on the open sea by those who go, enlarging their homeland, to plant its flag upon a new world.

. . .

The day Charles Blanchard arrived at his uncle's house, against all expectations, he found enough energy to do something. As soon as he was in the shop, he did not sit down as one might have thought, but he looked around him. He ended by discovering a door, which made the shop communicate with another room; this door was closed, but he went to it, opened it, and disappeared.

. . .

He said not a word, he made no sound, it was only a little later that Baptiste noticed his absence. He went to find him and thought:

. . .

"It is the journey that has tired him. He wants to sleep. I say, friend, what if you got into bed?"

. . .

Charles Blanchard had taken refuge in the room where one slept. But the next morning, when he was up, Baptiste said in vain:

. . .

"Come now, come with me into the shop."

. . .

Charles Blanchard retreated, pressed himself against the wall and tried to retreat further once he was there. Unable to manage it, he lowered his head and began to tremble.

. . .

Violence had to be used, he had to be seized by one arm. He did not struggle, not having the habit, but truly it was his corpse that was dragged into the shop. And it was impossible to release him afterwards: he did not stand on his legs.

. . .

One came to say:

. . .

"It is no doubt because he has left his mother. He is not used to us."

. . .

The aunt locked the door with a key, for he was trying to open it, then she leaned him against the door saying:

. . .

"Come now, look, stay a little with your uncle."

. . .

He stood upright out of obedience, and he showed his face; but as soon as he had glanced around him, he turned his back. His head was placed under his arm, he closed his eyes; with all his body he pressed himself against the door as if he wished to become part of it; one could believe his soul had already passed through it to go to the other side.

. . .

Sometimes, at mealtimes for example, the door had to be opened. As soon as it was ajar, he slipped through the crack, he escaped like a prisoner who has just recovered his liberty and hastens to make use of it. He ran to the first chair, it was good and sufficed him. It was upon that one that he sat down, then, with a thrust of his head and a thrust of his shoulder, he launched himself, he plunged, he entered into silence and seemed then to have found the element in which he could live.

. . .

The house of Baptiste, in fact, contained two rooms. The first was the shop, but for Baptiste it had such importance that it was the shop he called the house. It is by this name that one has had to speak of it. The second room was the chamber.

. . .

The chamber hardly counted: it was the room in which one does not work. It contained the beds, the table, and the chairs. It also contained a sideboard, a wardrobe, a clock, and, on the mantelpiece, on either side of the mirror, were placed two vases in which the wife might have put flowers had the idea come to her. It contained everything that had been acquired by the work that had been done in the shop.

. . .

In the chambers men are not at home.

. . .

She was the place where women are at home. Women give themselves over there to their occupations. They polish the furniture, one would say they burnish it; and, women finding nothing fine enough for themselves, one would say they practise each day at perfecting it. Women too know and practise a craft of order and alignment. Baptiste, sometimes, laughing, called the chamber: the parlour. He no longer dared set foot in it, fearing, by the mere presence of his workman's body, to break a mysterious harmony for which he did not feel himself made.

. . .

The afternoon of women passes in the chambers. It seems at first that they do needlework there and that

they occupy themselves, while their husband is entirely taken up with the labours of his man's trade, with the tasks of women which require much application. But when one knows them better, one perceives it is not quite so. Women occupy only their hands. Their mind in the chambers rests and tastes pleasures such as the rich know and which consist in enjoying, in the midst of fine things, pleasant thoughts. Silence is necessary to them, sometimes they fill it with a song chosen among all for the sweetness of its sentiments. They people the solitude as their heart pleases, they look around them and start from what they see to compose for themselves a chamber still finer than their own and to tell themselves that being the wife of a good workman, one day perhaps they will be able to acquire it.

. . .

For many reasons, Rose Dumont could not permit her nephew to remain beside her in the chamber, for he brought something that had to be driven out of it. It was as though his silence were alive, and like a monstrous beast were watching everything around him. Rose might well have tried to sing one of her songs: if someone had then entered the chamber, it was not the song he would have noticed, but the child's silence. Games of imagination beside him were quite impossible; one was not where one might have wished to be, in a world our dreams perfect and in the midst of which it seems our thoughts have grouped themselves in our head like roses

at the centre of a bouquet of greenery. It was he who was there, it was not another; even when one did not look at him, it seemed one was contemplating him face to face. His presence was indisputable, it was total. He was entirely what he was, he had brought here all the miserable smell of his past; one does not know if it was the stable or the cellar he smelled of; you were no longer in your own home, you were living the life he had lived. It reached your nostrils, you had to push back your breath so as not to suffer from it.

. . .

Rose would close her eyes and want to cry:

. . .

"Go away, you smell bad!"

. . .

It was not possible to be happy beside him.

. . .

In the early days, someone who had known him better might have believed he understood it, that he wished it, that he had made of it a kind of mission. He resisted when they tried to make him leave. He who never opened his mouth knew how to speak. He knew how to say:

. . .

"No, aunt! oh no, aunt!"

. . .

It was necessary to set about it, he had to be resolutely driven from the chamber. It became a habit. No word would have been strong enough. Rose called Baptiste:

. . .

"Come, come help me!"

. . .

Each of them took the child by one arm, not without having moreover threatened him with the gendarmes, and with violence, since it was not possible to do otherwise, they expelled him, they threw him into the middle of the shop. The door slammed.

. . .

"Come now, come and watch the clogs being made," said Baptiste, who was a conciliating man...

. . .

...The fifth day after his arrival, Baptiste said to him:

. . .

"Now, you must be starting to get used to us."

. . .

He answered nothing, he could have answered nothing, but when his uncle added:

. . .

"This afternoon, I shall have you rasp a few pairs of clogs."

. . .

He even stopped trembling. He would have wished to be entirely within his heart so as to stop its beating.

. . .

In the early days, Charles Blanchard would hear nothing of it. In his uncle's house he loved only the night. When evening had fallen and they had eaten the soup, after a half hour's wait, everyone went to bed. That was the moment he awaited. The lamp was extinguished, the shutters drawn, one heard only the regular breathing of Baptiste and Rose.

. . .

The child made every effort not to fall asleep. The night was thick, one would have said the sky and the earth did not exist, or else that they were all black. He opened both eyes to perceive it better. He felt himself in his place. In his mind, the sad memories of his past life spread slowly and took on that importance our memories have when we are quite alone. In his chest, the movements, the murmurs of his present life filled his heart, then, spreading through his body, filled him entirely with a kind of bitter liquid. It seemed he was all black, in an all black world. He did not fall asleep, so as to feel unhappy longer. And from his head, like smoke, dark thoughts of the future rose, which traversed the room and fixed themselves there, as if he had wished to maintain the obscurity, as if he had wished to make it thicker still.

. . .

And the following days, when already it was to be foreseen he was going to become a new Charles Blanchard, he did not abandon himself, as one might believe, to his new life.

. . .

One says to an ordinary child:

. . .

"You are going to rasp a pair of clogs for me."

. . .

He throws himself upon a game he does not yet know, with that eagerness children have for pouncing on happiness. Their joyful soul, at the vanguard of a docile body, draws it into all the adventures that present themselves.

. . .

Even when Charles Blanchard held a clog and a rasp between his hands and these objects no longer inspired any fear in him, he did not accept the amusing, or at least the interesting minute he might have spent in their company. Certainly, he practised upon a clog with a rasp the work his uncle had ordered him, certainly he obeyed the command he had received, but he did not wish to believe that life was relaxing towards him the severity of which it had always given proof. He did not know what he feared, but he feared something. With a light stroke of the tool so as not to precipitate events, with slowness to give himself time, he attacked his wood. He was attentive to each of his movements, to each of the sounds they provoked, to the slightest creakings that an ear as fine as his alone could hear. He feared the clog would split apart, that it would leap at his face, that the rasp would bite him. He always had one leg forward, he was always ready, at the first sign of danger, to drop everything and seek his salvation in flight.

. . .

He needed several days to acquire what another would have conquered at the first stroke: the peaceful consciousness of the task he was accomplishing. In the early days it seemed he was tracked like a beast, that a relentless labour was pursuing him into his most secret retreats. His soul and his heart fled to take shelter. He preserved his thought by locking it in the blackest and most remote corner of his brain. A full week was needed before he understood that no harm was meant him. It was only after that time that he recovered his breath, that he calmed, that he could consider with an assured eye his occupations and his destiny. One must mark with a white stone the day when Charles Blanchard gave to his clogs a little of that attention men accord to the task that occupies them. A great change had occurred in his life, when, having chased away vain terrors, he could say to himself, one evening, after having rasped his clogs:

. . .

"Today, I rasped six pairs."

. . .

There existed then for Charles Blanchard something called work.

. . .

Work does not let go of those it has chosen. Each morning, the child rose at the same time as his uncle, on the stroke of six. One might have thought the day that was beginning would be empty still and that it would be necessary to sit on a chair, to lower one's eyes, to contemplate it sadly and to tear from one's brain heavy thoughts to attempt to fill it. Yes, that is how the day began. But scarcely an hour had passed, it was not quite certain that seven o'clock had struck, when already Baptiste was saying:

. . .

"Come now, lad, today I am going to have you blacken some clogs."

. . .

To blacken the clogs, one uses, in place of a brush, a hare's paw that one dips in a black dye. Charles Blanchard was wary at first, but soon it was stronger than he. As soon as he had a little colour at the end of his paw, before he had even spread it on the edge of his clog, he was carried away by the most joyful of ideas that can seize a child. He thought:

. . .

"I am going to paint!"

. . .

Painting on clogs is not sufficient unto itself. When he had finished his task, all the clogs being blackened, when the new Charles Blanchard tried to re-enter the old Charles Blanchard, the one who had nothing to do, doing nothing was no longer what seemed preferable to him in life.

. . .

"Uncle, I have finished."

. . .

"You shall let them dry, and then I shall show you how to wax them."

. . .

It is not necessary to know how one waxes clogs. It will suffice to know that when Charles Blanchard knew how to wax them, he could say to himself:

. . .

"I know how to rasp; I know how to blacken; I know how to wax clogs."

. . .

It was he who next spoke first. The day came when, without his uncle having made a single gesture or

uttered a single word, Charles Blanchard could not remain silent on his chair and began to say:

. . .

"Uncle, would you like me to try splitting your wood?"

SUPPLEMENT TO THE FIRST VERSION

SUPPLEMENT

TO THE FIRST VERSION

SOLANGE BLANCHARD SENDS CHARLES BLANCHARD TO BEG AT FUNERALS

. . .

The only thing that consoled her a little was the thought that she could, in the evening, make vegetable soup. They often gave her vegetables at the farms she visited. They gave her potatoes, they gave her cabbages, turnips, onions, leeks. She loved soup so much! Soup is warm, she ate it, it seemed to her that it gave her as warmth what she had lacked these two years. She emerged from her silence, she wanted her son to understand clearly what a soup is worth.

. . .

She said to him:

. . .

"Eat well. Soup is good, and it stays with you."

. . .

It seemed to her she had discovered within herself a delicious organ called the stomach which, when one has enough to satisfy it, is the seat of a great happiness. She felt at ease, the soup sustained her, the soup carried away her sorrow, she was no longer afraid of falling ill. She consented to sacrifices, she committed imprudences; as one needs butter to put in the soup, she bought butter.

. . .

Sometimes, however, in the very middle of her pleasure, a sudden silence would occur in her head, she did not at first know what was going to happen, then a sharp awareness would pierce through those heavy feelings that had made her surrender to well-being. A clearer conscience became her conscience. She knew at what price she had paid for this soup she was eating. She blushed as if she had appeared before an accuser. She did not know how to defend herself, she accepted all the

reproaches, she received them, she gave them a place that the soup did not have. She thought:

. . .

"I am a glutton!"

. . .

It seemed to her she had sold her soul for a bowlful of soup. She was a beggar, she made no distinction between herself and those old men who live who knows where, who come out of prison, who make a profession of seeking their bread, who steal, who set fire to farms, who sleep in ditches. They could have said to her:

. . .

"I am your equal. You do the same thing as I."

. . .

Certainly, they received her well at the farms. The dogs barked but did not launch themselves at her, the women saw her coming, opened the door and shouted at the dog:

. . .

"Will you be quiet, filthy beast!"

. . .

They said to her:

. . .

"And me, my poor Solange, if I were to lose my husband what would I have to do? I have two children. I would have to seek my bread too."

. . .

These words did not console Solange, but on the contrary showed her that it would have taken a great misfortune for other women to arrive where she was.

. . .

And then, no matter how well they received her, she was not sure of herself. A caprice would have sufficed, a whim; it would have sufficed that once, not having thanked people with enough warmth, she had offended them, for those who do good like others to notice it. They would not have hesitated to tell her:

. . .

"I cannot give you anything. I need my bread for myself."

. . .

She was at the mercy of everyone; apart from beggars she was the equal of no one. There were on the Earth two sorts of inhabitants: those who earn their bread and can eat it with full mouths with no other care than that of being happy, and there was Solange Blanchard who, head bowed, approached them and waited to know whether, when they had eaten, there might not remain something they could share between their dogs and her.

. . .

She would not have suffered so much had she been alone in the world. She said to herself:

. . .

"If it were only me! Once I am dead, all this will no longer be known!" But she thought of the child who still had his whole life to fill. It would have been much wiser had she spoken to him of nothing, but sometimes, when the dark thoughts fell upon her head with the weight they have, she looked around her to see if someone could help her bear the burden. Her son was her only companion, and although he was but a child, he was there, she had no choice, she spoke to him:

. . .

"My Charles, what a sad destiny we have!"

. . .

He was a good little boy. He was beginning to become serious, he saw what his situation was, he shaped his life to the words his mother told him. He walked beside her, he matched his steps to those of his mother, she held herself a little bent when climbing the hills and he understood that one must hold oneself a little bent when climbing a hill. They went at an even pace; as the child's legs were smaller, he moved them more, they advanced on the same line in the same life, they carried the same thought, with only this difference: that the child being younger considered it a game whose rules he practiced with attention and without noticing the fatigue. He knew the paths, he knew that on such a road one goes to such a person, he took an interest in this, he was proud when he had guessed right.

. . .

"It is to mother Pernier's that we are going, maman."

. . .

When they came back, he still wanted to do as his mother did, and for a few minutes it was he who carried the basket.

. . .

Solange was pleased. She said:

. . .

"It is true that he gives me trouble, but from time to time he does me little services."

. . .

She ended by asking him to take her place. It happened several times, in rather important circumstances, that she sent him off in her name and entrusted him with what one might call a mission. She began the day they buried Monsieur Ducrot. Monsieur Ducrot, after a long illness, died as was expected. His funeral was to take place one morning at ten o'clock; he was a very rich man, and it was to be expected that upon leaving the cemetery his family, according to custom, would have some coins distributed to the poor. Solange could not attend the ceremony, being kept until noon by the housework at the home of Monsieur Lhotte, the clerk of the justice of the peace. She hesitated a little before going to ask at funerals, but upon reflection she realized that since she was already seeking her bread at the farms, she had no need to be proud.

. . .

She gave the child his instructions:

. . .

"You will go wait for the coffin in front of the house. When the procession sets off, you will place yourself behind everyone. You will enter the church, you will remain kneeling and you will pray well to the Good Lord. At the cemetery, you will see, there will be others like you; after the ceremony, you will all stay in front of the gate and the servant will give each of you something. If they ask your name, you will say that you are the little Blanchard."

. . .

They gave him a ten-sou piece. He was afraid of losing it, he did not want to put it in his pocket for fear that it might have a hole in it. He did not dare keep it in his hand, for fear it might slip between his fingers. He emerged at last from this difficulty and resolved the question by putting the coin in his hand, the hand in his pocket.

. . .

He walked very fast, he felt that joy of children who, just like grown persons, have made themselves useful. It seemed to him he had earned ten sous.

. . .

He went to many other funerals.

. . .

As soon as a rich man had died, a sort of atmospheric tremor, from village to village, announced the news. One would have thought a void had been produced somewhere, the air rushed toward it, a singular wind spread along the roads, raising the dust and coming to beat against the closed shutters of the house which, having lost its master, seemed as if it must belong to whoever would come to take it.

. . .

Men, women, children, the poor on the roads advanced in its direction. Distance, bad weather, heat, weakness, infirmities, nothing was an impediment for them. Some came with crutches, with stiff legs, some came limping. Children of two years had walked ten kilometers. Infants at the breast, heavy as stones, in the arms of the women cried from fatigue and fretfulness. Old men between two sticks, their heads trembling, consecrated what life remained to them to making an act of presence.

. . .

They attended all the ceremonies of death. They formed a single immobile and silent mass apart from the procession, they did not dare mingle with the crowd of the living: if they entered the church they stayed near the door and kept it open so as better to be able to flee. No one permitted himself a gesture, those who coughed

felt guilty, when they walked they moved their legs gently and feared that their steps might make a great noise. The children were watched by all eyes. They did not even pray, they were there, they had come, they had made the journey, they presented a defenseless life and waited, with humility, for those who had the power to consult among themselves about what share of the dead man's goods would be distributed to them.

. . .

Most of the time they were not given much. They had a movement of ill humor. It was not worth a rich man dying for the poor to receive so little. They noticed then that the road was long which separated them from their home. They returned without courage. The only thing that made them bear the fatigue was sometimes, when they had stumbled a little too much against the stones, to open the hand and look there, in the hollow of their palm, at the silver coin which, despite everything, was worth their suffering the difficulties of the journey. They put it away upon arriving, each of them had his hiding place, they put it safe from thieves. They were sad the following days at the thought of what they had seen. Each of them was ashamed to have been with the others. They had mingled with all the beggary of the surroundings, they had walked side by side with people who had ruined themselves through bad conduct, they had rubbed shoulders with the verminous, they had been part of a crowd which included idiots, the infirm, the idle;

some vagabonds without domicile, passing through the country, had come to join their group. There were there people to whom once they had given two sous, there were there people to whom they had never addressed a word because they wished to ignore even their existence. Some had been to prison.

SECOND VERSION

The Bread

SECOND VERSION

THE BREAD

Charles Blanchard, whose story I undertake today to tell you, showed during the first ten years of his life no virtue, no particular genius that might have set him apart from other children. He never differed from what you were, he went where you have gone, his eyes resembled yours, he saw what you have seen, and as for the events through which he passed, you have heard their telling from the mouths of those who attended your own beginnings in this world. I have, then, in commencing this book, but one word to say to you: There existed, in a small provincial town, a child of ten years who was called Charles Blanchard.

. . .

Destiny might have maintained him until the age of thirteen in what we call the state of innocence, if one day, the week of the patron saint's festival, which was celebrated each year on the Sunday following the feast of Saint John, an astonishing piece of news had not spread through the town:

. . .

"They say that this time, for the festival, we shall have the wooden horses."

. . .

Everything came to pass as had been announced: there were the wooden horses.

. . .

They were not known then as they are today. My story begins in 1849. Only one small boy, who had an uncle working in the factories at Montlucon, having gone to stay with him for some time the year before, had found himself there at the moment of the festival and had seen a carousel of wooden horses.

. . .

His explanations were no doubt not very clear, for when the great day arrived, his companions had retained from his speeches but a single point: that they

were going to see something beautiful. They were all surprised, one as much as the other; and even the one who had seen them the year before, at the moment when the canvas surrounding the wooden horses was removed, at eleven o'clock, after high mass, stood a good five minutes before he could form a clear idea of what he beheld.

. . .

There they were, all in a circle, one following upon another. There were red ones, there were yellow ones, there were green ones. They were fitted with two stirrups, a tail, a bridle. Their four legs had the form of horses. They turned to the sound of a gilded organ, and above them one could see perhaps hundreds of red streamers with silver fringes. It was by watching them for a long time that one made acquaintance with great marvels. Their eyes resembled real eyes: only the lashes were wanting. Those in the front rank were rearing, and their forelegs were raised a little higher than their hind legs. These wooden horses of the front rank were wooden horses at the gallop. At the centre of the carousel, a real horse, a great white horse, walked around a sort of column formed of six mirrors, in which one saw passing once more what one had already seen.

. . .

At first glance, the children were too surprised to realize what pleasure one might draw from this, and they contemplated a spectacle so beautiful that it might have been compared to the masterworks of art, which have little practical use and serve only to elevate our souls. There was nothing to do but look, and so they did not wish to lose a single glance.

. . .

After a time, more than one could not keep his happiness to himself. Charles Blanchard ran to his mother:

. . .

"Mama, I have seen the wooden horses."

. . .

She answered:

. . .

"Go and see them again then, my little one, it will help you pass the time."

. . .

That afternoon, he became entirely familiar with them. Toward half past two, in the families, when the midday meal was finished, the father, the mother, the

children, the relations from the neighbouring villages who had come to attend the festival, everyone left the houses. The wooden horses had shortened the lunch, had halted the conversations, and had taken the place of those glasses of brandy that the men, their elbows on the table, would drink until evening on the day of the festival during the years that had preceded this one. One might say that the wooden horses had transformed the customs. Around them one saw the whole small town gathered, the whole small town attentive; a great joy was what she had found, and before her eyes the horses, one after another, with all their colours, with their bridles, their tails, their stirrups, filed past, carried along by an organ whose voice, dominating all sounds, spread around her a life so imperious that the mothers themselves could not stay in place and, followed by their children, rushed forward to obey it. There was, at a certain moment, a great burst of laughter in the crowd, because an old peasant, who must have been a good sixty years old, straddled a little horse, his two legs dangling, and said:

. . .

"By my faith, I want to ride like the others."

. . .

To take a turn one paid a sou.

. . .

Everyone took a turn. In this great village where life, with an even gesture, bound the days together as one binds a sheaf, gathered them, heaped them one upon another, formed of them a year as one forms a haystack, it seemed that time had abandoned his monotonous occupation, that a joyful day, thrusting aside the ordinary days, had descended upon the Earth to the sound of music; one saw him, one ran toward him, one seized him while he was there.

. . .

"This year, for the festival, we have the wooden horses."

. . .

Each one wished to take his share of it. They gleamed, they sang, they turned; one did not know quite what turned with them. It seemed that the old world could no longer stay in place and that the Sky and the Earth had begun to turn. One forgot all the rest. One was no longer the carpenter, nor the wheelwright; one had dropped one's trade, one was one of the cavaliers of pleasure; a great movement tore you from yourself, you traversed space, mounted on a fine steed.

. . .

Charles Blanchard was not long before going to find his mother. She was one of those women who, on the day of the festival, close their doors tight and sit in a dark corner of the house, the better to prove to themselves that nothing could tear them from their sad destiny. It had been two years already since she had lost her husband.

. . .

The child arrived. He put just one foot into the room; he had left the door wide open, he had not closed it because he had no time to lose.

. . .

She began by looking at him. For one second only, he had stopped. He had two blue eyes, his gaze seemed to repeat his words and his legs were preparing the movement that would carry him to the wooden horses. She said first:

. . .

"Close the door, my little one."

. . .

He closed it; they were face to face. He was already advancing.

. . .

"You would like to take a turn on the wooden horses?"

. . .

He answered very quickly:

. . .

"Mama, it costs a sou. Do you want me to take a turn on the wooden horses?"

. . .

She had stayed at home and, the door and the window being closed, believed herself sheltered. She knew that festivals furnish us one more occasion to think of all that we lack. She learned that festivals come toward us when we do not go toward them.

. . .

"My poor little one, go!"

. . .

She was not a violent woman. She might have flown into anger and tried to impose her will upon him. No. She might have disparaged the value of the game of

wooden horses. She did not do that either. The truth is the best weapon of the poor. She made use of it.

. . .

"If I gave you a sou to ride the wooden horses, we should want for it tomorrow. I need it to buy us something to eat. You do want to eat tomorrow, my Charles?"

. . .

He did not know at first what he should answer. He corrected the movement of his legs, aligned them obediently; he was embarrassed on account of his hands; he had just heard, he had just received such words that he did not know how to hold himself so as to manage to bear them. His mouth opened, an empty mouth that no longer contained a single word. After a moment, he turned around. If he was able to walk, it was because he knew very well how to walk.

. . .

At that time, the poor were not what they are today. They could not read, they had never left their village, they were not mixed up in public affairs, they did not know that they were anything other than the poor. Poverty sat down beside them in the morning like the only companion; they received her, she was their life, she was their soul, they had accepted her. They were her

submissive sons, she placed her two hands upon their heads, their heads were between her two hands.

. . .

One must not be surprised if Charles Blanchard did not say to his mother:

. . .

"I want to ride the wooden horses, I want to ride them!"

. . .

Charles Blanchard, quite simply, returned to his world, he became part of what we might call his class, for the classes were quite separate in 1849. Until the age of ten, he had been, in a very general way, a child. He was scarcely yet the little Charles; he was not yet the son of the widow Blanchard. He became so the day he saw the carousel of wooden horses.

. . .

When he returned that evening, a new life was beginning. His house was his house as it had never been before. From far off, he advanced with great steps. He drew near to her at last, she contained a thick shadow into which he was already penetrating. She stood a little apart from the town. One would have said that she too

feared to mingle with the other houses. There they were, several of them, in the last street on the right, going up. Why were they called the New Houses? There were five of them, one beside another, capped with a very low thatch roof. They formed a single group and made one think of five old women who had seated themselves at the corner of the road and who had pulled down their hoods over their eyes because they were no longer interested in what might pass before them.

. . .

The last one was the house of Charles Blanchard. The door was large, but it was of wood; certainly the window was transparent, but truly it was lost in the wall, a square window that passers-by remarked upon, for it was ridiculous that it should be so small. Perhaps one must praise those who had the houses of the poor built for having understood that the light would serve them only to see their poverty clearly. One cannot say whether it was the roof that had raised its head or the walls that had bent their shoulders: the house was misshapen, was a little broken. It seemed that she had laboured long beneath the sky. One opened the door, one entered the room as one enters the soul of an old man. Of a whole life one saw only the remains. There was a bed, a table, four chairs and the bread-bin, just what is needed for a house not to be an uninhabited barn. There was also a clock that they had not been able to sell, it beat like a

pulse and counted the hours since hours existed upon the earth.

. . .

These houses are inhabited by people who resemble them.

. . .

Solange Blanchard was no longer young, being past forty, her appearance made one think of the happiness that will not return. Her cheeks were already marked by age; beneath sorrow their flesh had given way, they had no more changes to undergo: at the first blow they had yielded, they had hollowed themselves as have the cheeks of women of sixty. Her eyes were full of a clear water, it seemed that it rose from her heart; and for nothing, for a thought, for a regret, for a feeling that passes, they shed tears by a natural virtue. Her eyes were made for weeping.

. . .

She spoke sometimes, she said then:

. . .

"My poor Charles, you are not happy."

. . .

She said again:

. . .

"As for me, it does not matter, at my age. I have not much more to expect."

. . .

She left in the morning at seven o'clock to go and help Madame Menard, the tax-collector's wife, to do her housework and dress her children. She was finished at nine o'clock, and she went then to Monsieur Lhotte's, the clerk of the justice of the peace, where there was a sitting room, a stable, a garden, and where the work was considerable. On Saturday in particular, she was never finished before noon. She returned home afterwards. Her own housework gave her little trouble, she had already finished it in the morning at the moment of her departure.

. . .

There remained to her then nothing more, all the long afternoon, than to regret having nothing more to do for the rest of the day. Madame Menard gave her three francs every month, Monsieur Lhotte gave her four francs. She would have needed a third household. The poor would always need one more person to be able to have what is necessary to them. She sat down. For a long time she had chosen her place. There were two

places where she might have settled, at each of the corners of the fireplace. The one on the right was near the window, the one on the left was near the bed. She had never wished to place herself near the window. She made no gesture, she had not, like certain persons, taken up the habit of talking to herself, she did not think to pray to God, although she was very pious; God had made her poor, it seemed to her that this was his answer to ancient prayers. She thought of her unhappiness, she was very sad, sometimes she heaved a sigh so that God might hear her, so that he might understand how much she suffered, and so that he might grow weary of it.

. . .

In the evening at six o'clock she prepared the soup. At eight o'clock she undressed to go to bed. She cast a glance then at her skirt and her bodice which might have holes. They had, the one and the other, the same colour. She possessed two bodices and two skirts. She was quite wrong to mend them with black wool, she would have needed to find a particular wool of a somewhat dirty yellow, a wool that had long received the mud, the rain and the sun.

. . .

It was in this place, it was beside this woman that Charles Blanchard came to take refuge. He made no great noise. His entrance does not count among the en-

trances of kings. He took a chair, he sat down. He crossed his two small hands upon his legs, he became very gentle. One might have noticed that he had two blue eyes, those wide-open eyes of children into which it seems that all they see enters through doors flung wide.

. . .

His return was comparable to that of the prodigal son. During all the years of his early childhood, he had left, he had abandoned this house. He set off each morning. The vast universe was his dwelling. The sky, the sun, the meadows, the birds, the trees, the animals, all were a friend to him, all were a companion to him. He lived in the brotherhood of things with his body and his soul, he frequented all that one encounters and spent his youth dancing with the fools. He came back after the misfortunes and the disillusionments; he had asked too much of them: the earth and the skies were driving him away; along the road, from each house, a voice emerged that cried to him: "Go away!" It was no longer a matter of wooden horses. It seemed to him that the whole world had forbidden him its threshold. He returned home. He limited the world to the four walls of his room, he sat down in the middle, and the lesson that the dwellings of the poor teach, that was the one from which he would draw his profit. He was obedient and docile. He was like those studious children who go to school, who know nothing of human knowledge and wish to devote their efforts to acquiring it.

. . .

Charles Blanchard was not long in making acquaintance with someone who was to take the greatest importance in his life. He had known for a long time that men have a friend who each evening is awaited with impatience and gives to life when he arrives a taste so pure, a taste so fresh that it seems then that one has nothing more to desire. His hour comes when the day is done. He enters. Each one advances to receive him well, each one welcomes him, each one thanks him for this time again for not having failed them. All falls silent, all life is suspended from his, an angel accompanies him, the family circle forms around him. Now that he is there, the father, the mother, the children, each one can look at his neighbour and say: "The day has been hard, but now we rest with good heart." May heaven grant that he come again tomorrow! Charles Blanchard was not long in making acquaintance with someone whose value one better appreciates if he fails you. He is called the Bread.

. . .

The bread of Solange Blanchard did not resemble the bread of everyone. The bread of everyone costs four sous the pound and comes from the baker. It would be right to believe, so fine and tender is it, that one must call it by another name than that which one gives to bread. She had no trouble doing without it, for it resembled those cakes in which butter has been put and

of which she knew well it was not permitted her to make her ordinary nourishment.

. . .

Every Saturday she bought nine pounds of flour. The sack that contained it, she wrapped in her apron, for fear it might be pierced. She moistened the flour, she mixed it with a little leaven, she kneaded the dough that she thus obtained. Perhaps she did not understand it as well as the baker; no matter, she formed of it a block which, returning from the oven, could nourish her for the whole week. She even added to the flour a little bran, and she was very pleased with it. Bran does not give a bad taste, it is nourishing since it serves to fatten the animals, and finally it has its weight and permits one with nine pounds of flour to obtain a loaf that would give ten pounds at the weighing.

. . .

The first days, the bread of Solange Blanchard was black and pasty. It stuck to the palate, it required a certain strength and a certain skill to get it to pass, as they say, through the strait and be willing to go where bread goes, into your stomach. When one had swallowed it one received one's reward, each mouthful added itself to the other, one felt the volume of the bread, one could appreciate its weight, there was no denying that it was there. One said: "This time it is done, I have eaten bread!"

There was even reason to fear it might choke you. But from the third day on it underwent certain transformations. It did not become hard as one might have believed, the phenomenon that occurred was of a somewhat different order. It became dry first of all, then it seemed that the flour wished to reclaim its rights, the pasty mass disintegrated, each crumb crumbled in its turn, one obtained a sort of sand, one had to spend much saliva to agglutinate the grains. Toward the sixth day the bread was an ash that could only be made to pass with great gulps of water.

. . .

Such as it was, however, Solange Blanchard had for her bread a veneration, a particular devotion. Charles Blanchard ate as children eat, occupied with all the thoughts that came into his head. He let his gaze wander around him, he hummed while chewing, he got up and made the circuit of the table. His mother called him to order:

. . .

"Pay attention to your piece of bread, my little one."

. . .

He would have let it escape from his hand. Sometimes, in the famous period of the fourth, fifth and sixth days, when the crumb of which we have spoken no

longer adhered to the crust except by a sort of habit and would have spread over the floor like sand that nothing holds any longer, she said to him:

. . .

"One puts one's hand beneath one's piece of bread when one eats. You can see that the crumbs are going to fall on the ground."

. . .

And when, as they say, his eyes had been bigger than his belly and he could not finish the slice of bread that his mother had cut for him, she piously gathered the fragment that the child had not eaten and put it away with care so that he might find it again the following day.

. . .

Toward the end of the week, she came to say words such as mothers do not say:

. . .

"Do not force yourself to eat, my little boy!"

. . .

She behaved toward bread as the saints behave toward their souls. They keep it whole for the use of God. They know that the wind could scatter it, that a mouse would make its nourishment of it, they know that all that is good, that all that is right, that all that counts in their hearts must be shut away with care. They know that the spirit of evil prowls and that he is greedy. Besides, it is a matter of their eternal salvation.

. . .

A superstitious terror took hold of her sometimes. She wrapped her bread in a napkin, she took great care when she unfolded it that a piece of crumb, a piece of crust, which might by chance have come loose, should not escape and fall upon the floor. She shut it in the bread-bin whose lid she closed, then she wondered still if the bread-bin was well shut. She greatly feared mice, which are not large. She was afraid of cats, which are clever. A mere nothing would have sufficed for some creature to have got in beside the bread in her absence and, setting its teeth to it, devoured the best of it. She feared that a cockroach might eat a pound of it.

. . .

But the struggle was not to take place between the bread, the mice, the cats and the disorder that a child brings into households. There are other enemies for the bread of the poor, everything is an enemy for the bread

of the poor. What they love is an enemy, what they hate is an enemy. Bread makes one think of their hearts, of those hearts of the sick that every emotion comes to strike. On days of good health, Solange Blanchard had a little more appetite and ate a little too much of the bread that she had had so much trouble earning. On days of illness she ate a little less than usual, but she feared that illness might come to prevent her from going to earn her bread. Joy as much as sorrow was to be feared. It seemed that bread held more place here than anywhere else, nothing passed without striking against it.

. . .

Among the days there were two each year that dealt it a famous blow. The first was the day of the eleventh of May, the second that of the eleventh of November. These were the days when the rent was due. They announced themselves from afar. The eleventh of May was already advancing on the evening of the eleventh of November. The eleventh of November cost Solange Blanchard twenty francs. She told herself then that the eleventh of May would come in six months, that is to say in one hundred and eighty days. The eleventh of May would cost her twenty francs again, it was as if each of the days that separated her from it were to cost her two sous. It is better not to say that there were two days each year that did harm to the bread. Each day had its importance, at the price flour was, each day took a

pound from you. Time does not pass without asking you to pay it a toll. At night itself, when you sleep, each of the hours that strike steals from you a piece of bread. When they walked they did wrong to the bread, for they wore out their clogs. When they were seated, their clothes rubbed against the straw of their chair. When they were outside, the rain drowned the fabric of their garments, or else the sun dried it up, or else the mud ate it. And the linen that one soils! Once the child had lice, the lice of the poor are stubborn, one had to resign oneself to buying two sous' worth of grey ointment. We have been taught since 1849 that life is a constant struggle, that the spirit of death assails us, that in our very bodies war is declared, the bad cells devote their time to assailing the good ones, wanting to devour the life of the living. Solange Blanchard had a glimpse of the truth before the discoveries of the Pasteur Institute. Whatever she occupied herself with, whatever her attention, whichever way she turned to face the danger, she was assailed by a thousand enemies who attacked her bread. Events occurred such as this: the child was growing, his clogs hurt his feet, the sleeves of his coat reached only to his elbows, there was no longer room for his shoulders. He was going to need clothes. It was going to require, to buy clothes, a great deal of money with which one would not buy bread. The bread that he had eaten had made him grow. Bread itself made war on bread!

. . .

This was the law of God that the poor learn much more quickly than the rest of us to know, and without needing to look at evil under a microscope, for it surrounds them and falls under their senses. Solange Blanchard felt herself a very small thing beside a natural law, she felt herself very weak in the midst of the elements: was it not the will that governs the world that was attacking her bread!

. . .

For a long time the only resistance she opposed to it was to weep. She hoped by her tears to move she knew not whom in the universe. She did not wipe them away, she let them flow; a moment comes when your cheeks stream, when a warm water spreads everywhere over your face, when your very mouth is penetrated by it: it is your tears that you drink! She felt their taste: they are always more bitter than one had believed!

. . .

And this sediment they contain, when they have dried, leaves upon the skin a sort of mud that shows that you have wept. Sometimes, toward evening, when she looked at herself in the mirror, black patches and furrows around her cheekbones made her resemble those old women who no longer wash themselves because they are too near death to have to take care of

their faces. She was quite red, she was quite dirty, she was quite ugly. She raised her face to heaven and said:

. . .

"Look, Lord, at what state you have put your servant in!"

. . .

She ended, moreover, by growing weary of tears. The day came when, displeased at having wept so long, sated with sorrows and not having been consoled, she bore a grudge against sorrow itself, a little as one bears a grudge against a friend from whom one expected a service. She made every effort to push it away. She reflected much and tried to find no matter what that might hold in her life the place that sorrow held there. She said to herself:

. . .

"There might perhaps be another way than shedding these tears which have hardly served me until now."

. . .

For a time she thought of looking for work. One imagines quickly where work leads. Work permits one to pay the rent, work permits one to have clothes, work permits one to have bread. Well-paid work would permit still

more: you could have, to eat with your bread, many things the thought of which has not yet come to you: potatoes and cheese; you could make a vegetable soup. She did not want so much. She was like those invalids who dare not ask for the complete cure of their illness, but who would be so happy if they could suffer a little less! She bore a grudge against sorrow: now he who works has no more need to weep.

. . .

She repeated to herself many times:

. . .

"Ah! yes, I would need to find work!"

. . .

She did not know how to go about it. At the first attempt, she began to think that the rich have their servants who do all their work and that it is there where one might find a place that all the places are taken. There remained indeed some persons who employed a charwoman, but for two of these persons she was already working. She came even to tell herself that she had been very lucky.

. . .

An event occurred. She learned that one of her neighbours, whose husband was a mason and earned good wages, had found work sweeping the church on Saturday and earned that day twenty sous.

. . .

Another woman would have said to herself:

. . .

"Here is a thing I had not thought of. There must be others still."

. . .

Solange Blanchard did not act thus. She said to herself:

. . .

"There was still some work. It has just been taken. Now there is nothing left."

. . .

It was a fine hope that departed, it was a great event, that one. It was not simply a matter of work that consisted of sweeping the church and with which she had not been charged, it was a matter of the last thing

that, upon the earth, was offered to whoever wished to seize it: it had just been snatched from her.

. . .

Time passed. It happened sometimes, when she set her bread upon the table, that she would plant herself there and begin to examine it. Although she gave it great value, she was nevertheless aware of its defects. She said:

. . .

"It is very black and very ugly."

. . .

She ate a piece of the crust: it had the taste of stones. She ate a handful of crumb: it had the taste of sand.

. . .

She said then:

. . .

"If only one had enough of it!"

. . .

She weighed the piece in her hand; she was hardly ever mistaken in her estimates: there remained so many pounds! Little mattered the quality, it would have been better had it been worse still and had more of it remained. To be bad would have been for bread the best of qualities. Perhaps, had the crust been harder and the crumb more crumbled, they would not have been able to make disappear those enormous slices that they managed to eat.

. . .

One day, however, Solange Blanchard emerged from these calculations. As they say in mathematics, she believed she had found the solution. One always ends by finding something, when one searches. She made a true invention. The principle of it was quite simple. One day she said to herself:

. . .

"If I could manage to eat less bread! In that way, what we have would last longer."

. . .

She imagined a singular combination. Everyone has been able to observe in life that one must not eat between meals on pain of no longer being hungry at the moment of sitting down to table. Thus persons who are not in the habit of having a snack at four o'clock are

punished the day they allow themselves to be led into doing so. At the evening meal, they notice that the snack, as they say, has cut their appetite.

. . .

The invention of Solange Blanchard proceeded from this principle. She waited until it was four o'clock, and when four o'clock struck, she lifted the lid of the bread-bin. A little piece, she believed, adding itself to the bread she had eaten at noon, would, in a stomach still full, produce a swelling and prevent digestion from occurring with the rapidity it usually had. At seven o'clock, indeed, it seemed to her she was not hungry. She served the child and was able to say to him without lying:

. . .

"As for me, I have eaten, my little one."

. . .

She watched him eat. She was truly astonished not to have had this idea sooner. She ate a great deal, usually, and at the evening meal, had she not reasoned with herself, she could have eaten a pound of bread.

. . .

But there befell her what has befallen many inventors, whose imagination was lively and outran by some

distance the truth which always takes its time. The first evening, she did not accept the results of the experiment and preferred to wait until the next day, believing by her obstinacy to force nature to follow her. What had happened was this: at seven o'clock, she was not hungry, but at eight o'clock, she had the very clear impression that her stomach had grown larger, that what she had given it at four o'clock more than usual had increased its volume, and that an enormous stomach, a giant's stomach, was imposing upon her a hunger against which she was too weak to struggle. She did not eat, however, by virtue of this reasoning:

. . .

"Well then, it is time to go to bed. I do not need to eat in order to sleep."

. . .

The next day, she was cruelly punished. At noon, cost what it might, she had to satisfy her hunger. And as in the evening she would not give in and repeated the four o'clock trick, she was obliged at eight o'clock, on pain of fainting, to take the bread from the bread-bin and eat four quarters of it, that is to say until she felt at ease. One might even say, comparing what she had cut from her meal of the day before to what she had just added to her meal of today, that the experiment had not

turned to her advantage and that the bread came out of it diminished.

. . .

That was a sad day, that one. It is a sad day when one realizes there is nothing to do but wait for what is going to happen. She repeated to herself once more:

. . .

"My God, what is to become of me!"

. . .

She did not become much of anything.

. . .

It was a day in the month of August, the afternoon of the fourth of August 1849, at two o'clock, that she rose from her chair without anything having announced beforehand that she was deciding to take a resolution. She had no hesitation. She seized a large basket; she possessed two of them: all things considered, she took hold of the larger one. The child was beside her. She said to him:

. . .

"Come now, come with me, my Charles!"

. . .

She carefully closed the door, she was in the street. The child regarded her with surprise. Perhaps she feared he might question her; she said to him in a tone of command:

. . .

"Come along, come!"

. . .

Then she walked. Her life was beginning.

. . .

She took the main road; already she went with an even and somewhat slow step, like those who have long practised the main roads and know how one must behave with them. Her basket hung from her left arm; she leaned to the right to make a counterweight; she lowered her head and recalled those poor women who, knowing that all one can see along the roads does not belong to them, no longer wish to look at what is around them. The child was still very young. He walked like the little colt beside its mother, quickening his step, running, playing, stopping sometimes. He considered her from in front, from the side, from behind, made a circuit around her. He ended by tiring of the game, and said:

. . .

"Where are we going, Mama?"

. . .

She could not have been going there with pleasure, she answered rather curtly:

. . .

"You bother me, you will see."

. . .

A little further on, she turned left and entered a small country lane that seduced the child at once on account of its roughness, on account of the hedges, on account of some oaks that, planted at the edge of the fields, cast a shade so good that he ran to receive it. From oak to oak, he made the journey: the sky was pure, the sun was hot, from oak to oak he refreshed himself: the shade had the taste of a glass of water. The birds did as he did, and when they perched among the leaves, they celebrated in their language the victory they had just won over a greedy sun. He saw one that, its head raised, was swaying its tail, and seemed to be shaking a joy so lively that one would have wished, like it, to be a little bird.

. . .

He spoke of it to his mother, he wanted to show it to her, he asked:

. . .

"Is that the one they call the nightingale?"

. . .

She did not even look and answered:

. . .

"I do not know."

. . .

It was not until a little further on that she emerged from her thoughts. By dint of having walked along the roads, they arrived near a farmhouse. She felt at once the need to have courage, and, to see if she was capable of it, as the child said nothing, she began to speak:

. . .

"You see, it is the farm of La Garenne. We are going to see old mother Renon."

. . .

Old mother Renon, who was in the yard feeding the poultry, saw them arrive with surprise. She did not yet know. She cried out:

. . .

"So it is you, my Solange? And you have brought this big boy?"

. . .

Solange began without preamble:

. . .

"My poor mother Renon, there is no other way. I must bring myself to come to you."

. . .

Old mother Renon was a country woman with a big belly, large breasts, her shoulders were broad. She had given birth, she had nursed, she had taken her share of all the labours. Now she was old, her role had changed; she no longer went into the fields, she stayed at the house. She was called the Mother. She fed the cows, she fed the pigs, she fed the hens. She drew the milk, she prepared the meal for the men. All day long, at the byre, at the stable, at the kitchen, she busied herself with hay, she busied herself with bran, she busied herself with potatoes, with bread, with soup, with dairy. She never

sat at table, but as she fed the others, she knew what it was to be hungry. She had for the poor the very gesture she had for all that was around her.

. . .

"You need this much bread, my Solange... If you had come a little later, we would have had pears. Do take a cheese at least! Here are some eggs, but you will not speak of them to my sons... You must come back at chestnut time, I shall have apples and walnuts too... Ah! if you would wait until half past four, I would go and milk my cows. You would drink a little milk, wouldn't you, my little one?"

. . .

Solange answered:

. . .

"No, mother Renon, now that you have given us all we need, there is nothing left for us but to leave."

. . .

And on the threshold of the door, she recapitulated all the reasons she had had for coming:

. . .

"You see, I have tried everything. I have tried to look for work. How do you expect me to find any: I already have some! Then I tried to eat a little less, but I was falling into faintness. And then when one has wept all day, I assure you one is hungry in the evening! Well then, God's will be done! Now, you see, I am searching for my bread."

. . .

She searched for her bread. It is a hard trade. When she had bread, she noticed that there are things in life that count as much as bread.

. . .

Certainly, she was well received at the farms. The dogs barked but did not rush at her. The women saw her coming, opened the door and shouted at the dog:

. . .

"Be quiet, you nasty beast!"

. . .

They said to her:

. . .

"And me, my poor Solange, if I came to lose my man, what would I have to do? I have two children. I would have to search for my bread too."

. . .

These words did not console Solange, but on the contrary showed her that it would have taken a great misfortune for the other women to reach the point where she was.

. . .

And besides, however well they received her, she was not sure of herself. A caprice would have sufficed, a whim; it would have sufficed that once, not having thanked the people warmly enough, she had offended them, for those who do good like it to be noticed. They would not have hesitated to say to her:

. . .

"I cannot give you anything. I need my bread for myself."

. . .

The bread that was given to her, moreover, caused her no pleasure. She set it on the table, she left it there for a time, she was a little sad, she was a little ashamed. She said:

. . .

"Certainly, it is good bread, but I have not the heart to eat it."

. . .

They gave her big pieces. It was sometimes a golden loaf, without rye or bran, in which nothing entered but flour. One had only to have the saliva, the bread melted in the mouth, the bread ate itself.

. . .

The child was happy. He did not yet realize, he had just discovered that one could eat something good. Sometimes, for no reason, for the pleasure of it, he said:

. . .

"Mama, I am hungry."

. . .

She cut him good slices. He walked about the house to take a stroll while eating them. Then he began to sing. She did not much like that. She said:

. . .

"One must not be gay, my little one, it is bread that we have begged."

THIRD VERSION

THIRD VERSION

I

. . .

CHARLES BLANCHARD HAPPY

. . .

. . .

Charles Blanchard, whose story I undertake today to tell you, showed at first no virtue, no particular genius that might have distinguished him among other children. I shall begin the account of his life as you would have begun the account of your own.

. . .

One day, a woman gave birth to a boy to whom she gave the Christian name that pleased her. One day, to the number of inhabitants of France, the mayor of a small town added one.

. . .

The child knew first how to cry, then he learned to laugh, he got teeth, he made gestures, he pronounced his first words, and as he had received life, he wanted to live it whole and was already trying at times to escape from his mother's hands to go mingle with all that he saw in the world.

. . .

At the age of fifteen months, when he could walk alone, he rushed toward the objects that surrounded him, he went from one to another and seized them in his arms.

. . .

He was happy to be two years old, then to be three years old, because he could go further and embrace still other objects.

. . .

At four years old, although he had touched all the things he had been able to reach, he had not exhausted

a great curiosity that was at the bottom of himself and that soon pushed him to try to reach all the things he had not yet touched. This is why, when he was in his house, he set off for the street. When he was in the street, he did not stop there either and set off for the square; he would then have gone into the fields, into the woods, onto the roads and would not have been long in becoming, no one has the right to doubt it, the youngest of our explorers.

. . .

It was in the course of his travels that Charles Blanchard encountered all that he did not know. One cannot say that the world hides its face from us, each of our steps leads us on the contrary to a place where so many objects surround us that it seems the world wished to show us all that it contained.

. . .

Charles Blanchard learned of the existence of the sun, of the blue of the sky, of trees, of meadows, he learned that there were birds, dogs, cats, horses.

. . .

When he was small, he did not yet quite grasp all this. Life was comparable to those clearance shops which one knows contain everything one needs, but in the

midst of which, the first time one visits them, one has great difficulty finding what one came to look for.

. . .

It was by frequenting assiduously the town and the countryside that Charles Blanchard came at last to notice, to classify their riches. He saw the sun which is so beautiful one cannot look upon it directly, the sky which one cannot reach and which is above all the objects of the earth, the trees in whose shade one hastens to go and sit, the meadows whose grass is so soft that if they were not closed by fences one would roll about in them all day long. He saw the birds that run and fly even further than children, the dogs that follow you without doing you harm, the cats that climb onto the roofs, the horses that gallop with such swiftness that one harnesses them to carriages to go faster.

. . .

He was happy to be part of a world that possessed such wonders. He lived in their midst, his feet carried him from one to another, his heart beat with each of his movements, and two large, two beautiful blue eyes in his face had such a flame that they seemed to possess a life particular and distinct from that which one saw him lead. They made you think of two friends who are drawing a third along to pleasure.

. . .

The air was soft then as it is when one is four years old. The air was so pure and penetrated so deeply into the chest of the child that it is not enough to say he breathed with his lungs. He breathed also with his soul. Sometimes, without cause, or perhaps simply because he felt the air of the sky swelling his throat, he could not contain himself, and with all his strength, like a bird, he answered the goodness of the world and let out at the top of his voice great, long cries of joy.

. . .

He was happy as children are happy. The morning made him happy, the afternoon made him happy, the evening made him happy. Each day had its manner of being, the days had different ways of making him happy. The whole universe answered to his happiness. Did he set foot in the street? He found there occasions for happiness that he did not yet know. One would think the world was created so that children might rejoice in it.

. . .

Everything was an adventure for him, chance sometimes came to meet him and presented him with happinesses such as he could not have foreseen. One day, he was passing before the house of Madame Emile Giron which was not made like the others. A courtyard pre-

ceded it with a gate. The gate was open that morning. He entered, he climbed the eight steps of the front stoop. Never had he climbed the steps of a front stoop. It was a fine adventure. Another time, as he was passing before the garden of Monsieur Tardy, the doctor, workmen were in the midst of installing a Chinese kiosk. He saw it set in place, there were little bells at each corner, and when the work was finished, a little wind blew and the little bells began to chime. He saw, one morning, Galand the blacksmith, in the company of his workman, beating the red iron, and a rain of sparks around the anvil burst forth and radiated so beautifully that he rejoiced at having lived until this day to have been able to contemplate it.

II / THE SMALL TOWN

. . .

. . .

The small town where Charles Blanchard lived was not one of those restless cities where factories, shops, and inns set men, women, and wagons circulating in throngs and generate an activity that frightens children a little. It was one of those market towns, such as one sees in the provinces of central France, which, surrounded by countryside as a house is surrounded by a garden, take pleasure in their comfortable situation and find time to breathe the good air. The streets were wide, the houses white, only the smoke from the domestic

hearth rose into the blue; it could not trouble an immense and profound sky that occupied a great space and that, as the familiar expression has it, began where the rooftops ended.

. . .

The walks that Charles Blanchard took through his native town may be compared, as to their results, to those fine voyages in the course of which one learns that there exist other men, other seasons, other happinesses. The sun, like God, reigned in the very middle of the world, and from the height of his dwelling, bending his face toward the Earth, distributed to her in great floods his sentiments of joy. He was there. A tender light flowed over things which, motionless and full of pleasure, received it upon all their faces. It was morning.

. . .

One may say that the child encountered on his way all that one can see of gentleness in this world. The doors of the houses were open: the doors of this one, the doors of that one, the doors of yet another; each house made one think of a man who, emerging from a night of sleep, has need to look at what is happening outside. The housewives devoted the first hours of day to ridding the furniture of the dust the day before had left upon it: one glimpsed in each interior gleaming armoires, polished chairs, plump beds which, relieved of their burden

of the night, beneath their curtains that had been lifted, seemed to breathe. They did not content themselves with having put good order in their homes: once their house was swept, they went out and swept the street. Everything was clean, everything was young, the entire small town made one think of a child whom its mother has just got out of bed and who, having made its toilette, prepares to pass a charming day.

. . .

Time walked with ease. One had heard nine o'clock strike from the church steeple, then, as one had gone to take a turn and had looked about a little: suddenly, one could hardly believe it, a new hour was striking, and it was ten o'clock. How easy life was! Men, in groups, planted themselves in the very middle of the street, and after having looked at one another for some minutes, after having pronounced a few words, by common accord, all at once, they began to laugh. Women, drawn by the noise, mingled with them. A little later, each went off to his work. In the wheelwright's shop and in the blacksmith's, robust men, their sleeves rolled up, accomplished admirable labours and made children wish they were fifteen years older so they could, like them, shoe the wheels, struggle against the horses, and vanquish the red-hot iron.

. . .

Noon arrived without effort. The afternoon, which began next, was a new day gentler than the morning. Hours all blue had invaded the street and enveloped the houses; the walker was in the midst of them, and like one who leads a life for which it seems he was born, the depths of his heart were joyful and without worry. Hours all blue and full of a great calm spread out beneath the sky: they were beautiful, one had pleasure in seeing them. Behind certain windows, young women seated and working at some piece of sewing sang in the peace a sentimental ballad that, enlarging one's soul, led one to believe in universal happiness. Behind the windows where there was no one, one found oneself imagining that a happy young woman had just stepped away, but that she would appear again very soon to take up her role and thus make each house full of songs.

. . .

Charles Blanchard did not know at that time of how many hours each day was composed: there were a great number of them, each one taken between the one that had preceded it and the one that was going to follow; a delicious procession crossed through time; when it had passed, it seemed one had heard a long canticle being sung. Every day was followed by a morrow. Before knowing it, the child already knew that it would resemble the day before, that it would possess like her a pure air, a warm sun, and that in the houses as in the streets, men, women, children, all those who are of this world would

turn toward him a trusting face. Where is she, the disinherited creature who remembers having wept? Transparent days joined the Earth to the Sky, one drew ceaselessly nearer to a profound happiness into which, entering entirely, each one was going to enjoy eternal life.

III / THE MARKET

. . .

Here is why it is fitting to speak first of certain encounters that Charles Blanchard made at the Market square, which was, naturally, the first place where he stopped in the course of his outings.

. . .

The Market was held on Thursdays. The stalls were arranged in three rows. On the right, going down, one saw the vegetables and the fruits, in the middle the eggs, the cheeses and the butter, and on the left were displayed the chickens, the ducks and the geese. It was the gathering of all the provisions that are necessary to man, and one even encountered some, such as partridges or quails, that tempted no one, but that were there in case some passer-by full of extravagance had decided to commit a folly.

. . .

The child, for reasons that were rather easy to foresee, first made the acquaintance of all the fruits, and he

formed, on the same occasion, relations with the vegetables their neighbours. It was at this time that Charles Blanchard experienced great surprises. He saw pell-mell, in the course of that year, in a great disorder where the seasons were confused: cabbages, turnips, carrots, potatoes, beans, tomatoes, cauliflowers, spinach, pears, apples, cherries, strawberries, grapes, and those peaches that seem alive, that have flesh, skin, such a fine complexion that a feeling of a higher order adds itself to the pleasure one feels in eating them. He did not ignore, assuredly, that all this existed beforehand upon the earth; he had seen pears on the pear trees, cabbages in the gardens, but the question did not pose itself then in the same way. He found that the pear trees looked well in the fields, the pears well on the pear trees, and that it was in good taste to grow cabbages in the kitchen gardens. When one walked through the world with a little attention, one encountered things that seemed placed here and there for the pleasure of the eyes.

. . .

Charles Blanchard had the revelation of an entire unsuspected world; what did he not learn on that day! Certainly, he used his two eyes to look well, but his two eyes did not put him in sufficient relations with all that he had to see. It was as if a new sense made room for itself among those he already used to learn to know the Universe. There occurred a phenomenon comparable to a

landslide, a part of himself collapsed and left in the very middle of his body an enormous void that all he saw could scarcely have filled. It seemed to him very quickly that he appreciated and judged things with an organ more powerful still than his eyes: with his stomach!

. . .

. . . . . .

. . .

A new life began. It is not with impunity that one has felt great feelings. During the days that followed market day, it seemed to Charles Blanchard that he had lost something. He went through one by one the streets of the small town where he lived, he looked around him with great care, he could not bring himself to return to his house. He was seen passing here and there. He walked with small steps, he rubbed against the walls, he stopped before the shops, he planted himself near a dog, near a cat, near a passer-by, near a cart, near an open window. One does not know what was the object of his searches, but he pursued them with avidity. All that he perceived was submitted to a long examination: he asked himself if this was it!

. . .

Many times he was ready to seize strange things. What would he not have picked up! What would he not

have carried between his arms and pushed to the depths of himself to fill a bizarre void that he felt in his soul and in his body! It seemed to him that, from head to heel, he was hollow like a hole. He had learned, on market day, that he was hungry. He no longer knew, now, for what he was hungry. He walked through the world after a whole life of fasting, each of his steps was destined to make him find a little nourishment, he picked up everything that a small town can leave lying about.

. . .

They were numerous days, they were all the days of those summers that we lived when we were ten years old. Each morning at seven o'clock, as soon as his mother had left, Charles Blanchard in his house did not feel in his place. A voice in the street, a voice through the town, a voice under the heavens made itself at first very soft and went to his heart, then, if he delayed a few...

IV

THE FAIR

. . .

. . .

That year, on the second Sunday of June, an event occurred which happy days, long in advance, ought to

have foretold. When morning descended from the heavens, it was as if a new season were beginning. It was as if the heavens themselves were descending upon the Earth with the morning. The air one breathed had an unknown fragrance, a marvellous fragrance, and more than one person thought: It is a mystery, never has the small town where I live possessed such a perfume. The light was white and blue; if sometimes, at the end of a street, through a gap, one glimpsed the countryside, it was difficult to tell the difference between the colour of the sky and the colour of the fields. The houses that stood in the sun shone by natural law, and those that stood in shadow, an interior joy made them shine as well. Each person possessed in the very centre of his chest a pure heart, ready to receive great feelings. A new season was beginning, winter and sorrow had fled forever, one did not even think that morning would be followed by evening, then by night; it seemed that a whole century had just opened and that a Sunday without end, which would last until the consummation of time, had descended upon the Earth to dwell there.

. . .

One could scarcely recognise the Grande Place. Dark stalls, surrounded by canvas, which the day before had seemed rather to encumber it, had just undergone a marvellous transformation: at the first ray of sunlight, each of them had opened like a flower.

. . .

Charles Blanchard was greatly astonished. Yet he knew them. He had seen them the year before. There was the Aunt Sally where one could notice in passing the bride whose nose, as Villepreux the clockmaker had once said, was a turned-up nose. There was the shooting gallery. These were made for men, one had to have enough strength to throw the balls, one had to know how to handle a rifle. The lottery stalls were made for women. The women spun the wheel. When the wheel stopped, if they had not lost, they won a large vase of their choosing which one could afterwards see at their homes upon the mantelpiece.

. . .

The stalls were neatly aligned, with canvas roofs, and they contained beautiful objects like those one glimpses when the window is open in fine houses. One went to see them, one gave them a glance, it did not seem they were there for any other reason. One counted them, one said: For the festival, there were five stalls! One was rather proud to live in a town to which, on the day of the festival, five stalls came to set themselves up!

. . .

Charles Blanchard was greatly astonished. An idea came to him which took hold of him entirely, which he

began to follow and which carried him right into the midst of the stalls as if he were seeing them for the first time.

. . .

If he had held one of their rifles in his hands, he would have pressed the stock to his shoulder, he would have taken aim, one would have heard the sound the cap makes: there it is, I have fired a rifle! The Aunt Sally was set up in the very same stall as the shooting gallery. Time enough to set down his rifle, a step to the left, and he who had already thrown stones, he would have thrown balls at five for a sou. But the lottery! There was an all-blue vase, big as a head, with white flowers; one would have sworn they resembled daisies. When you have won it, the vendor places it in your arms. It is because you do not know what to do with it that you are happy.

. . .

It was only at eleven o'clock, a little before the congregation emerged from mass, that the wooden horses were freed from the veil which, until then, had hidden them from all eyes. Before eleven o'clock in the morning, no one would have been capable of imagining what pleasure is. There was something like an explosion. It seemed that a troop, hidden beneath the tent, had been

waiting only for this moment to escape with violence, and by surprise to seize hold of everything around it.

. . .

It did not even take a minute:

. . .

"There it is!"

. . .

The whole world belonged to the wooden horses.
V / THE CAROUSEL HORSES

. . .

. . .

They were gathered in the square, they followed one another in a movement ever equal to itself, they passed before your eyes, each in his rank, he who was there showed himself to you entire, then came a second, came a third, there came still more from behind, they had the number, they had the variety of forms; the splendour of one among them added to the splendour of the others, the magnificence grew and grew, and in a blare of fanfare, a dizzying procession passed before you, which was certainly composed of each of its riders, but which, gathering them all together, totalled a thousand glories,

and passed in its brilliance, in its pride and in its majesty to celebrate one of those festivals in which all humanity joins. It was not a matter of wooden horses, it was not a matter of a joy one purchases for a sou.

. . .

Charles Blanchard had a surprise for which he was scarcely prepared. The carousel of wooden horses was not at all what he had at first believed...

. . .

Certainly the carousel contained horses, these horses were even, to the point of mistaking them, like living horses. Not only did they possess stirrups, a tail, a bridle —they possessed also a mane. But the carousel itself was worth far more than its horses. It would have been difficult to say whether the carousel was red or whether it was gold. Its colours seized hold of you, one knew not which to love best. One saw there oriflammes, banners, gilded columns, artificial flowers, fringes. One saw there things whose names one could scarcely recall. Copper lamps swung from above, suspensions. A mingling of riches took hold in you of all those sentiments capable of admiration. You were very nearly forgetting to notice blue globes, white globes, yellow globes, which were mirrors, which must have been diamonds, which were, along with the sun, what shines most brightly in all the world.

They had hung them a little everywhere. The organ made one think of pianos.

. . .

One day, through an open window, the child had glimpsed the salon of Madame Leon Bonnet who was a very rich woman. He had received a blow from it. He had been truly struck in the face by silk curtains, by carpets, by sofas, by flower vases, by lamps with copper columns which seemed to him to number at least fifty. When he wished to boast, he would say:

. . .

—I have seen the salon of Madame Bonnet.

. . .

The carousel made one think of that salon. One would have been mistaken in trying to enumerate all its beauties. The carousel was comparable to palaces, the carousel was comparable to those salons one glimpses but once in a lifetime, the day when the window stands open.

. . .

Charles Blanchard had never set foot there, he would never have dared set foot there. He knew he was not made to cross its threshold.

. . .

Toward four o'clock in the afternoon, the people who until then had had their affairs, those who are always late, the girls who had gone to the dance hall for a turn on the floor, the last inhabitants of the small town in a word, with their children, with their friends, with the persons they had met along the way, came around the carousel of wooden horses to take the place each has the right to occupy. They advanced, as people advance, with the need to reach the front rank. A rather great movement resulted from this, as when new generations, pushing aside what hinders them, wish to make their place in the sun. It was a matter then of holding firm so that they might not dislodge you from the post you had conquered well before them. No one failed in this. One even heard the sound of several quarrels. Charles Blanchard knew a sentiment he had not yet felt. It would not suffice to call it respect. It was not before numbers, it was not before force that he yielded. He might, moreover, have profited from the push he was given, and, advancing a few steps, carried by the crowd, occupied the front rank without even having done so on purpose. He was careful not to. He saw these ones coming, he saw those ones coming, each of them walked with assurance as when a man walks in his own domain. Before even they were installed there, Charles Blanchard, with attentive eye, considered the spot which they seemed to wish to choose. When they approached it, he stepped aside with obedience, abandoned the ground to

them and went off a few steps further, into a corner, to take the place they had been willing to leave him.

. . .

Charles Blanchard did not fight. At no moment did it come to his mind that he might have struggled as the others struggled, and, playing with elbows, head and knees, beaten down in the human wall what would have been needed to give passage to his body. In the thickness of the mass, not a crack, not a fissure, not a hole; the row of spectators held its post with the firmness of old soldiers guarding their country. It was not a matter of grieving over this; it was not a matter of wishing it were otherwise: it was thus. The child stepped back a few paces. He crossed his two small hands upon his belly, and, legs apart, head straight, he planted himself with solidity and occupied the place that had been assigned to him. He blinked his eyelids, he breathed, he lived, he thought; when he was weary of having crossed his hands upon his belly, he crossed them behind his back. He occupied the last place with naturalness. He had two blue eyes, those eyes of children that are larger than the eyes of men because they have not yet seen anything and they need to see many things. He contemplated the spectacle he was admitted to contemplate. The backs of men were thick because many wore smocks; the skirts of women were ample; there were no small children, because their mothers placed them in the front rank. Sometimes a broad wave, a surge of pleasure

running in from some corner seized hold of them. The laughter of people who are enjoying themselves passed from each to each, one saw it circulate, it shook the shoulders of men, it seemed that from one to another they were passing it along, no one let it fall. It was around the wooden horses an afternoon of gaiety. In the sky there was what was needed of clouds so that one might be in shade in every place. One gave oneself over to the fine weather, one gave oneself over to the wooden horses, to the day of the festival. In broad sheets, it seemed that happiness fell from the azure and spread over men some luminous joy in which they stood upright.

. . .

Then, in the deepest part of his heart, there where one possesses what is needed to understand, to taste, to love all the things of the earth, the child felt another Charles Blanchard who, crushed by shadow, could not live there and held out to the world a world of sentiments so beautiful that one would have to be ignorant of them not to feel pity for them. He strove to forget him, he buried him beneath the weight of his heaviest thoughts, he knew how to fight when it was a matter of that, he drowned him in such a flood of bitterness that his happy brother, the little Charles Blanchard so gentle whom he carried within him fell back silently as one falls back upon one's bed, and all is finished. It was as if he had a dead man in his house. He wept for him. Great

tears flowed down his cheeks; one does not know how many he shed, they followed one another like memories, like thoughts follow one another, he was never at the last. He wept a long time, and when, toward evening, he set off quietly, he began again to weep upon the road.

. . .

It was thus that Charles Blanchard, at the age of ten, took among men the place of the poor. One is poor, first of all, for reasons of money. A sou would sometimes suffice for one not to become so. Soon it is too late. Poverty is no longer in their pocket, poverty has fixed itself in their heart. Charles Blanchard knew its first sentiments. He had not a revolt, he had not a complaint, it was as if the kingdom of God had already come and each had received his share. He bowed his head to accept his own.

VARIANTS

VARIANTS

OF CHARLES BLANCHARD

. . .

CHAPTER I

. . .

SOLANGE'S WORDS TO CHARLES BLANCHARD

. . .

... One understood quickly that these rooms were inhabited by a master jealous of his power who pressed upon the chamber the weight of a sombre thought that never left him. The child felt himself obey so much will. He would find his place, he would go to his chair without turning his head, she was far away, he was a little afraid,

he would sit down and no longer dared move, for fear it might be forbidden.

. . .

Sometimes, from that seven-year-old heart, a young blood would escape with a force that seemed able to bring down walls. What would Charles Blanchard do? He was a warrior, he looked around him first. The shadow and the silence mingled together spread that life which they spread. One might have thought he too was about to release his own and send them back to their corners. But no. The shadow and the silence are jealous. They advanced. He felt their breath first. Then that dampness they contain fell into the hollows of his shoulders, then that ice of which they are made pressed a black water upon his warm heart. He had had his fill. He had it up to his neck, he had a mouthful of it, he breathed them, he ate them, he formed his substance from them, he became shadow and silence. Who then has said that Charles Blanchard will go to hear the little bells of Monsieur Tardy's kiosk that ring when a light wind blows?

. . .

He knew her well, this house. He could have given you more than one detail about her, and about the bed, and about the table, and about the chairs, and about the bread bin, he could have told more than one bitter story for the furniture was like him subject to the four walls.

He could have told you of the woman you have seen motionless in the place that fate had assigned her, whose presence you had scarcely noticed, he could have told you of Solange Blanchard who counted a little more than the furniture.

. . .

Solange Blanchard was always seated. She would place herself on her chair, she would set her two elbows upon her knees. She would bend, she would fold in upon herself, she would gather her limbs so as to wrap well what she possessed, so that nothing might escape her, so as to surround with her knees, her arms and her back the poor soul she carried in her body.

. . .

Her face was grey. It is rather difficult to know what her dress was like: her dress did not stand out from the colour of the walls. Her hands were grey, and as for the body hidden beneath her garment, one could hardly imagine it was full of red blood, and one remarked only one thing of it: that it contained sighs or, sometimes, that a broken voice came from it. For she spoke. It happened that she added to the shadow and the silence of the house some words that made them heavier still. She said:

. . .

"My poor Charles, we are not happy."

. . .

She said:

. . .

"Your poor father had gone into the countryside, he got overheated. When he wanted to come home, he caught cold. He died of pneumonia in six days."

. . .

She also said:

. . .

"Do you remember our house when we lived in the town? We were all three very happy. There were two windows, one could watch the world go by and then one had the heart to take some pleasure."

. . .

During those afternoons so long in the course of which nothing happens, to prove to ourselves that we are not dead, we would search in the depths of our soul for what might happen. We are not dead. It even seems we are about to enter into full communion with our entire life. Our soul had settled in our heart: we find her, we

feel her, she is indeed within us, we are not alone. We then surround her with all our feelings so that she will not leave us, we are very gentle so that she will trust us and tell us her story. Our soul is a younger sister who, when one spends the afternoon beside her, opens up and teaches us about herself things we had not known until then. Solange Blanchard's soul was docile. At the first call she does not keep one waiting: here she is! She is already gaining ground, and in all of a woman's body she takes her place, and in her head, and in her thoughts, she will rise to her eyes, she will take hold of her gaze. Here is my soul! The two trickles of warm water that then flowed over her face came indeed from farther than her eyes and seemed to continue her feelings. She was not surprised. She knew well that this was her soul, these bitter tears that flooded, that overflowed her cheeks and that, through the opening of her mouth, then entered so that she might recognise it by the taste.

. . .

Such was Solange Blanchard. But if to depict her it was necessary to tell some traits of her personal life, to understand her one must say that her personal life counted for little. The old house, around her, with all its thatched roof, its four walls, the floor, the ceiling and each of its pieces of furniture, kept silence. The door was closed, not even flies entered. One understood why the window must not receive more light. It seemed that the very darkness lived and listened. A woman was here, So-

lange or another, charged with a role, and that she was going to fulfil. Neither the roof, nor the walls, nor the ceiling, nor the floor, nor the furniture knew how to weep, and in a world laden with tears, they bore so heavy a burden that someone had to weep for them. They would lean then over that one and encourage her until evening.

. . .

When Charles Blanchard, later, recalled the memories of his childhood, he never knew if it was his mother who had wept. The house was a house all in tears.

. . .

He lived here without uttering a reproach, without feeling the right to go elsewhere, without showing by a single reflection that he, too, had his own idea. He was like those studious children who go to school, who know nothing of human knowledge and wish to devote their efforts to acquiring it. He submitted to the principles, he conformed to the method. When he sat down, he sat down properly so that no gesture would come to distract him. His head was straight, his eye open, he waited. He was eager to know as much as the master. He received his teaching, he held out his heart like a cup, and whatever the other poured into it, it was precious. One might have said he opened his mouth and drank in long draughts. Sometimes, in moments of rest, he felt within him the taste of that bitter liquor that had been poured

for him, he pushed it so that it would find its place, he swallowed the last drop, and whatever it was, it passed and went to join in the hollow of his chest, in the depths of his heart, that blood of children so pure to which it mingled a black water.

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CHAPTER II

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ANOTHER BEGINNING

. . .

Perhaps it was by chance that Charles Blanchard managed to survive that winter, or perhaps one must see in this a deeper trait and pass a first judgement on this child. One could already say that he had in him enough resources to resist nine years of captivity. Where are they, the poor little ones we have known? We were told of some that they had a disease of the heart and we consoled ourselves with the thought that they could not have lived had they been rich. There were some who were consumptive. They were already coughing a great deal when they were very small. You know some who died of meningitis. Your mothers, then, would watch over your reading and tell you: Close your book, my little one,

you will tire your head. Besides, it was a matter of a child too serious for his age. The people who met him sometimes did not recall having seen him laugh. We learn then that Charles Blanchard's heart did not exceed the normal dimensions and was placed in the right spot, that this child, like everyone else, only coughed from autumn onwards, and that his head was solid and could bear all the thoughts that presented themselves to it. These are qualities that take one far, they enabled Charles Blanchard to reach, in the course of the following year, the age of ten.

. . .

At ten, one is several years older than at nine. At ten one suddenly perceives that one drags behind oneself a great number of years full of errors, during which a sort of foolishness or fear that characterises the ignorant prevented us from tasting excellent things we would have loved. This is why, several times, in spring, this happened: Charles Blanchard would leave his chair, he would first half-open the door to see if the street presented no danger, then, bravely, resolutely, he would plant himself before the threshold of his house. At first, he did not feel at home, and as soon as he heard the sound of a passer-by's footsteps, he would hurry back inside. But the moment came when he felt the courage to face the passers-by, when he learned that he had nothing to fear and that he was within his rights when he installed himself in the street. One day, his mother encouraged him:

. . .

"You are right to go out a little. You are there in the shade, facing the sun, it does you good."

. . .

She ended, besides, by sending him on a few errands. This is how he went several times to fetch salt from the grocer and how another time he went, farther still, to the baker. One day, on his own initiative, he crossed the whole town to prove to himself that he was capable of doing so.

. . .

For a long time, Charles Blanchard, in the course of his outings, learned nothing at all. He simply noticed that a child can go out and that the world, as he was inclined to believe, is not inhabited by a devouring beast ready to pounce upon people who leave their house. This discovery has, besides, much more importance than one might imagine. He among us who has two legs and two eyes ends, when he is not afraid to use them, by finding himself before certain spectacles that will know how to attract and hold his attention. One need only set off, it is not even necessary to walk for long. There are several who did not need to go half the way to meet what they called life; she herself travels great distances, she passes through villages, she stops a while in each street, you will

only have to take the few steps that separate you from one of them.

. . .

The small town where Charles Blanchard lived was not one of those bustling cities in which factories, shops, inns make men, women and carriages circulate in crowds and determine an activity whose spectacle leads you much more to pleasure or to work than to reflection. She was one of those small towns as one sees in the provinces of the Centre, which, surrounded by the countryside as a house by a vegetable garden, receive from it the products necessary for their subsistence and lead that existence of retired civil servants for whom it is enough to be sheltered from want. Movement there was measured, action wise and slow, the main event that stirred life and pushed it to show itself was the market which, on the square, gathered prudent housewives, able to appreciate the quality of goods and examining them with care.

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CHAPTER II

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THE CLOG-MAKER'S HOUSE (I)

. . .

… Such was the house of Baptiste and Rose Dumont. Its appearance was not deceiving. One ate there on the round table thick soups, after which one ate again the inexhaustible provisions the sideboard contained: beans, cabbages, potatoes and on Sunday a piece of bacon; one sometimes drank wine. One slept there in linen sheets, on a feather bed, under an overflowing eider-down whose warmth brooded over the well-being of a satisfied body and the feelings of a contented heart. One worked there all day. The clog-maker would seize the wood, split it, cut it, hollow it, give it the shape he had chosen, then when evening fell and he had stacked his clogs, he would straighten up and with a proud eye consider life. One was free, one was happy, one was confident. Each day was followed by an easy morrow. Each morrow was followed by another. One could look before oneself at great distances, one was sheltered from all the misfortunes that time sometimes brings with it. Nothing was lacking here of what is needed for existence to be happy and long. One could procure oneself many pleasures, one had already procured some. Baptiste and Rose would have thought something was missing if they had not tasted the one that consists in having a child. They had the means to make all the expenses its upkeep requires. This is why in addition to their house, their furniture and the money the wardrobe must have contained, they possessed a child. She was a little girl of ten. They had done well. She did them honour, she had

acquired all the qualities one needed to live beside them.

. . .

Her name was Cecile, she had beautiful blonde hair in a plait and the plait was tied with a blue ribbon. She went to school, she could read; in the evening, at four o'clock, when she came home, she would set her notebooks on the table and write for a long time. In the morning, she would help her mother, she would make the bed, she would dust the furniture, she would climb on a chair to wipe the mantelpiece. She would have liked to know how to cook. She rejoiced to live in the house of her parents. She had two large blue eyes which she used to see it well, then, when she had considered all its objects, she would make her reflections aloud. It seemed the house paid her back in gratitude. She would eat between meals sweet things that the house contained: sometimes it was a slice of bread and butter, sometimes bread and jam, or chocolate, or else fruit. It seemed it was to bear witness to her happiness that she was beautiful, and joyful, and greedy. She talked, she laughed, she sang, she ran among the furniture when the urge came upon her. She was happy like the room, active like the shop.

. . .

When Charles Blanchard entered his uncle's house, it was not one of those visits such as those of our relatives who have succeeded pay us once in their lives in the course of their journey to their native country. It was not necessary to wash the windows, to redden the tiles, to wax the furniture nor to change the curtains for the house to be worthy of him. It was not necessary to celebrate him with one of those abundant and recherche meals that show one places very high the habits and taste of the person one receives. When he had sat down, when that thing fatigued by the journey was set upon a chair, it was she who would have greatly needed a thorough cleaning to be worthy of the house.

. . .

His cap, his overcoat, his trousers, his stockings and down to his clogs were not yellow, were not black, were not grey, were not blue; their colour was that of those rags one has sometimes seen in the ditches of villages where the sanitation service is not well done, thrown among dead moles and pierced saucepans. His aunt, who was a woman of order, thought:

. . .

"I cannot help it. It seems to me I have not taken my sweepings out of the room."

. . .

As he was wrinkled, as he did not look at her, as he was silent, his cousin understood quickly that he was wicked. When, going from one place to another, she had to pass before him, she walked on tiptoe, for fear of waking a mysterious beast that, hidden in that malevolent body, would have snapped her up in passing. She ended by being unable to bear it, she rushed away from the danger; once in the street, she kept a certain distance between herself and the house. And a little later, as her mother, noticing her absence, went to the door to see what she could be doing, she still did not approach.

. . .

"Why don't you come in?" said Rose.

. . .

She advanced with caution, she spoke very low to say:

. . .

"I'm frightened!"

. . .

She was pale, she was trembling.

. . .

Her mother had to take her by the hand, bring her close by force, and make her touch her cousin with her finger. She drew back.

. . .

When they had to put him to bed, they had to take this double impression into account. Baptiste had had an idea such as men have. He would have liked his wife to go and share the little girl's bed, and he would have slept in his bed with the boy, but Rose was quick to put a stop to that.

. . .

"You can put him wherever you like, but I don't want him in my room. And besides, he would soon give my daughter nightmares."

. . .

Between the room and the shop there was a small space without light, which served as a lumber-room, a sort of dark closet where they put the dirty linen and the old clothes they had not yet thrown away.

. . .

Rose said:

. . .

"You just have to throw in there everything that can no longer be of use to us. I'll put my linen somewhere else. He can sleep in there."

. . .

Baptiste went to fetch from the attic an old straw mattress and a kind of mattress he had always kept, without knowing why, besides. He carried them to the place indicated. The aunt was annoyed at having to get out her sheets. In the end, she took only one: folded in two, it did the job. She placed on it an old blanket, then, when everything was installed, she approached the child who, bent double, seemed set in old age and decrepitude; she came very close and shouted in his ear as if he were deaf:

. . .

"Time for bed, grandfather!"

. . .

From the day after that, life began. For Charles Blanchard it was not the life of an apprentice, he was no longer at the point where the young man studies his trade and, each morning, discovering the difficulties, feels himself still far from the day when he will be able to practise it with ease. Who could have thought of making an apprentice of him? It seemed rather that he had long since served his apprenticeship. It seemed that he had

long since trained himself in quite another thing than the trade of clog-maker. He was no longer an apprentice, he was a master. He had succeeded, besides. He had achieved his type, he was perfect in his kind. Time could only add days to his age, time could only put him on display to men for a few years more. What he was, he was well, he was with force, he was with perseverance, he offered the example of it.

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CHAPTER II

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THE CLOG-MAKER'S HOUSE (II)

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This was called a coche, that was a chevre, here is a plot. The tools were called a paroir, a hachoir, a cuiller, a butoir, and there were others whose names one constantly forgot. One could not even have described them, for their shape was complicated and their use delicate, one had to wait for the moment when the clog-maker used them to ask him: "By the way, what is this tool called?" It was only after having seen them often and for a long time in the hands of a workman that one

learned that some served to rough out, others to hollow, others to finish the clogs.

. . .

Seeing the room, one thought of the fine clothes and the white linen the wardrobe contained, one told oneself that, on the round table, in the dishes the sideboard contained, good meals must be eaten after which one would go to enjoy a deep sleep under eiderdowns whose warmth was sweet to the heart like a feeling. Seeing the shop, one envied the life of an industrious workman who, all the day long, tastes that pleasure which consists in handling instruments whose use he alone knows and which makes of him, among other men, an active and intelligent man full of great merit. Seeing the room, one told oneself that workmen's wives are happy because they lack nothing, seeing the shop one told oneself that workmen are intelligent because they know how to do everything.

. . .

The house of Baptiste and Rose Dumont also contained a little girl. This little girl was not made like all children. Her name was Cecile, she had beautiful blonde hair in a plait and the plait was tied with a blue ribbon. She talked, she sang aloud, she ran in the street when the urge came upon her. She had two large blue eyes which she used to look around her, then when she had

seen what presented itself, she would make her reflections. She had her desires, she had her caprices, nearly always she was obeyed. She ate between meals, she was given sometimes a slice of bread and butter, sometimes bread and jam, or chocolate, or else fruit. She was beautiful, she was joyful, she was greedy, she lived in the house in the manner of little girls, she leaped, she laughed, one heard her warbling. She lived in the house as birds live in the woods.

. . .

There was room here for a little girl so made. She went to school, she could read; in the evening, at four o'clock, when she came home, she would set her notebooks on the table and write for a long time. At eight o'clock, after soup, it was she who put away in a cupboard the spoons, the plates and the glasses. In the morning, she helped her mother, she made the bed with her, she dusted the furniture, she climbed on a chair to wipe the mantelpiece. She joined in all the actions of daily life, she put the salt and the butter in the soup; once, under her mother's supervision, she had cooked a rabbit. There was room here for a little girl so made. She touched everything, she joined in all the work that was done in the room; her cheeks were red, her skin shining, she was cared for like the furniture. Her hands were nimble, her legs firm and straight, she went even into the shop and helped her father to stack the clogs; she was

deft, she was brave, she was active, she took part in the life of a workman.

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CHAPTER II

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THE CLOG-MAKER'S HOUSE (III)

. . .

The house of Baptiste Dumont and his wife whose name was Rose was, in the village of Champvallon, a workman's house.

. . .

It contained two rooms. The front room was called the chamber, the back room was called the shop. In the chamber one found all that is needed to live at ease. There was even a large mirror above the mantelpiece and on each side of this mirror blue vases in which one could have put flowers. It was not here that one would have gone without a wardrobe. The wardrobe was of walnut, with double doors. There was also a sideboard, a round table and two kinds of chairs. The first were like all the rather stiff chairs of the countryside, but the second

possessed a slanted back whose curved bars embraced so well the back of the person who leaned against them that it would have been useless to acquire an armchair. If there was no armchair, it was because one did not feel the need. The two beds did not look poor with their curtains, their pillows, their blankets, their eiderdown, the mouldings of their wood. They occupied a large space in the room, they were clean, swollen and important. They faced each other as in a well-fed family a man and a woman in good condition face each other. At the head of one of the beds, the one on the right, one saw a night table.

. . .

The shop contained the clog-makers' equipment and their tools which, at first sight, inspired respect. To know the names of the objects there was already a sign of superiority. This was called a coche, that was a chevre, here is a pelot. The tools were called a paroir, a hachon, a cuiller, a butoir, and there were others whose names one constantly forgot. One could not even have described them for their shape was complicated and their use delicate; one had to wait for the moment when the clog-maker used them to ask him: "By the way, what is this tool called?" It was only after having seen them often and for a long time in the hands of a workman that one learned that some served to rough out, others to hollow, others to finish the clogs.

. . .

As soon as one had crossed the threshold of Baptiste Dumont's house, one set foot in the shop. It no longer seemed then that one was in one of those villages in the centre of France that rest amid the countryside; one entered a country apart that was situated in no precise region and where there reigned the customs depicted for us in certain marvellous tales. Andersen would not have placed it in Denmark nor Canon Schmid in his Bavaria. Baptiste Dumont was a clog-maker. His house was situated in a particular country: the country of Clogs.

. . .

It contained so many that one might easily have imagined it contained them all and that one could have gone round the world afterwards without meeting a single one. They were there. Some were hung along the walls and hid them so well from view that one wondered if walls existed. Others hung from ropes stretched across the ceiling a little higher than your head, above those ropes there were others still from which a second layer of clogs was suspended, then there was a third layer no doubt, and as one could not see the ceiling, it seemed that the ceiling did not exist either and that the clogs occupied the house up to the roof. There were still others that, not having been able to find their place, scattered here and there on the floor, paved the shop and definit-

ively gave the impression that the whole house, wall, ceiling, floor, was built of clogs.

. . .

"It is not you who made them all," one would say to Baptiste.

. . .

He would show with pride the labels which, stuck to the sole, on the inside of each of them, bore in printed characters these words:

. . .

Baptiste Dumont clog-maker at Champvallon

. . .

And in the middle of the shop, in a space he had kept for himself, surrounded by his equipment, his instruments and his pieces of wood, with a courage he never let diminish, he was busy making more.

. . .

Sometimes, with great blows, giving with his whole body, with the mallet and the iron wedges, he would strike the wood like a sledgehammer and succeed in splitting it. Sometimes, using the complicated tools of

the trades, having taken it at the right place, with a knowing turn of the waist, with a skilful turn of the arm, he would hollow it with firmness. Later, with a difficult gesture, with a sure gesture, with other tools still, he was at the delicate part of his work and did not give a single false blow. Sometimes he had the strength, sometimes the dexterity, sometimes the precision. His posture and his very life were determined by the necessities of making clogs. Never did he stand quite straight like men who, suddenly, raise their head, abandon their occupations and look into the street wondering: Let me see, where am I, and what is happening around me? He was at such a moment of his work, the only event that could occur was this: a pair of clogs had just been roughed out. He would move on to the following operation which consisted in hollowing them. He would go from one tool to the neighbouring tool, as one goes from one friend to another, having obtained from the last all the services he could render you. He frequented them as one frequents people, needing through them to be pushed along in the world. They were called a hachon, a paroir, an asciot, a cuiller, a butoir, a rasp, a ve. He knew them well. For each of them he had the posture one must have. He took them as one must take them. Some required that he lean, he leaned; others that he bend, he bent; when he sat down, it was not to rest from his work: it was that, to use such a tool, it was necessary that he be seated. He ended, besides, by receiving his reward. The result of a well-directed effort, the crowning of a thousand delicate cares, the reward granted to a scru-

pulous conscience was that two perfect clogs, making the pair, had just been completed in his hands. He would examine them on both sides, he would knock them one against the other, they gave a clear and full sound, comparable to the sound a fine silver coin gives. Then he would put them away among the others. For so long they had been the object of his movements, the companions of his hours, that one would have said they partook of his life, that they had passed through his organs and that they were still warm.

. . .

Such was the shop of Baptiste Dumont. Clogs have a first odour which is that of their wood. The shop had that bitter odour still vivid of freshly cut wood that the newly made clogs gave it, but it also had that wiser odour as if resigned of well-dried clogs that makes you think that trees after their death keep and that one might call an odour of sanctity. Clogs are made from walnut wood. The shop smelt of leaf, smelt of walnut, smelt of mould. An intimate and discreet atmosphere was hers, as if the walnut trees before disappearing had confided to the quarters that were to be drawn from their branches some memory gentle and almost extinguished. But that was very little. One may say that clogs have another odour. Clogs recall the clog-maker. What one breathed above all in the shop was the odour of his virtues. They were made of courage, of perseverance, of a great feeling of assurance, and amid those provincial

days that are crossed by no noisy event, one would have said they unfolded all along the hours until evening, then when evening fell after a long time, they seemed to fill the house. The clog-maker worked with such simplicity and devoted with so natural a feeling his whole life to his clogs that one understood at once that there existed a way of living that gave calm, balance and assurance.

. . .

The shop was full of this truth, it was full of truth. One practised a trade there because one must practise a trade. It was here a particular case: that of the trade of clog-maker, but from the shop came a broader teaching: that one worked there because man must work. It must be said that the shop smelt of good air, that it smelt of truth, that it smelt of health, that some gentle stir in its atmosphere brought you an odour of perfect life and gave you to think that you were made for it.

. . .

... And now we have left the widow's house, where, delivered over to time as a man to an endless illness, life, waiting for it to finish her, had lain down far from the light. We are going to leave behind us, and may we not recognise them if later we pass again through the places they occupied then, the feelings she heaped up so as to have a whole world to oppose to ours, so that her misfortune might be greater than our joy. We have left the

widow's house. We shall no longer walk on the roads that, starting from her door, led us into countrysides at the end of which the farms were situated so far from inhabited places that one dared many things there. We shall no longer follow the road home, when a woman and her son were no longer, the one a child, the other his mother, but in the human species two creatures declassed and plunged in beggary up to their necks. We are going to forget the winter that, seated on the other side of the fireplace like an old man of a hundred years, had lived beside the poor during days so long that it seemed they had reached his age.

. . .

We shall not however leave the little boy who, in the midst of a desolate life, had embraced silence as a career and who, having abandoned all that was not himself, seemed to wish to plunge his destiny into the bottomless waters of a mortal solitude. We shall not stop here the book of his life, and as in romantic times, when tears were loved, we shall not accept his young despair, and we shall not entitle the truthful account of his first years: History of Charles Blanchard, the Child of Misfortune. We wish to hear the sound of his voice. We shall have the patience to wait for long days still, very bitter no doubt, to make him forget a little of his woes. We shall have faith in the joy of living, we shall hope that it will rejoin those who had strayed from it or those from whom it had strayed. May we meet it at the end of these

pages! Wait still: it is someone who knows it who begs you. The blind have seen, more than one has heard, who no longer even wished to listen, and the child who for so long has been silent, wait a little: what if he were to speak to your ears, in a voice as clear as yours, and by the road of deliverance lead you into a country you knew poorly before he had shown it to you. What if we were to entitle this book: History of Charles Blanchard, the Laughing Young Man!*

. . .

It is not necessary to describe point by point, as had to be done when he lived with his mother, the life into which Charles Blanchard was drawn during the first days he spent with his uncle. We shall not make, as is ordinarily done in books, a portrait of Baptiste and Rose Dumont surrounded in their interior by all those objects and all that furniture amid which married people are at home and which, in households where there are no children, receive the care these would have received. Still less shall we go back to the village of Champvallon to see their house from a little higher and better place, among those of other men, their tastes, their habits and their labours. We shall not ask them for a detailed account of each of their daily actions. At what time did they rise? To what task did they devote the first part of their day? Of what foods was the menu of their meals composed? And in those provincial afternoons whose hours beneath a dull sky hang like enormous cumber-

some bunches of grapes, with what gesture did they pluck, one after another, heavy minutes? We shall not study the curtains and the mattress of the bed in which they put their nephew to sleep.

. . .

It was not their words Charles Blanchard heard, it was not in this bed rather than another that he lay down in the evening, it was not in rainy or sunny afternoons that he lived. When he ate cabbages, beans or potatoes, did he know what he was eating? Do daily actions exist for him? If he made a few gestures since he was not dead, one may say it was solely because of that. He did not contract habits, he did not acquire new tastes. It was not Champvallon he lived in. He did not see a single piece of the house's furniture.

. . .

As regards the particular case of Baptiste, we have no need to furnish a precise description of this man, and drawing him with a clear line, to distinguish him from Jacques or Thomas, clog-makers like him. We have no need, in painting a character, to attain that perfection which means that if he passed near you in the street, you would be able to recognise him among three thousand other passers-by. It was barely necessary to say, to fix a few details, what his trade was, and it was solely

for the convenience of the narrative that he had to be called by his name.

. . .

It was not beside a man of forty-five, with a beard already grey and wearing an imperial, somewhat stooped because clog-makers, to have more strength in their arms, give blows with the shoulder, it was not beside his uncle Baptiste Dumont who, in 1869, when he was a soldier, fighting in the Italian campaign, had received a bullet in the thigh at Solferino, that Charles Blanchard lived during the first days of his apprenticeship.

. . .

One would have said he lived beside a dragon. What monstrous beast, pouncing upon him suddenly, when he lived in his mother's house, had in a single blow devoured the thoughts that in a place for which he was made, he had taken twelve years to form? One would have said it had carried him off through the air. Where then had it set him down? It did not leave him. It seemed it had installed itself in the middle of the door, to guard every exit, and that it sent him full in the head the implacable feeling of its presence. The beast of labour that feeds on the flesh and blood of men and that, the better to bring them to the point, seizes them when

they are still children, had taken this one with fury. He lived beside it.

. . .

At first, Charles Blanchard could not get used to the shop. It was useless to leave him there during entire days and to watch him so that he would not escape, he still could not get used to it. It seemed he had been taken out of his natural element and plunged into another element for which he was not made. He choked at first like a man who has just fallen into water. His body had lost its weight, his feet their support, death surrounded his chest; with his two arms, he tried to keep it at a distance.

. . .

When he calmed down, the first surprise past, he was not yet where he thought he was. It now seemed he had been plunged into an incandescent atmosphere. To breathe the air of the shop was a task he would have wished not to have to accomplish. He went about it in several attempts, he tried to stop in its passage a flood of burning gas that rushed into his throat. He could not manage it. One might have believed that in his chest a whole enemy army, having entered by force, was burning a vanquished people upon enormous pyres. He felt full of blood and full of fire, and throughout the extent of his lungs, there was a series of explosions, as if the fire,

reaching into the depths, had reached, as in a city, the secret reserves where the powder is buried. He coughed as one explodes.

. . .

These were dreadful days. He surrounded with his two arms, to protect it, the poor creature that he was. He clothed himself in himself as a woman covers with a great embrace her sick child. It was worse still. He felt the pain stir beneath the hand he pressed upon it. He coughed, he coughed it. One could hear that cough. It made one think of those vain barkings that dogs address to the moon that threatens them, or, better still, of those great cries by which the dying, on their beds of agony, hope to awaken the pity of their god.

. . .

His eyes hurt. The shop had a vast window and drew its light directly from the sky. A great white daylight with which it was filled possessed it entirely, and between the four walls, occupying even the corners, a vigorous daylight with authority forced you to live under its law. It made one think of the sun itself, and, with its implacable arrow, full in the pupils, reached the child with such force that it was to be feared it would go through his head. He felt its burning as far as his nape. To close his eyes was not enough. He had two thin and transparent eyelids, he would have needed eyelids of lead. He had lived until

then in the dark room of Solange's house, it was night his eyes had received there, it was in shadow his body had developed, and whoever through his flabby flesh could have glimpsed its organs would no doubt have found them full of some matter such as one sees in cellars, whitish, soft and mouldy. His eyes hurt. Two inflamed eyelids veiled an eye raw and like some bloody ball. His eyes hurt more than hurt, for it seemed that the light, penetrating through them into the mysterious depths of his flesh, had reached the strange growths of the shadow. Disturbing fermentations swelled him, a swarming in his entrails was horrible and accompanied by a dull noise one could not bear and which made his aunt, turning towards him, sometimes shout at him angrily:

. . .

"Be quiet!"

. . .

For a long time he suffered from an intestinal disorder.

. . .

Scarcely four days had passed when one might already wonder, as after the twelve years of his childhood, that he was not dead. One could not write the

strange dialogue of the elements that, leagued against a child, were trying their power upon him.

. . .

The air said:

. . .

"I choke him."

. . .

And the light:

. . .

"I dissolve him."

. . .

Another comrade came to their aid.

. . .

Charles Blanchard was scarcely beaten down when a new companion was already seizing him and wished in his turn to try his strength. He came to know labour.

. . .

Charles Blanchard did not know what labour is. He quickly believed his uncle was mad. But how then did this man live? When he could have spent the days on his chair, he would get up, without one being able to imagine the cause. He was standing. The child was already examining him with distrust, but soon, when, seizing in his full hand one of the tools that surrounded him, Baptiste would examine its edge before using it, Charles Blanchard understood that he must not lose sight of him and that it was time to be on his guard.

. . .

. . . . . .

. . .

Many days were needed for him to have driven out death, more time was needed than one could believe. It was necessary that he transform himself drop by drop, that the poor blood that was his renew itself entirely. Medicine teaches us that it takes three years for a human body to modify its substance completely. For three years Charles Blanchard was still to feel misery within him.

. . .

He had not, besides, cause to rejoice during the first weeks of his recovery. Certainly, he was better. Past the first disorders of a sudden revolution, a peace some-

what sad no doubt had established itself in his body, one would have said he bore more than one mourning; but in the deep layers one was beginning to accept life already, such as circumstances imposed. The air of the shop was received without protest by submissive lungs. The light was accepted as a necessary evil. Certainly, he breathed, he was beginning to look around him at a world that no longer had that gesture of leaping at his eyes. But it was then that an enemy he had not had the leisure to think of until now advanced at his hour, and with that assurance that the feeling of royalty gives a king, presented himself straight before the child. Charles Blanchard had to learn to know labour.

. . .

. . .

. . .

The first labour Charles Blanchard undertook was accomplished in the following circumstances: The quarters of wood Baptiste used were piled to his left, within reach of his hand; one of them having fallen very close to his leg was going to hamper him in his movements. He addressed the child to say to him:

. . .

"Pick up this piece of wood for me and put it with the others."

. . .

Then as he had not had to be asked twice to accomplish this task, Baptiste showed him some clogs which, along the wall, on the floor, were lined up and said to him:

. . .

"Look at these clogs, they are not finished. This evening, when I have a moment, you will have to rasp them."

. . .

In the afternoon, Baptiste had a moment. To rasp clogs, one need only place them, set them on one's knees, take in both hands the instrument called a rasp and use it. Charles Blanchard, the first day, rasped four pairs of clogs without difficulty.

. . .

The next day, Baptiste had him blacken them. For this one uses, as a brush, a hare's foot that one dips in a black dye. It is an amusing task in the course of which one does not practise the trade of clog-maker, but another much finer: that of painter.

. . .

That was not all, besides, for a little later, Baptiste having to split his wood had driven in the iron wedges that must penetrate its mass. He was going to seize his mallet when he had an idea. He called his nephew to say to him:

. . .

"Take the mallet by the handle and strike as hard as you can on the wedges. We shall see your strength."

. . .

Labour lies in wait for men and awaits them at each of the moments of their rest. It had been enough that Charles Blanchard was obliged to remain in the shop. Labour at first put on some ceremony and approached him in the early days as if it had only wished to distract him, or else as if it had wished to be forgiven the unfortunate impression it had at first sight produced on him. Labour wished only his happiness. It even left him when it had gone a proud satisfaction.

. . .

"You see, you know how to do such a thing. You have rasped, you have blackened clogs. You know how to work now."

. . .

And for what the child did not yet know how to do, it prepared it for him like a delicate surprise.

. . .

"It will be better still when you can split wood like your uncle."

. . .

. . .

VARIANTS OF THE OTHER VERSIONS

. . .

THE MARKET

. . .

... He learned at once that the stomach is in man the essential organ, that by which he rises to the highest degree and reigns over all humanity with glory. And how powerful Charles Blanchard's stomach was! It seemed to him he could have eaten the vegetables as they were, all raw. He would have eaten the cabbages, he would have eaten the turnips, he did not know what tomatoes were, he did not wonder, although he was delicate, if he could get used to their taste: he would have made but one mouthful of them! He would have plunged his head into a basket of pears; he would have bitten, he would have

chewed, he would have swallowed, he would have gone on to the next basket. Nothing would have stopped him: not the spinach, not the salad, not the carrots; he who did not like cheese would sometimes turn around to face the row of cheeses and he would have eaten whole cheeses. All that the Market Square contained would scarcely have satisfied his appetite.

. . .

When he was on the Market Square, Charles Blanchard could not bring himself to leave. At most he would happen to move away from the vegetables and fruits to take a turn on the side of the poultry, but he did not possess very clear notions about meat, and moreover that of geese, hens and ducks was covered and hidden by feathers that had nothing tempting. He would quickly return to the spot he had left, not without having in passing given a glance at the pats of butter. He would have bet he could eat one without bread. But here are the first baskets of fruits and vegetables: it seemed to him he was returning to his homeland. He would approach them; when no one was looking, he would touch them a little with his hand that he swung, as if carelessly. He would walk, all surrounded by cherished friends, he would recognise them, he would send them his affection. Willingly he would have said to them: It is I, do you feel that I am here! Certainly he could not bring himself to leave. One does not know what he was waiting for. He was waiting for something: for an apple of its own ac-

cord to come into his mouth, for the peaches and grapes to begin walking at his side, for the old world to be set in motion, for Heaven and Earth to merge, for a revolution to occur suddenly; and he must not go away, for great events might happen during his absence.

. . .

. . .

THE WOODEN HORSES (I)

. . .

... There was more still, not all of it happened in his head. Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, the people who until then had had business, those who are always late, the girls who had gone to the dance to do a turn, the last inhabitants of the small town in a word, with the children, with the friends, with the people they had met on the way, came around the merry-go-round of wooden horses to take the place each has the right to occupy. They advanced, as people advance, with the need to go to the front row. A fairly large movement resulted from this, a surge as when new generations, pushing aside what hampers them, wish to make their place in the sun. It was then a matter of holding fast so that they could not dislodge you from the post you had long before them conquered. No one failed to do so. One even heard the sound of a few quarrels.

. . .

Charles Blanchard knew a feeling he had not yet experienced. Perhaps it would be fitting to call it respect or submission to destiny. Perhaps these words do not express it enough still. It was not before numbers, it was not before strength that he yielded. He could, besides, have taken advantage of the push that was given him, and, advancing a few steps, carried by the crowd, occupied the front row without even having done it on purpose. He was careful not to. He saw these ones coming, he saw those ones coming; they advanced with assurance, he felt that a great difference existed between them and him; with an attentive eye, before even they had settled in, he considered the spot they seemed to wish to choose. When they approached it, he would move aside obediently, abandon the ground to them and go a few steps further, into a corner, to take the place they had been good enough to leave him.

. . .

What could be foreseen even happened. Which is that before the growing crowd, from here to over there, then elsewhere still, settling successively everywhere there was no one whose place he could take, the moment came when he had but one single refuge, near a wall, there where a man even would not have wished to stay, for fear of being crushed. This last refuge was finally forbidden him when a band of young peasants

who had drunk a little came and planted themselves in front of him.

. . .

Charles Blanchard then occupied the place destiny had assigned him. He did not struggle. At no moment did it come to his mind that he could have fought as the others fought, and playing with elbows, head and knees, brought down in the human wall what was needed to let his body through. From the first blow, he was a vanquished one. So it was. In the thickness of the mass, not a crack, not a fissure, not a hole, the row of spectators held its post with the firmness of old soldiers guarding their country. It was not a matter of grieving over it, it was not a matter of wishing it were otherwise. So it was. The child would step back a few paces. He would cross his two small hands on his belly, and, legs apart, head straight, he would plant himself with solidity and occupy the place that had been assigned him. He would blink his eyelids, he would breathe, he would live, he would think. When he was weary of having crossed his hands on his belly, he would cross them behind his back. He occupied the last place with naturalness. He had two blue eyes, those eyes of children that are larger than those of men because they have not yet seen anything and they need to see many things. He contemplated the spectacle he was permitted to contemplate. The backs of the men were thick because many wore smocks, the skirts of the women were ample, there were no small children,

because their mothers placed them in the front row. Sometimes a broad wave, a surge of pleasure rushing from a corner would seize them all. The laughter of people enjoying themselves passed from each to each, one could see it circulate, it shook the shoulders of the men, it seemed that from one to another they passed it on, no one let it fall. Around the wooden horses it was an afternoon of gaiety. In the sky there was what was needed of clouds so that one might be in the shade everywhere. One abandoned oneself to the fine weather, one abandoned oneself to the wooden horses, to the day of the fair. In broad sheets, it seemed that happiness fell from the azure and spread over men some luminous joy in which they stood.

. . .

. . .

THE WOODEN HORSES (II)

. . .

After a moment, his mother came to see him. She touched his shoulder, he turned round; it was only she! She had given a sideways glance at the wooden horses. One does not know if it was them she had seen, perhaps she had noticed only a band of wooden beasts whose mixture, drawn into a great circular movement, turned with garish colours around a sort of gaiety that was

neither of her age nor of her condition. She leaned over the child, she told him all she knew:

. . .

"Come now, my little one, you can see that they are made of wood."

. . .

He did not answer. It was not true that the wooden horses were made of wood. The wooden horses were red, were green, were yellow. They did not resemble those wooden horses with which children play and then abandon anywhere, in a corner. They were more beautiful than the horses one knows, they had the real size, the size those should have so that one could mount upon their backs. Charles Blanchard was seven years old, he was at a very particular point in his life. He did not perhaps believe, but he willingly imagined that the wooden horses were beasts from another country that had been brought together and that walked one after another to make turn a beautiful merry-go-round, a beautiful gilded palace.

. . .

He did not even need resignation. The poor have received the grace of God.

. . .

He had that surprise one feels when one perceives that the truth is so simple. From the first blow his heart was made for it. It had few transformations to make when it settled there. A crowd of feelings, of themselves, grouped around it.

. . .

Truly, the merry-go-round of wooden horses was too beautiful for Charles Blanchard. It contained all the things one did not see at his home. In the morning the child had noticed only the horses. It contained other things still. One sees there mirrors, oriflammes, hangings, artificial flowers, fringes. The colours were dazzling, it would have been difficult to say if the merry-go-round was red or if it was gilded. The organ made one think of pianos.

. . .

Once, through the open window, the child had glimpsed the drawing room of Madame Leon Bonnet who was a very rich woman. There was a column lamp and double silk curtains. The merry-go-round made one think of that drawing room. The merry-go-round was comparable to palaces, the merry-go-round was comparable to drawing rooms one glimpses only through the window. Charles Blanchard had never set foot there, he would never have dared set foot there. He knew he was not made to cross their threshold.

. . .

There is then something singular to add. If someone at that moment had given him a sou, Charles Blanchard would not have believed he possessed what was needed to be admitted to mount the wooden horses.

. . .

Certainly, he went back to see them since they were there. Children cannot help going to see what exists. Perhaps he walked more slowly than he had done in the morning. No matter! He set off nevertheless. There was a merry-go-round of wooden horses in the town. Charles Blanchard had been created and brought into the world to contemplate it.

. . .

He noticed at once, besides, that he had been rather bold until then. He had rather considered the wooden horses as his property. He had run during a turn beside a great red horse that was the one he preferred, and he had touched it on the leg. And between two turns, when there are enough of those who descend to embarrass those who mount, he had mingled with the crowd of people who had the right to approach the merry-go-round.

. . .

. . .

THE WOODEN HORSES (III)

. . .

He was seven years old, he was at a very particular point in his life. He did not perhaps believe, but he willingly imagined that the merry-go-round was a great living creature with six mirrors at its centre, and that made beasts turn around its six mirrors. It was scarcely a pleasure for him. There was something to know here, there was a secret of nature to surprise. He watched the people, they were grouped by twos, by threes, by families, by masses, each horse had its rider. It was a matter of a thing worth taking an interest in. Men, women, children, no one uttered a word, each closed their eyes a little, each had seized the bridle of their mount; and with a serious air, with an attentive air, for this is how it happens in villages, they abandoned themselves to a happiness full of music. They seemed possessed entirely by a mystery whose revelation would never reach Charles Blanchard. A turn of wooden horses lasted three minutes. At the end of three minutes everyone descended. There were some who then took out their handkerchief and wiped their lips as when one has eaten with a full mouth.

. . .

At no moment did it come to his mind that he could have been in their place. He did not envy them. There is even something singular to say: Perhaps he no longer imagined that with a sou in hand he would have possessed what was needed to have a turn on the wooden horses. He watched attentively. He saw there children with whom he had played. Never had he seen them so well. They were not, as he had believed, his fellows. Their clothes were beautiful, their hands, their heads, their gestures, everything showed him that until now he had been mistaken about them. They had with the wooden horses a freedom that made you think they were accustomed to living with them. Sometimes they would sit backwards, and their faces turned towards the croup of their horse, they were deft, they were joyful, and behaved with pleasure as if they had long been its familiars. Other times they would sit like women. They could have fallen, but they did not fall; everywhere, in all positions, they were at ease, they seemed to have been created to mount the wooden horses. He contemplated their faces. Their eyes were not made like his, their cheeks were finer, their noses delicate, he could not take his gaze from them. Their heads held straight above their shoulders; if they gave you a glance, they gave it you from somewhat above. They were grave, simple in happiness, they resembled the rich one sees only in carriages, a word from them would have been a cause of pride for you. They were the masters, they were the warriors, they would have been those who command us. They looked noble.

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THE WOODEN HORSES (IV)

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... Those who mounted the wooden horses, besides, were not made in his image. He watched them attentively. Never had he seen them so well. There were children there with whom he had played. Until now he had been mistaken about them. Their clothes were beautiful, their hands, their heads, their gestures, everything showed him that until now he had been mistaken about them. He did not envy them, he admired them. Sometimes they did not mount in the way everyone else did, they would sit backwards, and their faces turned towards the croup of their mount, they were deft, they were joyful. They could have fallen, but they did not fall. Everywhere, in all positions, they were at ease, they seemed to have been created to mount the wooden horses. They lived, they went, they circulated among things in the midst of which Charles Blanchard felt he would have been lost. He contemplated their faces. Their eyes did not seem to him made like his. Their cheeks were finer, their noses delicate. He could not take his gaze from them. Their heads held straight above their shoulders; if they gave him a glance, they gave it him from somewhat above. He would not have dared speak

to them. They were the masters; they were those who command us, none could be compared to them. They looked noble.

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Perhaps one should use a terrible comparison. Charles Blanchard knew a feeling such as dogs know. He stayed here, because he had to be somewhere, but he stayed there gently, with timidity, and, his two arms pressed along his body, his legs aligned, his head a little low, so as not to take too much space, even in height, he diminished and lessened his presence. It was a feeling such as dogs know who possess no property in the sun and everywhere feel themselves in the property of others. He did everything he had to so that he would not be chased from it. He did not wait for people to have chosen their place; from as far as he saw them coming, he would move aside and offer them his. He was afraid of bothering those who were in front of him. Sometimes, for no reason, he would step back a few paces. Other times, however, he had a reason. Someone, without even seeing him, had cast a glance in his direction.

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--- *Variant: "the Consoling Young Man."