GEORGE SAND

The Devil's Pool and Other Stories

Translated by

E. H. and A. M. Blackmore and Francine Giguère

The Devil's Pool and Other Stories

SUNY series, Women Writers in Translation
Marilyn Gaddis Rose, editor

The Devil's Pool and Other Stories

by

George Sand

Translated by

E. H. *and* A. M. Blackmore
and
Francine Giguère

State University of New York Press

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

For information, address State University of New York Press,
90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207

Production by Marilyn P. Semerad
Marketing by Fran Keneston

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sand, George, 1804–1876.
[Short stories. English. Selections]
The devil's pool and other stories / by George Sand ; translated by E. H. and A. M. Blackmore and Francine Giguère.
p. cm. — (SUNY series, women writers in translation)
Includes bibliographical references.
Contents: The devil's pool — Lavinia — The unknown God.
ISBN 0-7914-6149-1 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-6150-5 (pbk. alk. paper)
I. Blackmore, E. H. II. Blackmore, A. M. III. Giguère, Francine. IV. Title. V. Series.

PQ2397.B56 2004
842'.7—dc22 2003060637

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Introduction

The Devil's Pool (La Mare au diable) has always been George Sand's most popular work. Scholars and specialists may have their own preferences; but with the general public, this book has always been the favorite. It is her *Gigi,* her *Ethan Frome,* her *Pride and Prejudice.* It is one of the few Sand works that continued to be read during the long drought when most of her books were neglected, and at the present day it retains its supremacy. At the time of writing, 117 editions of works by George Sand are available in France. No fewer than fifteen of them are editions of *La Mare au diable,* and one of those is the overall Sand bestseller.

This popularity is not hard to explain. No other work by George Sand contains so many of its author's characteristic merits packed into such a short space. *The Devil's Pool* occupies a central position in her output, both chronologically and thematically. It belongs to the middle years of her long career; it is early enough to have ties with her first novels, it is advanced enough to contain anticipations of those still to come, yet it is also firmly grounded in the concerns and interests of its own era. Here is George Sand the critic of conventional marriage and other established institutions. Here is George Sand the regional writer, the sharp-eyed observer of distinctive local customs. Here is the political George Sand, the opponent of injustice, the advocate of the underprivileged. Here is the George Sand of fantasy, fairy tale, and nightmare. Here, above all, is the George Sand who knows how to tell a story. Moreover, *The Devil's Pool* contains these attractions in an unusually concise form. Like so many popular favorites (*Gigi* and *Ethan Frome* among them)—and unlike so many of Sand's books—it has the advantage of brevity.

When it was written, its author was forty-one years old. She was born on 1 July 1804 and was named Amandine-Aurore-Lucie

(or Amantine-Aurore-Lucile) Dupin. Her family background was distinctly unconventional, and contains complexities of relationship that are difficult to express clearly; standard English was never designed to deal with such situations. Her grandmother, for instance, was the product of an illegitimate union between the illegitimate son of King Augustus II of Poland and the illegitimate daughter of a common prostitute. The novelist herself was barely legitimate; her parents married three weeks before she was born. Her father was a second cousin of the last three Bourbon kings of France (Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, and Charles X); her mother's father ran a tavern.

In September 1808 her father died; but the remainder of her early life seemed to proceed along stable lines. Her paternal grandmother raised her on the family estate at Nohant until 1818, when, in the time-honored manner, the girl was sent to a Parisian convent to complete her education. (The convent was the Couvent des Anglaises, and most of the staff were British; in that unlikely environment were sown some of the seeds that would come to fruition over a decade later in "Lavinia.") In 1820 she returned to Nohant and, again in the time-honored manner, began to receive visits from possible husbands and their families. In September 1822, after five months' acquaintance, she married Casimir Dudevant.

Dudevant was twenty-seven years old. He may have seemed superficially suitable, but he shared very few of his wife's interests. Moreover, like many young men in that environment, he had developed habits of heavy drinking and sexual promiscuity, which proved hard to break after marriage. Disharmony and drink sometimes led him to be physically violent, and that was not calculated to improve the situation. His wife dealt with the increasing conflict and isolation in the home environment partly by turning to other men for a salvation they could never really provide (as "The Unknown God," among other works, will observe), but partly by doing something more practical—withdrawing into the realm of her own imagination. Probably in the early months of 1829, she began to write stories. When, at the end of 1830, she finally broke with her husband and went to live in Paris, she was already starting to think of a career as a professional writer. During 1831 she published, sometimes anonymously, sometimes under various pseudonyms, a number of short pieces and a full-length novel, *Rose et Blanche,* written in collaboration with Jules Sandeau. Dur-

ing 1832 she published her first independent novels, *Indiana* and *Valentine,* under the pseudonym she was to retain for the rest of her career: George Sand.

In many ways her choice of occupation was a logical one. Novel-writing had long been a recognized, socially acceptable activity for educated women. Mademoiselle de Scudéry's *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649–53) and Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) attained European celebrity; closer to George Sand's own lifetime, there was the example of Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1819). Moreover, the demand for new novels was increasing, due partly to the increasing literacy of the general population, partly to the influence of Walter Scott (especially after the publication in 1823 of his *Quentin Durward,* with its French setting), and partly to social changes that made the old Classical novels seem outdated and unappealing. A new generation of Romantic writers was emerging. Their methods outraged the old and the conservative; such outrage led to conflict (notably in February 1830, at the first performance of Hugo's play *Hernani*), and such conflict attracted attention, and such attention was good for business. Consequently, publishers were eager to print works by young or youngish Romantics, especially controversial ones. *Indiana* and *Valentine* were issued in a world that had just seen the appearance of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* (*Red and Black,* November 1830), Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (March 1831), and Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* (*The Wild Ass's Skin,* August 1831). Within the next twelve months Balzac's *Le Médecin de campagne (The Country Doctor)* and *Eugénie Grandet* would also be available.

For marketing purposes nineteenth-century France recognized three categories of fiction. A *conte* (short story) was too short to be published on its own; it might be printed in a magazine (complete in a single issue), or it might form part of a collection in volume form. A *nouvelle* (novelette—but without the English term's pejorative associations) was just long enough to be published as a separate volume, and might also be issued as a short serial, running for about a month in a weekly magazine. A *roman* (novel) was generally published in several volumes, and might be issued as a long serial, running for three to eighteen months in magazine form.[1]

By the time she came to write *The Devil's Pool,* Sand was already the author of several dozen *contes* and *nouvelles.* No exact

number can be given, because it is impossible to say where, in her work, short fiction begins and ends. Is "Le Poëme de Myrza" ("Myrza's Poem," 1835) a story or a prose poem? Is *Lettres à Marcie* (*Letters to Marcie,* 1837) a *nouvelle* or a series of essays? Is *Aldo le rimeur* (*Aldo the Rhymester,* 1833) a story in dialogue or a play? Habitually she wrote what she wanted to write, without stopping to ask whether it conformed to any recognized literary genre.

In such a diverse body of work, different readers will have different individual favorites, but two of Sand's early stories have always elicited particular critical praise: "Lavinia" and "The Unknown God."

"Lavinia" was written in January 1833[2] and published two months later, in an anthology called *Les Heures du soir (Evening Hours)*. At that time it bore a French title, "Une Vieille Histoire" ("An Old Story"); but when it was reprinted in George Sand's own collection *Le Secrétaire intime (The Private Secretary)* in April 1834, it acquired the English title by which it has been known ever since: "Lavinia: An Old Tale." Few works by Sand, long or short, have been so consistently praised. When, in 1850, the world's most influential literary critic, Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, listed the works by George Sand that he personally regarded as masterpieces, "Lavinia" was the earliest name on the list.[3] When, half a century later, Wladimir Karénine issued the first volume of her classic critical biography, she described "Lavinia" as "the most delightful of all George Sand's delightful *nouvelles*. . . . It is one of the jewels in her crown. It is a story that can always be reread with pleasure. If ever a volume of her *Selected Works* is prepared, this little work, the product of such fine artistry, certainly ought to be part of it."[4]

"Le Dieu inconnu" ("The Unknown God") was written in January-February 1836[5] and published in September of the same year, in a two-volume anthology entitled *Dodecaton*. Among an unusually strong list of contributions—including works by Stendhal, Dumas, Mérimée, Vigny, and Musset—Sand's new story was given pride of place at the start of the first volume. Again Karénine's judgement is representative; she calls the tale "one of George Sand's most perfect works, in style, conciseness, and finish."[6] Like "Lavinia," it is written throughout with a concentration and sureness that may surprise readers of the more discursive longer novels. The keynote is struck firmly at the very start; the narrative

then sets off confidently, with a clear sense of direction; every paragraph brings it closer to its goal, and the conclusion, when it arrives, seems to have grown almost inevitably from the initial situation. Due to the stories' thematic concentration and absence of digression, Sand's criticism of current marriage customs may seem even more radical here than in her full-length novels of the same period ("Lavinia" was approximately contemporary with the original edition of *Lélia*, and "The Unknown God" with its revision).

La Mare au diable (The Devil's Pool) was written in four days at the end of October 1845.[7] Part of the first chapter appeared on 7 December in Pierre Leroux's socialist magazine *La Revue sociale,* where it was entitled "Préface d'un roman inédit" ("Preface to an Unpublished Novel").[8] The whole *nouvelle* was published serially in the magazine *Le Courier français* from 6 to 15 February 1846. In manuscript, and in serial form, it was divided into eight chapters; the definitive division into seventeen chapters first appeared when it was reprinted in book form, in May 1846. In other respects the text underwent no significant revision of any kind.

The work's quality was immediately recognized, both by professional critics and by the general public. The term "masterpiece" *(chef d'oeuvre)* was used by many of its earliest readers—including the painter Delacroix[9]—and reappeared later in (for instance) the classic essays by Sainte-Beuve (1850) and Zola (1876).[10] By November 1846 a schoolteacher named Charles Aubertin was reading the book to his classes "as a model of prose style."[11] This too was the beginning of a long tradition. The book's brevity and status as an acknowledged classic made it an obvious choice for school and university study, and it remains a familiar course text in France to this day.

The Devil's Pool was the culmination of Sand's work in short fiction; she wrote few *contes* and *nouvelles* afterwards. During the late 1840s, she became increasingly involved in the theater and added a successful career as a dramatist to her work as a novelist. From that time on, any short or medium-length story tended to receive dramatic rather than fictional treatment. The only significant exceptions were the late-period *Contes d'une grand-mère (Tales of a Grandmother),* written for her granddaughters, and published between 1873 and 1876; but those little narratives obviously belonged to a different genre, and they required radically different approaches and techniques from adult fiction.

The true successors of "Lavinia" and *The Devil's Pool* are to be found not in the children's stories but in the stage plays of her final phase.

Modern editions of *The Devil's Pool* customarily contain not only the story itself, but also two later documents: Sand's "Notice" ("Prefatory Note") completed on 12 April 1851 for an illustrated edition that was published the following year, and her essay on local marriage customs, "La Noce de campagne" ("A Country Wedding"), completed on 24 March 1846 and published serially in *Le Courrier français* very soon afterwards, from 31 March to 6 April. Sand linked the essay loosely to the tale by presenting it as an account of the rituals observed at the wedding of Germain and Marie, while stressing that it formed no part of the story, which was complete in itself. "*The Devil's Pool* has already been narrated to you in full," she wrote to the editor of *Le Courrier français;* "so slender a subject didn't require any expansion. But as I told you, I've now succumbed to an impulse to describe the strange wedding rites observed by my local countryfolk. . . . The only merit of this little study is the interest that those curious customs may possibly arouse."[12] A short essay written a few months earlier than *The Devil's Pool,* "Les Mères de famille dans le beau monde" ("Mothers in Fashionable Society"), is also loosely related to the story (it is particularly relevant to the Dance of Death motif and the presentation of Widow Guérin), and has a further point of kinship with "A Country Wedding" in its lightly fictionalized mode of presentation; it too has therefore been included in the present volume.[13]

To provide the two earlier stories with a comparable supplement, we have selected Sand's much-admired "Lettre à M. Nisard" ("Open Letter to Monsieur Nisard"). This was written shortly after "The Unknown God," during the third week of May 1836;[14] Nisard's critical essay on Sand's novels had appeared in the *Revue de Paris* on 15 May, and the novelist's reply was published in the same journal on 29 May. Although it is overtly concerned with the novels that Nisard had been reading, it has just as much relevance to "Lavinia" and even more to "The Unknown God," which shares many of its themes (for instance, like "The Unknown God," it presents the teachings of Christ not as a bulwark for the marriage customs of nineteenth-century France but as a challenge to them). Not surprisingly, Sand herself thought highly of it, and she used

it as the conclusion of her 1837 book *Lettres d'un voyageur (Letters from a Traveler)*.

The present volume, then, includes not only the stories "Lavinia," "The Unknown God," and *The Devil's Pool,* but also the four nonfictional or semifictional pieces that are most directly related to them. We have placed those pieces in chronological sequence within the body of the volume itself, partly because the opening lines of "A Country Wedding" are designed to follow immediately after *The Devil's Pool,* and partly so that the development of Sand's art can be traced by any readers who wish to do so.

There is no room in a general introduction for a comprehensive examination of stories as many-sided as these, and, after all, Sand is not so incompetent at her chosen profession that she needs to have her creations explained by someone else. We must, however, say a few words about one aspect of her work that cannot be reproduced in translation—her prose style.

Perhaps Jules Lemaître hit on the most distinctive feature of George Sand's style when he described it as "easy."[15] That is certainly the feature that stands out if you set a page by Sand against a page by any of her contemporaries. One way or another, they all give the impression of laboring at their work. Balzac labors like a sculptor grappling with a recalcitrant block of granite, Flaubert like an etcher adding fine details under a magnifying glass. But Sand never seems to labor. Phrase follows phrase, sentence follows sentence, without the slightest hint of strain or effort. There are no jolts or surprises—either for good or for ill. (As Lemaître says, there is no "finesse or extraordinary brilliance.") Zola makes the same point: "Nothing ever catches your attention—neither a picturesque adjective, nor a novel turn of phrase, nor an odd juxtaposition of words."[16]

That may make Sand's style sound neutral or nondescript. In reality it is nothing of the kind; as Zola also observes, it is utterly "personal." In fact, it reflects its author's celebrated disregard for established conventions—when they are mere conventions. She won't dress her prose in the orthodox frills and flounces, any more than she will dress herself in such things. She won't submit to the literary rules laid down by the Académie Française, any more than she will submit to the social rules laid down by the French aristocracy. This doesn't mean that she will go out of her way to write "badly" ("badly" by the Académie's standards); but

neither will she go out of her way to avoid doing so. Of one such lapse she writes, "This grammatical fault has, I am told, attracted notice; but I think one should put into workers' mouths the turns of phrase that are most natural—even when they are incorrect; even when, in an emotional crisis of an exceptional kind, the characters are instinctively speaking (and thinking) in a more elevated way. After all, in ordinary life the most educated people commit hundreds of grammatical faults every day—and very rightly so."[17] Observe that last phrase. On occasions—"hundreds . . . every day"—it is not only permissible to break the rules, but "very right" to do so.

In another essay she explains "why I don't allow my publishers to correct my punctuation. . . . I don't believe that it should be determined by grammatical rules, I maintain that it should be more elastic, without any absolute rules. There are hordes of good textbooks on punctuation. You should read them, you should (when necessary) consult them, but you shouldn't abjectly submit to them. 'The style is the man,' goes the old saying. Punctuation is much more the man than style is." She illustrates this in detail, showing how different people will punctuate their speech and writing differently depending on their character, and how even one person (the actress Rachel, for instance) may punctuate differently at different stages of life. Indeed, one of the things that sets the good writer apart from the rulebook writer is a willingness to punctuate the same sentence construction differently in different contexts: "There are places where the text shouldn't be cluttered with punctuation, and other places where no mark of punctuation should be omitted. It becomes a matter of taste, and that's why I don't allow any absolute rules. For instance, in a dialogue between two people of different characters, I'd have them use different punctuation as well as different phraseology. In a rapid narrative I wouldn't allow many breathing-spaces, and even in a basic expository passage, I wouldn't chop into separate sentences what is merely a single mass of phrases contributing to a single idea." Therefore, she tends to punctuate more lightly than most of her contemporaries, using a comma where the rule book would demand at least a semicolon, or leading an idea forward fluidly with a semicolon where her male colleagues would end it emphatically with a period. Finally, noting the relation between language and social status, she suggests that many of the existing

middle-class rules will probably be eroded as more and more people from lower socioeconomic groups become literate. "I have no authority to simplify the rules of language, but I think they will simplify themselves by the admission of the so-called illiterate classes into the mainstream of bourgeois society—which is already far from rigidly homogeneous in terms of French usage." But won't the country's great writers themselves incite everyone to throw off the tyranny of the rule book? "Alas, no—not while there are guardian academies of the dead letter, and while every writer wants to belong to them!"[18]

And indeed none of the stories in this volume is written entirely in Académie French. Each of them has its own linguistic quirks and peculiarities. "Lavinia" is strewn with Briticisms, "The Unknown God" with Biblicisms, *The Devil's Pool* with the provincial idioms of Sand's native Berry. There is a great writer's love of language in this, but there is something deeper too. In "A Country Wedding," looking back at the characters of *The Devil's Pool,* Sand makes the following comments: "These people speak a dialect that may be too French for us; since the days of Rabelais and Montaigne, the progress of the language has lost us many of its old riches. That's the way with any form of progress, and we simply have to make the best of it. However, it's still a delight to hear those picturesque turns of phrase thriving in the ancient soil of central France—all the more so, because they really suit the good-natured placidity and entertaining garrulity of the people who use them." Sand sees orthodox modern French—Académie French—as a constrained and impoverished language. Society has erected a set of arbitrary rules and imprisoned itself within their borders. Thus the writer's use of idioms from other times (Rabelais, Montaigne, the Scriptures) and other places (Berry in *The Devil's Pool,* England in "Lavinia") serves a crucial purpose: it demonstrates that there is value ("treasure") beyond society's rule books. Moreover, the "true expression" of a people's character is to be found in that people's language, and may not necessarily be communicable in some other tongue. The privileged status of Académie French disadvantages underprivileged social groups (rural peasants, women) in two ways. First, such people can't speak the Académie's language (they don't have the proper education); and secondly, even if they could speak it, it might not provide them with any "true expression" of their particular needs and difficulties.

Similar points were made by several writers in Sand's circle. In his 1856 "Réponse à un acte d'accusation," Hugo argues that conventional language acts as a force of social control by restricting what may be said. If there are pigs in power and whores on the streets, you are not allowed to say so, because society decrees that the words "pig" *(cochon)* and "whore" *(catin)* are impolite. You can express your complaint only in roundabout, euphemistic ways that underplay the extent of the problem and indeed misrepresent its nature. So the underprivileged remain underprivileged, while power remains in the hands of those who have written the rule book.[19] But perhaps the matter was never put more crisply and expressively than it was by Sand herself. The Académie, she wrote, "is a relic of literary feudalism."[20]

Sir Henry and Sir Lionel, in "Lavinia," are among the privileged few. The rule book was designed for their convenience, and they know exactly how to abide by it. ("In matters of love Sir Lionel was an accomplished hero. His heart may have been false to more than one infatuation, but his visible conduct had never departed from the proprieties.") Moreover, they speak a language that Sand prefers, on the whole, to her own. French, she thinks, "derives too much from a dead tongue, Latin"; it tends to favor the old ways, "it generates ornamental phrases too easily," it is ill adapted for a modern society. English may have its disadvantages (which she notes), but at least it "gets to the point."[21] So she relishes Sir Lionel's and Sir Henry's forthright Anglicisms, their cries of "dash it" and "for God's sake spare me," even while she mocks them. Speech is freer and more direct in Belgrave Square than in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; England has no dictators in its recent past and no academicians in its present. Yet Sir Henry and Sir Lionel are the prisoners of its rule book, even so. In the presence of their social inferiors they are secure. As long as Lavinia is an inferior (a nonaristocrat, a foreigner, a woman), as long as she hasn't learned the rule book's language, English gentlemen can "tease her mercilessly about her foreign accent and faulty turns of phrase." (Compare Germain in *The Devil's Pool:* "God have mercy on me, I'm so clumsy—whenever I try to say what I think, it always comes out all wrong!") But the new Lavinia is no longer an inferior. She has learned the rules (she is now "speaking remarkably pure English," which Lionel finds "more in accordance with his ideas—more in accordance with society"); yet she

refuses to be bound by those rules (there is, we are told, a touch of un-English "originality" in her speech). That originality—it colors, of course, not only her speech, but also her actions—is what defeats her male persecutors.[22] Nothing in their culture or education has equipped them to handle it. They remain trapped within the very rules that were designed to assist them.

"The Unknown God" shows us a similar situation. Social constraints and inhibitions perpetually keep the well-bred Leah from joining the Christians; her African slavewoman, by contrast, is free to participate fully in the new faith as soon as she wishes to do so.

Sand's prose does not go out of its way to flout convention. She writes with a serene indifference to the rule book, not with an entrenched hostility to it. She is not seeking to overthrow her society; she feels that its problems are more likely to be overcome quietly, by indirect means, than by overt opposition. Revolution, or even the imposition of reform laws on a reluctant country, is not her goal. (To take one example, she does not believe in giving the women of 1848 the right to vote. Society is not yet ready for it. "Before the status of women can be transformed in such a way, society itself has to be radically transformed."[23]) Change, in her view, is best achieved from within, not imposed from without.

This is seen most strikingly in the conversations between the illiterate farmhands of *The Devil's Pool*. Germain and Marie do not utter lower-class rural French; as Sand herself says at the start of "A Country Wedding," they utter a middle-class urban translation of it. (A contrast may be drawn with some of her plays, which contain much closer imitations of regional dialect.) At first glance the effect may seem disappointingly tepid. Yet a more attentive reading will show that the middle-class urban conventions—the Académie conventions—are repeatedly being subverted by sly minor unorthodoxies of punctuation, syntax, and vocabulary. The prose of "Lavinia" and "The Unknown God" could be analysed in similar ways. Sir Henry and Sir Lionel do not speak in the dialect of the British aristocracy, Pamphilus and Eusebius do not speak in that of the Bible; they speak essentially in Académie French, but an Académie French occasionally disrupted with Briticisms or Biblicisms. For some readers at least, the effect is curiously unsettling—perhaps even more unsettling than a more overtly adventurous literary style might be; a single *ain't* in an otherwise respectable scholarly monograph may be far more disruptive, and

have a much greater impact, than any number of *ain'ts* in an avant-garde novel. Nearly all of the time, Sand lulls her middle-class Parisian audience into a sense of security with familiar, unchallenging words and familiar, unchallenging sentence constructions; but occasionally she strikes a jarring note, and then we realize that she is heedless of the rules rather than subservient to them. Nearly all of the time, she is content to wear a crinoline; but she wears it because she wishes to wear it, not because society tells her to do so, and occasionally she will choose to wear something else instead.

The narrative of *The Devil's Pool* shows us, in microcosm, how such unobtrusive acts of independence may lead to social change. The little society of that story fosters the flirtations of the widow at Fourche, and allows the molestations of the farmer at Les Ormeaux, but its rule book opposes the marriage of Germain and Marie. That rule book, of course, has never been written down; but it is more powerful than any written document, because it is ingrained in the very hearts of the people—including Germain and Marie themselves. Mere legislation could do nothing against it; the government far away at Paris could pass any number of laws permitting people like Germain and Marie to marry, and the community at Belair would not be affected at all. (The story clearly shows us how remote Belair is even from Fourche, let alone from Paris.) Revolutions and counterrevolutions could overrun the country, Napoleons and Robespierres could arise and vanish, and life at Belair would remain the same. Yet the rule book is not the only thing ingrained in the local inhabitants' hearts; their hearts also contain forces that might be called "natural"—forces that are embodied in the Devil's Pool, and that are heard in the chance utterances of children who haven't yet learned the rules. Most of the time, those forces and the rule book get along harmoniously enough; but occasionally—it happens in this story when Germain and Marie are in the woods together—they clash. Then the rule book tries to deal with the forces of nature by ascribing them to the devil, or by prescribing certain social rituals to defuse them ("You mustn't come near it unless you throw three stones in the water with your left hand and make the sign of the cross with your right"), or both. The story doesn't reply by simply glorifying the forces of nature. Those forces aren't inherently good, any more than they are inherently devilish; it depends what you choose to

make of them. If Germain were a different sort of person, or if Marie were a different sort of person, the tale would proceed in a different direction; the chapter "Despite the Cold" shows us that. If Germain were like the farmer at Les Ormeaux, or if (on the other hand) he were so rigid that he could suppress his impulses altogether, then the rule book would not be challenged, and no social change would happen. But put a certain kind of person in a certain kind of situation, and the forces of nature *do* challenge the rule book—challenge it, sometimes, so persistently and effectively that they gain a little victory over it. At the end of the story, life at Belair seems to be going on exactly as it was at the start. No revolutions have happened, no demagogues have arisen, no laws have been enacted or amended. Perhaps the local inhabitants don't even realize that any change has happened. But a change *has* happened; a rule has been quietly broken; and a precedent has been set for other people to break it too. The rule book will never be quite the same again. And next generation, perhaps, another situation will arise, and another rule will be broken . . .

Moreover, the tale itself is designed to encourage a similar kind of change in the minds of its middle-class Parisian readers. Like the story it tells, the tale operates unobtrusively, from within society rather than in overt opposition to society; many of its readers may be unaware, or only dimly aware, that their preconceptions are being challenged at all. After all, it attacks a prohibition that is no prohibition for its readers; in middle-class Parisian society, teenage Maries *do* marry twenty-eight-year-old Germains, and nobody feels the slightest concern. Yet the prohibition has been craftily chosen. In itself it seems trivial, but it draws on two issues that are far from trivial. It indirectly reminds its readers that the lower classes do not share their own advantages (in a community where a man's average life expectancy is about fifty years, Germain is already a senior citizen); and it indirectly rouses one of the most universal and emotive of all social taboos (Marie has been entrusted to Germain in loco parentis, which gives the encounter at the Devil's Pool a hint of incest).[24] Similar comments could be made about the story's subsidiary elements. The widow at Fourche and the farmer at Les Ormeaux pose no direct challenge to the reader; no Paris ballroom would accept such people for a minute. Yet their behavior is not altogether unlike patterns of behavior that are extremely common in middle-class Parisian

society (compare the widow in the novel with the "Mothers in Fashionable Society" whom Sand had contemplated a few months earlier). Here and elsewhere, the characters of *The Devil's Pool* are kept at a distance from the reader—but not at a safe distance.

Sand's influence on the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot, and Henry Handel Richardson has often been discussed. Her influence on the stories of E. Nesbit has been less frequently remarked; yet perhaps it goes just as deep.

Nor are her challenges directed only at nineteenth-century middle-class Parisians. Mindless conventions exist in every society, and her work is a perpetual incitement to live independently of them. Therefore, her stories are not mere milestones in the history of progress, pleas that have lost their relevance because the social reforms advocated by them have now taken place. No rule book or law code will resolve the conflicts they dramatize. They demand not simply a new method of supporting those in financial need, but a greater humanity in our dealings with our neighbors; not simply a revision of the marriage laws, but a return to the standards of Christ—which in some respects may offer an even more radical challenge to modern sexual customs than to nineteenth-century ones! Thus we cannot sit back comfortably and applaud Sand for aiming her shafts at our ignorant and unenlightened forebears. She is aiming at us too.

Her strategy commonly affects readers in a way that may be seen from Sainte-Beuve's famous essay. Sainte-Beuve pronounces *The Devil's Pool* "a little masterpiece," a "charming idyll"; in its central chapters he finds "a succession of delightful, exquisite scenes, which have no match or model in any idyll, either ancient or modern." He is utterly enthralled with it. Clearly, he doesn't consciously recognize that the little parable offers any opposition, or even any challenge, to his own beliefs and standards. Yet subconsciously he is not entirely at ease. He keeps looking over his shoulder to assure himself that the proper cultural stereotypes are being observed: "Germain, like all men—even the strongest and bravest ones—is impatient by nature; Marie, like all virtuous women, is patience personified." And so on. The opening chapter gives him a few moments of apprehension: "It always worries me when I see a philosophical idea used to advertise a novel." (He means, of course, an idea that conflicts with his own. When writers advocate ideas that conform to his own, he is never conscious

that any special advocacy is happening at all—as a glance through his *Causeries* will readily illustrate.) He breathes an audible sigh of relief when the philosophizing stops and the storytelling begins. In the narrative too there are things that fleetingly unsettle him: "In the chapter after 'Evening Prayers,' which is entitled 'Despite the Cold,' there was a moment when I was afraid that an annoying stroke of clumsiness might spoil the purity of the composition." But after all (he reminds himself) life is like that; "coarsenesses"—rapes and seductions—do happen and can't always be overlooked; and anyhow in this particular instance no harm is done: so he recovers his balance and goes on his way, without ever getting quite clear in his mind whether he has been disturbed by the possibility of an evil in society or of a misjudgement in a work of art.[25] In effect, he reads the tale in a way that excises its subversive elements and turns it into something less critical of nineteenth-century orthodoxy.

Indeed, the stories' quiet challenge to society does not always, or even often, succeed. Usually, instead of changing the world, they are changed by the world—changed into something more conventional and more convenient. That would not have surprised their author; on the contrary, it is exactly what she would have expected. Subtle destabilizations—visits to the Devil's Pool—have different effects on different readers; as we observed before, it depends what you make of such things. Change will occur only when a reader has (like Germain) both the sensitivity to feel that the rule book is being challenged and the integrity to avoid brushing the challenge aside in some socially acceptable way. That is a rare combination; and that, Sand would have said, is why change is always a slow process.

The Devil's Pool describes itself not as a "study of concrete reality," but as a "quest for ideal truth." It stands in close relation to life, but it is not life; like many literary works of its era, it is, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, a "criticism of life." Its author keeps her eyes attentively on the way things are; its backdrop is modeled closely on the "concrete reality" of her local region, its characters behave very much as the people of her local region do behave; a steady stream of narratorial comments keeps reminding us of that ("countryfolk don't eat fast"; "there's a strong tradition of purity in some rural districts"; "in true country fashion, they were going to answer his questions with other questions"). But *The Devil's Pool*

is not a photograph of the way things are; it is an exploration of the way things could, possibly, be. With regard to the way things are—with regard to "concrete reality"—Sand is as unillusioned an observer as Balzac himself. She offers no happiness for Lavinia or, except at death, for Leah; the happiness of Marie and Germain is won only with difficulty, and only in an environment "remote from the corrupting influence" of the urban privileged classes—an environment which the storyteller locates in the realm of "ideal truth" rather than "concrete reality" (though she also shows that such an ideal is no mere daydream—that it is closely tethered to the practicalities of life in certain real, and concrete, human communities). She has sometimes been regarded as a naïve optimist, someone who refused to face facts and looked at the world through rose-colored spectacles. In fact her writings proclaim no extravagant hope and promise no imminent millenium. Her portrait of life is an unglamorous one, and all the more strikingly so because it is presented so serenely.

When translating Sand's work, it is customary to conform to the conventions of standard English in punctuation, syntax, and vocabulary. This is understandable; our language is not hers, and any attempt to imitate her prose in a foreign tongue would be foolish. In the following translations, however, we have ventured to depart from the tradition, and have occasionally introduced a forbidden punctuation mark or a nonstandard sentence construction that may suggest something of her own techniques. Nevertheless, we fully realize the dangers of this policy, and have endeavored to be cautious: she would wish us to subvert, not to rebel. The publishing industry has become more standardized in the two centuries since she wrote; the modern style manual imposes much greater uniformity than the nineteenth-century Académie was able to do, and leaves less room for individual variation. What present-day mainstream novel or history book is punctuated and paragraphed as idiosyncratically as Hugo's *Les Misérables* or Michelet's *Histoire de France?* Thus our departures from the rule book have had to be more sparing than hers; otherwise they would have looked like attempts at revolution rather than destabilization. In particular, the application of regional dialect is a delicate task. As Rosemary Lloyd has wisely remarked, "Any such venture risks, at best, being misleading, and at worst making the characters appear ridiculous."[26] All previous translators rendered the

Berrichon passages of *The Devil's Pool* into standard English throughout, and probably with good reason; the works of so notorious a woman had to be made respectable before they could gain a hearing in the English-speaking world, just as the operas of Mussorgsky had to be purged of their idiosyncrasies before they could gain acceptance in Western opera houses. Nevertheless we think that today, when international travel is becoming more frequent and information is more freely exchanged across the globe, local dialects are starting to lose some of the ridiculousness noted by Lloyd. Not everyone now laughs at a Jewish or Cockney accent; John Clare's poems no longer have to be dressed in a suit and tie when they appear before the public; there is a growing belief that the citizens of New Delhi or Port Moresby are not committing any crime if they write a different English from those of Mayfair or Manhattan. And if it is misleading to give Germain and Marie the regional idioms of an Anglophone farming district, it may be even more misleading to transpose their dialogue into urban middle-class language without providing (as Sand herself does) an occasional reminder that the transposition *is* a transposition, and that in real life their speech would be neither urban nor middle-class. Readers who find the result unsettling may wish to consider why they are unsettled by it. And readers who do not find it unsettling may wish to consider whether they are doing what Sainte-Beuve did, and unconsciously editing away George Sand's subversiveness while they read.

Lavinia (1833)

An Old Tale

LETTER

"Dear Lionel,

"Now that you're getting married, don't you think it would be proper for us to return each other's letters and portraits? We can do it easily enough, since chance has brought us so close—after ten years spent under different skies, here we are only a few miles apart. I'm told you come to Saint-Sauveur from time to time; I'm staying here only a week.[1] I hope, then, that you'll be here in the next few days, with the little packet I want. I'm at the Estabanette just below the waterfall. You could bring it to the bearer of this letter; she will give you in exchange a similar packet, which I've already prepared to hand over to you."

REPLY

"Dear Madam,

"The packet you instructed me to send is here, securely sealed, with your name on it. No doubt I ought to be flattered that you were so sure I'd have it with me whenever and wherever you might choose to ask for it.

"But do I need to go to Saint-Sauveur myself, Madam, and place it in the hands of some third party who will return it to you? You yourself don't feel that it would be wise for me to have the pleasure of seeing you; why, then, should I go to the place where

you're staying, and expose myself to the emotion of being so close to you? Wouldn't it be simpler and better for me to give the packet to a messenger I can trust, who could take it from Bagnères to Saint-Sauveur? I await your instructions on this point; whatever they may be, Madam, I shall submit to them without question."

LETTER

"Dear Lionel,

"I found out that you happen to have my letters with you just at present, because my cousin Henry said you told him so when he met you at Bagnères recently. Still, I'm very pleased to find that Henry wasn't lying to me; like all gossips, he doesn't always tell the truth. I asked you to bring the packet to Saint-Sauveur in person because such documents shouldn't be exposed to unnecessary danger in these mountains; they're infested with smugglers who steal everything they can lay their hands on. I know you're just the man to protect a valuable parcel bravely, and I'd feel safest if you yourself were the guardian of this particular one, as it's a matter of some interest to me. I didn't offer to meet you because I thought the procedure I told you to follow was unpleasant enough, and I was afraid to trouble you still further. But since you seem disappointed with it, I'm perfectly happy to meet you; I do owe you that small compensation. I don't want to make you waste valuable time waiting for me, so I'll specify a day when you can be sure to find me. Please be at Saint-Sauveur at 9 P.M. on the fifteenth; call at my residence, and send word to me by my Negro maid. I'll return at once. The packet will be ready. Farewell!"

Sir Lionel was disagreeably surprised by the arrival of this second letter. It caught him just as he was planning a trip to Luchon; the fair Miss Ellis, his betrothed, was expecting him to escort her there. It was sure to be a delightful trip. At a watering place, pleasure parties are almost always successful, because they follow each other in such rapid succession that nobody has time to prepare for them. In such situations life moves on swiftly, suddenly, unexpectedly; and the constant arrival of new companions gives a party an improvised air—even in the most trivial respects.

Sir Lionel, therefore, was enjoying himself at the watering places in the Pyrenees—as far as a true Englishman may enjoy himself without any breach of decorum. Furthermore, he was rather in love with Miss Ellis's opulent figure and comfortable dowry; and his defection on the eve of so important a cavalcade (Mademoiselle Ellis had ordered from Tarbes a very fine dapple-gray Bearnese horse, whose fine points she proposed to display at the head of the party) might spell doom for his matrimonial prospects. He was in an embarrassing position, though. He was a man of honor, and of the most punctilious kind. He decided to put this moral dilemma to his friend Sir Henry.

Henry was a lighthearted creature, however; and so, in order to gain his full attention, Sir Lionel began by picking a quarrel with him.

"You great ninny and tattler!" he exclaimed as he entered the room. "A fine thing you did, telling your cousin I was carrying her letters about with me! You never could manage to keep a secret! You're an absolute running stream—the more you receive, the faster you flow. You're like one of those open-ended vases on statues of naiads and river gods; water just passes straight through, it never stops for an instant—"

"Bravo, Lionel!" cried the young man. "I do like to see you in a fit of temper; it makes you so poetic. At a time like this you turn into a running stream yourself—a river of metaphors, a torrent of eloquence, a reservoir of allegories—"

"It's no laughing matter," snapped Lionel angrily; "we're not going to Luchon."

"Not going! Who says so?"

"I say so. Neither you nor I will be going."

"You? Oh, you can do whatever you like. As for me, however, I'm much obliged to you, but I must disagree."

"I'm not going, and therefore it stands to reason that you're not going either. You've made a blunder, Henry, and it's your job to set it right. You've caused me a terrible disappointment; your own conscience will tell you that you should help me to bear it. You'll be so kind as to dine with me at Saint-Sauveur."

"Devil take me if I do any such thing!" exclaimed Henry. "You remember the little girl from Bordeaux I had such a laugh about yesterday morning? Well, I've been madly in love with her ever since last night. She's going to Luchon, so I intend to

go; she'll ride my Yorkshire, and she'll make your big chestnut Margaret Ellis simply burst with jealousy."

"Look here, Henry," said Lionel earnestly, "are you my friend or aren't you?"

"Of course I am; it's a well-known fact. But it's no use going into hysterics about friendship just at the moment. I can see where this solemn start is leading; you're trying to browbeat me—"

"Now listen to me, Henry. You're my friend; you're pleased when things go well for me; and I'm sure you wouldn't readily forgive yourself if you caused me an injury—a genuine misfortune."

"Good Lord, no; but what on earth are you talking about?"

"Well, Henry, you may quite possibly have caused my marriage to fall through."

"Nonsense! That's sheer lunacy! Just because I told my cousin that you had her letters, and she's asking you to return them? What influence can Lady Blake have over you nowadays? Why, it must be ten years since either of you gave the other a moment's thought. You can't be conceited enough to think that she's never got over your desertion! Come now, Lionel, this is carrying remorse too far! You didn't do as much harm as all that! I mean, it wasn't as if she had no compensations—"

While he spoke, Henry nonchalantly glanced at the mirror and adjusted his tie; two actions that, in the time-honored language of pantomime, are easy enough to interpret.

Sir Lionel didn't enjoy getting a lecture on modesty from a man more conceited than himself.

"I don't care to indulge in any reflections on Lady Blake's conduct," he replied, trying to suppress his annoyance. "No feeling of wounded vanity will ever lead me to blacken any woman's reputation, even if there's no love lost between us."

"My own case precisely," declared Sir Henry without thinking; "I've never been in love with her, and if she's shown more partiality for some of the other fellows, I've never been jealous of the fact. Anyhow, it's not for me to cast aspersions on the virtue of my wondrous cousin Lavinia, since I've never made any serious attempt to conquer it."

"That's been very kind of you, Henry; she must be much obliged to you!"

"Come, come, Lionel, what are we talking about? What did you really come here to say to me? Yesterday you seemed to have little enough regard for the memory of your first love; you were

absolutely prostrate at the feet of the radiant Miss Ellis. Where are you today, if you don't mind? You don't seem capable of listening to reason on the subject of the past, and you're talking of going to Saint-Sauveur in preference to Luchon! Come now, just which one of them is to be your true love and bride?"

"Miss Ellis is to be my bride, if it should please God and you."

"Me?"

"Yes; you can get me out of this scrape. For a start, look at this latest note your cousin has written me. . . . You've done? Splendid. You see, I must choose right away between Luchon and Saint-Sauveur—between a woman to be won and a woman to be comforted."

"Just a moment, you impudent dog," exclaimed Henry; "I've told you a thousand times that my cousin is as fresh as a daisy, as pretty as a picture, as sprightly as a bird, blithe and blooming and bonny and something of a flirt. If that girl is in the depths of despair, may I suffer the like sorrow myself and never get over it!"

"Don't think you're upsetting me, Henry; on the contrary, I'm delighted to hear it. But in that case, can you tell me what strange caprice has caused Lady Blake to insist on meeting me?"

"My dear nincompoop," cried Henry, "don't you see that it's all your own fault? Lavinia hadn't the slightest desire to meet you; I'm quite sure of that, because when I mentioned you to her, and asked her if her heart didn't quicken now and then at the sight of a riding party on the road from Bagnères (which might include you, you see), she replied in a tone of complete indifference, 'Oh, I can just imagine my heart quickening at the sight of *him!*' And she gave the most delightful little yawn as she uttered the last words—now don't bite your lip, Lionel—one of those pretty little, cool little feminine yawns, so graceful that they seem almost like a delicate caress, and so long drawn out that they seem the absolute epitome of apathy and unconcern. And instead of making the most of her excellent disposition, you have to go around uttering fine sentiments. In the true and perpetually touching spirit of a discarded lover (even though you're jolly glad you *are* one), you have to strike the pose of being sorry you're not going to see her, instead of telling her straight out that you're thoroughly grateful she's letting you off—"

"That would be too impertinent for words. How could I tell she was going to take a bit of conventional small talk so seriously?"

"Oh, that's Lavinia all over; that's her way of making mischief. I know what she's like!"

"These females and their eternal mischief making! But I don't agree; Lavinia was never a tease—she was always the sweetest girl in the world; I'm positive she can't be looking forward to this meeting any more than I am. Look here, Henry, do get us both out of this mess; take the packet and go to Saint-Sauveur and fix the whole thing up yourself; make her see that I couldn't possibly—"

"Forsake Miss Ellis on the very eve of your wedding, eh? That's a fine excuse to offer a rival! Can't be done, my dear fellow; you got yourself into this pickle, and you must get yourself out of it. When a man is fool enough to keep a girl's picture and letters for ten years, and scatterbrained enough to boast about it to a tattletale like me, and rash enough to strike clever sentimental poses in a coldblooded farewell letter, he must suffer the consequences. While Lady Blake's letters are still in your possession, you're not entitled to refuse her anything; whatever method of communication she may demand from you, you must simply submit to it—until the solemn obligation has been carried out. Come on, Lionel, call for your pony, and let's be off; I'll go along with you. I daresay I've been a little to blame in this matter, and as you can see, I do put joking aside when a wrong has to be righted. Off we go!"

Lionel had hoped that Henry would find some other way to get him out of his predicament. For a while he lingered where he was, motionless and dismayed, rooted to his place by a secret irrational hope of somehow resisting Fate's decrees. At last, however, he rose, sad and resigned, with his arms crossed. In matters of love Sir Lionel was an accomplished hero. His heart may have been false to more than one infatuation, but his visible conduct had never departed from the proprieties. No lady ever had cause to reproach him for any act at variance with the refined and generous condescension that is a well-bred man's supreme sign of indifference toward a woman scorned. The handsome Sir Lionel was conscious that he had been scrupulously faithful to these rules, and he therefore found it easy to bear the troubles inevitably associated with his triumphs.

"Here's a stratagem," exclaimed Sir Henry, also rising. "Everything in this place is decided by the coterie of our fair compatriots; and the mightiest powers in that council of Amazons are Miss Ellis and her sister Anna. We must get Margaret to postpone

tomorrow's outing till the following day. Just at present a day is a good deal, I know; but we have to get it somehow—find some important excuse that prevents us from going. Then we can set out tonight for Saint-Sauveur. We'll be there in the afternoon; we'll rest till evening; at nine o'clock, while the rendezvous is taking place, I'll have our horses saddled and ready; at ten o'clock (I can't think it will take more than an hour to exchange two packets of letters) we'll mount and set off; we'll ride all night; we'll be here at daybreak; we'll find the fair Margaret champing at the bit on her noble steed, and my pretty little Madame Bernos prancing restively on her Yorkshire; we'll change boots and horses, and, covered with dust, worn out with fatigue, consumed with love, pale and interesting, we'll follow our Dulcineas over hill and dale. If such ardor doesn't meet its just reward, all women ought to be hanged to teach them a lesson. Come along; are you ready?"

Lionel, filled with gratitude, gave him a bear hug. An hour later, Henry returned.

"Let's be off," he said; "everything's settled; the Luchon trip has been put off till the sixteenth. It wasn't easy, though. Miss Ellis had her suspicions. She knows my cousin is at Saint-Sauveur; and she has the most awful aversion to my cousin, knowing what a fool you made of yourself over her. But I managed to get her off the scent pretty cleverly. I told her you were dreadfully ill, and I'd just forced you to go to bed—"

"Good God! It's sheer madness! It could be my downfall!"

"No, not at all! Dick will put a nightcap on your bolster, set it in your bed, and order three pints of herbal tea from the housemaid. What's more, he'll keep the bedroom key in his pocket and station himself in front of the door, with a long face and dismal eyes; and I've told him not to let anyone in—he's to flatten everyone who tries to get past him, including even Miss Ellis. Ah, here he is already, getting your bed into shape. Splendid! He's put on an excellent face; he's trying to look sad, and he's actually looking stupid. Let's go out through the valley gate. Jack can take our horses out to the ravine, as if for exercise, and we'll meet up with him at Lonnio Bridge. Come along, on our way, and may the god of love protect us!"

They soon crossed the area between the two mountain chains, and didn't slacken their pace until they reached the narrow dark gorge running from Pierrefitte to Luz, which must surely be one

of the grimmest and most remarkable places in the Pyrenees. Everything about it has a forbidding look. The mountains converge, the Gave contracts and runs with a dull roaring sound beneath archways of rock and wild vines; the black cliffs are covered with climbing plants whose brilliant green shades off into blue toward the horizon and gray toward the heights. The running water, like seawater, reflects them in hues ranging from limpid green to drab slate blue.

Immense marble bridges sweep in a single span from mountain to mountain, with chasms beneath them. Nothing can be more impressive than the shape and situation of those bridges, launching out into space and hanging poised in the moist pale air that seems to fall regretfully down the ravine. The road swings from one side of the gorge to the other seven times in the space of ten miles. When our pair of travelers crossed the seventh bridge, they could see the beautiful Luz valley bathed in the rays of the rising sun at the bottom of the gorge as it spread out gradually before them. The wayside mountains were so high that not one shaft of sunlight yet reached them. Dippers were uttering their plaintive little cry in the grass beside the stream. The cold and frothy water was struggling to raise the veils of mist that fell across it. Toward the heights, a few meager lines of light were starting to gild the crags draped with clematis. But in the distance of that rugged landscape, beyond the immense masses of rock as black and bleak and harsh as one of Salvator Rosa's favorite scenes,[2] the lovely valley, bathed in glittering dew, wavered in the light like a sheet of gold within a black marble frame.

"What a lovely sight!" exclaimed Henry. "I do pity you for being in love, Lionel. You don't appreciate all these magnificent things; you think the loveliest shaft of sunlight can't match one smile from Miss Ellis's lips."

"You must grant, Henry, that Margaret is the prettiest creature in the whole United Kingdom."

"Yes, from a theoretical standpoint she's a flawless beauty. And that's exactly my objection to her. I'd like her better if she were less perfect, less majestic, less classical. I'd prefer my cousin a thousand times over, if God gave me the choice between them."

"Don't be absurd, Henry, you don't mean a word of it," said Lionel, with a smile; "you're blinded by your family pride. Anyone who has eyes in his head can see that Lady Blake's beauty is, to say

the least, a doubtful commodity. I knew her when she was in her absolute prime, and I assure you, there could never be any comparison between them."

"I quite agree. But think how graceful and kindhearted Lavinia is! Her eyes are so bright, her hair is so lovely, her feet are so dainty!"

Lionel amused himself for some time combating Henry's admiration for his cousin. He enjoyed praising his current love, but he also felt a secret pride when he heard a defense of his former inamorata. It was a passing touch of vanity, nothing more; poor Lavinia had never really reigned in his heart, which had been spoiled by easy conquests from a very early age. Perhaps it can be a real misfortune for a man to be pushed into the limelight too soon. An untried judgement may well be misled, and an inexperienced mind may well be corrupted, if women worship him blindly and their foolish rivals are vulgar enough to be jealous.

Lionel had known the happiness of love too often, and his heart had lost its vitality; he had exercised his passions too early in life, and was no longer able to feel any deep-seated emotion. His handsome, manly face and youthful, vigorous features concealed a heart as cold and worn out as an old man's.

"Tell me, Lionel, why didn't you marry Lavinia while she was still Miss Buenafè? If she became Lady Blake, it was entirely your fault. I don't mean to be a rigid moralist, and I'm quite willing to advocate our sex's inalienable right to do as we please; but when I ponder your conduct, I can't say I altogether approve of it. After courting her for two years, compromising her as much as it's possible to compromise an English young lady (which is no small feat in the blessed realm of Albion), and causing her to reject some extremely eligible offers, you leave her in the lurch and go running after an Italian opera singer—who certainly didn't deserve the honor of inspiring such a crime. Wasn't Lavinia pretty enough and witty enough? Wasn't she the daughter of a Portuguese banker—admittedly a Jew, but a rich man all the same? Wasn't she a good match? And wasn't she madly in love with you?"

"Why, my dear fellow, that was the very problem: she loved me so much that I couldn't possibly have made her my wife. Any man of sense will tell you that one's lawful spouse ought to be a calm and gentle helpmeet, English to the core, not overly susceptible to love, incapable of jealousy, fond of peace and quiet, and

sufficiently addicted to black tea to keep her faculties in a conjugal state of mind. With that passionate, active Portuguese girl, constantly on the move ever since early childhood, exposed to lax morals and free-thinking notions and every dangerous idea that a woman can pick up while traveling the globe, I should have been the most wretched of husbands—and possibly the most laughed at. That love affair spelt inevitable disaster for me from the outset, but for a good fifteen months I simply wouldn't see it. I was so young in those days—I was only twenty-two; remember that, Henry, and you won't be inclined to condemn me. But I did open my eyes in the end—just when I was about to commit the signal folly of marrying a woman madly in love with me—I stopped short on the very brink of the chasm, and fled in order to avoid succumbing to my own weakness."

"Humbug!" said Henry. "Lavinia told me a very different story. According to her, you were already tired of your poor Jewess long before your heartless decision to run away to Italy with Rosmonda; she could feel only too deeply how weary you were in her presence. Not that Lavinia tells the tale in any spirit of self-glorification, I must say; she paints her unhappiness and your heartlessness more artlessly and modestly than any woman I've ever known. 'Frankly, I was boring him,' she says in her own peculiar way. I tell you, Lionel, if you'd heard her utter those words with all the artless grief she puts into them, you'd be feeling the lash of remorse: that I'll wager."

"Ah, but haven't I felt it!" cried Lionel. "What makes a fellow sick of a woman, more than anything else? Everything you have to suffer on her account after you leave her. Middle-class morality is howling fire and brimstone; your own conscience is too jittery by half; countless vexing memories keep haunting you; and the poor cast-off creature herself keeps gently reproaching you (in the very mildest and most hurtful terms) through Rumor's myriad mouths. Dash it, Henry, I don't know anything more wearisome and drearisome than this business of playing the ladykiller."

"Don't I know it?" Henry replied in a chivalrous voice, with the little swagger of conceited irony that was his trademark.

But his companion didn't deign to smile. He kept on riding slowly, letting the reins dangle on his horse's neck, and gazing wearily at the delightful scenes spread out beneath him in the valley.

Luz is a little town about a mile from Saint-Sauveur. There our dandies halted. Nothing could persuade Lionel to press on to Lady Blake's residence; he installed himself at an inn and lay down until the hour appointed for the rendezvous.

Luz has a much cooler climate than the Bigorre valley;[3] but even so, the day was hot and oppressive. Sir Lionel, lying on a tenth-rate inn bed, noticed a few feverish twitchings, and then fell asleep—with some difficulty, thanks to the buzz of the insects that whirled about his head in the burning air. His companion, being more active and more fancy-free, explored the valley, paid visits to all and sundry, watched the parties of travelers riding on the Gavarnie road,[4] saluted any fair lady he saw at her window or in the street, made eyes at the young Frenchwomen (to whom he was distinctly partial), and eventually returned to Lionel around nightfall.

"Come on, up you get!" he cried, pulling back the serge curtains. "Time for your rendezvous!"

"What, already?" asked Lionel, who was just beginning to sleep comfortably, thanks to the cool evening air. "What time is it, Henry?"

"At the close of the day, when the hamlet is still,
And naught but the torrent is heard on the hill,"
Henry declaimed in oratorical tones.

"Oh, for God's sake, spare me your quotations, Henry! I can see for myself that it's getting dark and silent, that the sound of the stream is carrying to us more clearly, and so on; but Lady Blake isn't expecting me till nine. Surely I can have a bit of sleep in the meantime."

"No, Lionel, not another minute. We'll have to go to Saint-Sauveur on foot. I had our horses sent there this morning; the poor creatures are tired enough as it is, to say nothing of what they still have to do. Come along, put your clothes on! Nice work! At ten o'clock I shall be at Lady Blake's door on horseback, holding your palfrey and handing you the reins, just as our illustrious Will used to do outside the theater when he was reduced to the position of stableboy.[5] Come along, Lionel; here's your portmanteau—a white cravat—some wax for your mustache. Gently does it! Oh! Such negligence! Such apathy! Do give some thought to the matter, my dear fellow! Why, it's an absolute crime to appear carelessly dressed before a woman you no longer love! No; you

need to present yourself at your very best, I tell you, so that she can appreciate the full value of what she has lost. Come now, brush your hair even more carefully than you would if you were going to open the ball with Miss Ellis. Splendid! I'll brush your coat for you. What's this! Don't tell me you've forgotten to bring the essence of tuberose to sprinkle on your handkerchief! That would be utterly inexcusable. No, here it is, thank God! There you are, Lionel, all scented and shining; off you go. And do remember, this is your farewell appearance on Lady Blake's horizon; you're honor bound to bring tears to her eyes."

While they were passing through the village of Saint-Sauveur, which consists of fifty houses at the most, they were amazed that no people of fashion could be seen in the streets or at the windows. But they understood that curious phenomenon when they passed a house from whose windows came the discordant sounds of violin, flute, and *tympanon* (a local cross between French tambourine and Spanish guitar). The noise and dust informed our travelers that a ball had begun, and that all the most fashionable members of the French, Spanish, and English aristocracies were crammed into a little white-walled room embellished with garlands of box and thyme, and were dancing to the strains of the most execrable out-of-tempo cacophony that ever deafened mortal ears.

A few groups of "bathers"—those whom either lack of opulence or genuine ill-health robbed of the pleasure of taking an active part in the evening—were crowded about the windows, where they peered enviously or satirically over each other's shoulders at the ballroom and exchanged occasional commendatory or malicious remarks, while they waited for the village clock to strike the hour when every convalescent must retire to bed or else lose the "benefit" of the mineral waters.

As our two travelers were passing one of these groups, there was a jostling motion toward the window; Henry tried to join the onlookers, and heard these words:

"There's that pretty Jewess Lavinia Blake getting up to dance. They do say she's the best dancer in Europe."

"Come here, Lionel," exclaimed the young baronet; "come and see how charming my cousin is, in that lovely outfit of hers."

But Lionel angrily and impatiently pulled him by the elbow and dragged him away from the window, without deigning to glance in that direction.

"Come along," he said, "we're not here to watch a dance."

Yet he didn't move away quickly enough to avoid hearing another remark thrown off in the vicinity.

"Oho!" said someone. "That handsome Comte de Morangy has asked her to dance."

"Who else, I'd like to know," another voice replied.

"He's altogether lost his head over her, I've been told," remarked a third speaker. "He's done for three horses and I don't know how many grooms already—all on her account."

Pride is a strange adviser; it makes us flatly contradict ourselves a hundred times a day. In reality Sir Lionel was delighted to know that Lady Blake had a new attachment to keep her independent of him. And yet the discarded woman seemed to be enjoying public triumphs that could make her forget the past; and this was a kind of insult that Lionel found hard to swallow.

Henry, who knew the neighborhood, guided him to the edge of the town, where his cousin was living. There he left him.

The house stood a short distance apart from the others. On one side it abutted onto the mountain; on the other it overhung the ravine. A few paces away, a torrent was falling noisily into a cleft in the rock; and the house—bathed, so to speak, in that wild cool sound—seemed to be shaken by the falling water, as though it was on the point of tumbling into the chasm too. It was one of the most picturesque locations that could have been chosen—and Lionel recognized that Lavinia's romantic and somewhat quirky nature had been at work there.

An old Negro woman opened the door of a small drawing room on the ground floor. Light fell on her glistening, leathery face, and instantly Lionel let out a cry of surprise. She was Lavinia's old nurse Pepa, whom Lionel had seen for two years in the company of his love. He wasn't on guard against his emotions; the unexpected sight of that old woman roused memories of the past and, for a moment, threw him into confusion. He nearly rushed up to hug her and call her "nurse" and treat her as an old friend and faithful servant, as he used to do in the golden days of his youth; but Pepa stepped back a short distance and gazed at Lionel's eager face in bewilderment. She didn't recognize him.

"Dear me! Have I really changed so much?" he thought.

In a faltering voice he declared, "Lady Blake sent for me. Didn't she tell you?"

"Oh yes, sir," replied the woman; "my lady is at the ball; she told me a gentleman was to call, and then I was to bring her her fan. Wait here please, and I'll go and tell her."

The old woman started to look for the fan. It was on a marble table next to Sir Lionel. He handed it to her; and after she left, his fingers still smelt of its fragrance.

The perfume worked on him like a charm; it stirred his senses to the quick, and made his heart quiver. It was Lavinia's favorite perfume—a kind of aromatic herb grown in India; her clothes and furniture always used to be steeped in it. That scent—the scent of patchouli—was itself a whole world of memories, a whole lifetime of love; it emanated from the first woman Lionel had ever really loved. His vision wavered; his pulses throbbed violently; a cloud seemed to pass in front of his eyes, and within the cloud was a girl of sixteen, dark and slender, lively and gentle—Lavinia the Jewess, his first love. He saw her pass, swift as a doe, skimming through the heather, speeding through her game-stocked paddocks, riding her black hackney through the swamps; as light-hearted and passionate and capricious as Diana Vernon[6] or some blithe fairy of the Emerald Isle.

Soon he grew ashamed of his weakness; he recalled the weariness that had blighted that love affair—and every other. He looked back with philosophic sadness on the ten down-to-earth sensible years that now separated him from those days of pastoral and poetry; then he looked into the future—a future of parliamentary fame and a brilliant political career in the guise of Miss Margaret Ellis (who herself appeared in the guise of her dowry); and finally, with the skeptical eye of a disillusioned lover and a thirty-year-old man at odds with social life, he looked around the room in which he was waiting.

At a Pyrenean watering place you live in simple lodgings; but floods and avalanches damage many houses each winter, and their decorations and furnishings have to be replaced or restored in springtime. Lavinia's hired cottage was built of unpolished stone with pinewood paneling inside. The wood was painted white, and was as bright and crisp as stucco. A multicolored rush mat woven in Spain served as the carpet. Snow-white dimity curtains caught the moving shadows of the firs, which were tossing their dark foliage in the night wind, beneath the moon's watery gaze. There were a few small vases of varnished olive wood, filled with the

prettiest wildflowers from the mountains. Lavinia had picked them herself, in the most isolated valleys and on the loftiest peaks: nightshade with its scarlet interior; monkshood with its sky-blue crest and poisonous calyx; pink and white campion with its delicately crenellated petals; pallid soapwort; bellflowers as translucent and pleated as muslin; purple valerian—all the wild daughters of solitude, so fresh and fragrant that the chamois fears to crush them even by brushing against them, and even the most idle, silently flowing rivulets unknown to the hunter scarcely bend them.

The little white scented room did indeed have an air of unwitting assignation about it; yet it also seemed a shrine of pure and virginal love. Its candles lit it timidly; its flowers seemed to veil their bosoms modestly from the light; no woman's garment, no touch of coquetry, had been left behind on its furniture; only a bouquet of withered pansies and a torn white glove lay side by side on the mantelpiece. Impelled by an irresistible impulse, Lionel picked up the glove and crumpled it in his hands. It felt like the cold, mechanical grip of a final farewell. He picked up the odorless bouquet, contemplated it for a moment, reflected bitterly on the flowers that composed it, and abruptly threw it down. Had Lavinia deliberately left it there so that her former lover would notice it?

Lionel moved over to the window and drew aside the curtains; the sight of nature might perhaps distract him from the emotion that was steadily taking hold of him. It was an enchanted scene. The house stood in solid rock, and seemed like a bastion jutting out from an immense perpendicular wall of boulders, with the Gave lashing at its foot. On the right was the cataract falling with a furious roar; on the left was a clump of fir trees leaning out over the chasm; in the distance was the valley, faintly illuminated by the moon. A big wild laurel was growing in a cleft of the rock; its long shiny leaves reached all the way to the windowsill, and the breeze made them rustle, so that it seemed to be saying something mysterious.

While Lionel was engrossed in contemplating this scene, Lavinia appeared; the torrent and the wind were making so much noise that he hadn't heard her. She stood behind him for a while, presumably composing herself and perhaps wondering whether this was indeed the man she had loved so much; although the situation had been planned beforehand and its emotions could

be foreseen, she still felt as if she were dreaming. She could remember a time when she would have dropped with anger and grief at the mere sight of Sir Lionel. Yet there she now was, mild and calm and maybe indifferent. . . .

Lionel turned instinctively and saw her. He wasn't expecting what he saw, and he let out a cry; then, ashamed of such a breach of the proprieties and embarrassed of his own emotion, he pulled himself together and tried to greet Lady Blake in an impeccably well-bred manner.

All the same, in spite of his best endeavors, he did feel an unforeseen awkwardness, an uncontrollable agitation; and it paralysed his usual cleverness and frivolity—the easy complacency that he could always toss into circulation and hand around like a gold coin to anyone who happened to be present, when the laws of courtesy demanded it. On this occasion, rebellious as he was, he couldn't utter a word. He simply stood there staring enthralled at Lady Blake.

He hadn't expected to find her so beautiful; that was the trouble . . . She had been sadly changed—quite heartsick—when he left her. Her cheeks had been wasted with tears, her figure had grown thinner with sorrow; her eyes had been lifeless, her hands dry, her dress careless. The poor foolish creature, she had let herself get ugly in those days. The only part of a woman that grows more beautiful under suffering is the heart; but she hadn't considered that. And most men would quite happily deny—as a celebrated council of Italian prelates once did—that women have souls. But she hadn't considered that, either.

At present, however, Lavinia was radiant with the renewed beauty that women regain when their hearts haven't been irreparably wounded in early youth. She was still thin and pale and Portuguese-looking, with slightly bronzed skin and a rather austere profile; but her face and her manners had acquired all the charm, all the caressing grace, of a Frenchwoman's. Her restored health and tranquillity had given her dark skin a velvety texture; her slender form had regained its youthful flexibility; her hair, which she had cut off in the old days as a sacrifice to love, now flourished in all its splendor, tumbling in thick swirls over her smooth brow. She was dressed in a gown of India muslin. In her hair she wore a spray of white heather picked from the ravine—no plant is more graceful; looking at its delicate strands swaying

against the black hair, you would have said they were clusters of living pearls. Her simple dress and hairstyle were exquisitely tasteful; they revealed a woman's ingenious coquetry by the fact that they concealed it.

Never had Lionel seen Lavinia look so alluring. For a moment he was on the brink of falling at her feet and asking to be forgiven; but the calmness of her smile helped him regain the bitterness that is so necessary if such an interview is to be handled with every appearance of dignity.

Not being able to find any appropriate phrases, he took a carefully sealed packet from his breast pocket and put it on the table.

"As you see, Madame," he said in a self-assured voice, "I've obeyed you like a slave. May I hope that I'm now to be given my freedom?"

"I believe, Sir Lionel," Lavinia replied with an air of somewhat melancholy playfulness, "that your freedom hasn't been too tightly chained so far. Have you really remained in my fetters all this time? I must confess I hadn't flattered myself with any such thought."

"In heaven's name, Madame, this is no time for jesting! Don't you think this a sad occasion?"

"It's an old custom," she replied, "a conventional ending, an inevitable stage in all love stories. If people realized, when they wrote to each other, that one day they'd have to extract their letters from each other so warily—but no one ever thinks of that. At the age of twenty we write with such absolute confidence in the eternal vows we've exchanged; we cast a pitying smile on all the commonplace passions dying around us; we're arrogant enough to think that we alone will be exempt from the universal law of human frailty! A noble error, a lucky form of conceit, which creates all the glories and illusions of youth! Wouldn't you say so, Lionel?"

Lionel was too bewildered to speak. Perhaps it was natural for Lavinia to utter such sadly philosophical words; but he had never seen her like this, and it seemed to him a blatant self-contradiction. When he had first encountered her, she had been a frail young girl plunging blindly into all the errors of life and yielding herself trustfully to every tempest of passion. Even when he had left her shattered by grief, she had still kept vowing eternal devotion to the man who was causing her sorrow. So it was a frightening, painful thing to see her now sentencing all her past

illusions to death. She had outlived herself; and she wasn't afraid to deliver the funeral oration on her own life. It was a profoundly depressing sight, and Lionel couldn't witness it unmoved. He could find nothing to say in reply. He knew better than anyone all the things that might be said in such a situation; but he didn't wish to help Lavinia along the road to suicide—he didn't have the courage. In his embarrassment, he simply kept fidgetting with the packet of letters in his hand.

"You know me well enough," she said, "—or rather, I mean you remember enough about me—to understand that I'm not reclaiming these tokens of former affection for any of the prudential reasons that commonly influence women when they fall out of love. If you have any suspicions of that sort, I need only remind you that they've been in your hands for ten years, and never once have I thought of getting them back from you. I should never have decided to do any such thing, if it hadn't been for the fact that another woman's peace of mind might be jeopardized by the existence of such documents—"

Lionel watched Lavinia closely, looking for some slight touch of bitterness or grief when she thought of Margaret Ellis; but he couldn't detect even the subtlest change in her expression or tone of voice. She seemed to have become invulnerable.

"Has the creature turned into diamond—or ice?" he silently asked himself.

"If that's your only motive," he said aloud with a mixture of gratitude and irony, "you're being very generous."

"What other motive could I have, Sir Lionel? Will you kindly tell me that?"

"If I wished to question your generosity, Madame (which God forbid!), I might assume that you could have personal reasons for wanting to retrieve these letters and this portrait."

"It would be a little late in the day for me to start thinking of that," said Lavinia, laughing; "to be sure, if I told you that I'd waited till this late hour to have 'personal reasons' (as you call them), you'd be overcome with remorse, wouldn't you?"

"You're putting me in a very awkward position, Madame," said Lionel.

He uttered the words quite calmly; he was back on home territory now. He was ready to deal with reproaches; he'd been expecting them. But the enemy changed her tune on the spot,

and he wasn't able to make use of his advantage. She answered him with such a friendly smile that he hardly recognized her; he had known only the passionate side of her nature.

"Come now, my dear Lionel," she said, "don't be afraid that I'll misuse this little opportunity. I've gained a certain amount of sense with the years; and I've long understood that you can't be blamed for what happened to me. I'm the one to be blamed—in relation to myself, in relation to society, and perhaps in relation to you. When a pair of lovers are as young as we were, the woman ought to be the man's guide. She ought to use her influence over him to help him retain his position in the world, instead of leading him astray by giving him false, impossible hopes for the future. I had no sense of the right thing to do; I placed thousands of obstacles in your way. I was—unwittingly, but still unwisely—the reason for all the howls of disapproval that were hurled at you. I even had the agony of seeing would-be avengers threatening your life; I tried to disown them, but they rose up against you nonetheless. I was the torment of your youth and the curse of your manhood. Do forgive me; I've well and truly made atonement for the harm I did you."

Lionel was more and more bewildered. He had gone there like a man on trial, who is forced to stand in the dock against his will; yet she was treating him like a judge and humbly asking for mercy. Lionel had been born with a kind heart, though the blast of the world's vanities had blighted it in its bloom. Lady Blake's generosity touched him all the more because he wasn't prepared for it. Overcome by the beauty of the character thus revealed to him, he bowed his head and bent his knee.

"I never understood you, Madame," he said in an altered voice; "I didn't appreciate your true value; I wasn't worthy of you, and I'm ashamed of that."

"Don't say such things, Lionel," she said, offering him her hand; "I was a very different person in the days when you knew me. If I could live the past over again, and be courted now by someone with a social position like yours—"

("The little hypocrite!" thought Lionel; "Comte de Morangy, the fine flower of the French nobility, is in love with her!")

"—And if I could settle the public, outward life of the man I loved," she went on without any show of pride, "I might possibly be able to add to his good fortune instead of trying to destroy it."

("Is this an overture?" Lionel wondered, utterly at sea.)

In his bewilderment he pressed Lavinia's hand fervently to his lips. He looked at it as he did so. It was a remarkably fair and dainty hand. Often a woman starts life with red, swollen hands; only later do they become longer and paler and more graceful.

The more he looked at her and listened to her, the more new merits he found in her—and the more perplexed he became. For instance, she was now speaking remarkably pure English. In the old days Lionel used to tease her mercilessly about her foreign accent and faulty turns of phrase, but she now preserved only enough of them to add a touch of elegant originality to her phrasing and pronunciation. The prouder and wilder side of her character might now be concentrated in the very depths of her soul; outwardly, at least, there was no longer any sign of it. She seemed less forthright, less flamboyant, perhaps less poetic than she had been; but in Lionel's eyes she was now far more attractive; she was more in accordance with his ideas—more in accordance with society.

What can I tell you? After an hour's conversation, Lionel quite forgot the ten years that had separated him from Lavinia—or rather, he forgot the whole of his life; he felt as if he were in the presence of some new woman, and in love with her for the first time. When he looked back at the past, he recalled a sullen, jealous, demanding Lavinia—and, especially, a Lionel who was guilty in his own eyes. Lavinia herself could see how painful his memories might be, and she was tactful enough to be extremely careful when alluding to them.

They told each other what had happened to them since their separation. With sisterly impartiality Lavinia asked Lionel about his new romance; she spoke highly of Miss Ellis's beauty; she seemed genuinely interested in the young lady's character and in the advantages that her former friend might gain from such a marriage. For her own part, she gave a disjointed but amusing and lively account of her travels, her friendships, her marriage to an elderly nobleman, her bereavement, and the use she had since made of her money and her freedom. There was a distinct touch of irony in everything she said; she bowed in homage at the shrine of Good Sense, but her mocking tone suggested a hint of secret bitterness at the rule of that imperious goddess. But the main feelings evident in that early-ravaged heart were

compassion and kindness, and they gave it a touch of nobility that set it apart from any other.

More than an hour had elapsed. Lionel didn't notice the passage of time. He was engrossed in his new impressions; he felt the sudden fleeting interest that is the last remaining faculty of a worn-out heart, and he used every means at his disposal to lead the conversation round to the true state of Lavinia's feelings. But his efforts were futile; the woman was more quick-witted and clever than he was. He would think he was touching a chord, and then find only a wisp of hair in his hand. Just when he seemed on the point of grasping her moral essence and subjecting it to analysis, the wraith would slip away like a breath and escape as elusive as air.

Suddenly there was a loud knock at the door. The noise of the waterfall had masked everything at first, and prevented them from hearing the initial summons; now it was repeated with some impatience. Lady Blake gave a little start.

"That's Henry," Sir Lionel told her; "he's giving me a reminder; but if you'll be so kind as to allow me a few more moments, I'll ask him to wait. May I be permitted that favor, Madame?"

Lionel was proceeding to urge this request when Pepa hurried into the room.

"Comte de Morangy positively insists on coming in," she told her mistress in Portuguese. "He's right there—he won't listen to reason—"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lavinia in English, genuinely surprised. "He's so jealous! What am I to do with you, Lionel?"

Lionel stood as if struck by lightning.

"Show him in," said Lavinia hastily to the maid; "and now," she added, turning to Sir Lionel, "go out on the balcony. The weather is glorious; you can surely wait there a few minutes to do me a favor."

And she bustled him out onto the balcony. She closed the dimity curtains, and said calmly to the Count, who was just walking into the room, "What is the meaning of all this noise of yours? It's a positive invasion."

"Do forgive me, Madame," exclaimed Morangy; "I beg your forgiveness in the humblest possible way. I saw you leave the ball suddenly with Pepa, and I thought you were ill. You haven't been well for some days now; and I was so worried! For God's sake, do forgive me! I'm a fool, an idiot, Lavinia—but I love you so much that I don't know what I'm doing any more—"

As soon as Lionel got over his initial surprise, he lost his temper.

"The impudent little hussy!" he thought, while the Count was speaking. "She has the nerve to ask me to stand by and listen while she has a tête-à-tête with her lover! Oho, if this is a premeditated act of revenge, if it's a wilful insult, they'd better watch out for me! But there's no sense in that. If I did show any sign of resentment, it would be a victory for her.—Very well, let's contemplate this love scene with all the calmness of a true philosopher."

He leant over to the window and cautiously enlarged the crack between the curtains with the end of his riding crop. He was thus able to see as well as hear.

The Comte de Morangy was one of the most handsome men in France, tall and fair, a dandy from head to foot, with immaculately curled hair and a face that was imposing rather than expressive. His voice was soft and velvety, and he spoke with a slight lisp. His eyes were large, though not sparkling; his mouth fine and roguish; his hands as white as a woman's; his feet shod with inexpressibly good taste. In Sir Lionel's eyes, he was the most formidable rival a man could possibly have to face; from the tips of his whiskers to the tips of his toes, the Count was an opponent who would really test his mettle.

Morangy was speaking in French, and Lavinia was answering in the same language, which she handled as proficiently as English—another new talent! She listened to the nob's insipid compliments with remarkable courtesy. The Count ventured two or three amorous speeches, which seemed to Lionel to depart somewhat from the rules of good taste and dramatic propriety. Lavinia wasn't at all angry; there was scarcely a hint of mockery in her smile. She urged the Count to return to the ball on his own, pointing out that it wouldn't be proper for the two of them to return together. But he insisted on escorting her to the door, vowing that he himself wouldn't enter until she had been there a good quarter of an hour. As he spoke, he seized Lady Blake's hands; and she abandoned them to him with the most provoking and indolent unconcern.

Sir Lionel was running out of patience.

"What a fool I am," he reflected, "to stand by patiently and watch this little charade, when I can simply walk out and leave it."

He went to the end of the balcony. But it led nowhere; and immediately below it, there was a rocky ledge that didn't look much like a path. All the same, Lionel ventured to climb boldly over the balustrade and walk out onto the ledge. But he was soon forced to stop; the ledge broke off abruptly near the waterfall, and even a chamois might have hesitated to go another step. Just then the moon rose enough for Lionel to see the full depths of the chasm, which lay only a few inches ahead of him. He had to shut his eyes to overcome the feeling of giddiness that swept over him, and he retreated with some difficulty to the balcony. When he finally managed to scramble back over the balustrade and had at least that frail bulwark between him and the precipice, he thought he was the luckiest fellow in the world—even though the sound of his rival's triumph was the price he had to pay for his safety. He was forced to resign himself to the inevitable and listen to the Count's melodramatic tirades.

"Madame," Morangy was saying, "you've been playing games with me long enough. Surely you must know how much I love you; and I think it very cruel of you to treat me as if this is some mere passing fancy. I shall love you for the rest of my life; and if you don't allow me to devote my whole life to you, then, Madame, you'll see a man of the world lose all sense of propriety and turn his back on the realm of cold logic. Don't drive me to despair; you'll be sorry if you do."

"So you want me to give you a plain answer, do you?" replied Lavinia. "Very well, I shall. Do you know my story, Monsieur?"

"Yes indeed, Madame; I'm fully aware of it. I'm well aware that, in the past, a wretched scoundrel—the lowest of the low, in my opinion—shamefully deceived you and abandoned you. I feel deeply sorry for your misfortunes; and that merely adds to my affection for you. Only the very noblest spirits are doomed to be victimized by men and public opinion."

"Well, Monsieur," Lavinia replied, "I can assure you that I've learnt from the rough lessons that fate has taught me; nowadays I'm on guard against my own heart and other people's. I know that a man isn't always able to keep his promises, and that as soon as he has obtained something, he misuses it. That being so, Monsieur, you mustn't hope to move me. If you're speaking seriously, my answer is that I'm unassailable. This woman, who has been vilified so much for the sins of her youth, now has a stronger defense than virtue—distrust."

"Oh, but you don't understand me, Madame!" cried the Count, falling on his knees. "Devil take me if I ever had a single thought of taking advantage of your misfortunes or hoping for any sacrifice that would be an insult to your pride—"

"Are you quite sure that you've never had any such thought?" asked Lavinia, smiling her sad smile.

"Well, let me be frank," said Monsieur de Morangy, dropping his aristocratic airs and speaking with a truthful sound in his voice. "Perhaps I did have—before I really knew you—some thoughts of the kind that I now reject and bitterly regret. It's impossible to hide anything from you, Lavinia; in your presence I lose all my willpower, all thought of deception, I can do nothing but respect you. But since I've known the kind of woman you really are, I've loved you in the way you deserve, I swear it. Listen to me, Madame; I'll wait at your feet till you give me my sentence. I want to devote my whole life to you with vows that can't be broken. I'm offering you my name—an honorable name, I venture to think—and my fortune—a splendid fortune, though you know I have no vanity about that—and my heart—which adores you, and beats for you alone."

"So you're really proposing marriage to me, are you?" asked Lady Blake—but not in insultingly surprised tones. "Well, Monsieur, I do thank you for this mark of esteem and affection."

She held out her hand to him in a friendly way.

"God of mercy—she's accepting!" cried the Count, covering it with kisses.

"Not at all, Monsieur," said Lavinia; "I'm simply asking for time to think it over."

"But there is some hope, isn't there?"

"That I can't say. I really am grateful to you, though. Goodbye. Do go back to the ball; I positively insist on it. I'll be there in a few moments."

The Count kissed the hem of her cape with some passion, and left the room. As soon as the door was shut, Lionel drew aside the curtains and waited for Lady Blake to invite him back in. Lady Blake, however, was sitting on the sofa with her back to the window. Lionel could see her face reflected in the mirror opposite. Her eyes were fixed on the floor; she seemed pensive and despondent. She was engrossed in thought and had completely forgotten Lionel—as she showed frankly, though not very courteously, by emitting a little cry of surprise when he stepped into the room.

He was pale with anger; but he restrained himself.

"You'll appreciate, Madame, that I've treated your new attachment with respect," he said. "Only the most profound disinterest could have enabled me to listen to such insults—perhaps deliberate ones—and remain quietly in my hiding place."

"Deliberate?" echoed Lavinia, staring at him peremptorily. "How dare you think of me like that! If that's your opinion of me, sir, you may leave at once!"

"No, not at all; that isn't my opinion at all," said Lionel, moving toward her and gripping her arm in his agitation. "Please don't pay any attention to what I'm saying. I'm quite shaken. . . . You must have had a very high regard for my self-control to put me through such a scene."

"Your self-control, Lionel! I don't understand you. Don't you mean your indifference?"

"Go ahead—laugh at me as much as you like; be absolutely ruthless; walk all over me! You've every right to do it. . . . But I really am most unhappy!"

He was deeply moved; but Lavinia thought (or pretended to think) that he was merely acting a part.

"Enough of this," she said, rising to her feet. "You heard the answer I gave the Count, and you might make your own use of that; and yet I'm not insulted by the fact that the man loves me. . . . Good-bye, Lionel. We'll part for good, and not harbor any ill feelings. Here are your letters and your portrait. . . . Do let go of my hand now; I have to return to the ball."

"And dance with Monsieur de Morangy, I suppose?" said Lionel, dashing his picture angrily to the ground and stamping on it.

"Now listen," said Lavinia, looking slightly pale but quite calm, "the Comte de Morangy is offering me a certain rank and a complete rehabilitation in society. A deserted woman inevitably suffers a cruel stain to her reputation, and my marriage to an elderly nobleman didn't quite wipe it away. Everyone knows that an old man always gets more than he gives. But a young man, rich and noble and envied by everyone and loved by the women—that's a different matter! That deserves some thought, Lionel. I'm very glad I've treated the Count so cautiously up till now. I've suspected for a long time that his intentions were honorable ones."

"Women!" exclaimed Lionel bitterly, when he was alone. "Vain to the last!"

He returned to the inn and rejoined Henry, who was waiting for him with considerable impatience.

"Damn you, Lionel!" he exclaimed. "I've been waiting in my stirrups for a good hour. Just imagine—two whole hours for a meeting of that kind! Come along, let's be off! You can tell me all about it on the way."

"Good night, Henry; you can tell Miss Ellis that the bolster in my bed has taken a turn for the worse. I'll be staying here."

"Good God!" exclaimed Henry. "Did I hear you say you don't mean to go to Luchon?"

"Some other time; I'm staying here for the moment."

"Are you out of your senses? You can't possibly do that! You haven't made it up with Lady Blake, surely?"

"Not in the least, as far as I know; far from it! But I'm tired and down in the dumps and stiff all over; I'm staying here."

Henry fell back to earth with a jolt. He exhausted all his eloquence trying to persuade Lionel to go, but failed; so he got off his horse and tossed his bridle to the groom.

"Well, if that's the way things are, I'll stay too," he declared. "It all seems such a joke that I propose to see it through to the end. To hell with love affairs at Bagnères and wayside frolics! My honorable friend Sir Lionel Bridgemont is giving a performance for my benefit; I'll watch the show with the utmost interest and fascination."

Lionel would have given anything to be rid of this scatterbrained, bantering snoop; but it couldn't be done.

"Since you've set your heart on following me," he declared, "I must tell you that I'm going to the ball."

"The ball? Very well. Nothing like a good dance to cure stiff joints and low spirits."

Lavinia was dancing with Monsieur de Morangy. Lionel had never seen her dance. When she arrived in England, she'd known nothing but the bolero—which she had never cared to dance under the austere skies of Great Britain. But she had now learnt French contredanses, and she danced them with Spanish voluptuous poise tempered by a faint suggestion of English prudery. People were standing on the benches to watch her. The Comte de Morangy was triumphant. Lionel was lost in the crowd.

How much vanity there is in a man's heart! This woman had long been imprisoned and subjugated by his love; in those days

she had belonged to him alone, and no one in the world would have had the courage to take her from his arms. Now she was free and proud and the center of attention, and every glance she received gave her some revenge or compensation for the past. Lionel suffered bitterly at the sight. When she returned to her place, the Count's attention was distracted for a moment; Lionel moved stealthily to her side and picked up her fan, which she had just dropped. Lavinia didn't expect to find him there. She gave a gasp, and her face visibly paled.

"Good heavens!" she said. "I thought you were on the way to Bagnères."

"Don't worry, Madame," he whispered; "I have no intention of compromising you with Monsieur de Morangy."

But he couldn't restrain himself for long; very soon he came back and asked her to dance with him.

She accepted.

"Shouldn't I be asking Monsieur de Morangy's permission too?" he inquired.

The ball lasted till daybreak; as long as Lady Blake remained, it was certain to continue. A certain amount of disorder creeps into any party as the evening advances, and this allowed Lionel to speak with her fairly often. By the end of the night his head was completely turned. He was thoroughly under her spell, spurred on by a sense of rivalry with the Count, and exasperated by the admiration of the onlookers, who kept getting between himself and her; he tried as hard as he could to rekindle their dead romance, and by the time the ball ended, his pride had goaded him into a state of indescribable exhilaration.

He was quite unable to sleep. Henry, who had courted every last woman and danced every last dance, was snoring his head off. As soon as he was awake again, he rubbed his eyes and said, "Well, well, praise the Lord, Lionel my friend! This is a fine little story, you and my cousin getting back together again—oh, you can't fool me, I'm in the secret now. I saw how sad Lavinia was when we first got to the ballroom—she danced as if she was just going through the motions; but she brightened up the moment she set eyes on you. She was positively radiant during that waltz, while you were whisking her around the room like a feather. You're a lucky dog, Lionel! A pretty bride and a fine dowry at Luchon; a pretty mistress and a fine conquest at Saint-Sauveur!"

"Let me alone and stop talking drivel," Lionel grumbled.

Henry was the first to dress. He went out to see what was going on, but soon returned, making his usual din on the way upstairs.

"Really, Henry," said his friend, "will you never shake off that breathless tone and those frantic gesticulations? You always act as if you've just started a hare and you're talking to a pack of uncoupled hounds."

"To horse! To horse!" cried Henry. "Lady Blake is in the saddle; she's off to Gèdre with ten other mad wenches and heaven knows how many beaux; the Comte de Morangy is at their head—which is not to say that he's the only one inside hers, if you follow my drift."

"Shut up, you clown!" exclaimed Lionel. "Very well; to horse then, and let's be off!"

The riding party had the start on them. The road to Gèdre is steep and narrow, a kind of stairway cut in the rock; it runs along the very edge of the precipice and poses innumerable problems for horses—and equally serious dangers for their riders. Lionel set out at a full-blooded gallop. Henry thought this was sheer madness; but he took it as a point of honor not to be left behind, and therefore followed hard on his heels. Their arrival had a strange effect on the cavalcade. At the very sight of two riders galloping thoughtlessly on the brink of that dreadful chasm, Lavinia shuddered; and when she recognized them as Lionel and her cousin, she turned pale and nearly fell off her horse. The Comte de Morangy noticed it, and wouldn't take his eyes off her. He was jealous.

That was an additional provocation for Lionel. Throughout the day he fought stubbornly for Lavinia's slightest glance. The difficulty of getting a few words with her, the flurry of the ride, the impressive sight of the landscape around them, Lady Blake's skillful though goodhumored resistance, her fine horsemanship, her grace and daring, and the ever-poetic, ever-natural way she expressed her feelings, all stirred Sir Lionel to the very depths of his being. For the poor woman, beset by two lovers and trying to keep an even balance between them, it was a very tiring day; so she was grateful for her lighthearted cousin and the blatant nonsense he talked whenever he cut in between her and her admirers.

By sunset the sky had clouded over, and a bad storm was brewing. The riders quickened their pace, but they were still about

three miles from Saint-Sauveur when the weather broke. It became pitch dark; the horses were terrified, and Morangy's ran away with him. The little band was scattered; and some serious accident might have put a sorry end to the day that had begun so happily, but for the hard work of the guides who were accompanying them on foot.

Lionel lost his way in the gloom and had to walk along the cliff face, leading his horse by the bridle, to prevent both of them from falling into the chasm; but he had far deeper worries on his mind. No matter where he looked, he couldn't see Lavinia anywhere. Then, after he had been anxiously searching for a quarter of an hour, a flash of lightning showed him a woman seated on a rock just above the path. He stopped, listened, and recognized Lady Blake's voice; but there was a man with her, and he could only be Monsieur de Morangy. Lionel cursed him from the bottom of his heart, and made his way toward the couple as best he could. If nothing else, at least he could disturb his rival's happiness. Much to his delight, however, he soon recognized Henry sitting beside his cousin. Henry, like the generous devil-may-care comrade he was, gave up his place to Lionel. He simply kept his distance and saw to the horses.

Nothing can be more solemn or splendid than the blast of a storm in the mountains. Deafening thunderbolts rumble above the chasms, echoing and resounding in their depths; the wind lashes the tall fir trees so that they cling to the cliff face as a garment clings to a human body, and plunges into the gorges, where it emits great piercing long-drawn soblike laments. Lavinia was absorbed in contemplation of this imposing spectacle; she listened to the myriad sounds of the storm-tossed mountain, and waited for the next flash of lightning to cast its bluish glare over the landscape. She gave a start when it lit up Sir Lionel sitting beside her, just where her cousin had been a moment before. Lionel thought the storm was frightening her, so he took her hand and tried to comfort her; but a new flash of lightning showed that Lavinia, with one elbow on her knee and her hand beneath her chin, was gazing enthusiastically at this mighty display of the raging elements.

"My word, this is a beautiful sight!" she said to him, "and how bright and soft that blue light is! Did you see those jagged rocks gleaming like sapphires, and the icy peaks rising like giant

ghosts in their shrouds against the leaden background? And did you see how everything seemed to shift and sway while it flashed from dark to light and back again, as if the very mountains were going to tumble down and collapse?"

"I can see nothing but you, Lavinia," he said firmly; "the only sound I can hear is your voice, the only air I can breathe is your breath, the only emotion I can feel is the sense that you're near me. Do you realize how madly I love you? You must know; you wanted it. Well then, go ahead; enjoy your triumph. I most sincerely and most humbly beg you, do forgive me and forget the past, and let me have the future—I want that passionately; you *must* grant me that, Lavinia. I want you with all my heart; I have some rights over you—"

"Rights?" she rejoined, taking her hand away.

"Hasn't the wrong I did you given me some rights, Lavinia—in a terrible way? You gave me those rights so that I could ruin your life—surely you can't rob me of them today, when I want to set things right and make amends for the harm I did?"

We all know everything that a man can say in such a situation. Lionel spoke far more eloquently than I could have done in his place. He was desperate. It was clear to him that his rival had a very substantial advantage over him—unless he could match his offer. He could see no other way of overcoming Lady Blake's resistance, so he rose to the same pitch of devotion, and offered Lavinia his own name and fortune.

"Do you realize what you're saying?" she declared, with some intensity. "You'd throw over Miss Ellis when you're on the point of marrying her and the wedding day has already been set?"

"Yes," he replied; "yes, that's just what I'll do—even though the world will think it's shameful and despicable. I'm willing to do anything for you, Lavinia—even if I have to pay for it with my blood; the worst thing I ever did in my life was my failure to appreciate you, and my first duty now is to return to you. Do answer me—do give me back the happiness I lost when I lost you. Now I can prize it and hold onto it—because I have changed too; I'm no longer ambitious and restless and tortured by deceitful hopes for a future I can't see. I know what life is, now; I know what the world and its empty glitter are worth. A single glance from you is worth more than all the successes I've ever had—I know that now; I've always been chasing dreams of happiness, and

they've always fled from me until today, when they've brought me back to you. Won't you come back to me too, Lavinia? Who will ever love you as I love you? Who will ever see the nobility and patience and kindness in your heart as I see it?"

Lavinia remained silent, but Lionel could feel that her heart was beating very fast. Her hand was trembling in his, and she was no longer trying to take it away. The wind blew a lock of her hair loose, and Lionel showered it with kisses. She didn't try to take that away, either. Neither of them felt the rain, which was now falling in large sporadic drops. The wind had quietened, the sky was growing somewhat lighter, and the Comte de Morangy was coming toward them as fast as his lame and shoeless horse (which had nearly killed him by falling over a rock) could go.

Lavinia eventually saw him and quickly drew back from Lionel's endearments. Lionel was furious at the ill-timed intrusion, but he was full of hope and love; he helped her to remount her horse, and escorted her to her door. There she told him, in a low voice, "I fully appreciate the value of the offer you've made me, Lionel. I must think about it very carefully before I give you an answer."

"Good God! That's exactly what you said to Monsieur de Morangy!"

"No, it isn't quite the same," she replied in an altered tone of voice. "But there could be some silly gossip if you stay here. If you really do love me, Lionel, you must promise to do as I tell you."

"Before God and you, I swear I will."

"Off you go, then; go back to Bagnères. You'll have your reply within the next three days—I promise."

"But good God! That's a whole age of uncertainty! How will I ever survive the wait?"

"You'll have your hopes," Lavinia told him. Then, as if afraid of saying too much, she hurriedly shut the door.

Lionel did have his hopes. They consisted of Lavinia's remark plus everything that his pride could tell him.

"You really shouldn't be giving up the game," Henry told him on the way back; "Lavinia was just starting to weaken. Upon my soul, Lionel, this isn't like you. Apart from any other consideration, you're leaving Morangy in full possession of the field. . . . Well, well, you must be more in love with Miss Ellis than I realized!"

Lionel was too absorbed in his own thoughts to hear him. He passed the time that Lavinia had specified shut up in his room, and said he was ill; he didn't care to confide in Sir Henry, who was lost in conjecture about his behavior. At last the letter arrived. Here it is:

"Neither of you. By the time you receive this letter and Monsieur de Morangy receives his (I've sent him to Tarbes),[7] I shall be far away from both of you; I shall be gone—gone forever and irrevocably from both of you.

"You're offering me your name and rank and fortune. You think that a woman must find a brilliant position in society very tempting. Not in the least—not if she knows and despises society as I do. All the same, Lionel, you mustn't think that I'm undervaluing your offer to sacrifice an excellent marriage and bind yourself to me forever.

"You've been able to appreciate how deeply it hurts a woman's pride when she is deserted, and how wonderful it is for her to see the deserter back at her feet again; and you wanted me to enjoy that triumph by way of compensation for everything I've suffered. I do respect you for it; and if I hadn't forgiven you long ago for what happened in the past, I'd certainly forgive you now.

"But you must realize that it isn't in your power to repair the harm you've done. It isn't in any man's power. The blow I received was a deadly one. It destroyed all my illusions and left me unable to love anyone. Nowadays I see life in a rather dull and wretched light.

"Not that I'm making any complaint about my fate. It was bound to happen sooner or later. We all grow old and see our various hopes disappointed. I was robbed of my illusions rather early in life, I know; and long after I had lost any trust in men, I still felt a need for love. Long and often I had to struggle against my own youth as a fatal enemy; but I always managed to overcome it.

"Do you think I didn't have to fight hard in this last struggle, to resist the things you promised me? I can say it frankly, now that I've run away and am out of danger—I do still love you, I can feel that. We never entirely lose the stamp of our first love. It may seem to have vanished, we may fall asleep without feeling any pain from the harm we've suffered; but as soon as the image of the

past rises up once again and the old idol reappears, we're ready to bow down and worship it all over again. But it's a mere shadow, a phantom, a mirage, to be driven out, driven away; if I ventured to follow it, it would lure me back to the same old reefs and leave me there shattered and dying. I don't believe in it any more; away with it!

"I know that you can't control the future. Even if your lips are speaking the truth today, the frailty of your own heart would force you to tell lies tomorrow. And why should I blame you for being that way? We're all frail and fickle, aren't we? I myself was calm and collected enough when I met you yesterday—I was sure that I couldn't fall in love with you—I'd been encouraging Monsieur de Morangy's courtship—and yet, in the evening, when you sat beside me on the rock and spoke to me with such passion in the thick of the wind and rain, I could feel my very heart softening and melting. Now, looking back, I can see that it was simply your old voice, your old passion, my first love, my own youth, all coming back to me again!

"And now that I've regained my composure, I feel a deadly sense of sorrow. I've been dreaming a lovely dream in the midst of my unhappy life; I've woken up again, but I can still recall it.

"Farewell, Lionel. Even if your wish to marry me had lasted long enough to be carried out (and you may already be feeling, by now, that I was right to refuse), you would have been wretched in such a bond. People are always malicious and reluctant to praise our good deeds; they would have seen yours as a mere act of duty, and wouldn't have honored you for it as much as you might have hoped. Then you would have thrown away your happiness without gaining the admiration you might have expected in return. Who can tell? Perhaps I myself might have forgotten too easily how generous your return had been; I might have taken your reawakened love simply as an act of reparation that your sense of honor demanded. We mustn't spoil that night of trust and sincerity; let's keep it as a memory, but not make any attempt to repeat it.

"No need for your pride to feel wounded in regard to Comte de Morangy. I was never in love with him. My heart is quite dead nowadays; he is simply one of the many weak creatures who have tried to set it beating again and—even with my own help—have failed. I don't want a husband even of his kind. A man of his rank always sells his protection too dear by keeping you conscious of it.

And, in any case, I hate marriage; I hate men—all of them; I hate eternal vows and promises and plans and the business of settling the future in advance with contracts and deals—Fate simply laughs at all such things. The only things I now like are travel, daydreaming, solitude, being able to walk through the world's hustle and bustle and laugh at it, poetry to help me bear the past, and God to give me hope for the future."

Sir Lionel Bridgemont's pride was indeed wounded at first—badly wounded. However, any reader who has become too deeply interested in him may take comfort from the fact that he had done a considerable amount of thinking in the space of three days. His initial idea now was to gallop off in search of Lady Blake, overcome her resistance, and conquer her cold logic. But then he reflected that she might well persist in her refusal; and in the meantime, Miss Ellis might very possibly take offence at his conduct and break off the match . . .

So he stayed where he was.

"Aha," Henry said to him the following day, when he saw him kissing Miss Ellis's hand (there had been a pretty lively quarrel over his absence, after which she had granted him that mark of her favor), "so we'll be sitting in parliament next year, eh?"

The Unknown God (1836)

During the reign of Diocletian, while Christianity was advancing under persecution, Pamphilus, a presbyter from Caesarea, came to Rome to help the apostles' successors—Gaius, Quentin, and various other holy men—in their efforts to prepare souls for martyrdom,[1] so that the blood of Christians might wash the stains of pagan debauchery from the paving stones of Rome. The whole burnt offering of Jesus was constantly going up to heaven; and his disciples were stepping forward to sacrifice their lives on the still-blazing altar. God himself was appalled at the depravity of the human race; but such sacrifices might place a few glorious deaths in the scales of his justice, as a counterbalance to so many shameful lives, and might thus redeem the world.

One evening, Pamphilus delivered a brief and noble exhortation. The rest of the flock always listened to these as if for the last time (indeed, next morning some shepherd or sheep was often missing from the assembly, and the psalm "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord"[2] was being chanted softly over a grave). He then blessed his brethren, bade them a sad farewell, and watched them slowly depart in absolute silence through the dark passages of the catacombs.[3] This particular evening he was gripped by an unusual sense of indescribable sorrow. Those people destined for sacrifice readily developed strong, unbounded ties of affection for each other; and their souls were frequently torn between the pangs of human grief and the joys of godlike zeal.

For a while the Christian presbyter simply remained standing before the altar, without making any further attempt to pray. The weariness of his body (fasting had wasted it), the coldness of

the vault, the gravity of the daily farewells, and the presence of the tomb, all roused solemn and terrible feelings within him. Every day, for more than a month now, some mutilated corpse or other had been brought to that tomb after receiving the newly blood-stained crown of martyrdom.

Finally he knelt before the cross and cried out: "Lord, if I must drink this cup, spare me its dregs; if I must be placed in this tomb, let it be tomorrow, so that the tears in my heart may be dried and I may not see any more of my brethren laid to rest here."

At that point, Pamphilus heard a knock at a nearby door. The believers had set up the door and locked it from within to avoid being caught unawares, and to ensure that there was only one way out of the underground passage—the way by which Pamphilus had watched them depart. Therefore, the person who was knocking must be either a spy or else some brother who was currently being pursued and had been forced to flee suddenly into the catacombs. Without a moment's hesitation Pamphilus arose and boldly unbarred the door. Perhaps he imagined that he had recognized the footsteps of his friend Eusebius,[4] whom he had left at Caesarea in his eagerness to face the current persecution; perhaps, in his state of otherworldly excitement, he imagined that God had already granted his prayer, and was now sending him the executioner he had requested. Pamphilus had no human ties; every moment of his life, he was ready to appear before God.

He asked in a calm voice, "What do you want?"

And, at the same time, he opened the door.

He saw a veiled woman, who moved toward him nervously and said, "Don't torture me, don't put me to death; I'm a pagan, but I'm not here to betray you; I want to call on your god."

"Our God has told us to repay good for evil," replied Pamphilus; "we don't kill people or torture them—even if they do want to betray us. Come in, my child, and pray to the true God."

"Please close the door first," said the pagan woman, "because if anyone caught me here, I'd be accused of Christianity and tortured to make me reveal its mysteries."

The presbyter closed the door. When he turned back to the woman, she had removed her veil; he could see that she was still young, richly adorned, and remarkably beautiful, though signs of weariness and sadness could now be seen in her face.

"Who are you?" he asked her. "And what do you want? There's the altar of our God; if you do want to pray to him, I'll kneel beside you and pray that he may grant what you wish."

But the woman didn't reply. Instead, she looked around with mingled fear and curiosity. By the light of the lamp burning before the altar, she could make out the sarcophagus and the livid stains on the shroud that draped it. She drew back in horror, and said:

"You claim that you people don't kill or torture anyone—yet there's a tomb with blood on it."

"My child," the presbyter replied, "it's the blood of my brethren, whom your brethren have killed."

The pagan woman seemed to grow calm; but a moment later, a pang of sadness came over her.

"Our gods aren't as cruel as we are," she declared. "They're not like the gods of Gaul and Germania, who call for human sacrifices; hecatombs from the herd or flock are enough for them. Why, the god Mars himself prefers a heifer's firstborn calf to the blood shed in war. Believe me, you high priest of the god Christ, our gods are mild and gentle; they incite us to pleasure rather than cruelty. I really think they must be fast asleep; fair-haired Hebe must have given them the water of Lethe to drink, instead of ambrosia,[5] because they have deserted us; they no longer seem to watch over our lives at all. People who have been forsaken by their gods start to behave like northern barbarians. Personally, I've always worshiped in the proper way. I've sought the favor of the goddesses in particular; I've tried to appease them with offerings appropriate to my wealth and position in life—I'm rich, you see, and I'm a member of the nobility; my name is Leah."[6]

"You're a woman famous for her beauty and her luxurious way of life—and yet you're risking persecution and death by coming here! Then you must have felt how wretched and worthless all human joys are."

"I've grown tired of pleasures, old man, and my pride has been wounded. I'm still young, but sorrow already has me in its clutches; I've asked heaven to give me back the happiness I used to have, I've sacrificed to every deity who could possibly help me,[7] but it's all been in vain.—I've wearied the steps of Venus's temple in vain; I've offered her six pairs of young African pigeons, whiter than milk; I've set my trembling hands and faded mouth on the

gold cestus inlaid with jewels that drapes the statue of Juno Victrix, which is supposed to be an image of the cestus she borrowed from Venus to reawaken the love of her immortal husband, the king of the gods. But the forgetful goddess of love hasn't bestowed any such powers on *me;* and though Juno is the haughty queen of Olympus, she hasn't given *me* any pride that could make up for the absence of love.—I've embroidered Tyrian veils and offered them to Pallas in vain; she hasn't granted me any wisdom, or even any desire to study and learn.—I've presented my very richest gifts to Hebe; I've sacrificed spotless heifers and yearling lambs to her. But her unseen hand no longer wipes away the first wrinkles that Time leaves on her favorites' brows; her kindness no longer makes the roses bloom afresh every morning on their lips. Tears keep furrowing my cheeks; iris colors keep spreading around my eyes; and she does nothing to stop it.—As for Cupid, the child of the Sun, I've offered him firstborn hares that have never tasted the mountain thyme and sage; I've imported from Greece myrtle grown in the groves of Amathusia and Cnidus,[8] and scattered its blossoms on his altars. But the love god has certainly forgotten me! The gods and goddesses have enjoyed more than enough smoke from my sacrifices, and not one of them has made any response! My prayers have gone up to them long enough! Surely it's time I had help and comfort from some deity or other! I don't care whether he comes from the north or the east, or the realms of Africa where the gods are said to be black, or the land of the Hebrews who are said to have only one god that is always the same—as long as my prayers are heard, I'll offer him the very finest burnt offerings, I'll spare neither honors nor gifts for his priests! Tell me what you think, old man; ask your oracles if the god of the Galileans has more power or kindness than our gods, who have grown so deaf!"

"Woman," Pamphilus replied, "we never accept gifts, and we never consult oracles."

"Then how can you worship your god," asked Leah, "and how can he be of any use to you?"

"He has taught us his word; yet he doesn't dwell in the bowels of vain idols. He never needs any earthly offerings; the offering he wants is the love and devotion of faithful souls. And as for priests, anyone and everyone who worships Christ has vowed to live humbly and in poverty."

"So you never ask him anything—and he never has anything to give you? Is he like Destiny, who rules all the gods but can't change anything that he has determined, no matter how you pray to him?"

"Our God hears our prayers and grants them; and to put things in your own language so that you can understand me, Destiny obeys him as a slave obeys his master. The whole universe is governed by his will, and no gods exist before him. Learn his word, study his law, and you will know that his mercies contain greater treasures than all the vain things of this world."

"Then do I need to study your mysteries before I can ask your god for anything, and won't he grant me what I want unless I become an initiate? In that case, I must say good-bye; I lead such a busy life that I don't have time to listen to your preachings, and even if I did, I'd simply be bringing persecution on myself. I did think I could come here and make an offering and receive some kind of answer, and perhaps go away with a little hope; but if your law forbids its priests to receive pagans' prayers, I'll have to go back yet again and ask Venus to give me a lover, or Vesta to teach me continence."[9]

"Now wait a moment," said Pamphilus gently; "I'm forbidden to ask my God for anything foolish or wicked, and you seem to be complaining about the ravages of time and the loss of worldly love. Christ's word teaches us that spiritual beauty and pure love are the only kinds of beauty and love that can please the Lord. Whereas, if I fully understand what you've been saying, I believe you're suffering from the evil that afflicts your whole nation. You're weary of doing wrong, you're sick of doing wrong; you turn to the imaginary deities who are supposed to bestow utterly contradictory blessings—chastity, lechery, knowledge, pride, delirium, wisdom—and you ask for all of those things at the same time. You don't know what you want; you don't realize what could heal you; and I must tell you that you couldn't understand what I have to say, because the time is too limited, you can only stay here an hour or so, and your spirit is so alien to the spirit of the true God that it would take me a whole year to convert you. But listen to me. There is the image of that God. Kneel down before it to show your respect, not for the wood of that crucifix, but for what it represents—the Son of God who is in heaven. Lift up your soul to Jehovah, and tell him what is troubling you. All you need to know

is that he is a good and merciful God, a Father to those who are afflicted and contrite, a God of love to those who are earnest and tormented. No interpreter or priest or angel has to stand between him and you. Simply pray that he may look into the depths of your heart. He will see what is there, better than you yourself can. And if you truly wish to know him and serve him, he will grant you his grace—which is a more precious gift and a more powerful comfort than all the false delights of life."

"I've heard words like yours before," Leah replied. "When Nazarenes are condemned to death nowadays, they always call on some god who is said to be the god of love and grace, so I'm told. Yet he's supposed to be quite different from the goddess of Cythera and Paphos;[10] and it's hard for me to understand this grace that you say he could give me. Still, I'll go and pray to him in his temple, since you're allowing me to do so; if the immortal gods really do know men's secret thoughts, it must be even better to tell them those thoughts by praying and showing them that we trust in them."

"O you blind creature looking for light!" exclaimed Pamphilus. "Very well, do what you wish. May the Lord God open your eyes!"

Then the Roman lady knelt on the moist ground, raised her lovely head adorned with golden pins and fillets, stretched out her bare snowy arms toward the image of Christ, and prayed thus:

"O unknown god, I don't know what I should ask you to give me, but I do know what complaint I should present to heaven. My life has become more bitter than an olive plucked straight from the tree. I've seen the very finest men fall at my feet; yet the one I chose as my husband forsook me and turned to vulgar pleasures. All he wanted was to see me abandon my strict morals and rush into some other man's arms, so that he'd have the right to indulge in his own shameful love affairs. Well, I did think I could take revenge and satisfy my pride by looking for love elsewhere. People say, god of the Nazarenes, that you're like Jupiter and understand all the thoughts and actions of men; so you already know what happened. You know how Icilius was unworthy of my love—how he deserted me for prostitutes and used the excuse that he couldn't love an adulteress for long. Then Antony was enslaved at my feet for a while, but soon he became guilty of the same sin as Icilius; and when I raged at him, he tried to justify his

faithlessness by saying that prostitutes are no worse than women who have had two lovers. Lord, you know that I never stooped to plead with the worthless fellow; I simply tried to take revenge for his injury by finding someone else. But you also know that my next love was no happier than the others had been. I've been ill-treated at every turn. My life and beauty have been wasted in useless bouts of affection and fury. And when I called on the gods of the underworld to punish these treacherous creatures, you know how I was told that there aren't any gods of the underworld any more—that Pleasure has stifled Cerberus, and the Furies themselves have become cheap, now that Plutus, Comus, and Priapus are ruling the world together.[11]

"O unknown god, that's the point we've reached nowadays! Men no longer believe that there's any justice in heaven, and the shameless Bacchantes hurl insults at the weeping Vestals. Even Lucina has stopped protecting the honor of wives and mothers, and the altars of Cypris are tended only by disheveled Maenads.[12] And yet women exist solely to love and be loved! What will become of the girls who are led to the bed of roses by love alone, if gold can create more intense pleasures—if the brothels of Rome know secrets that we never learn? Our men prefer impure concubines to us; must we call on our slaves to take their place in our arms? More than one of us hasn't blushed to do so, and has abandoned herself to dreadful orgies, to escape the loneliness of her villa and the anger she feels at the way her love has been violated. And yet, O mighty god, woman is a frail creature; when she finds a source of strength, she won't willingly be the first to leave it! If she's unfaithful, she's dishonored—she has to atone for it by shame—so it's a dangerous thing for her to do. Therefore, O Nazarene, the men are the ones I'm accusing—my husband, and Icilius, and Antony, and all the other men I've loved in vain; I'm denouncing them all, I'm calling on you to judge them. Punish them for me—or else help me to forget them, help me to gain the indifference of old age. Or, if I've lost some of my beauty and I could win back my unfaithful lovers by regaining it, then give me back my youth and my power to attract them. All the same, there's Torquata the dancing girl, who has worn herself out with debauchery—why should she be chosen in preference to me? Have I really lost my charms to such an extent? Then there's Grecian Lycoris, who has been a wife to nine hundred men—is she really

any lovelier or more passionate than I am? And don't I see even the youngest and prettiest wives neglected like myself, while their husbands turn to livid-lipped harlots instead? Do we have to stand naked on the public stage, or drink ourselves drunk in the presence of our lovers, before we can rouse any spark of passion from them?

"Yet what can we possibly do, alone and despised in the silent depths of our gardens? Men can devote themselves to their work in military life or politics or the academies; they can find consolation there. But we're not allowed to take part in such things; our physical weakness and our upbringing prevent that. We're trained to attract men; as soon as our hair starts to fall over our shoulders, our mothers teach us how to bind it up in scented tresses and decorate it with jewels so that the men will notice us. The most serious work we ever learn is the art of adornment; the only tasks that aren't shut out from us are tasks that awaken our senses and entice us to enjoy carnal pleasures. Yet as long as we stay virtuous, we can never rouse our husbands to anything more than cold respect and languid boredom. And if we feel jealous and make scenes and try to keep them by our side, they start to mistrust and despise us.

"That's how the women of Rome are being treated, O god of Galilee! Our fine ladies, whose wombs bore only heroes and whose gold bracelets were offered to the fatherland, used to be held in such honor—now see what has become of them! Today Lust goes to bed in the public streets, and the whole male sex raises her up and bears her off in triumph under the very eyes of the virtuous women. If your people still cling to the ancient virtues, O Galilean—if your law compels their hearts to be faithful and their loins to be chaste—then strike down this impure city with a thunderbolt, and raise up a new race to reign here instead! I've told you the horrors that we're doomed to face; now answer me through the mouth of your priest. Give me some oracle to comfort or teach me. I'd do anything to escape from these constant pangs of frustration and anger. I'd turn to witchcraft, take part in dreadful sacrifices, drink poisons from Erebus if necessary, sooner than go back hopeless to my lonely bed and my futile ache for revenge.—I've spoken to your god, priest; now tell me his answer. Don't you have some Sibyl that you need to consult? Or if you know some potion that will arouse love in men, or quench

it in women, then give it to me—I'll drain it to the very last drop, even if my bowels have to suffer the torments of death as a result. Tell me, old man, what kind of hecatomb do I need to offer on your altars? Do you doubt that I'm rich? Do you doubt that I'll keep my word? I'll sacrifice all the flocks and herds on my lands to your Christ; I'll send him every gold vessel in my villa. Do you want my ornaments—the golden fillets around my brows, or the gems on my shoes? I'm told you accept gifts from the rich and give them to the poor—I'm told that helps to propitiate your gods. I'd give up anything to gain the treasures of either love or oblivion."

"You poor unfortunate woman," Pamphilus replied, "we don't have any power to give you what you want. Our God doesn't permit us to help people gratify their fleshly passions; he would wither our wicked hands if we used poisons to kindle or cool the blood that he has set flowing in human veins. He is a God of chastity; his servants vow to be chaste, as he is. Those of us who marry believe that men should be just as faithful as women; infidelity is equally sinful for both sexes. Only Christians hold the secret of true and lasting love. They worship only one Lord, who alone contains all the virtues; you pagans worship all the vices, in the shape of many different deities. Such deities are evil demons, my child; they should be despised and hated, not honored and feared. You should be sacrificing to the God of forgiveness, kindness, and purity; and you should be sacrificing not lambs and heifers, but all your thirst for revenge, all your stubborn pride, and all the vain pleasures of your life."

"All the pleasure and peace has gone out of my life," the Roman lady declared, "so the only things I could sacrifice to your god would be my anger and hatred—which I'd gladly do if he'd grant me the pleasures I've lost and the peace I want."

"My God will never bless pleasures of that kind. He condemns them; he forbids them unless they're sanctified in his name by an indissoluble vow."

"Then what comfort does he offer forsaken wives?" asked Leah, rising.

"He opens his arms to them," replied the Christian, "and invites them to find comfort on his breast."

"That's a very strange oracle, priest," said the lady; "I don't understand it. Can I make love to your god, and can he make love to me?"

"Yes, my child; God loves all of us, because all of us are his children. When people forsake each other, he comforts those who take refuge in him. If you taste the love of God, Leah, you'll find it offers such pure delights that you'll forget all the earthly ones."

"These oracles of yours become more and more astonishing—and alarming," said the woman, drawing back from the altar and partly veiling her face. "The gods' love is a fearful thing, old man! All the mortals who dared to indulge in it paid a terrible price. Semele was burnt to ashes by the radiance of Jupiter's face; Juno, in her jealousy, hunted down Latona—"[13]

"Don't say such things, you foolish creature! Put all those ignorant, worthless notions out of your mind. The true God never stoops to human weaknesses; he isn't clothed in flesh like your imaginary lords. You're a true child of your age; you're so far along the path of error that I don't know what language to speak to you. I don't have time to teach you now. Do you want to become a Christian?"

"Only if I could be persuaded that it would put an end to my sufferings."

"I can promise you in Jehovah's name that you'd receive comfort in this life and great rewards in the next."

"But how could I believe your promises? Up till now I haven't been shown any proof of your God's power."

"Should I ask God to persuade you with wonders and signs?" said the presbyter, more to himself than to the Roman lady.

"Do that," she exclaimed, "and I'll fall at his feet."

"No," Pamphilus replied; "your soul is in bondage to error. What is driving you to seek conversion isn't yet the voice of heaven; it's the voice of your own passions, and they're still striving so hard that you can't hear what God is saying. Listen to me, woman: go back home, try to forget the man who has injured you, and live chastely. Doom yourself to a life of solitude, seclusion, and sorrow; offer God your troubles and sufferings, and never tire of enduring them. When the sufferings seem too great for you to bear, don't appeal to Vesta or Venus. Forget such phantoms; kneel down and look up to heaven, where the living God is reigning, and speak these words: 'O true God, teach me to know you and love you, because I want to know and love no one but you.'"

"And then what miracle will he do for me?" asked the lady in some bewilderment.

"The truth will come into your heart, the love of God will strengthen your soul, peace will return to your senses, and you will be comforted."

"Forever?"

"No; human beings are frail, and need constant help from heaven to achieve anything. You'll need to keep praying whenever you are afflicted."

"And I'll be comforted every time?"

"If you pray with all your strength and all your heart."

"And I'll be a Christian?" asked Leah, growing worried. "My husband would betray me—he'd send me to my death!"

"These persecutions will weaken; Christ will triumph," said Pamphilus. "In the meantime, don't be afraid; don't, as yet, reveal your new faith to anyone; and pray secretly in your heart to the unknown God. Soon you'll long for instruction and baptism; and when you've become a Christian, you won't be afraid of martyrdom any more. Now go away; you've been here long enough. When you start to feel the effect of my promises, you can come back to the catacombs."

Next day the catacombs were invaded, the Christians were scattered, and for two years the religion of Christ seemed to be abolished in the city of Rome. Pamphilus returned to Caesarea, and Eusebius, armed with his friend's advice, replaced him in the city of Saint Peter.[14] He gathered the flock together, and found that it had become larger. The faith had grown during its captivity; the truth had been spread in the dark; and even among the former persecutors, there were now some new brethren breaking bread freely with the faithful.

One evening, while Eusebius was walking through the city of the Caesars to visit a secret crypt in the countryside, he was approached by an African slavewoman. The woman had been following him for a long time, and he had assumed that she was a spy. He was on the point of turning back to prevent her from discovering his destination, when she said to him, "A Roman lady wants to see you before she dies, in the name of the God of Nazareth. Come with me; and don't be alarmed, because your God is with us."

Eusebius followed her. As night fell, he passed into the deep shadows of an opulent country villa and was ushered to Leah's side. The Roman lady, in her purple gown, was already growing

cold; she raised herself on her ivory bed and asked him in a barely audible voice, "Are you Eusebius, the friend of Pamphilus?"

"I am," replied the holy man.

"Then come and baptize me," said the dying lady; "because I want to confess my faith in the unknown God before I die.[15] For two years I've been weeping and praying to him and calling on him to help me. I've grown fond of my sufferings, and my tears no longer hurt me—just as Pamphilus promised. I've lived the way he told me; I've given up pleasures and circuses and carnivals and chariots and the temples of powerless gods. Whenever I've felt tortured by the loss of those wretched delights, I've withdrawn to the silent depths of my garden and prayed; and every time, a strange feeling of contentment, a wonderful sense of peace, has come over me. I was never able to get any instruction in your mysteries; that would have meant exposing one of you to persecution, so I kept waiting for a better opportunity. But death is going to rob me of that happiness. I'm dying—dying in peace, with the hope of seeing your God, because I've done what Pamphilus told me: I've prayed with all my strength and all my heart. I've always prayed the way he taught me: 'O true God, teach me to know you and love you—' "

The words passed away on Leah's lips, and death's pallid veil began to spread across her face. Eusebius poured holy water over her brow and said to her:

"May the Lord himself teach you in heaven what you never learnt on earth! A sincere heart and a life of atonement are the truest forms of baptism he requires while we are here."

Leah began to smile. The slave who was tending her marveled at the glorious beauty visible in her face, and ran to get a mirror of burnished iron, which she offered her, declaring naively, "Don't be afraid that you're going to die, mistress; see, all the freshness is coming back into your face—your eyes are sparkling, your lips are reddening. The God of Galilee has worked a miracle for you. If men could see you now, they'd leave all the other women and bow down to you instead. Get up and call for your chariot, while I bind and adorn your hair; Caesar himself must fall in love with you now."

Leah looked at her reflection in the gleaming metal; then, lowering her weary arm, she said, "If the God of Galilee did restore me to life, I wouldn't go back among men. I wouldn't want

this beauty, restored by his mysterious love, to become the tainted prize of any mortal scoffer. I can feel that I'm dying—that I'm going back to the home of imperishable beauty, which divine Plato calls the sovereign good. He too believed that the fount of love and perfection is in heaven.[16] —Tell me, priest: the water that you poured over my head—isn't it a symbol of the everlasting fountain where I'm going to quench my thirst?"

"Yes, my child," replied the presbyter.

He spoke to her of redemption and hope, and saw her die with a smile still on her lips. The peace that she had found in her devotion to the unknown God, and the tranquillity of her final moments, made such an impression on the black slave that she followed Eusebius to the Christians' crypt and also embraced the religion of the God who comforts lovers and redeems slaves.

Open Letter to Monsieur Nisard (1836)

Dear Sir,

Very few critics deserve to have either their praise acknowledged or their errors answered. If I receive your generous commendations with gratitude, and if I try to refute your strictures, it's because I find that your work displays not only talent and insight, but also a great deal of broadmindedness and honesty.

If I wanted merely to satisfy my vanity, I'd simply express my thanks—because you praise the imaginative side of my fiction far beyond its merits. But the more moved I am by your approval, the less I can accept some of your adverse criticisms; and so, in order to defend myself, I'm committing (with great reluctance, and contrary to my usual practice) the impertinence of speaking about myself to someone I haven't had the pleasure of meeting.

You say, sir, that an aversion to marriage is the basis of all my books. Well, allow me to point out four or five exceptions.[1] *Lélia,* for one—which you list among my attacks on that social institution, and which doesn't, to the best of my knowledge, say a single word about it. *Lélia,* of all my attempts at fiction, might also serve to answer your accusation that I want to bring back "sensual egoism" and construct "a materialistic philosophy." Nor, when I wrote it, did *Indiana* strike me as a defense of adultery. In that novel (where, if I remember rightly, no adultery ever takes place), I think the so-called lover ("that king of my books," as you wittily call him) comes off worse than the husband. If I'm not absolutely mistaken about my own intentions, *Le Secrétaire intime* deals with the joys of conjugal fidelity. *André* is neither "against" marriage

nor "for" adulterous relationships. *Simon* ends with a wedding, for all the world like a fairy tale by Perrault or Madame d'Aulnoy.[2] Then there's *Valentine*. Its ending isn't, I must confess, either original or ingenious; an oldfashioned catastrophe steps in to prevent an adulteress from enjoying, in a second marriage, the happiness that she hadn't been willing to wait for. The issue of marriage is no more under consideration in *Leoni* than in the Abbé Prévost's inimitable novel *Manon Lescaut,*[3] which I tried, for purely artistic reasons, to provide with a kind of pendant. The consequences of passionate love for an unworthy object—the slavery imposed by a corrupt creature's power on a blind creature's weakness—surely don't appear in a better light in the former work than in the latter. There remains, then, *Jacques*. *Jacques* is, I think, the only one of my books that has had the good fortune to attract any attention from you—and that's certainly more than any work of mine, to date, deserves to receive from a serious man.

Maybe *Jacques* really does display all the hostility to domestic harmony that you detect in it. Admittedly, other people have detected just the opposite—and they could be equally right. When a book, however slight it may be, fails to demonstrate, clearly, unambigously, indisputably, and unanswerably, what it set out to demonstrate, that's the fault of the book—but it isn't always the fault of the author. As an artist, he has sinned gravely; his hand, lacking experience and control, has failed to communicate his intention; but as a man, he didn't mean to puzzle his readers or distort the fundamentals of everlasting truth.

Many stories, true or false, are told in Florence and Milan about the immortal Benvenuto Cellini.[4] I've heard it said that when he started to make a vase, he would often plan its shape and proportions carefully; but when he came to carry out the design, he would become so fascinated by some figure or festoon that he'd get carried away, enlarging one detail to poeticize it, and displacing another so that he could give it a more graceful curve. Thus, roused by his love of detail, he'd neglect the work for the ornament, and he'd come to his senses too late, when he couldn't return to his original design. Instead of the cup he had set out to make, he'd produce a tripod; instead of a ewer, a lamp; instead of a crucifix, the hilt of a sword. And thus, by pleasing himself, he'd displease the people for whom his work had been intended.

While Cellini was at the height of his powers, this passion was itself one of his assets; everything he made was perfect and flawless in its particular genre. But when—because of persecution, a disorderly life, imprisonment, travel, and poverty—his hand became less sure and his inspiration less deft, he began to produce works marvelous in detail but unimaginably clumsy as a whole. The cup, the tripod, the ewer, and the sword hilt combined in his brain, clashed with each other, reunited, and finally appeared side by side in formless, useless compositions, somehow lacking logic and unity.

Now, what people ascribe to the great Cellini in the dotage of his genius, happens every day to lesser talents that haven't yet reached maturity and possibly never will. That is what happened to me when I wrote *Jacques;* and very likely all my other stories suffer from the same haste, produced by an eager but awkward craftsman who indulges some passing fancy and misses the goal because he dallies along the way.

It isn't, then, to the reader who has so favorably and severely assessed me, that I'm appealing against his own verdict; it's to the artist whose talent has surely also had days of youth and hours of temptation. Such a person ought to be very cautious in passing judgment, and ought to realize that the hardest thing in the world—the supreme triumph, so to speak, of the human will—is to say what you want to say and do what you want to do.

Thus, in dealing with the aspects of my books that are repugnant to good sense, your attack should have been directed not at the intention, but at the execution. Perhaps you shouldn't have assumed so confidently that my purpose was to attack society; and certainly you shouldn't have assumed that my products were so well thought out, so clever, and so skillful. In other words, I may have much less talent and much more conscience than you imagined. Seventy-five percent of artists spend their lives struggling to issue fragments from a whole that remains forever buried in the sanctum of their minds.

The part of your verdict that I do accept as entirely valid is this:

"The purpose of George Sand's works is to do away with husbands, or at least to make them unpopular."

Yes: my ambition would indeed have been to do away with *husbands,* had I felt that I had the power to be a "reformer." However, if I haven't managed to make myself clear, it's because

I don't have any such power; by nature I am more a poet than a lawgiver. You will, I trust, entertain this humble claim!

Still, I do believe that fiction is, like drama, a school for morals, where contemporary *abuses*, *absurdities*, *prejudices*, and *vices* can be exposed to criticism from any and every angle. I've often used the term "social laws" to refer to the italicized words in the previous sentence, and I never for a moment dreamed that there was any harm in doing so. Who could imagine that I meant to rewrite the laws of the realm? To tell the truth, I was much astonished when certain followers of Saint-Simon[5]—well-meaning philanthropists, worthy and sincere seekers for truth—asked me what I wanted to replace "husbands" with. "Marriage," I replied naïvely—just as I think religion should replace priests, who have done so much damage to religion.

Yes, maybe I did commit a great sin against language when, referring to social abuses, absurdities, prejudices, and vices, I spoke collectively and said "society." Often, similarly, I made the mistake of saying "marriage" when I meant "married people." None of the people who had any personal knowledge of me misunderstood that; they were aware that I've never dreamed of rewriting the constitutional Charter.[6] I thought the general public would take too little notice of me to start challenging a mere poet's use of language and mounting a sort of inquisition into his personal life in the privacy of his garret—so that he was forced to justify his deeds, ideas, and beliefs, and define the exact meaning of his expressions (which may not always have been very precise, but were probably always self-explanatory in their particular contexts). Maybe the public hasn't played a very big role in all this, and the self-styled "insulted" male sex has simply indulged in a little childish gossip about matters unworthy of such a melancholy honor. Still, one thing is sure: I was wrong not to have been absolutely clear, precise, logical, and accurate. Alas, dear sir, I do blame myself constantly for a serious failing—for the fact that I'm no Bossuet or Montesquieu;[7] but I must confess that I have little hope of ever correcting it.

Another serious rebuke that you address to me is this: "Perhaps someone who has not had a happy life would have done better to avoid scandalizing the world with their personal misfortunes and turning a private matter into a public issue"—and so on.

The whole of that paragraph is nobly thought and nobly written. What makes me resist it isn't the idea expressed in it. I do prize patience and selflessness above all else, and I'll make no reply to the part of your rebuke that might concern me personally. Were I addressing a priest, maybe my full confession might succeed in earning me absolution, along with reprimands and penances. But only Rousseau, to date, has been allowed to deliver his confession in public.[8] I shall, therefore, reply only in general terms.

It seems to me that there's a lot of hypocrisy in people's talk of patience and selflessness. It seems to me (though I could be wrong) that we're not living in an age of infinite haughtiness and self-assertion. I don't see that men today have a very keen sense of their personal dignity; I don't see that they have to be urged to bow the knee any lower than they already do before issues and concerns that belong neither to religion, nor to morality, nor to virtue, nor to law and order.—Similarly, I don't see that the wives of these men are overflowing with Spartan courage or Roman national pride.

In short, my eyesight may be at fault, but I think I see that people greatly misuse "silence" when they make it a way to "avoid" both "violent conflict" within marriage and the "licentiousness" ("catastrophe" would have been a more accurate term) of a "separation." In the days of faith, in the ages when Christ was revered, patience and selflessness were indeed crucial virtues to recommend to women who had recently left the Druid altars, the blood-stained army camps and war councils where their husbands may have let them meddle a bit too much. But our modern way of life doesn't have much in common, as far as I can tell, with the Teutonic forests—especially now that the Regency and the Directory have taught women how to get along so nicely with their husbands.[9] I'd have thought, therefore, that, if any moral had to be attached to my trifling fictions, it might well be this: "Licentiousness in women is *very often* provoked by cruelty or vice in men"; or this: "Telling lies isn't virtuous; cowardice isn't selflessness"; or, for that matter, this: "A husband who cheerily neglects his marriage vows, reveling and drinking and blaspheming, is *sometimes* less pardonable than a wife who miserably breaks hers, and who suffers and atones for doing so."

To complete the list of my wholehearted agreements with your judgments, I'll say this: the kind of love that I "exalt" and

enthrone on the ruins of "vice" is indeed my utopia, my dream, my poetic ideal. Love of that kind is great, noble, beautiful, volontary, everlasting; but, after all, love of that kind is marriage as Jesus ordained it, as the apostle Paul expounded it, and even, if you like, as our Civil Code, Part 5, Chapter 6, spells it out, with responsibilities for both partners.[10] And that is exactly what I am asking from society—as a new idea, or an institution lost in the mists of time, which might very appropriately be revived, dragged out from the dust of the ages and the mire of habit, if we want to see true conjugal fidelity, true domestic peace and purity replace the type of shameful business deal and mindless tyranny that the world's vice and degeneracy have bred.

Now, you, dear sir, judge this social issue from a very lofty height; you are a tolerant thinker, an assured and sensible moralist, who doesn't see any danger in so-called immoral books. Why, then, when you wrote those three or four fine pages on public morality with reference to me, did you neglect such a golden opportunity to denounce the husbands' greed, habitual debauchery, and habitual violence, which so often permit or provoke their wives' misdeeds? Wouldn't you have done your self-imposed duty to society more fully if you had come out decisively in support of the age-old Christian morality, which demands that the head of a household should himself be chaste and considerate? This isn't a matter of a few exceptional cases, "ill-matched unions." Any and every possible union will be intolerable as long as custom is infinitely lenient toward the sins of one sex, while the stern and salutary rigor of the past is retained only to condemn those of the other. I know perfectly well that it takes some courage to tell a whole generation to its face that it is unjust and corrupt. I know that if you write what you really think, you gain a lot of enemies—among the people who are comfortable with contemporary vices. I know that when you *have* taken that liberty, you must expect to spend the rest of your days enduring a persecution that won't stop short on the threshold of your private life. But I also know that when a few women have had that kind of courage, it wouldn't be unworthy for a man—especially a man who is conscientious and talented—to pardon their failures, and to help and support anything in their work that may be true and noble.

If you'd been living in the days when *Tartuffe* was attacked as an impious work,[11] you would have been one of the people who

didn't champion hypocrisy but, on the contrary, fought with all the strength of their convictions and all the integrity of their hearts against the critics' malicious interpretations. Then as now, you would have written—and signed it with your own blood—that the idea behind *Tartuffe* was notably pious and honest, that an attack on a hypocrite isn't an attack on God, that a family's peace and dignity aren't disturbed when sneaks and schemers are driven out of its midst.

Tartuffe, of course, is a masterpiece; both in conception and in execution, it deserves the support of every high-minded person. But if works of that caliber are no longer being written—if the vivid colors of the golden age have faded—if, instead of Aristophanes, Terence,[12] and Molière, we have only George Sand and Company—nevertheless, to the eyes of a discerning thinker, the perennial frailty of humanity is still there, still bloodstained and leprous, and it still deserves both horror and compassion. "Justice"—that perpetual dream of simple souls—is still standing; far away, to be sure, but still radiant, still necessary, still calling for our every desire and our every effort. If you critics are reduced to judging pallid works, isn't that all the more reason why you should go straight to the heart of the matter, dear sirs, and spare the preacher in order to encourage the principle? In that way you would compensate for our inadequacies, and replace what our era lacks in power and genius.

Finally, dear sir, I should thank you for the good advice that you have given me. I do plead guilty, I repeat—because if you haven't always quite understood me, that's my fault and not yours. Someone who is watching a battle from a mountaintop can see the armies' various mistakes and losses better than someone who is in the thick of the conflict, with all its dust and excitement. So a dispassionate critic can know more about an impetuous artist and his work than the artist himself does. Socrates often had to tell his disciples, "You set out to give me a definition of knowledge, but you've given me a definition of music and dancing; that isn't what I asked you to do, and neither is it the answer you meant to provide."[13]

Mothers in Fashionable Society (1845)

"Who is that fat woman dancing?" I asked the Parisian who was piloting me through the ballroom for the first time.

"That's my aunt," he said, "a very young, very frolicsome, and, as you can see from her diamonds, very rich person."

Very rich, very frolicsome, maybe, I thought; but very young, that can't be right. I kept looking at her, dumbfounded; and, as I was unable to detect any trace of youth about her, I ventured to ask the sum total of her years.

"That's a silly question," replied Arthur, laughing at my faux pas. "My dear sir, I'm my aunt's heir; I'm certainly not going to tell her age." Seeing that I didn't understand, he added, "I have no desire to be disinherited. But allow me to introduce you to my mother. She used to be very close to yours; she'll be delighted to meet you."

I followed Arthur, and, next to a veritable shrub of camellias, we found two young ladies sitting in the midst of a cloud of more or less frivolous male butterflies. Arthur introduced me to the younger—at least, to the one who at first appeared to be so; she was the better dressed, the better groomed, the more engaging, and the more courted of the two. I was still dazed by the lights and the music, and by the fact that I was making my debut in Parisian society and was afraid of seeming gauche and provincial—and indeed I was as gauche as anyone can possibly be, because I didn't hear the introductory compliments that Arthur recited while he steered me toward this dazzling beauty, and it took me a good five minutes to recover from the teasing and provocative glance her lovely dark eyes

shot at me. She spoke to me, she questioned me; I answered wildly and randomly, not being able to overcome my awkwardness. Eventually I managed to grasp that she was asking me whether I danced; and as I was beginning to offer my apologies, "He dances just as well as anyone else," Arthur declared; "he hasn't yet had the courage to take the plunge, that's all."

"Bah! The first step is the hardest," the lady retorted; "we must overcome this timidity. I suppose you haven't ventured to engage anyone? Well then, I shall cure your embarrassment and hurl you into the fray. Come and waltz with me. Give me your arm . . . not like that . . . put your arm around me, so . . . not stiffly, don't crumple my dress; that's right! You'll get the hang of it. . . . Wait for the ritornello, follow my movements . . . here we are . . . let's go!"

And, light as a sylph, bold as a soldier, solid as a besieged citadel amid the jolts of the dancers, she whirled me away.

For a while everything seemed like a dream. My sole concerns, as I leapt and spun, were to avoid falling over with my partner, to avoid crumpling her, and to keep in time with the music. Little by little I began to see that I was managing just as well as anyone else—in other words, that these Parisians waltzed just as badly as I did—and I settled down and gained in assurance. I began to look at the creature I was holding in my arms, and discovered, as we waltzed round the room, that this radiant puppet (she was a little out of breath and had been crammed a little too tightly into her bodice) was growing uglier before my very eyes. Her debut had been brilliant, but she fatigued easily; dark circles were developing around her eyes, blotches were appearing in her complexion, and, it must be confessed, she seemed to me less and less young and light. I had some trouble getting her back to her place, and when I tried to thank her politely for initiating me on the dance floor, I came out with such clumsy and coldly respectful language that she scarcely seemed to hear me.

"Now then," I said to my friend Arthur, "who was the lady I've just been waltzing with?"

"That's a fine question! Have you lost your wits? I introduced you to her only a moment ago."

"That doesn't tell me anything."

"Why, you scatterbrain, she's my mother!" he replied with a touch of impatience.

"Your mother!" I echoed, embarrassed by my folly. "Do excuse me; I thought she was your sister."

"Charming! Then he must have thought my sister was my mother! My dear fellow, you mustn't make that kind of mistake, and go rattling off compliments to the wrong lady in imitation of Thomas Diafoirus."[1]

"Your mother!" I went on, heedless of his jibes. "She dances well . . . but then, how old is she?"

"Not again! This is too much. Everyone will send you packing if you keep on asking women's ages."

"But surely your mother wouldn't bear me any ill-will; after all, it's just an innocent compliment. From her jewels, her figure, and her vivacity, I thought she was a mere girl. I can't believe she's old enough to be your mother."

"Well, well," said Arthur, chuckling, "these simpleminded country folk do know how to get themselves forgiven. All the same, I must warn you not to play the dashing young blade too much with my mother. She loves to poke fun at people; besides, it would really be in the worst possible taste to show any surprise that a mother is still active on the dance floor. Look around you. Aren't *all* the mothers dancing? It's quite the thing, at their age!"

"Then women here must marry very early in life to have such grown-up children."

"No earlier here than elsewhere. My dear boy, you really must get the whole idea out of your head; I should tell you that after they reach thirty, Parisian women have no age at all, for the simple reason that they never get any older. It's the height of rudeness to ask how old they are, as you keep doing. What if I told you that I don't know my mother's age?"

"I wouldn't believe you."

"And yet I don't. I'm too well born, and I've been too well brought up, to ask her any such question."

I went from one surprise to another. I returned to Arthur's sister, and I still thought that, superficially at least, she looked less young than her mother. She was a girl of about twenty-five; no one had thought of marrying her, and she was cross about it. She was

poorly dressed, either because she had no taste, or else because the necessary expense for her attire couldn't be afforded. Either way, her mother had clearly never tried to display her to advantage, and therefore had done her a serious disservice. Perhaps as a reaction against her mother's giddy manner, she was no flirt. Nobody paid her much attention; she wasn't asked to dance much. Her aunt—the fat aunt who danced with such frenzy, and whose heir Arthur claimed to be—chaperoned her now and then while her mother danced. At such times the aunt was keen to be back on the dance floor herself, and so brought the girl a few recruits who were dutybound to oblige. I was soon assigned this task, and performed it less reluctantly than the others did. The girl wasn't at all ugly; she was merely cold and awkward. Yet she did loosen up and get a bit livelier in my presence. She went so far as to tell me that she was bored with society, and that the ballroom was her torture chamber. I then realized that she had been dragged along against her will, to accompany her mother; she herself was, in effect, acting as mother to the author of her days. She was doomed to be a mere pretext. Arthur's father, who had the tastes you'd expect to find in a man of his age, resigned himself to running the gauntlet of society or remaining alone by the fire, because Madame kept telling him, "If you have a daughter to marry off, you certainly must take her out to dances." And all the while, the daughter didn't get married. The father kept yawning, and the mother kept dancing.

I took the poor young lady onto the dance floor a number of times. At a ball in the country, this would have compromised her, and her parents would have given me a piece of their mind. In Paris, by contrast, everyone was exceedingly grateful to me, and Mademoiselle didn't display any of the pretty bashfulness that launches so many small-town sentimental romances among young people. This gave me the right to sit beside her afterwards and have a talk with her, while the two matrons exchanged sweet nothings with their admirers and simpered charmingly.

Our own chat was much less frivolous. Mademoiselle Emma was perceptive—too perceptive; it made her malicious, though she wasn't witty by nature. My simplicity gave her confidence.

She even informed me about the matters that had so astonished me at the start of the ball, and proved a much more forthcoming tour guide than her brother, so that I didn't need to venture many questions.

"You're amazed at the sight of my fat aunt kicking up her heels with such gusto," she told me; "well, that's nothing; she's only forty-five, she's just a girl. She's very upset about her weight—it makes her look old. My mother is better preserved, don't you think? Yet she's been a grandmother for some years; my older sister has children of her own. I don't know Mamma's exact age; but even if we assume that she married very early in life, I'm sure she must be fifty at the very least."

"That's amazing!" I exclaimed. "Good God, when I think of my poor mother, with her big bonnets, her big shoes, her big knitting needles and her spectacles, and then look at all the ladies of the same age here in short sleeves and satin shoes, with flowers in their hair and young men on their arms, I really believe I must be dreaming."

"Then perhaps you're having a nightmare," suggested Emma unkindly. "My mother used to be so strikingly beautiful that she might possibly have still some right to try and appear so. But it's less pardonable for my aunt to wear such a low-cut dress and exhibit the sorry sight of her obesity as freely as she does."

I automatically turned around—and accidentally bumped against two shoulderblades so bulging that I had to glance at the aunt's floral chignon to convince myself I was seeing her from behind. This overabundance of health positively horrified me, and Mademoiselle Emma quickly noticed my pallor.

"That's nothing," she said with a smile, and the pleasure of mockery fleetingly lit up her eyes with the glow that love had never given them. "Look around; count up all the young girls and pretty women. Then count up all the ugly women (of whatever age) and the ones who are over the hill; and finish off with the old hags, the hunchbacks or near-hunchbacks, the mothers and grandmothers and great-aunts, and you'll see that decrepitude and ugliness constitute the majority in our ballrooms and dominate society."

"Oh, it really is a nightmare!" I exclaimed. "And what scandalizes me most is the exorbitant luxury involved in rigging out

these unbridled and fantastic creatures. Ugliness never seemed as repulsive to me as it does here. Until now I felt sorry for it. I even had a kind of respectful sympathy for it. When a woman has neither youth nor beauty, one feels obliged to honor her all the more by way of compensation. But this bedizened old age—this brazen ugliness—these wrinkles that contort themselves into voluptuous smiles—these ponderous and superannuated odalisques who squash their frail squires flat—these skeletons draped in diamonds, who seem to creak as if they're going to disintegrate into dust—these false tresses, false teeth, false waists—all these false airs and graces—they're a ghastly sight—they're the Dance of Death!"[2]

An old friend of Arthur's family—a fairly well-known painter, and a wit—came up to us and heard my last words.

"Young man," he said, as he sat down next to me, "I quite approve of your anger, though it doesn't exactly assuage mine. Are you a poet—or an artist? If you're either, what are you doing in a place like this? Be off with you! Otherwise you might grow accustomed to this abominable reversal of the laws of nature. And the very first law of nature is harmony—in other words, beauty. Yes, there's beauty all around us, as long as it knows its place and doesn't stray from what naturally suits it. Old age is beautiful too—as long as it doesn't try to twist itself into an imitation of youth. Is there anything finer than the noble bald head of a calm and honorable old man? Look at all these old periwigged idiots. Well now, if I could dress and groom them as I pleased, and make them look and act differently, I'd find some excellent models among them, I can tell you that. As you see them now, they're mere hideous caricatures. Where have good taste, and awareness of the most elementary principles, and (I must add) even plain commonsense, gone? I'm not talking only of current fashions in clothing; though men's fashions are the most dismal, silly, graceless, and inconvenient things imaginable. That black is a symbol of mourning; it strikes you to the heart.

"As for women's fashions, they're pleasant enough at the moment, and might even be considered pretty. But so few women can tell what suits them! Look around, and you'll find scarcely three out of forty in this room who are presentably got up and

know how to turn the restrictions of current fashion to their advantage. Most of them have more taste for opulence than for beauty. The same thing is happening in all the arts, in all forms of decoration. The wealthy spendthrifts want what is costly; the wealthy misers want what is showy; nobody wants what is simple and beautiful. Well now, don't the women of Paris have monstrous enough models in front of their eyes to cure them of any taste for ugliness?"

"What about the old English ladies piled high with feathers and diamonds," I exclaimed, "like fantastically caparisoned horses of the Apocalypse!"[3]

"You may be able to talk about them," he replied; "perhaps you notice some of them in this very room. I, however, have trained myself not to see them. When I suspect that they're in a room, I erase them from my sight by sheer willpower."

"Really?" said Mademoiselle Emma, laughing; "oh, but you can't possibly avoid seeing that enormous Lady ——! There she is, treading on your toes at this moment. Even if you can't see the huge creature, you must at least feel the weight of her. Five and a half feet tall; four feet around the waist; a plume from an undertaker's hearse; lace that has yellowed on the bodies of three generations of dowagers and cost three thousand francs per meter; a bodice shaped like a sentry box; teeth all the way down to her chin; a chin bristling with a gray beard; and, to match the lot, a pretty little light blonde wig with dear little girlish curls. Just look at her; she's the pearl of the United Kingdom."

"My imagination revels at such a portrait," returned the painter, turning his head away; "but some realities are uglier than anything our imaginations can invent; and therefore, even if the noble lady trod on my whole body, I still wouldn't look at her."

"But I thought you said nature never creates anything ugly," I pursued.

"Nature never creates anything too ugly for art to transform into something more beautiful—or more ugly, depending on the artist. And every human being is the artist who shapes his own self, morally and physically. He can make use of it either for better or for worse, depending on how true or how false he is. Why do we see so many women, and even men, who are creatures of

artifice? Because they have false notions of themselves. As I said, beauty is harmony, and beauty exists in nature because the laws of nature are ruled by harmony. When we disrupt that natural harmony, we produce something ugly; and nature seems to aid and abet us, because she keeps on generating what is consistent with her own rules, thus heightening the contrast. The upshot is that we blame her, when we ourselves have been foolish and guilty. Do you follow me, Mademoiselle?"

"It's a bit abstract for me, I must confess," Emma replied.

"I'll use an example to explain it," said the artist; "the very example that prompted our discussion. As I said at the start, there's nothing ugly in nature. To simplify matters, let's confine our attention to human nature. There's a conventional belief that it's horrible to grow old, because old age is ugly. As a result, a woman has her white hairs plucked, or dyes them; she uses makeup to hide her wrinkles, or at least, tries to add some luster to her faded cheeks with the deceptive glitter of bright fabrics. I don't want to make a long catalogue of cosmetic artifices, so I'll stop there. But note that instead of banishing the signs of old age, such devices merely make them more lasting and more glaring. Nature digs her heels in; old age refuses to back down; a face looks all the more wrinkled and angular underneath hair of an artificial tint that clashes with the wearer's true, undisguisable age. Bright, vividly colored fabrics, flowers, diamonds against the skin—everything that glitters and attracts attention—will make anything that is already faded seem even more faded. And apart from the physical effect, there's the effect on our minds, which must necessarily be affected by what our eyes see. Our judgement is shocked by such discrepancies. 'Why struggle so hard against the divine laws?' we instinctively ask. 'Why adorn your body as if it could still arouse passion? Why not be content with the majesty of age and the respect that it inspires? Flowers on those bald heads or white hairs? What a joke! What a desecration!'

"Old age breeds disgust when it's patched and painted; but it would leave a much kinder and less unflattering impression if it gave up trying to transgress the laws of nature. There *are* styles of dress and adornment appropriate for old men and women. Look at some of the old masters' paintings[4]—

Rembrandt's white-bearded men, Van Dyck's matrons with their long silk or black velvet bodices, their white bonnets, their austere ruffs or wimples, their imposing and noble brows plainly visible, their long and venerable fingers, their rich and heavy chains—forms of adornment that set off ceremonial robes without robbing them of their dignity. Not that I'm saying we should copy the old fashions slavishly; that would be just eccentric. Any attempt at originality would be unbecoming in old age. But sensible customs and logical habits would soon spread comparable fashions throughout society, and public common sense would soon create a different costume for each age group—instead of creating a different costume for each social class, which has been the rule far too long. Give me the task of designing the old men's dress, since I belong to that group myself, and you'll see that a lot of these fellows who nowadays can't model for anything but caricatures will look decidedly handsome. I myself, for a start. Here I am, obliged to wear a coat that chokes me, a shoe that pinches me, a cravat that accentuates my pointed chin, and a shirt collar that bunches up my wrinkles—for fear of looking odd and breaking the rules of good taste. Well, you'd see me with a fine black robe or a long flowing mantle, a venerable beard, calf-length fur boots or slippers—a whole set of clothes that would match the way I naturally look, my ponderous gait, my need for comfort and dignity. And then, my dear Emma, you might perhaps say, 'There's a handsome old man.' Instead of which you're obliged to say, when you see me wearing the same kind of clothes as my grandson, 'What a villainous-looking old fellow!'"

Emma laughed at this entertaining declaration, and then said, "I think you're too frank for your own good—and other people's. Just imagine what a revolution, what an uproar there would be among the women, if they were forced to emphasize their age by starting to wear an octogenarian's costume when they turned fifty!"

"Believe me, it would make them look younger," he replied. "Anyhow, we could design different clothes for every twenty-year age group. I must say, by the way, that it's a mistake when a woman tries to turn her date of birth into a big secret. Sooner or later some slip will be sure to betray the fact that you've lied about your

age; and then, even if it's only been by a single year, everyone will maliciously pile the years on you by the handful. 'Thirty?' someone will say; 'more like forty.' 'Well, she looks a good fifty,' someone else will say. And some comedian will add, 'Maybe a hundred! When a woman is so clever at hiding her age, how can you tell?' It seems to me that if I were a woman, I'd prefer to look a well-preserved forty than a badly-faded thirty. I'm sure that whenever I learn that a woman is no longer admitting her age, instantly I start to think of her as old—very old."

"Well, I feel the same way," I remarked in turn; "but tell me more on the subject of dress. You'd leave fashions for young women just as they are today?"

"Not at all, if you don't mind my saying so," he replied; "I find them much too plain. Compared to the mothers' fashions, which are so opulent, they're quite niggardly—repulsively so. I think Emma, for instance, is dressed like a child; from the time she turned fifteen, I would have adorned her much more than she currently is. Are people already trying to make her look younger? There's no need for that. It's customary, we're told, it's tasteful; plainness suits the modesty of youth; I fully agree, but doesn't it also suit the dignity of motherhood? Then the older women comfort the girls by telling them, 'Your natural charms are adornment enough for you; we're the ones who need the help of art.' A curious model! A curious display of modesty and morality! And in the eyes of an artist, what a topsy-turvy notion! Here we have a matron decked out in finery, while her pretty and charming daughter is dressed for her first communion—dressed almost as a nun! Why, what are flowers and diamonds for—what are rich fabrics and all the treasures of art and nature for—except to adorn beauty? And if you're singing the praises of plain modest purity, is that a virtue limited to virgins? Why are you so quick to rob yourselves of the one quality that could make you still more beautiful? If you want to appear youthful, why do you make yourselves look immodest? A bizarre kind of reasoning! An insoluble puzzle! Some shameless creatures seem to think that a woman should be like a flower, and display more and more of her breast as she ripens. What they don't realize is that a woman doesn't pass straight from beauty to death as a rose does. She is more fortunate; after the loss of her first brilliance, she retains a fragrance more lasting than that of roses."

The ball was finishing. Emma's mother and aunt stayed to the very end, getting steadily bolder and livelier—and, due to the excitement and fatigue, looking steadily uglier. Emma was in a good mood because she had heard their follies anathematized. After the old artist left, she continued to talk with me, but her conversation became so bitter and vindictive that eventually I had to go away, deeply saddened. Bad mothers, bad daughters! "Is that what our world is like, then?" I asked myself.

The Plowman, a woodcut from *Les Simulachres & historiées faces de la mort (The Dance of Death)* by Hans Holbein the Younger (1538).

The Devil's Pool (1845)

1. The Author to the Reader

By the Sweat of thy Brow
Thou shalt maintaine thy meagre Life;
After long Suff'ring, Toyle & Strife,
DEATH takes thee from the Plough.

This quatrain in archaic French, printed below a picture by Holbein,[1] has a profoundly sad naïveté. The woodcut shows a farmer driving his plow across a field. A vast expanse of countryside extends into the distance; a few squalid huts are visible there; the sun is setting behind a hill. A hard day's work is ending. The peasant is old, stocky, dressed in rags. Before him he's driving a team of four gaunt, worn-out horses; his plowshare is digging into rough, unruly ground. One creature alone is light and nimble in this scene of "Sweat" and "Suff'ring." He is a weird character indeed, a skeleton armed with a whip, running alongside in the next furrow and lashing the terrified horses—doing the work of the old farmer's plowhand. He is Death, the specter whom Holbein introduced allegorically into the series of philosophical and religious scenes—gloomy and clownish at one and the same time—known as *The Dance of Death.*

In this collection—or rather this vast composition, where Death plays his part on every page and is the *leitmotiv* and dominant theme—Holbein has summoned up rulers, pontiffs, lovers, gamblers, drunkards, nuns, harlots, robbers, beggars, soldiers, monks, Jews, travelers, the entire world of his own day and ours; and everywhere the specter of Death is taunting, threatening, and triumphing. From one scene only is he absent: the scene where

poor Lazarus lies on a dunghill at the rich man's gate and declares that Death holds no terrors for him—presumably because he has nothing to lose; his very life is Death anticipated.

Is it really a comforting thought, this Stoic notion devised by the half-pagan Christianity of the Renaissance? Does it really satisfy religious people? Self-seekers, sneaks, tyrants, libertines, all the proud sinners who misuse life, will suffer when they're in Death's clutches, no doubt. But what about the blind, the beggars, the madmen, the poor peasants? Will the thought that Death can't do them any further harm make amends for a whole lifetime of misery? Of course not. Over the artist's work hangs an inexorable gloom, a dreadful inevitability. It's like some bitter curse hurled at the doom of humanity.

Holbein's astute portrait of the society he saw before him is, in fact, grimly satirical. Everywhere he was struck by crime and misfortune. But what shall we depict—we artists living in a different age? Should people nowadays be rewarded with the thought of death? Should we today invoke death to punish injustices and put sufferings right?

No; we are no longer dealing with death, but with life. We no longer believe either that the grave will wipe out everything, or that blessings will be gained by compulsory acts of renunciation; we want to have a good life, because we want to have a fruitful one. Lazarus must leave his dunghill, so that the poor will no longer gloat over the death of the rich. Everyone must be made happy, so that the happiness of a few won't be a crime and a curse in the sight of God. The plowman, sowing his wheat, must recognize that he is working for the cause of life, and not rejoice over the fact that Death is walking alongside him. In short, death must be seen neither as a punishment for prosperity nor as a compensation for hardship. God hasn't appointed it to be either a punishment or a compensation for life; he has blessed life,[2] and the grave mustn't be seen as some refuge to which we can send people when we don't want them to be happy.

Some present-day artists, serious observers of the world around them, devote themselves to the task of portraying wretchedness, abject poverty, Lazarus's dunghill. No doubt that does come within the scope of art and philosophy; but when they depict poverty as being so hideous and degraded, and sometimes so corrupt and criminal, do they really achieve their purpose, and is

the result as salutary as they claim? We won't venture to say. It may be argued that they terrify the unjust rich man by showing him the gaping chasm that lies beneath the fragile crust of his wealth—just as, in the days of the Dance of Death, they showed him his open grave with Death lying ready to fold him in an obscene embrace. Nowadays they show him the burglar breaking down his door and the murderer creeping up while he's asleep. Frankly, we can't understand how it will reconcile him to the human race he despises, or make him care about the sufferings of the poor wretch he dreads, if the hapless fellow is presented to him as an escaped convict or a nocturnal prowler. The hideous image of Death, gnashing its teeth and playing its fiddle in the pictures of Holbein and his predecessors, did nothing to convert the wicked and console their victims. And isn't our own literature, in this respect, a bit like the art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance?

Holbein's revelers fill their glasses with a kind of desperation to drive away the idea of the invisible cupbearer Death. The unjust rich of our own day want fortified walls and cannons to drive away the idea of a Peasant's Revolt—which, according to Art, is diligently plotting in the dark, waiting its chance to pounce on the fabric of society. The church of the Middle Ages soothed the terrors of princes and potentates by selling them indulgences. The government of today appeases the rich by making them pay for vast numbers of policemen and jailers and bayonets and prisons.[3]

Albrecht Dürer, Michelangelo, Holbein, Callot, and Goya created powerful satires on the evils of their various times and countries.[4] Their works are immortal—historical documents of indisputable value. We won't deny that artists have a right to probe the wounds of society and lay them bare before us; but does art have no other task nowadays than the portrayal of threats and terrors? In the literature of mysterious vice, which talent and imagination has made so fashionable lately, we prefer the gentle, kindly characters to the melodramatic villains. The former can influence people; the latter can only frighten them—and fear never cures selfishness; on the contrary, it intensifies it.

We believe that art's task is a task of human feeling and love; that novels today should replace the fables and allegories of primitive times, and that artists have more far-reaching and more poetic things to do than to suggest a few cautious conciliatory measures in response to the terrors their own pictures have evoked.

They should aim to make the objects of their interest attractive—indeed, I wouldn't complain about a little embellishment here and there, if that should be necessary. Art isn't a study of concrete reality; it's a quest for ideal truth;[5] and *The Vicar of Wakefield* has been a more useful, more edifying book than *Le Paysan perverti* or *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.[6]

Well, reader, forgive these reflections of mine, and treat them as a kind of preface. There will be nothing else like them in the little tale I'm about to tell you. But since it is going to be so short and simple, I did feel a need to defend it in advance by saying what I think of today's multitudinous horror stories.

I let myself be drawn into this digression because of a plowman. The story I meant to tell you was the story of a plowman—and here it is.

2. Plowing

I'd been staring gloomily at Holbein's plowman for a long time; then I went out walking in the countryside, thinking about rural life and the farmer's lot. It's a sad thing indeed to spend all strength and time digging the depths of this jealous earth, which yields her rich treasures so grudgingly, when the sole reward and profit you get for your labors, at the end of the day, is a bit of the blackest and coarsest bread. The wealth of the soil, the crops and fruits, the proud cattle growing fat in the lush grass, belong to a few, and are mere instruments of hardship and slavery for the majority. A man of leisure doesn't generally love those things for their own sake—those fields and meadows and natural scenery and the superb animals that are going to be turned into hard cash for his personal use. A man of leisure may resort to the country for his health, to get a bit of fresh air, but then he returns to the big city to spend the wealth that his toiling vassals have produced.

As for the laborers, they are too downtrodden, too wretched, and too afraid of the future to enjoy the beauties of the countryside and the charms of rural life. They too see the golden fields, the lovely meadows, the superb livestock, in terms of money bags—of which they will get only a tiny proportion, not enough for their needs. And yet, every year, those accursed bags must be filled, to

satisfy the master and earn the right to live a wretched, poverty-stricken life on his land.

All the same, Nature is eternally young, beautiful, and generous. She lavishes her poetry and beauty on every plant or animal that is allowed to develop freely. She holds the secret of happiness, and no one has ever been able to steal it from her. The happiest man of all would be the one who knows his job, works with his hands, finds welfare and freedom by using his strength and his brains, and really has time to live, mentally and emotionally—has time to appreciate his own work and love God's. An artist can experience delights of that kind when he contemplates and reproduces the beauties of nature; but if he's honest and humane, his pleasure must be spoiled by the sight of so many people suffering in this earthly paradise. Happiness can exist only where heart, mind, and hand work together in the eyes of God, where the Lord's bounty is in harmony with man's bliss. Then the allegory painter could set beside humanity, not dismal fearsome Death stalking whip in hand through the plowland, but a radiant angel scattering blessed grain far and wide across the damp furrows.

And the notion that farmers could live serenely, freely, poetically, productively, and simply, isn't so hard to imagine that it should be dismissed as an impossible daydream. Virgil's sad sweet words "Happy indeed would the farmer be, if he could but know of his happiness!"[7] express a regret—but also, like all regrets, a prediction. The day will come when plowmen too can be artists, and can at least feel what is beautiful, even if they can't express it (which won't matter much by that time). Can't we see that this mysterious sense of poetry is already within them, in the form of instincts and indefinite fancies? True happiness can already be discerned, at an elementary level, among the present-day plowmen who are sheltered by a certain degree of comfort, and whose moral and intellectual development hasn't been totally stifled by abject hardship. Besides, if poets have already arisen in the midst of pain and weariness, how can we claim that manual labor prevents mental activity? If that does happen, surely it can be attributed to overwork and severe poverty; but we can't honestly say that moderate, useful work will create only bad workers and bad poets. Anyone who derives some uplifting pleasure from poetic feelings is a true poet—even if he has never written a scrap of verse in his life.

So, I was thinking along those lines, and what I didn't realize at the time was that my very surroundings were contributing to my confidence that the human race could be educated. I was walking along the edge of a field that was being prepared for sowing. It was a wide expanse, like the one in Holbein's picture. The landscape spread out far and wide too, and provided a huge green frame (just tinged with red by the approaching autumn) for this big bright brown field. In some of the furrows, recent rain had left trickles of water that glittered like silver threads in the sunlight. It was a clear, mild day, and the soil, freshly opened by the plow, emitted a light steam. At the far end of the field an old man, whose broad shoulders and stern face suggested those of Holbein's plowman, but whose clothes didn't carry any hint of poverty, was solemnly driving an old-fashioned plow drawn by two placid oxen—true patriarchs of the meadow, tall and rather lean, with cream-colored coats and long drooping horns—the kind of old workers who have become, after years of custom, "brothers," as they're called in our part of the country: if they are parted, they refuse to work with any new comrade, and simply pine away with grief.

People who don't know the country dismiss the notion of an ox's affection for his yokemate as a fairy tale. Well, let them come and look at one of these poor creatures, thin and wasted, restlessly lashing his lean flanks with his tail in some corner of the stable, snorting with mingled fright and contempt when food is offered him, constantly eyeing the door, pawing at the empty place beside him, sniffing at the yokes and chains his companion used to wear, and lowing dismally for him all the time. "That's a pair of oxen gone," the oxherd will say; "this one won't ever work again—his brother's dead. We really ought to fatten him up for the slaughterhouse, but he won't eat; he'll be dead of starvation before long."

The old plowman was working slowly, silently, without any superfluous effort. His docile team were in no greater hurry than he was; and yet, thanks to the steadiness of his work, the absence of distractions, and the accurate way in which he judged his expenditure of energy, he plowed a furrow just as quickly as his son—who was driving four less vigorous oxen over a stonier and stubborner patch of ground not far away.

The scene that next caught my eye was a really fine spectacle—just the subject for a painter. Over on the other side of the plain, a fine-looking young man was driving a magnificent team:

four pairs of young animals with short curly heads recalling those of the ancient wild oxen, dark tawny black-dappled coats shot with glimmers of fire, big untamed eyes, jerky movements, and the nervous, abrupt way of working that creatures have when they are still rebellious against the yoke and the goad, when they quiver with anger every time they obey the authority so lately imposed on them. "Newly yoked" was indeed the term for those oxen. The man who drove them had to clear a corner that had previously been pastureland and was full of age-old tree stumps. A tough job; and his youth, energy, and eight half-wild animals were hardly enough to do it.

A boy of six or seven, pretty as an angel, with a sheepskin slung round his shoulders over his blouse so that he looked like the little John the Baptist in some Renaissance picture, was scampering along in the next furrow, pricking the oxen's flanks with a long, light, blunt-tipped goad. The proud beasts quivered under the child's tiny hand, so that their yokes and head straps creaked, and the plow beam shook violently. Every time a root halted the plow, the farmer would call each animal by name in a loud voice, more to calm it down than to excite it; for the oxen, exasperated by this sudden obstruction, would become restive and paw the ground with their great cloven hoofs. Indeed, they would have swerved to one side, dragging the plow across the field, if the young man hadn't kept the first four under control with his voice and his goad while the boy dealt with the others. The little fellow would start shouting too—in a voice that was meant to be fearsome, but remained as sweet as his angelic face. The whole scene, in fact, with its strength and its grace, was full of beauty: the landscape, the man, the boy, the yoked oxen; and in spite of this mighty struggle to conquer the earth, there was a feeling of gentleness and profound tranquillity about everything. The farmer's apparent violence was simply an outlet for his strength and his energy; every time an obstacle was overcome and the plow went on its solemn, even way, he immediately settled back into the serenity characteristic of simple souls, and glanced with fatherly satisfaction at his son, who turned and grinned back at him. And then the young father would start the solemn, melancholy song that our old traditions have handed down—not to all plowmen indiscriminately, but to those who are best at rousing and restraining the spirit of working cattle. This song may originally have

been regarded as sacred, and mysterious powers would have been ascribed to it; even today, folk still think that it can stir up or soothe these animals and charm away the tedium of their long drudgery. If you're good at driving your team, making an absolutely straight furrow, and knowing exactly when to raise or lower the plowshare in the earth, that still isn't enough; no one can be a perfect plowman unless he is also able to sing to his oxen—a unique skill, which calls for special taste and special talent.

Actually, the song is simply a kind of recitative stopped and started as the singer pleases. Its irregular form and its "wrong" notes ("wrong" by the rules of musical art)[8] make it impossible to describe. But it's a beautiful song just the same, and it's so apt to the kind of work it accompanies, to the pace of the oxen and the peacefulness of the countryside and the simplicity of the men who sing it, that no genius unacquainted with work on the land could have invented it, and no singer other than an "expert plowman" of the region could repeat it. At a time of year when there's no work or activity in the fields except for the plowing, this sweet and powerful song rises like a voice of the breeze, which has something of the same peculiar tonality. The last note of each phrase is held and trilled with an extraordinary length and strength of breath, rising smoothly a quarter of a tone as it does so. It's primitive, but indescribably fascinating; and when you're used to hearing it, you can't imagine that any other song could arise at those times and in those places without sounding discordant.

So, then, I was faced with a picture that contrasted with Holbein's, though the scene itself was similar. Instead of a miserable old man, here was a young and vigorous one; instead of a team of gaunt and weary horses, four yoke of strong and hearty oxen; instead of Death, a pretty child; instead of despair and destruction, activity and happiness.

Then the French rhyme "By the Sweat of thy Brow" and the Virgilian "Happy indeed would the farmer be" came into my head together; and as I saw this fine-looking pair, man and child, accomplishing—under such poetic conditions, and with such a combination of grace and strength—so solemn and imposing a task, I felt a sense of deep pity and involuntary respect. Happy indeed would the farmer be! Yes; so, no doubt, would I be in his place, if my arm suddenly became strong and my voice powerful, and I could both fertilize Nature and sing her praise in such a way,

without losing the ability to see and appreciate harmonies of color and sound, subtleties of music and shape—in short, the mysterious beauty of the universe—and, above all, without losing my inner sense of the divine impulse that shaped the whole of this immortal sublime creation.

Sadly, though, this man has never appreciated the mystery of beauty; and this boy will never appreciate it either. God forbid that I should think them no better than the animals in their charge, with no glimpses of rapture to soothe their toil and lull their troubles. I can see the Lord's seal on their brows; they were born to rule the earth far more truly than those who get it merely by paying for it. And the proof that they have such feelings is the fact that they can't be exiled with impunity; they love the soil they have watered with their sweat; any true peasant will die of homesickness if he is sent in a soldier's uniform away from his native fields. All the same, this man doesn't enjoy some of the immaterial pleasures that I can experience—even though he has the right to them, being a worker in the immense temple that only the sky is vast enough to encompass. He has no consciousness of his own feelings. Those who condemned him to slavery from his mother's womb weren't able to rob him of his indefinite dreams; but they did rob him of the ability to reflect.

Ah, well! Such as he is, incomplete, condemned to everlasting childhood, he is still nobler than a man whose feelings have been stifled by learning. Do you think that you have a lawful and inalienable right to look down on him? Don't set yourself above him; you're very much mistaken, and it shows that your brain has destroyed your heart—indeed, that you're a person of the blindest and most limited kind. I prefer his simplemindedness to all your pseudoenlightenment. Whatever merit you might find in stressing the squalor of his life (which your own stern and contemptuous social code has imposed on him), I personally will get more pleasure if I describe its tender and touching side.

I knew the young man and the fair child; and I knew their story—everyone has his own story; everyone could make an interesting tale out of his life, if only he could appreciate it. Germain, though a mere plowman and peasant, understood his own feelings and obligations; he had told me about them, simply and clearly; and I had listened to him with interest. After I'd been watching him plow for a while, I began to wonder why his story

couldn't be written down, even though it was as simple and straightforward and unadorned as the furrow he was making with his plow.

Next year that furrow will be filled and covered by a new one. In the field of human existence, most people's footprints are made and erased in the same way. A bit of soil obliterates them; the furrows we dig are superimposed on each other, like graves in a cemetery. Isn't a plowman's furrow just as valuable as an idler's—even when the idler, for some peculiar or ridiculous reason, has made a certain amount of noise in the world and left an abiding name behind him?

Well, if we can, we'll try to save the furrow of Germain, the "expert plowman," from oblivion. He himself won't know or care anything about it; but I shall get some pleasure from the attempt.

3. Père Maurice[9]

"Germain," his father-in-law said to him one day, "you should think about getting married again. It's almost two years since you lost my daughter, and now your oldest boy is seven. You're getting close to thirty, my son; and you know that in our part of the country everyone says a man is too old to marry after he reaches that age. You have three fine children, and they've never been a burden to us till now. My wife and my daughter-in-law have done their best for them, and given them the love that was fit and proper. Why, Little Pierre is almost grown up now; he already goads the oxen well, you can trust him to look after the cattle in the meadow, and he's strong enough to lead the horses to water. We're not worried about him; but we are worried about the other two. God knows we love them, the poor little things, but they've been a real handful this year. My daughter-in-law has a baby of her own to look after, and another on the way. When that one comes along, she won't have any more time to look after your little Solange, and especially your Sylvain, who isn't yet four and never keeps still night or day. He's full of energy, just like you; he'll make a good worker, but he's a real handful of a child, and my wife is too old to run and catch him when he goes scampering off toward ditches or throwing himself in front of cattle. And now that my daughter-in-law is going to bring another one into the

world, her second last baby will be on my wife's hands for a year at least. So your children are starting to worry us; they're becoming too much for us. We never like to see children badly looked after; you can't rest when you think of all the accidents that might happen to them unless you keep a sharp lookout. So you need another wife and I need another daughter-in-law. Think about it, Germain. I've said this to you before, more than once. Time is slipping by; it won't wait for you. You owe it to your children and the rest of us, who want everything running smoothly at home; you ought to get married as soon as possible."

"All right, father," replied his son-in-law; "if that's what you really want, it will have to be done. But I can't pretend that it won't hurt me. It will hurt me very much. I'd almost as soon go and drown myself. A man knows what he's lost, but he never knows what he's going to find. I had a fine wife; she was pretty and tenderhearted and brave; she was good to her mother and father, good to her husband, good to her children; she was a good worker outdoors and indoors, and she did her work well. She was good in every way, in fact; and when you gave her to me and I married her, we never made any agreement that I should forget her if I was unlucky enough to lose her."

"That shows what a good heart you have, Germain," Père Maurice answered; "I know you loved my daughter and made her happy; if you could have died instead of her, I know Catherine would be still alive and you'd be in the graveyard. She deserved that kind of love, and we haven't recovered from her death any more than you have. But I'm not asking you to forget her. The Lord God wanted her to leave us, and now we never let a day go by without showing him, in prayers and thoughts and words and deeds, that we remember her and miss her. But if she could speak from the next world and tell you what she wants, she'd tell you to find a mother for those little orphans of hers. So the question is to find some woman good enough to take her place. That won't be very easy, but it isn't impossible. And when we've found her, you'll love her just as you loved my daughter, because you're a good man and you'll be grateful to her for helping us and being fond of your children."

"All right, Père Maurice," said Germain, "I'll do what you want, just as I've always done."

"Well, my son, I must admit that you've always listened to friendly advice and good sense from the head of the house. So let's talk about choosing your new wife. In the first place, I don't think you should choose a young girl. That isn't what you need. Young girls are flighty. It's hard work bringing up three children, especially when they're from another marriage, so you want some good kindly soul who is steady and sensible and not afraid of hard work. And if your wife isn't more or less the same age as you, why would she accept such a task? She'd think you were too old and the children were too young. She'd begin to complain, and the children would suffer."

"That's exactly what worries me," said Germain. "What if the poor little things are treated badly and hated and beaten?"

"Lord forbid!" replied the old man. "But there aren't as many bad women as good ones in our part of the world; we'd have to be out of our senses if we couldn't find one who suits you."

"That's true, father; there are plenty of good girls in the village. There's Louise, and Sylvaine, and Claudie, and Marguerite—why, you could take your pick."

"Gently, my son, gently; all those girls are too young or too poor—or too good-looking; after all, Germain, we need to think about that too. Good-looking women aren't always the steadiest ones."

"Do you want me to marry a woman who's ugly, then?" asked Germain, growing a little uneasy.

"No, not at all; you'll have more children by your new wife, and there's nothing as sad as having children that are ugly and weak and sickly. No, a woman who is still in her prime, fit and healthy, and neither pretty nor ugly, would be just the right thing for you."

"To find the kind of woman you want," said Germain with a slightly sad smile, "she'd have to be made to order—I can see that. Even more so, because you don't want her to be poor—and rich ones aren't easy to find, especially for a widower."

"But she might be a widow herself, Germain. What about a widow who is well off and hasn't any children?"

"I don't know anyone like that in our parish just at present."

"Neither do I. But there are some in other places."

"I can see you have someone in mind, father; come on, tell me about her."

4. Germain the Expert Plowman

"Yes, I do have someone in mind," replied Père Maurice. "She's a widow, a Léonard who married a Guérin, and she's living at Fourche."[10]

"I don't know her, and I don't know the place either," answered Germain, resigning himself to the inevitable, but growing more and more unhappy.

"Her name is Catherine, just like your dead wife."

"Catherine? Well, I'd be glad to say 'Catherine' again. Though if I couldn't love her as much as I loved my first wife, it would only make me feel worse, it would make me remember her all the time."

"Oh but you *will* love her, I'm sure of that! She's a good creature, and she has a warm heart. I haven't seen her for a long time; she wasn't an ugly-looking girl in those days, but she isn't young any more, she's thirty-two. She comes from a good family—all of them fine people—and she has about eight or ten thousand francs of land, which she'd be glad to sell, because she wants to marry again, just like you, and she'd buy new land in the neighborhood where she'd be living. Now, if your character suits her, I'm sure she won't object to your situation."

"So you've already settled it all?"

"Yes, except for finding out what you and she think about it; you'll have to ask each other that when you get acquainted. Her father is a relative of mine, in a distant way, and he's been a very good friend to me. You'd know him, surely—Père Léonard?"

"Yes, I've seen him talking to you at fairs; at the last one, I remember you had lunch together. So that was what he was discussing with you, all that time?"

"That's right. He watched you sell your cattle, he thought you managed it well, and he also thought you were good-looking and fit and sensible. And when I told him what kind of a man you are, and how well you've behaved in the eight years we've been living and working together, without ever a cross or angry word, then he had the idea of marrying you to his daughter. And to tell the truth, it suits me too—she has a good reputation, and her family are decent people and pretty well off, as I happen to know."

"I can see the idea of money is quite important to you, Père Maurice."

"Certainly it is. Isn't it the same for you?"

"Well, all right, if it's what you want; but as far as I'm concerned, you know that I never worry about how much I earn. I don't have any head for accounting, I don't understand things of that kind. I know about land; I know about cattle and horses and carts and sowing and threshing and fodder. As for sheep and vineyards and gardening and fruit growing—well, they're your son's job, as you know, and I never meddle with that. And when it comes to money, I don't have a good memory; I'd sooner let you have everything than fight over what's yours and what's mine. I'd be afraid of making a mistake and wanting something that didn't belong to me. I could never make sense of business unless it was plain and simple."

"More's the pity, my boy, and that's why I'd like you to have a wife with a good head on her shoulders, who could take my place when I'm gone. You've never managed to make sense of our accounts, and that could lead to trouble with my son later on, when I'm no longer around to keep the two of you in agreement and tell you what belongs to each of you."

"I hope you're going to live for a long time yet, Père Maurice. But don't worry about what will happen after that; I'll never start any quarrels with your son. I trust Jacques just as much as I trust you. I don't have any property of my own; the only things that might come to me are from your daughter, and they belong to our children, so I can rest easy—and so can you. Jacques would never rob his sister's children for his own children; he's fond of them all just about the same."

"You're right about that, Germain. Jacques is a fine son, a fine brother, and honest too. But Jacques could die before you do, before your children are grown up; and in any household you need to be careful not to leave youngsters without a head of the family to give them advice and sort out their differences. Otherwise the lawyers meddle with everything and start squabbles, and the whole property gets swallowed up in lawsuits. So if we bring anyone new into the family, whether it's a man or a woman, we need to remember that one day they might have to look after the doings and dealings of a good thirty children and grandchildren and sons-in-law and daughters-in-law—you can never tell how much a family could grow. And when there are too many bees in the beehive, and they need to start a new swarm, everyone wants to

take away his own share of the honey. When I took you for a son-in-law, my daughter was rich and you were poor, but I never blamed her for choosing you. I could see you were a good worker, and I knew that the best kind of riches, for country people like us, is a pair of arms and a heart like yours. When a man brings that much into a family, he's brought plenty. But a woman is different. She works indoors; she saves what is there, she doesn't add to it. Besides, now that you're a father and you're looking for a new wife, you need to remember that your next children won't have any claim on the property of the children from your first marriage. If you happen to die, those new children will be penniless unless your wife has some property of her own. What's more, the children that you'll add to our little clan are going to cost something to feed. Now, of course, if that did fall on us, we'd do it, you can be sure of that, and we wouldn't complain, but everyone would be worse off—even the older children would suffer by it. When families grow too big and the money situation stays the same, the result is poverty, no matter how much you put a brave face on it. Those are my thoughts, Germain; think about them, and see if you can get Widow Guérin to like you; her good behavior and her cash would be a help to us now, and we'd also have some peace of mind about the future."

"All right, father. I'll try to please her and like her."

"To do that, you'll have to go and see her."

"Where she's living? At Fourche? That's a long way off, isn't it? And we don't exactly have the time to go running around at this time of year."

"When you're trying to make a love match, you expect it to take time. But when two people don't have any silly fancies and know what they want and are getting married for plain practical reasons, it doesn't take long to settle. Tomorrow's Saturday; you could stop plowing early and leave around two o'clock. You'd be at Fourche by dark; the moon is full just at present, the roads are good, and it's only about three leagues away. It's near Le Magnier. Besides, you can take the mare."

"I'd just as soon go on foot, in cool weather like this."

"Yes, but the mare is a fine-looking animal, and when you're planning to propose, it looks better if you turn up on a good horse. You can wear your new clothes and take a nice present of game for Père Léonard. You can pay him a visit from me, have a

talk with him, spend Sunday with his daughter, and come back Monday morning with either a yes or a no."

"All right," said Germain calmly—though he didn't feel particularly calm.

Germain had always lived a steady life, as hardworking countryfolk do live. He'd married at twenty, and he'd only ever been in love with one woman; since his bereavement he'd never flirted with any girl, though he was impulsive and good-humored by nature. In his heart he had continued to mourn, faithfully and genuinely; and he was distinctly uneasy and unhappy about accepting his father-in-law's advice. But his father-in-law had always ruled the household sensibly; Germain was entirely devoted to the common welfare (and therefore to its personification, the head of the household), and it never occurred to him that he might have the option of rebelling against good sense and everyone's best interests.

All the same, he was sad. There were few days when he didn't shed tears secretly over the loss of his wife; and though he was starting to feel the effects of loneliness, his fear of entering a new marriage was greater than his desire to escape from his grief. He had a vague idea that love might comfort him if it took him by surprise—for that's the only way love can comfort us. We never find it when we're looking for it; it happens to us when we least expect it. This cold-blooded marriage scheme presented to him by Père Maurice, this unknown fiancée, perhaps even all the good things that had been said about her virtue and good sense, gave him food for thought. And he went away pondering, in the way a man ponders when he doesn't have enough ideas to debate the pros and cons of a matter. He couldn't find any good reason to rebel and be selfish: he merely suffered from a dull heartache and submitted to an evil that couldn't be avoided.

Père Maurice, meanwhile, had returned to the farm, and Germain spent the last hour of daylight repairing some gaps that the sheep had made in the hedge around a paddock near the farm buildings. He pulled the thorny branches back into place and held them there with clods of earth, while thrushes warbled in the nearby thicket—urging him, it seemed, to hurry because they were keen to come and investigate his work as soon as he was gone.

5. La Guillette[11]

At the house, Père Maurice found an old neighbor who had come to chat with his wife and, at the same time, pick up a few live coals to light her fire. Mère Guillette lived in a wretched little cottage a couple of gunshots away from the farm. But she was a decisive and orderly woman. Her little home was clean and tidy, and the careful patching on her clothes showed that she hadn't lost her self-respect during her poverty.

"So you've come to light your evening fire, Mère Guillette," said the old man. "Is there anything else you'd like?"

"No thank you, Père Maurice," she answered; "not just at present. You know I don't go begging and taking advantage of my friends' kindness."

"Very true; and that's why your friends are always willing to oblige you."

"I was just having a chat with your wife; I was asking her if Germain was finally making up his mind to get married again."

"Well, you're no gossip," Père Maurice replied; "people can talk in front of you without fear of having it all repeated. So I can tell the two of you that Germain has definitely made up his mind. He's leaving for the farm at Fourche tomorrow."

"That's good news!" exclaimed Mère Maurice. "God grant him a wife as good and true as himself, poor boy!"

"Oh, he's going to Fourche, is he?" remarked La Guillette. "Well now, fancy that! That would suit me perfectly. You were just asking me whether I wanted anything, Père Maurice, and I can tell you one favor you can do for me."

"Go on, tell us; anything you like."

"I wonder if Germain would be so good as to take my daughter with him."

"What—to Fourche?"

"No, not Fourche exactly; Les Ormeaux. That's where she'll be staying for the rest of the year."

"What!" said Mère Maurice. "You're going to part with your daughter?"

"She really must start working and earning her living. It does upset me, though, and it's upsetting her too, poor soul! We didn't have the heart to do it at Midsummer; but now Martinmas is coming up,[12] and she's found a good situation as a shepherdess

on the farms at Les Ormeaux. The farmer passed this way the other day, when he was coming back from the fair. He saw my little Marie with her three sheep on the common. 'You've hardly enough to do,' he says to her; 'three sheep aren't much for a shepherd girl. What about looking after a hundred? I can take you along with me. Our shepherdess has got sick, she's going back to her family; if you come to our farm before the week is out, you can have fifty francs for the rest of this year, up to Midsummer.' Well, the girl refused, but she couldn't help thinking about it, and she told me the whole story when she came home that evening. She could see I was worrying about how we're going to manage through the winter—it's going to be a long hard winter this year, because the cranes and wild geese flew past a good month earlier than they usually do. We both had a good cry, but in the end we made up our minds to do it. We knew we couldn't stay together—it's hard enough to keep one person alive on our little scrap of land—and since Marie is old enough (she's just going on sixteen) she'll have to do the same as everyone else; she'll have to earn her own living and be a help to her poor mother."

"Mère Guillette," said the old farmer, "if fifty francs was enough to help you out of your trouble and save you from sending your daughter away, I'd gladly find it for you—though fifty francs is a sizeable amount for people like us. But we need to think of common sense as well as friendship, no matter what we're doing. Even if it kept you from hardship this year, it wouldn't solve the problem of next year; and the longer your daughter takes to make up her mind, the harder it will be for the two of you to part. Little Marie is growing tall and strong now, and there isn't enough at home to keep her busy. She might become lazy—"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that!" said La Guillette. "Marie has got just as much appetite for work as any rich girl with an important job. She's never idle for a moment, and whenever there's no particular work to be done, she rubs and scrubs our poor old bits of furniture till they shine like a mirror. She's worth her weight in gold, and I'd really prefer her to be a shepherdess with you here, instead of going far away to people I don't know. If only we'd made the decision at Midsummer, you could have taken her; but now you've hired all your hands, so there can't be any question of that till the same time next year."

"I'd certainly be glad to do it, Mère Guillette; it would be a real pleasure. But in the meantime it would be good for her to learn some kind of work and get used to serving other people."

"Oh yes, I'm not denying that. What's done is done. The farmer at Les Ormeaux sent to ask about her this morning, and we said yes, so she must go. But the poor girl doesn't know the way, and I don't like to send her so far all on her own. If your son-in-law is going to Fourche tomorrow, maybe he can take her with him. I've never been there myself, but from what I've been told, it seems to be near the farm where she's going."

"It's practically next door; certainly my son-in-law can take her. That's only right and proper. He could even take her behind him on his mare—that will save her shoes. Here he is now, coming in for his supper. Listen, Germain, Mère Guillette's little Marie is going to be a shepherdess at Les Ormeaux. You can take her on your horse, can't you?"

"Yes, of course," answered Germain, who was always willing to help a neighbor in spite of his own worries.

In our own social setting, no mother would ever dream of doing such a thing—entrusting a girl of sixteen to a man of twenty-eight; yes, Germain was in fact only twenty-eight, and though he might be getting too old to marry according to local notions, he was still the best-looking man in the neighborhood. Work hadn't wrinkled and withered him as it wrinkles and withers the majority of countryfolk who have ten years' plowing behind them. He was strong enough to keep plowing for another ten years without showing the signs of age; and a young girl would have had to be very prejudiced on the subject of age if she failed to notice that Germain had a healthy complexion, bright eyes as blue as a May sky, a red mouth, excellent teeth, and a body as lithe and graceful as a young horse that has never yet left his meadow.

But there's a strong tradition of purity in some rural districts remote from the corrupting influence of the big cities; and among the various families in Belair, Maurice's was regarded as one of the most honest and trustworthy. Germain was going away to find a wife; Marie was just a child, too young and too poor for him to consider her in any such light; and unless he had been a bad, heartless man, he couldn't possibly have had any thought of harming her. Therefore, Père Maurice wasn't at all concerned when he saw him take up this pretty girl to ride behind him; and La Guillette

would have felt she was insulting him if she had given him any advice about "respecting the girl like a sister." Marie hugged her mother and her young friends some twenty times, and then, in tears, mounted the mare. Germain, who had his own reasons for being sad, felt all the more sympathy for the girl's grief, and rode away looking very grave, while all the people of the neighborhood waved good-bye to poor Marie without thinking any ill.

6. Little Pierre

The gray was young, shapely, and strong. She carried her double burden with ease, laying back her ears and champing her bit like the proud, high-spirited mare she was. As she passed along the meadows she caught sight of her mother (who was called the Old Gray, whereas she was the Young Gray) and whinnied good-bye to her. The Old Gray came toward the hedge, audibly shaking her hobbles, and tried to gallop along the edge of the field to follow her daughter; then, seeing her set off at a brisk trot, she whinnied in turn and stood still, looking thoughtful and anxious, with her nose in the air and her mouth full of grass that she no longer thought of eating.

"That poor thing can always tell her own offspring," said Germain, to distract little Marie from her sorrows. "Which reminds me, I didn't kiss my Little Pierre before I left. He wasn't there, the naughty boy! Last night he kept trying to make me take him along; he was crying for a good hour in bed. And this morning it was the same: he tried everything to get me to agree. Oh he's a sly, crafty little youngster! But when he saw it was no use, the little gentleman lost his temper; he went off to the fields, and I never saw him again all day."

"Well, I saw him," said little Marie, trying to keep back her tears. "He was running toward the clearing with the Soulas children, and I did think he must have been away from home for a good while, because he was hungry—he was eating sloes and blackberries. I gave him my lunch bread, and he said to me, 'Thank you, Marie dear; next time you come to our place, I'll give you some cake.' That's a nice little boy you have there, Germain."

"Yes, I certainly have," replied the plowman; "there's nothing I wouldn't do for him. If his grandmother hadn't been more

sensible than I am, I'd have taken him with me—I couldn't have helped it, when I saw him crying as if his little heart was going to burst."

"Well, why shouldn't you have taken him with you, Germain? He wouldn't have been any trouble really; he's so good when you give him what he wants!"

"Where I'm going, he would have been in the way, so I gather. At least that's what Père Maurice thought. . . . But I thought quite the opposite, myself; I thought it would be a good idea to see how they treated him—he's such a nice boy, they couldn't possibly help being kind to him. . . . But the family back home told me not to show the home duties right away. . . . I don't know why I'm telling you all this, little Marie; it can't make any sense to you."

"Yes it does, Germain. I know you're going to get married; Mother told me that, and she said I mustn't say anything about it to anyone, either at your place or where I'm going. So don't worry: I won't say a word about it."

"That's good, because it isn't done yet; maybe I won't suit this woman."

"Oh but surely you will, Germain. Why shouldn't you?"

"Who knows? I've got three children, and that's a real burden for a woman who isn't their mother."

"Yes, but your children aren't the same as other children."

"You think so?"

"They're as lovely as little angels, and they've been so well brought up—you couldn't ever find children that are nicer."

"Sylvain takes a bit of handling."

"He's only little—he can't help being naughty; but he's very quick-witted!"

"That's true, he is quick—and brave, too! He's not afraid of the cows and bulls; and if you let him have his own way, he'd be climbing up on horseback already, just like his brother."

"I would have brought the oldest one with me, if I were you. Any woman would be sure to like you, when she saw that you've got such a lovely child."

"Yes, if she's fond of children. But what if she isn't?"

"Are there any women that don't like children?"

"Not many, I think; but there are some, and that's what I'm worried about."

"So you don't know this woman at all?"

"No more than you do; and I'm afraid I might not know her any better even when I've seen her. I'm not very suspicious. When people say nice things, I just believe them; but more than once I've had cause to be sorry for that afterwards, because words aren't always the same as actions."

"They say she's a very good woman."

"Who says so? Père Maurice?"

"Yes—your father-in-law."

"That's all very well, but he doesn't know her either."

"Well, Germain, you'll soon see. Hopefully, if you pay close attention to everything, you won't make a mistake."

"Look, Marie, I'd feel a lot happier if you wouldn't mind coming to the house for a minute before you go on to Les Ormeaux. You're so sharp—you've always been clever, you don't miss anything. If you see anything that makes you doubtful, you could tell me in private."

"Oh, no, Germain, I couldn't do that! I'd be too afraid of making a mistake. And if I said anything that turned you against this marriage, your family would be cross with me. My poor mother has got quite enough troubles as it is; I mustn't bring any more on her."

During this conversation, the Young Gray pricked up her ears and shied, then retraced her steps and went toward the bushes, where she was now beginning to recognize the thing that had initially frightened her. Germain looked at the bushes, and in a ditch, beneath the still-green branches of a pruned oak, he saw something that he took for a lamb.

"It's a stray animal," he said, "or a dead one—it isn't moving. Someone might be searching for it. We'd better take a look."

"That isn't an animal," little Marie exclaimed, "it's a child, asleep; it's your Little Pierre!"

"The very idea!" said Germain, dismounting. "Just look at the little rascal asleep there, miles and miles from home, and in a ditch where a snake could easily get at him!"

He lifted up the boy, who opened his eyes, smiled, and threw his arms around his father's neck, saying, "Please take me with you, Papa!"

"Oho, always the same old story! What were you doing there, Pierre, you naughty boy?"

"I was waiting for Papa to come past," said the boy; "I was watching the road, and I watched so hard I fell asleep."

"And if I'd gone past without seeing you, you would have stayed out there all night, and a wolf would have eaten you!"

"Oh, I knew you'd see me all right!" replied Little Pierre confidently.

"Well now, Pierre, kiss me good-bye and run along home quickly, unless you want them to have supper without you."

"Aren't you going to take me with you then?" wailed the little boy, starting to rub his eyes to show that he was planning to burst into tears.

"You know very well that Grandpa and Grandma don't want that," said Germain, hiding behind the old people's authority as a man does when he's none too confident of his own.

But the boy wouldn't listen to anything. He began to cry with all his might, saying that if his father was taking little Marie, he could perfectly well take him too. They protested that they had to go through huge forests full of ferocious animals that ate little children; that the Young Gray wouldn't carry three people and had said so when they were starting out; and that they were going to a region that didn't provide beds or supper for children. None of these excellent arguments convinced Little Pierre. He threw himself down on the grass and rolled over and over, howling that Papa didn't love him any more and that if he didn't take him he'd never go back home ever again, day or night.

Germain had a father's heart as tender and weak as a woman's. His wife's death and the care he'd been obliged to lavish unaided on his little ones, as well as the thought that these poor motherless children needed a great deal of love, had all contributed to this. And so intense was the struggle within him—all the more because he was ashamed of his weakness and was trying to hide it from little Marie—that his brow began to perspire and his eyes grew red, as he was on the point of weeping too. At last he tried to get angry; but when he turned back to Marie to let her see how strongminded he was, he found that the good girl's face was wet with tears. Then all his courage forsook him and he could no longer keep back his own tears, though he still went on scolding and threatening.

"Really, you're too hard-hearted," little Marie told him at last. "I'm sure I could never refuse a boy who is so unhappy, if I

were in your place. Come on, Germain, please take him. Your mare is quite used to carrying two people and a child; your brother-in-law and his wife—and she's much heavier than I am—go to market every Saturday with their boy on the good creature's back. He can ride in front of you. Besides, I'd rather go on foot by myself than upset your little boy so much."

"No need for that," replied Germain, who was dying to be persuaded. "The Young Gray is a strong horse; she could carry two more, if there was room on her back. But what are we going to do with this boy while we're traveling? He'll be cold, he'll be hungry—and who will look after him tonight and tomorrow, and put him to bed and wash him and dress him? I wouldn't dare give so much trouble to a woman on our very first meeting; she would surely think I was taking a lot for granted!"

"Well then, Germain, you'll know instantly what kind of woman she is, depending on whether she's kind or angry. Besides, if she won't take care of your Pierre, I'll look after him myself. I'll go to the house tomorrow and dress him, I'll take him into the fields with me, I'll keep him happy all day, and I'll see that he doesn't want for anything."

"He'll be in your way; he'll tire you out, you poor girl! A whole day is a long time."

"No, it will be a pleasure; he'll keep me company; I won't be so miserable on my first day in a new place. I'll feel as though I'm still at home."

Seeing that little Marie was taking his side, the boy had clutched her skirt and was clinging so tightly that it couldn't have been torn away without hurting him. Then, when he saw that his father was starting to give way, he grabbed Marie's hand in his two tiny sunburnt hands and kissed her, bouncing up and down for joy, and dragging her toward the mare with the burning impatience children display when they want something.

"Come along," said the girl, lifting him in her arms, "let's see if we can calm this poor little heart of yours; it's fluttering like a bird's. And if you start to feel cold when night comes on, Pierre dear, I'll wrap you in my cloak. Now go and kiss Papa and say you're sorry you were naughty. Tell him you'll never ever do it again. You understand?"

"Oh yes—as long as I always do just what he wants, I suppose!" said Germain, wiping the little boy's eyes with his handker-

chief. "Why, Marie, you're going to spoil the little scamp. . . . But seriously, you're too kind, little Marie. I don't know why you didn't come to our farm last Midsummer and mind the sheep. You could have looked after the children, and I'd much rather pay you good wages to take care of them—instead of looking for a wife who might think she's doing me a favor if she doesn't actually hate them."

"You mustn't look on the black side of everything," replied little Marie, holding the horse's bridle while Germain put his son in front of the big goatskin packsaddle. "If your wife doesn't like the children, I can come and work for you next year, and I'll keep them so happy that they'll never notice a thing—you can be sure of that."

7. On the Moor

"Wait a minute," said Germain, when they had gone a short way, "I wonder what they'll think back home when they don't see any sign of this little fellow? The family will start to worry; they'll look high and low for him."

"What about that man working on the road up there? You can tell him you're taking the boy with you, and ask him to let your people know."

"That's true, Marie; you think of everything. I quite forgot Jeannie[13] would be over there."

"And he lives next to the farm, so you can be sure that he'll do it for you."

When they had taken this precaution, Germain set the mare trotting again, and Little Pierre was so delighted that it was some time before he realized that he'd gone without his dinner; but the motion of the horse gave him a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach, and at the end of a league he began to yawn and grow pale and confess that he was dying of hunger.

"Now it's starting!" said Germain. "I knew perfectly well we wouldn't go far before this young man began howling with hunger or thirst."

"I'm thirsty too!" said Little Pierre.

"Well then, let's go to Mère Rebec's tavern at Corlay, the one called 'The Break of Day'—a nice sign, but very bad lodgings! You'll have a drop of wine as well, won't you, Marie?"

"No, really, I don't need anything, thanks," she said. "I'll hold the mare while you go in with the boy."

"But now I think about it, you must be starving. This morning you gave Little Pierre your own lunch bread, you kindhearted girl; and you wouldn't take any dinner with us at home—you did nothing but cry the whole time."

"Oh, I wasn't hungry; I was too upset! Really, I don't feel the least bit hungry, not even now."

"You'll have to force yourself to eat, young lady; otherwise you'll fall sick. We still have a long way to go, and it won't do if we arrive starving and begging for bread. I'll set you a good example myself; I can't say I have much of an appetite, but I'm sure I can do it, because to tell the truth, I didn't have any dinner either. I could see that you and your mother were crying, and that made me feel bad. Come along now! I'll tether the Young Gray next to the door. Down you get, just to please me."

All three of them entered Mère Rebec's premises, and within a quarter of an hour their fat, lame hostess had managed to produce a nice-looking omelet and some wholemeal bread and light wine for them.

Countryfolk don't eat fast, and little Pierre[14] was so hungry that it was a good hour before Germain could think of setting off again. At first little Marie ate simply out of politeness; then, bit by bit, she began to feel hungry—you can't go without food for long at the age of sixteen, and country air won't take no for an answer. In addition, the kind words that Germain had said to comfort and strengthen her were starting to take effect. She tried hard to convince herself that seven months would soon be over, and thought how happy she'd be when she found herself back in her own little town with her own family, now that Père Maurice and Germain had agreed to let her work for them. But just as she was beginning to cheer up and play with little Pierre, Germain had the unlucky idea of showing her the view from the tavern window; from that height the whole valley was visible, smiling and verdant and fertile. Marie looked out and asked whether you could see the houses at Belair.

"Certainly you can," said Germain, "and the farm too, and even your own house. Look—see that little gray dot near Godard's big poplar, just below the belfry?"

"Oh yes, I can see it!" said the little girl; and with that she burst into tears again.

"I shouldn't have set you thinking about it," said Germain; "I'm going from one blunder to another, today! Come along, Marie, let's set off; daylight is short just at present, and in an hour's time, when the moon rises, it won't be very warm."

They went on their way again, across the great moor. Germain couldn't make the Young Gray trot very fast, for fear of tiring the young girl and the child; and as a result, the sun had already set by the time they left the road and entered the wood.

Germain knew the way to Le Magnier, but he thought it would be quicker to avoid the Chanteloube road and go down by Presles and La Sépulture instead—a route he wasn't in the habit of taking, in his travels to and from the fair. He lost his way, and they wasted more time before reaching the wood; even then, he didn't enter it on the right side and didn't realize his mistake, so that he turned away from Fourche and went much higher up, in the direction of Ardentes.[15]

And after that he still wasn't able to find his way, because as night fell, a thick mist rose—the kind of mist that comes on an autumn evening and is made still more hazy and treacherous by the pale light of the moon. The big pools of water scattered throughout the glades were emitting a vapor so dense that, while the Young Gray was crossing them, their presence could be detected only by the splashing of her hooves and the difficulty she had getting her feet out of the mud.

At last they found a fine straight track and followed it to the end. Then Germain tried to work out where he was, and realized that he was lost. Père Maurice had explained the way to him and told him that when he left the wood, he had to go down a very steep slope, pass through a wide meadow, and ford the river twice. Indeed, he'd warned him to be careful crossing the river, because there had been heavy rains early that season, and the water might be a bit deeper than usual. Now Germain could see neither the hillside nor the meadow nor the river, but only a moor, as level and white as a mantle of snow; so he stopped, looked around for a house, waited for a passerby—and found no source of information anywhere. Then he retraced his steps and entered the wood again. But the mist thickened even more, the moon was completely hidden, the paths were dreadful and full of deep ruts. Twice the Young Gray almost fell. Her heavy burden made her lose heart; and although she still had sense enough to avoid the

tree trunks, she couldn't stop her riders from bumping into the big head-high branches that obstructed the way and put them in considerable danger. One of these collisions knocked off Germain's hat, and he had great difficulty finding it again. Little Pierre had fallen asleep and was lying like a sack of potatoes in his father's arms, which hampered him so much that he was no longer able to guide the horse or keep her up.

"I think we must be bewitched," said Germain, stopping; "this wood isn't big enough for a man to lose his way—unless he's drunk—and yet for the last two hours, at the very least, we've been going round in circles without finding any way out. The Young Gray has only one idea in her head, and that's to go back home. It's her fault I've lost my way. If we wanted to go home, we'd only need to give her the bit. But we'd be fools to give up when we might be just a couple of steps from our journey's end; we'd simply have to travel the whole distance over again. All the same, I don't have any idea what to do next. I can't see either the sky or the ground, and I'm worried that the boy might catch a fever if we stay here in this wretched fog—or else the horse might stumble and fall, and we'd crush him beneath our weight."

"We mustn't keep going any longer," said little Marie. "We'd better get down, Germain. Give me the boy; I can carry him easily enough, and I can stop the cloak from slipping off and leaving him uncovered—I can do that better than you can. You can lead the mare by the bridle. Maybe we'll have a clearer view when we're nearer the ground."

This strategy did prevent falls from horseback, but it wasn't an improvement in any other way, because the fog hung low and seemed to stick to the ground. Their progress was painfully slow, and they were soon so weary that they came to a halt when they managed to find a dry spot beneath some big oak trees. Little Marie was soaked, but she never uttered a word of complaint or fretted about anything. Her only concern was the boy; she sat down and put him on her lap, while Germain fastened the Young Gray's reins on a branch and explored the area.

The Young Gray, however, was far from happy with the journey. She reared up, dislodged the reins, broke her girths, gave half a dozen head-high kicks as a parting gesture, and set off through the undergrowth, showing very plainly that she could find her way home without anyone's help.

"That's done it," said Germain, after a vain attempt to catch her. "Here we are on foot now. And even if we could find the right path it wouldn't do us any good, because we'd have to walk across the river; and considering the amount of water on these tracks, we can be sure the river has overflowed into the meadows. We don't know any other route. So we'll just have to wait till this fog lifts; it can't last more than an hour or two. As soon as we can see our way, we'll see if we can find a house at the edge of the wood. But we can't move from here at the moment. Ahead of us there's some kind of ditch or pond—I don't really know what it is; and I couldn't exactly say what is behind us either, because I can't even tell which way we came."

8. Beneath the Big Oak Trees

"Well, Germain, we'll just have to be patient," said little Marie. "We're not badly off on this little hillock. The rain can't get through the leaves of these big oak trees, and we can light a fire; I can feel some old stumps that are easy to move and dry enough to burn. You do have a light, Germain, don't you? You were smoking your pipe a few minutes ago."

"I did have. My tinderbox was in the bag on the saddle, with the game I was taking to my intended; but that wretched mare went off with everything, even my cloak; she's going to lose that—or else tear it on every branch she comes to."

"Nothing of the kind, Germain; the saddle and cloak and bag are all there on the ground at your feet. The Young Grey broke her girths when she ran away; she threw everything off."

"That's the truth, thank God!" said the plowman; "and if we can feel around for some dead wood, we should be able to dry ourselves and get warm."

"That's easy enough," said little Marie; "there's dead wood crackling underfoot everywhere. But give me the saddle first."

"What do you want it for?"

"I want to make a bed for the little fellow. No, not like that; upside down. In the hollow he won't roll around, and it's still quite warm from the horse's back. Get those stones you can see over there, and prop it up on both sides."

"I can't see any stones at all. You must have eyes like a cat."

"There now, it's all done. Give me your cloak, Germain, so that I can wrap up his little feet; and I'll put my cape over his body. Now see if he isn't as cozy as he'd be in his own bed. And feel how warm he is!"

"That's true! You certainly know how to take care of children, Marie."

"There's nothing magic about that. Now get the tinderbox out of your bag, and I'll fix the wood."

"That wood won't catch fire; it's too damp."

"You never have any confidence, Germain! Don't you remember, when you were a shepherd, how you used to make nice big fires in the fields while it was raining?"

"Children who mind the sheep might be able to do that; but I've been driving oxen ever since I could walk."

"That's why you're so strong with your arms but not so clever with your hands. There now, the fire's laid; just see if that won't burn. Give me the light, and a handful of dry fern. That's right. Now start blowing. You don't have weak lungs, I hope?"

"Not that I know of," said Germain, blowing like a blacksmith's bellows. In an instant the flame shone out, first with a reddish glow, and at last rising in pale blue jets beneath the oak boughs, where it battled against the fog and gradually dried the air for some ten feet[16] in all directions.

"Now I'm going to sit down alongside the boy and make sure the sparks don't fall on him," said the girl. "You just pile on the wood and stir up the fire, Germain; we won't catch fever or cold here, I'll promise you that."

"My, you're a clever girl," said Germain; "the way you make a fire is like witchcraft. I'm feeling better already—and I'm in better spirits, too; what with my legs soaked to the knees, and the thought of having to stay like that till daybreak, I was very grumpy a moment ago."

"And when people are grumpy, they can't think straight," little Marie replied.

"Well, aren't you ever grumpy?"

"No, never. What's the use?"

"It may not be any use, but when you've got troubles, how can you help it? And God knows you've had your share of troubles, you poor girl; you haven't always been happy."

"It's true, we've had our sufferings, Mother and me. We've been through some bad times, but we've never lost heart over it."

"I'd never lose heart over a job, no matter how hard it was," said Germain; "but I'd feel terrible if I didn't have any money. Thanks to my wife, I've always had enough. I married into money, I still have plenty of money, and I'll continue to have money as long as I work on the farm—which will be always, I hope. But everyone must have their troubles. I've had my sufferings in other ways."

"Yes; you lost your wife. That's very sad."

"It is, isn't it?"

"Oh, I cried and cried about it, Germain; she was so kind-hearted! Look, we mustn't talk about her any more, or I'll start crying again. All my troubles seem to be coming back to me today."

"It's true, she was very fond of you, little Marie. She thought very highly of you and your mother. Why, what's this? You're crying! Now then, young lady, I don't want to start doing the same—"

"Yes but you *are* doing the same, Germain! You're crying too! There's no shame in a man crying over his wife. Now don't be embarrassed; why, I feel it just like you do."

"You're very kind, Marie; it does me good to be crying together with you like this. But look, put your feet close to the fire; your skirts are wet too, you poor girl! Here, let me sit beside the boy instead of you; you really must warm up better than that."

"I'm warm enough, thanks," Marie said. "Do you want to sit down? Have a corner of this cloak. I'm quite comfortable myself."

"In fact, we're not too badly off here," said Germain, sitting down quite close to her. "The only thing is, I'm starting to feel hungry again. It must be at least nine o'clock by now, and these dreadful tracks were such hard going that I'm feeling all worn out. What about you, Marie—aren't you hungry too?"

"Me? No, not at all. I'm not used to having four meals a day like you are. I've gone to bed so many times without any supper, one more or less doesn't affect me."

"Well, well, a wife like you is very convenient, she doesn't cost much," said Germain, smiling.

"I'm not a wife," said Marie in all innocence, not realizing where the plowman's thoughts were leading. "You must be dreaming."

"Yes, I think I *am* dreaming," Germain replied; "maybe the hunger is making my mind wander."

"What a glutton you must be, then!" she retorted, brightening up a little in turn. "Well now, if you really can't survive for five or six hours without eating, don't you have some game in your bag and a fire to cook it?"

"So I have! That's a clever idea! But then what happens to the present for my future father-in-law?"

"You've got six partridge and a hare. Surely you wouldn't need all that to fill your stomach!"

"Yes, but if we cook anything here, without any spit or andirons, it will just burn to cinders."

"Not at all," said little Marie; "I can cook it under the coals, and there won't be a taste of smoke, I promise. Haven't you ever caught larks in the fields and cooked them between two stones? Oh but that's right, I keep forgetting—you've never been a shepherd. Come on and pluck that partridge. No, not so hard—you'll tear the skin off."

"Well, you can pluck the other one, and show me how."

"So you want to eat two, do you? What an ogre you are! There now, they're all plucked, I'm going to cook them."

"You'd be perfect in an army canteen, Marie; the only trouble is, there's no canteen, and I'll have to drink water out of that pool over there."

"You'd like some wine, wouldn't you? Or maybe you'd rather have coffee. You must think this is a drink stall at the fairground. Go and call the waitress; let's have some wine for the expert plowman from Belair!"

"Why, you little rascal, you're making fun of me! Wouldn't you drink wine if you had it?"

"Me? I had some with you tonight at Mère Rebec's, and that was the second time in my life. But if you behave yourself really well, I'll give you a bottle practically full, and very good wine too."

"Why, Marie, I really think you *are* a witch!"

"Well, you were silly enough to order two bottles of wine at Mère Rebec's, weren't you? You and your boy drank one of them, but I hardly had three drops from the one you gave me. But you paid for them both without even noticing."

"So?"

"So I put the one that hadn't been drunk in my basket, because I thought maybe you or the boy might feel thirsty on the way; and here it is."

"Well, well, you're the most thoughtful girl I ever met in my life. She was in tears when we left the inn, poor girl, but she was still thinking of others rather than herself, even so. Well, well, Marie, the man who marries you will be no fool."

"I certainly hope not; I don't think I'd care for a fool. Come along now and eat your partridges, because they're done to a turn; we don't have any bread, so I'm afraid you'll have to settle for chestnuts."

"Where on earth did you get chestnuts?"

"Amazing, isn't it! I just picked them off the branches as we were going along, and put them in my pockets."

"What, and they're cooked too?"

"Well, what kind of brains would I have if I couldn't put chestnuts on a fire once it was lit? That's what we always do in the fields."

"Well, well, little Marie, we're going to have a real supper here, you and me! I'm going to drink your health and wish you a good husband—just the kind you want, whatever that is. Talking of which, what kind *do* you want?"

"I honestly couldn't say, Germain; I never thought about that yet."

"What, never ever?" asked Germain, who was starting to eat with a plowman's appetite, though he cut off the best pieces and offered them to his companion—who, however, kept on refusing, and contented herself with a few chestnuts. "But tell me, Marie," he went on, as he could see that she wasn't going to answer, "haven't you had any thoughts about marriage yet? After all, you're old enough."

"Maybe I am," she said, "but I don't have enough money. You need at least three hundred francs to get married, and I'd have to work five or six years to earn that much."

"You poor girl! I wish Père Maurice would give me three hundred francs; I'd give them to you."

"Thanks a lot, Germain! What would people think of me then?"

"Why, what should they think? Everyone knows I'm too old to marry you. Nobody would get any ideas that I—that you—"

"Look, Mister Plowman, here's your boy waking up!" said little Marie.

9. Evening Prayers

Little Pierre had sat up and was gazing around, looking thoughtful.

"Aha, that's what he always does whenever he hears someone eating," said Germain. "The sound of a cannon wouldn't wake him, but if you start chewing nearby, he opens his eyes immediately."

"You must have been just the same at his age," said little Marie with a mischievous smile. "Well now, Pierre, you're looking for your bed canopy, are you? It's made of greenery tonight, dear; but your father's eating just as usual. You want to have supper with him? I haven't touched your share; I had a feeling you'd ask for it!"

"I do wish you'd eat something, Marie," said the plowman. "I won't eat another thing. I'm just being a greedy pig. You're giving up your share for us; that isn't right, it makes me ashamed. Look, it's taken away all my appetite; and I don't want my boy to eat either, if you don't."

"Leave us alone," little Marie replied; "you're not in charge of our appetites. Mine is closed for the day, and your Pierre's is wide open like a little wolf's. Just look at the way he's tucking into it! Oho, he's going to be a big strong plowman too!"

Indeed, Little Pierre very soon showed whose son he was; hardly awake, and without any idea where he was or how he'd got there, he began eating ravenously. Then, when he had satisfied his hunger, he grew excited (as children do when there's some change in their familiar routine) and showed more quick-wittedness, curiosity, and intelligence than usual. He made them tell him where he was, and when he found he was in the middle of a wood, he became a tiny bit frightened.

"Are there any ferocious animals in this wood?" he asked his father.

"No," declared Father, "none at all. Don't be frightened."

"So you were just telling lies when you said if I went into the big woods with you the wolves would catch me?"

"There's logic for you!" said Germain, feeling embarrassed.

"He's quite right," said little Marie, "that's what you told him; he can remember, he's got a good memory. Well now, Pierre, your father wouldn't ever tell a lie. We went through the big woods while you were asleep, and now we're only in the little woods, and there aren't any ferocious animals here."

"Are the little woods far away from the big woods?"

"Far enough. And anyhow, the wolves never go out of the big woods. And even if any of them did come here, your father would kill them."

"And you'd do it too, little Marie?"

"Yes, we'd all do it—you'd help us, wouldn't you, Pierre? You're not afraid, are you—you'd give them a good thrashing!"

"That's right," said the boy proudly, striking a heroic pose; "we'd kill them for sure!"

"There's nobody like you for talking to children and making them listen to reason," said Germain to little Marie. "Of course, it isn't very long since you were a little girl yourself; you can remember how your mother used to talk to you. The younger people are, the better they get on with youngsters, it seems to me. I'm very much afraid that if a woman is thirty years old and has never known what it's like to be a mother, she'll find it very hard to talk like children and reason with children."

"Why shouldn't she, Germain? I don't know why you've got such bad ideas about this woman; you'll change your mind!"

"Devil take her!" said Germain. "I wish I was heading the opposite way from her and never coming back. What do I want with a wife I don't even know?"

"Papa," said the child, "why do you keep talking about your wife today when she's dead?"

"Well now, surely you haven't forgotten your poor dear mother?"

"No, I saw her put in a nice box made out of white wood, and Grandma took me to kiss her and say good-bye to her. She was all white and cold, and every night Auntie gets me to pray to God so she can go up to heaven with him and get warm. Do you think she's up there right now?"

"I hope so, Pierre; but you still need to keep praying; it shows your mother that you love her."

"I'm going to say my prayers now," replied the boy; "I forgot about them tonight. But I can't say them all by myself, I always forget bits. Little Marie will have to help me."

"Of course I'll help you, Pierre," said the girl. "Come and kneel down here with me."

The boy knelt on the girl's skirt, put his hands together, and began to say his prayers, at first with plenty of fervor and assurance, because he knew the beginning quite well, then more slowly

and hesitantly, and finally repeating word for word what Marie said (after he'd reached the place where he would fall asleep every night—which had prevented him from learning the end). This time again the effort of concentrating and the monotonous sound of his own voice had their usual effect. He uttered the last syllables only with great difficulty, and only after he'd been told them three times; his head grew heavy and dropped on Marie's breast; his hands relaxed, unclasped, and fell open on his knees. By the light of the campfire Germain looked at his little darling dozing on the girl's breast. She held him in her arms and warmed his fair hair with her breath, as she drifted into a solemn reverie herself and silently prayed for Catherine's soul.

Germain was touched. He wanted to tell little Marie how grateful and appreciative he was; but he couldn't find the right words to say it. He moved closer to her so that he could kiss his son (she was still holding little Pierre to her breast), and he barely had the power to take his lips away from the boy's forehead.

"You're kissing him too hard," said Marie, gently pushing away the plowman's head; "you'll wake him up. Let me put him to bed again—he's already back in dreamland."

The boy let her put him down, but as he felt the goatskin on the saddle, he asked if he was on the Young Gray. Then he opened his big blue eyes and stared at the branches for a minute; he seemed to be dreaming wide awake, or else struck by some idea that had been gradually stealing over him during the day, and now finally crystallized at the approach of sleep.

"Papa," he said, "if you want me to have another mother, I hope it's going to be little Marie."

And without waiting for an answer he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

10. Despite the Cold

Little Marie seemed to regard the boy's odd words as nothing more than a sign of friendship. She wrapped him up carefully, stirred the fire, and then, as the fog slumbering on the nearby pool gave no sign of lifting, she told Germain to stretch out by the fire and have a nap.

"I can see you're half asleep already," she said, "because you're not talking any more, and you're looking at the fire just like your little boy was doing a moment ago. Go and have some sleep; I'll keep watch over the two of you."

"You're the one who ought to sleep," the plowman replied; "I'll look after you both, because I never felt less like sleeping in my life. I've got fifty different thoughts going through my head."

"Fifty—my! that's a lot," said the little girl slyly. "There are plenty of people who'd be glad to have one!"

"Well, maybe I'm not clever enough to have fifty, but I do have one, and it's been on my mind for the past hour."

"And I'll tell you what it is—and also what you were thinking earlier."

"All right, Marie, go ahead—if you can guess it, tell me what it is; I'd be delighted to hear it."

"An hour ago," she replied, "you were thinking of eating—and now you're thinking of sleeping."

"I know I'm only an ox driver, Marie, but really, you seem to think I'm an ox. You're just being mischievous; I can see you don't want to talk with me and that's that. All right, go to sleep then. That'll be better than finding fault with a man when he isn't in a good mood."

"If you want to talk, let's talk," said the girl, half lying down next to the child and resting her head on the saddle. "You're only fretting yourself, Germain—which doesn't give the impression that a man is very brave. Just think of all the things I could say myself, if I didn't fight against my troubles!"

"Yes, of course; and that's exactly what worries me, you poor girl! You're going to live far away from your family, in a wretched place full of moors and marshes where you'll catch all the autumn fevers; and nobody earns much from sheep there, which is always a worry to a shepherdess if she's trying to do her best. And you'll be living among strangers, too, and they might not appreciate you or treat you very well. That worries me more than I can say. Really I'd like to take you back to your mother instead of going on to Fourche."

"Poor old Germain! That's very kind of you, but it isn't very sensible. You shouldn't behave like a coward to help your friends. Instead of pointing out all the bad things I'll be facing, you should

point out all the good things, like you did when we were eating at Mère Rebec's."

"I can't help it. That was the way I saw things then, but now I see things differently. You'd be much better off finding a husband."

"It can't be done, Germain, I told you that. It can't be done, and so I don't think about it."

"But suppose it did happen. Maybe if you told me what kind of man you'd like, I'd be able to think of someone suitable."

"Thinking won't find someone. I never think about it myself; what's the use?"

"You wouldn't have any thoughts of finding a rich man?"

"No, of course not; I'm as poor as Job."[17]

"But if he was well off, you wouldn't be sorry to have a good house and good food and good clothes and a nice family. You'd be able to help your mother then."

"Oh yes, that would be all right. Helping my mother is just what I want to do."

"And supposing that did happen, even if the man wasn't very young, you wouldn't be too fussy?"

"I'm sorry to disagree, Germain, but that's most important, in my opinion. I wouldn't like an old man!"

"No, of course not. But what about someone my age, for instance?"

"Your age is too old for me, Germain. I'd rather have someone who was Bastien's age, even though Bastien isn't as good-looking as you."

"What, you'd rather have that boy—Bastien the swineherd?" said Germain indignantly. "When his eyes are just like the pigs he looks after?"

"I could put up with his eyes, since he's only eighteen."

Germain felt terribly jealous.

"Well, well," he said, "I can see you've set your heart on Bastien. That's a funny idea, I must say."

Little Marie burst out laughing.

"Yes, it would be a funny idea, wouldn't it," she replied, "and he'd be a funny sort of husband. You could make him believe anything you wanted. The other day, for instance, I picked up a tomato in the Curé's garden, and I told him it was a nice red apple. He bit into it like a little glutton. You should have seen what a face he made! Heavens, that was an ugly sight!"

"You're making fun of him—you're not in love with him, then?"

"That wouldn't prove anything. But I don't like him. He treats his little sister badly, and he's dirty."

"Well then, do you have someone else in mind?"

"And just what business is that of yours, Germain?"

"No business of mine, just by way of conversation. I can see you already have an admirer in mind, young lady."

"No, not yet, Germain; you're wrong. That might happen later. But I won't get married till I've saved some money, so I'll certainly get married late—and to an old man."

"Well then, why not get married to an old man right now?"

"Certainly not! When I'm not young any more, it won't bother me. At the moment, though, it's different."

"I can see that you just don't like me, Marie; that's obvious enough," said Germain bitterly and incautiously.

Little Marie didn't answer. Germain leaned toward her; she was asleep. She had dropped back, overcome—almost struck down—by sleep, as children do when they fall asleep while they are still chattering.

Germain was glad she hadn't caught his last words. He saw that they hadn't been at all sensible, and he turned away from her to distract his mind and change his train of thought.

But no matter how he tried, he couldn't sleep, and he couldn't think about anything except the things he had just said. He walked round and round the fire, went away, came back; in the end, feeling as alarmed as if he had swallowed gunpowder, he leant against the tree that sheltered the two children, and watched them sleep.

"Little Marie is the prettiest girl in the whole neighborhood," he said to himself. "I don't know why I never noticed that. She doesn't have much color, but her little face looks as fresh as a wild rose. And what a nice little mouth she has, and that little nose of hers is so cute! . . . She isn't very big for her age; she's built like a little quail—she's as light as a sparrow! . . . I don't know why people back home make such a fuss about the big fat red-faced women. My wife was more on the thin, pale side, and I liked her better than anyone. . . . This girl looks very delicate, but she's healthy, and she's as pretty to look at as a little white newborn goat. . . . And she's so gentle and kind, too—you can see the kindness in her heart just by looking into her eyes, even when they're

closed and she's asleep. . . . And as for brains, she has even more brains than my darling Catherine had, I must admit; you'd never be bored with her. . . . She's happy, and sensible, and hardworking, and loving, and she's fun. What more could you want? . . .

"But what's the use of thinking about all that?" Germain went on, trying to look away. "My father-in-law would never hear of it; the whole family would think I was crazy! . . . Besides, she wouldn't accept me herself, poor girl! . . . She thinks I'm too old—she told me so. . . . She isn't selfish; she doesn't mind being poor and having troubles, and wearing old clothes, and suffering from hunger two or three months every year, just as long as she can please herself and marry a husband of her own choosing some day . . . and she's quite right! I'd do the same in her place . . . and even now, if I had my own way, I'd marry a girl I really wanted, instead of someone who doesn't appeal to me. . . . "

The more Germain tried to reason with himself and calm himself down, the further he was from succeeding. He'd go off and walk a couple of dozen steps into the fog, trying to get away from it all—and suddenly he'd find himself on his knees beside the two sleeping children. At one point he meant to kiss Little Pierre, who had one arm around Marie's neck, and he became so muddled that Marie woke up, feeling a breath hot as fire pass across her lips. She looked at him with a bewildered expression, not at all understanding what was going on inside his mind.

"I didn't see you children, you poor things," said Germain, hastily backing away. "I very nearly tripped over you and hurt you."

Little Marie was innocent enough to believe him, and she went back to sleep. Germain moved to the far side of the fire and vowed to God that he wouldn't budge till she was awake. He kept his word, but it wasn't easy. He thought it would drive him out of his mind.

At last, toward midnight, the fog lifted, and Germain could see the stars shining through the trees. The moon, too, freed herself from the vapors that had veiled her, and began to strew her diamonds over the dewy moss. The bases of the oak trees remained in majestic darkness; but a little farther off the white trunks of the birches looked like a row of phantoms in their shrouds. The fire cast its reflection in the pool; and the frogs, gradually getting used to it, ventured a few reedy, querulous notes. The old trees' angular, lichen-encrusted branches stretched out

and intertwined like great gaunt arms above the travelers' heads. It was a lovely place—but so lonely and so sad that Germain could endure it no longer, and started to sing and throw stones into the water to rid his mind of its terrible wearying solitude. He was also hoping to wake little Marie; and when he saw her sit up and look around at the weather, he suggested that they should set out again on their journey.

"In a couple of hours," he said, "when it's close to morning, the air will get so cold that we won't be able to stand it, even with this fire of ours. . . . We can already see our way now, and we're sure to find some house where they'll take us in, or at least some barn where we can spend the rest of the night under shelter."

Marie had no will of her own; and though she was still longing desperately for sleep, she got ready to follow him.

Germain picked up his son without waking him, and beckoned Marie closer so that she could get under the cover of his cloak; she wouldn't take her own cape, because it was still wrapped around little Pierre.

For a few moments Germain had managed to distract his mind and cheer himself up; but when he felt the young girl so close to him, he began to lose his head again. Two or three times he stepped ahead suddenly and left her walking on her own; then, noticing that she was having trouble keeping up with him, he would wait for her and draw her sharply toward him, holding her so tightly that she was quite surprised—even annoyed, though she didn't dare to say so.

They didn't have the slightest idea which way they had come, so they didn't know which way to go—the result being that they went right through the wood again and found themselves once more facing the lonely moor. They retraced their steps and, after roaming hither and thither, finally glimpsed a light through the trees.

"Good," said Germain; "here's a house where the people are already awake, because the fire's alight. It must be later than I thought."

But it wasn't a house; it was their own campfire. They had covered it over when they left, and it had been rekindled by the breeze.

They had been walking for two hours only to find themselves back where they started.

11. Out Under the Stars

"This time I give up!" said Germain, stamping his foot. "We're bewitched for sure, and we'll never get away from here before daybreak. The place must have a spell on it."

"Well now, we mustn't get angry," said Marie; "we'll just have to make the best of it. We'll make a bigger fire, the boy is wrapped up so well that he won't come to any harm, and it won't kill us to spend a night out in the open. Where have you hidden the saddle, Germain? Right in the middle of those big holly bushes! You are a scatterbrain, aren't you! That's useful when we want to get it back!"

"Here, you hold the boy, and I'll get his bed out of the bushes; I don't want you getting your hands scratched."

"Here's the bed—I've already done it. It's only a few scratches; it isn't as though I've been stabbed with a sword or anything," replied the brave little girl.

She put little Pierre to bed again; by now he was so sound asleep that he took no notice of this new journey. Germain piled such quantities of wood on the fire that it lit up the whole forest round about; but little Marie was utterly worn out, and though she made no complaint, her legs would support her no longer. She was very pale, and her teeth were chattering with cold and weakness. Germain took her in his arms to warm her up. A sense of concern and compassion, and an overwhelming flood of affection, took possession of his heart and stilled his senses. As if by miracle, his tongue was loosened and every feeling of shame vanished.

"Marie," he said, "I like you, and I'm very sorry you don't like me. If you'd let me be your husband, I wouldn't let anything stand in the way—no father-in-law or family or neighbors or anyone else would stop me from marrying you. I know you'd make my children happy, you'd bring them up to remember their mother as they should, and I'd be happy with a clear conscience. I've always liked you, but now I'm so much in love with you that you could ask me to spend my whole life doing anything you like, and I'd promise it right away. Forget how old I am, just think about how much I love you. Look, people are wrong when they say you're old when you're thirty. Besides, I'm only twenty-eight! A girl is afraid that she'll be criticized if she marries a man ten or twelve years older than herself, because that isn't the way things are done in our part of the world. But I've heard of other places

where people don't pay any attention to that—they prefer a girl to be married to a solid reliable older man, instead of a young boy who might seem all right at the time but could still go wrong later. Besides, age isn't always a matter of years. It depends on your strength and your health. When a man is worn out by overwork and hardship or leading a bad life, he'll be old before he's twenty-five. Whereas with me—but you're not listening to me, Marie."

"Yes I am, Germain, I'm listening all right," little Marie replied; "but I'm thinking about what my mother always says: you feel sorry for a woman if she's sixty and her husband is seventy or seventy-five, and he can't work and support her any more. After a while, he's too weak, and she has to look after him just when she's starting to need a lot of rest and gentle handling herself. That's the way people end up in the poorhouse."

"It's right for parents to say that, Marie, I do admit that," said Germain; "but still, they're asking you to sacrifice the best years of your life, while you're young, for the sake of what might happen later in life, when you're no use anyway and it doesn't matter how you end up. But it's different with me. There's no danger that I'll starve to death when I'm old. I'll even have something saved up, because I'm living with my wife's family and working hard and not spending anything. And besides, I love you so much that it'll stop me from getting old—you'll see. Everyone says if a man is happy he stays young. Loving you makes me younger than Bastien—I can feel it. He isn't in love with you, he's too stupid, he's too much of a boy, he can't see how pretty and good you are, and how you're meant to be courted. Look, Marie, there's no reason to hate me. I'm not a bad man, I made my Catherine happy, she said before God when she was on her deathbed that she'd always been happy with me. And she told me I ought to get married again. Tonight, when her boy was falling asleep, I really thought her spirit must have been talking to him. Didn't you hear what he said? And how his little lips were shaking, and how his eyes were looking up in the air at something we couldn't see? He was seeing his mother, surely; she made him say he wanted you to take her place."

"Germain," said Marie, greatly astonished and thoughtful, "you're being very honest about this, and everything you're saying is true. I'm sure it would be good for me to love you, if it wouldn't annoy your family too much. But what can I do? I don't feel

anything toward you in my heart. I do like you a lot; your age doesn't make you ugly, but it does frighten me. It seems to me that you're someone I should respect—a sort of relative, like an uncle or a godfather—and there would be times when you'd treat me as a little girl rather than a wife who was equal to you. And besides, all my friends might make fun of me. It would be stupid to take any notice of that, but I still think it would make me feel a bit embarrassed and unhappy when I was getting married."

"That's just childish, Marie; you're just talking like a child!"

"Well, there you are then! I *am* a child," she said, "and that's why I'm afraid of a man with too much sense. You can see that I'm too young for you; you're already telling me that I'm not talking sensibly! I can't be any more sensible than my age will let me."

"God have mercy on me, I'm so clumsy—whenever I try to say what I think, it always comes out wrong!" cried Germain. "The plain truth is, you're not in love with me, Marie; you think I'm too dull and blunt. If you did have any love for me, you wouldn't see all my faults so clearly. But you're not in love with me, and that's that."

"Well, it isn't my fault," she replied, a little hurt that he wasn't talking to her so tenderly any more. "I've been doing my best to listen to you; but the harder I try, the less I can see the two of us as man and wife."

Germain didn't answer. He held his head in his hands, and little Marie couldn't tell whether he was weeping or sulking or fast asleep. Seeing him so unhappy, and not being able to guess what was going through his mind, she felt rather uneasy; but she dared not say anything more to him. She was too bewildered by what had just happened to feel any need for sleep, so she waited impatiently for the sun to rise. She kept tending the fire and watching over the child, whom Germain seemed to have quite forgotten. Yet Germain wasn't asleep. He wasn't thinking about his situation; he wasn't daydreaming to keep up his spirits; he wasn't making any plans for seduction. He was simply suffering. A whole mountain of troubles was weighing down on his heart. He wished he were dead. Everything seemed to have gone against him; if he could have wept, he wouldn't have done it halfheartedly. But his sorrows were mingled with a touch of self-reproach. He was in torment; yet he had no power or desire to feel sorry for himself.

When morning came and the sounds of the countryside drew Germain's attention to the fact, he lifted his face from his hands and stood up. He could see that little Marie hadn't been

sleeping either; but he couldn't find the words to tell her that he was concerned about her. He was utterly despondent. Once more he hid the saddle in the bushes, slung his bag over his shoulder, and took his son by the hand.

"Now we'll try and finish our journey, Marie," he said. "Do you want me to take you all the way to Les Ormeaux?"

"We'll stay together till we're out of the wood," she replied; "and when we know where we are, we can go our separate ways."

Germain didn't answer. He was hurt that the girl didn't want him to take her as far as Les Ormeaux, and it didn't occur to him that his own tone of voice might have provoked the refusal.

After going a couple of hundred yards, they met a woodcutter who put them on the right track and told them that once they had crossed the big meadow, their destinations would be within easy reach—one of them had only to go straight ahead, and the other to turn left. The two places were so close together that the houses at Fourche could be seen distinctly from the farm at Les Ormeaux, and vice versa.

Then, when they had thanked him and gone on, the woodcutter called them back and asked them whether they had lost a horse.

"I found a fine gray mare in my yard," he told them; "maybe she was forced to take shelter there because of a wolf. My dogs kept yapping the whole night, and in the morning I saw the horse under my shed; she's still there. Come along, and if you recognize her, you can take her."

Germain described the Young Gray and satisfied himself that she was indeed the animal in question; then he started to go back for his saddle. Little Marie offered to take the boy to Les Ormeaux, where he could be fetched after Germain had made his appearance at Fourche.

"He's a bit messy after the night we've had," she said. "I'll clean up his clothes and wash that cute little face of his and do his hair; and when he's presentable, you can introduce him to your new relatives."

"Who says I want to go to Fourche at all?" Germain retorted grumpily. "Maybe I won't!"

"Yes you will, Germain; you must go there; you've got to," replied the girl.

"I suppose you just want me to hurry up and marry somebody else, so that I won't bother you any more."

"Look, Germain, you mustn't think about that any more; it's just a thought that came into your head during the night, because things had gone wrong and upset you a bit. But now you need to come back to your senses. I'm going to forget everything you said and never talk about it to anyone—that's a promise."

"Oh, you can talk about it, if you want. If I've said something, I'm not the sort of person to pretend I didn't. What I told you was the honest truth, and I wouldn't be ashamed to let anyone know it."

"Yes, but what if your wife found out that just before you met her you'd been thinking about someone else? It wouldn't exactly give her a good impression. So you must be careful what you say from now on; and you mustn't look at me oddly like that when people are around. Don't forget about Père Maurice, he's trusting you to follow his advice, and he'd be very angry with me if I stopped you. Good-bye, Germain. I'm taking Little Pierre with me. That will make you go on to Fourche; I'm keeping him as a hostage."

"So you want to go with her, do you?" the plowman asked his son, seeing how the boy was clinging to little Marie's hand and following her resolutely.

"Yes, Papa," said the boy. He had heard what had been said so unguardedly in his presence, and he had his own way of understanding it. "I'm going with my friend Marie. You can come and fetch me when you've finished getting married, but I still want Marie to be my little mother."

"There, you see; he wants it himself!" said Germain to the girl. "Listen to me, Little Pierre," he added, "I want it too—I want her to be your mother and stay with you all the time; she's the one who doesn't want it. I can't get her to change her mind; you try and see if you can."

"Don't worry, Papa, I'll make her say yes. Little Marie always does what I want."

He went away with the girl. Germain was left alone, sadder and more irresolute than ever.

12. The Belle of the Village

But when he had tidied his clothes and his horse's harness after their recent travels, when he was mounted on the Young Gray and knew the way to Fourche, he felt that there was no longer any

retreat—that the whole disturbing night had to be forgotten like a dangerous dream.

He found Père Léonard sitting on a fine spinach-green wooden bench just outside his white-painted house. A flight of six stone steps led up to the door, showing that there was a cellar. The walls of the garden and hemp field were plastered with lime and sand. It was a handsome place, and might almost have passed for the home of a respectable middle-class family.

Germain's future father-in-law came forward to meet him. For five minutes he plied him with questions about the various members of his family; then he added the standard polite remark that people use to find out the object of a new acquaintance's journey, "So you're visiting this part of the country?"

The plowman replied, "I've come to see you and give you this little present of game from my father-in-law. And he wants me to tell you that you'll know why I'm here."

"Ha! ha! ha!" said Père Léonard, laughing and patting his ample stomach, "I see, I know, I understand! And, young man," he added with a wink, "you won't be the only one courting. There are three waiting inside the house already, just like you. I never turn anyone away; and they're all good matches, so I'd be hard pressed to choose one rather than another. Still, I'd rather it was you, because of Père Léonard and the fine land on that farm of yours. But my daughter is of age, and she's her own master; she'll do what she likes. Come in and introduce yourself. I hope you'll draw the lucky number!"

"I'm sorry, excuse me," said Germain, much surprised to find himself an addition to the numbers when he'd expected to have the field to himself. "I didn't realize your daughter already had people courting her. I didn't come here to compete against anyone for her."

"If you thought my daughter would be left on her own while she waited for you to arrive," returned Père Léonard without losing his good humor, "you were much mistaken, my boy. Catherine has what it takes to attract a husband; her only problem will be knowing which one to choose. Never mind; come inside, don't be discouraged. She's a woman worth competing for."

He steered Germain into the house with a boisterous push in the back, and called out: "Here you are, Catherine, here's another one!"

This brash though jovial introduction, in the presence of the widow's other admirers, made the plowman feel still more embarrassed and uneasy. He lingered awkwardly for a few moments before daring to raise his eyes to the beauty and her court.

The Widow Guérin had a good figure and wasn't lacking in freshness. From the very start, however, Germain didn't like her expression and dress. She had a bold, self-satisfied look; while her silk apron, her black tulle scarf, and her cap fringed with three rows of lace, weren't altogether in keeping with the steady, serious widow he had imagined.

Her showy dress and forward manner made Germain think her old and ugly, though she certainly wasn't either. He felt that such fripperies and playful ways might suit little Marie's youthfulness and liveliness well enough; but the widow's jokes were ponderous and in poor taste, and she didn't exactly display her finery to advantage.

The three suitors were sitting at a table laden with wine and meat, which were laid out for them all Sunday morning; Père Léonard liked to show off his wealth, and the widow wasn't sorry to parade her pretty china and keep table as befitted a woman of independent means. Germain, simple and gullible though he was, saw the situation clearly enough; and as they drank the toast, he behaved more cautiously than he had ever done. Père Léonard made him sit down with his rivals and seated himself opposite him, showing a clear preference for the plowman and treating him as well as he knew how to do. Despite the inroads that Germain had already made on it, the present of game was still sizeable enough to produce an effect. The widow seemed to be impressed by it, and the suitors eyed it scornfully.

Germain felt ill at ease in this company, and didn't eat very heartily. Père Léonard teased him about it.

"You look rather down in the dumps," he said, "and you're neglecting your glass. You mustn't let love take away your appetite; a starving lover can't think up fine speeches like a man whose wits have been sharpened with a drop of wine."

Germain was mortified by this suggestion that he was already in love; and the widow's affected behavior—she lowered her eyes and smiled as if she felt already in command of her prey—made him want to protest against his alleged surrender. But he didn't want to seem impolite, so he merely smiled and held his peace.

In his eyes, the widow's beaux seemed a trio of louts. They must have been very rich for her to let them woo her. One of them was over forty and almost as fat as Père Léonard; another was blind in one eye and stupefied with drink; the third was young and good-looking enough, but he kept trying to seem clever, and he uttered such drivel that it was positively embarrassing. Yet the widow laughed at all his stupid remarks as though she admired them—which didn't seem any great proof of her powers of discernment. At first Germain thought she must be infatuated with the fellow; but he soon discovered that he himself was being singled out in a marked way, and that she wanted him to venture further. This made him feel—and appear—still more solemn and aloof.

The time came for Mass, and they all rose from table to attend it. They had to go to Mers, a good half-league away, and Germain was so tired that he would have dearly liked some sleep first; but he wasn't in the habit of missing Mass, and so he set out with the others.

The roads were full of people, and the widow strutted along proudly with her head high and her three admirers escorting her. Now she took one suitor's arm, and now another's. She would very much have liked to show off the fourth too, in the sight of the passersby; but Germain thought it was silly to be dragged along in the wake of a petticoat for all the world to see. So he kept at a reasonable distance, chatting with Père Léonard, and managed to keep the latter's attention so well occupied that the two of them didn't seem to belong to the same party as the others.

13. The Master

When they reached the village, the widow stopped and waited for them. She was determined to make her entry with her full entourage; but Germain denied her the pleasure. He left Père Léonard, went over and talked to a few people he knew, and then entered the church by another door. That annoyed the widow.

After Mass she made a triumphant appearance on the village green. A dance was being held there, and she opened it with each of her three lovers in turn. Germain watched her. He thought she danced well, but with a certain amount of affectation.

"Well now, aren't you going to dance with my daughter?" asked Léonard, slapping him on the shoulder. "You're too shy, that's your trouble!"

"I've never gone dancing since my wife died," replied the plowman.

"Well, you're looking for another wife now, so you'll have to take the mourning away from your heart as well as your clothes."

"That's no reason, Père Léonard. Besides, I think I'm too old. I don't care for dancing any more."

"Listen," said Père Léonard, drawing him off to a quiet spot, "you were upset when you came here and saw that the place was under siege already. You're very proud, I can see that; but you need to be realistic, my boy. My daughter is used to a great deal of attention, especially since she left off mourning two years ago; and it isn't her job to go running after you."

"So your daughter has been looking for a husband for two years, and she hasn't yet made her choice?" said Germain.

"She doesn't want to rush things, and she's right. She acts lively, and it might seem to you that she doesn't think much; but in fact she has a lot of sense, and she knows exactly what she's doing."

"I wouldn't have guessed it," said Germain naïvely; "she has three suitors after her, and if she knew her own mind, she'd feel that at least two of them were in the way—she'd tell them to go home."

"Why should she? You don't understand at all, Germain. She isn't interested in the old man, or the one-eyed man, or the young man, I'm pretty sure of that; but if she sent them away, people would think she wanted to stay a widow, and nobody else would come."

"Oh, I see—they're a kind of advertisement."

"That's right. Where's the harm in it, as long as they don't mind?"

"Well, one man's meat is another man's poison," said Germain.

"It'd be poison for *you,* I can see that. But you see, something could easily be arranged; if you were chosen, the coast would be left clear for you."

"Yes—if! And in the meantime, how long would I have to sit around waiting to find out?"

"Ah, that depends on you, I imagine—on how persuasively you can talk. Up till now my daughter has been well aware that the best time of her life is the time when she's being courted. She

isn't in any hurry to submit to one man when she can give orders to a number of them. She'll enjoy herself playing that game as long as it gives her pleasure; but if she finds that you give her more pleasure than the game, that will be the end of the game. The only thing is, you mustn't give up hope. Come back every Sunday, have a dance with her, show her you're interested, and if she thinks that you're more attractive and better brought up than the others, one fine day she'll let you know, I expect."

"I'm sorry, Père Léonard—your daughter can do whatever she likes, and it isn't my business to criticize her—but if I was in her place, I'd behave differently. I'd be more frank and open, I wouldn't let men waste their time when they must have better things to do than hover around for a woman that doesn't care for them. But still, if that's what she likes and it makes her happy, it's none of my business. But there's one thing I do need to say, and I feel embarrassed saying it after this morning. You misunderstood why I came, and I didn't have time to explain, so you've been left with the wrong impression. You see, I didn't come here to propose to your daughter; I just wanted to buy the pair of oxen you're planning to take to the fair next week—my father-in-law thinks they might suit him."

"Oh, I understand, Germain," said Léonard very coolly; "when you saw my daughter with these lovers of hers, you changed your mind. Suit yourself. What appeals to some people doesn't appeal to others; you're perfectly entitled to withdraw, because you didn't say anything about your intentions. If you really do want to buy my oxen, come and look at them in the meadow. And whether we agree on a sale or not, you can still come back and have dinner with us before you leave."

"I don't want to put you out," Germain replied. "I expect there are things you need to do here. I'm tired of watching people dance and doing nothing myself. I'll go and have a look at your oxen, and meet you later at your house."

So Germain made his escape and headed for the distant meadow that Léonard had pointed out to him. It was quite true that Père Maurice wanted to buy a pair of these oxen, and Germain felt that if he could bring back a fine-looking pair at a reasonable price, he'd more readily be forgiven for his wilful failure to do what he had been sent to do.

He walked quickly, and soon found he was only a short distance from Les Ormeaux. This made him long for his son—and also long to see little Marie again, though he'd given up all hope of happiness with her and even put the thought out of his head. Everything he had just seen and heard—the vain, coquettish woman; the crafty yet narrow-minded father who encouraged his daughter to be so proud and deceitful; the citified luxury, which seemed to him an offence against rural propriety; the time wasted in silly, idle talk; the home so different from his own; and above all the deep-seated unease that a farmhand feels when he leaves his customary hard work—all the frustrations and annoyances that Germain had suffered during the last few hours made him long to be back with his child and his little neighbor. Even if he hadn't been in love with the latter, he would still have wanted to be with her, in the hope of distracting his mind and restoring his spirits.

But he looked in vain through the adjacent meadows. He couldn't find either little Marie or little Pierre; and yet it was the time of day when shepherds are out in the fields. There was a big flock of sheep in a field of stubble. He asked the boy who was looking after them whether they belonged to the Les Ormeaux farm.

"Yes," the boy said.

"Are you their shepherd? Do boys mind the sheep, on farms in this part of the world?"

"No. I'm just minding them today because the shepherdess left. She got sick."

"But haven't you got a new shepherdess who arrived this morning?"

"Oh yes, that's right. But now she's gone too."

"What do you mean, gone? Didn't she have a boy with her?"

"Yes. A little boy that was crying. Both of them went away after a couple of hours."

"Went away? Where?"

"Where they came from, I suppose. I didn't ask them."

"But why did they go away, then?" asked Germain, growing more and more uneasy.

"Don't ask me; how would I know?"

"Maybe they couldn't agree about the wages. But surely that would have been settled beforehand."

"I can't tell. I saw them come here and go away again, that's all."

Germain went toward the farm and questioned the farmhands. Nobody could give any explanation; but they all agreed that the girl had spoken to the farmer and then gone away in silence, taking the boy, who was in tears.

"Has anybody done anything to hurt my son?" exclaimed Germain, his eyes blazing.

"Oh, he was your son, was he? What was he doing with that girl? And where are you from, and who are you?"

Germain saw that, in true country fashion, they were going to answer his questions with other questions; so he stamped his foot impatiently and asked to see the master.

The master wasn't there. He wasn't in the habit of staying around all day when he came to the farm. He'd mounted his horse and set out for one of his other farms—nobody knew which.

"But look here," said Germain, who was quite alarmed, "can't you give me any idea why the girl left?"

The farmhand and his wife exchanged an odd sort of smile. Then the man replied that he didn't know anything about it—it wasn't any of his business. All Germain could find out was that the girl and child had gone in the direction of Fourche. He rushed back to Fourche. The widow and her lovers hadn't yet returned; neither had Père Léonard. The maid told him that a girl and a child had come looking for him, but since she didn't know them, she hadn't cared to ask them in, and had told them to go on to Mers.

"Why didn't you let them in?" asked Germain angrily. "People must be very suspicious in this part of the world, if they won't open the front door to a neighbor."

"Well, naturally!" replied the maid. "In a house as rich as this, you have to keep a close watch on things. While the master's away I'm responsible for everything, and I can't just open the door to anyone at all."

"That's a mean way to live," said Germain; "I'd rather be poor than live in fear like that. Good-bye to you, miss, and good-bye to this horrible country of yours!"

He made inquiries at the neighboring houses. Yes, the shepherdess and child had been seen. They had been taken for beggars (the boy's departure from Belair had been unpremeditated, without any attention to his dress—he was wearing a torn shirt

and a little lambskin over his shoulders—and little Marie was necessarily ill-clad even at the best of times), and they had been offered bread. The girl had accepted a piece for the child, who was hungry. Then she had gone away with him, very quickly, and had disappeared into the woods.

Germain thought for a moment, and then asked whether the farmer from Les Ormeaux had come to Fourche.

"Yes," he was told; "he went by on horseback, very soon after the girl."

"Did he go off after her?"

"Oho, so you know him, do you?" said his informant (the local innkeeper) with a laugh. "Yes, of course. He's the very devil for running after the girls. But I don't think he'll have caught this one. Though mind you, if he set eyes on her—"

"That's enough, thanks!"

And he flew rather than ran to Léonard's stable. He tossed the saddle onto the Young Gray, leaped on her back, and set off at full gallop for the Chanteloube woods.

His heart was pounding with anger and worry; sweat was pouring down his brow. He spurred the Young Gray till the blood ran—though she needed little enough urging when she saw that she was on the road back to her stable.

14. The Old Woman

Germain soon found himself back at the place where he had spent the night, beside the pool. The fire was still smoldering, and an old woman was picking up the remains of the dead wood that little Marie had piled there. Germain stopped to question her. She was deaf, and misunderstood him.

"Yes, that's right, young man," she said, "this is the Devil's Pool. It's a bad place. You mustn't come near it unless you throw three stones in the water with your left hand and make the sign of the cross with your right. That makes the evil spirits go away. Otherwise there's bad luck for anyone who goes past."

"I'm not asking you about that," said Germain, coming closer and shouting at the top of his voice. "Have you seen a girl and a child going through the wood?"

"Oh yes," said the old woman, "there *was* a little child drowned in it."

Germain shuddered from head to foot; but fortunately the old woman added, "That was a long time ago now. They put up a fine cross there in memory of the accident. But one night there was a bad storm, and the evil spirits threw it into the water. You can still see a bit of it. If anyone ever had the bad luck to spend the night here, he'd never find his way out before daylight, that's for certain. He could walk and walk as much as he liked, he could go two hundred leagues in the woods, but he'd always come back to the same place."

In spite of himself the plowman found that these words caught his imagination. He thought of the evils that must happen if the old woman's claims proved true, and his blood ran cold. Since he had no hope of getting any further information, he remounted and resumed his search of the woods, calling to Pierre with all his might, whistling, cracking his whip, and breaking branches to fill the whole forest with the sound of his coming. Then he listened to see if there was any answer. But he could hear only the bells of cows roaming the glades, and the wild grunts of swine bickering over acorns.

At last Germain heard the sound of a horse on the track behind him, and a middle-aged, swarthy, robust man, who was dressed a bit like a city dweller, called out to him to stop. Germain had never seen the farmer of Les Ormeaux, but an instinctive surge of anger made him guess at once that this was the fellow. He turned back, looked him up and down, and waited to hear what he had to say.

"Did you see a girl about fifteen or sixteen come this way, with a little boy?" asked the farmer with a pretence of nonchalance, though he was obviously disturbed.

"What do you want with her?" retorted Germain, without the least attempt to conceal his anger.

"Well now, my friend, I could point out that it's none of your business. But I don't have anything to hide, so I'll tell you. She's a shepherdess. I hired her for the year without knowing her. When she came, she looked too young and weak for farm work—at least that was my opinion. So I had to let her go. I did want to pay her for her little journey, but while my back was turned she just went

off in a huff. She was in such a hurry that she even forgot some of her things and her purse. Not that there's much in it, I suppose—only a bit of small change, probably!—but still, I had to come this way, so I thought I might meet her and give her what she's forgotten, as well as the money I owe her."

This story, however unlikely, sounded quite possible, and Germain's honesty made him hesitate over it. He directed a penetrating gaze at the farmer, who submitted to this examination with a great deal of either impudence or innocence.

"I must get to the bottom of this," thought Germain; and he held back his indignation.

"She's a girl from our neighborhood," he said, "I know her; she must be around here somewhere. . . . Let's go on together—we'll find her again, I expect."

"All right," said the farmer; "let's go. But if we don't find her before we reach the end of this path, I'll give up; I have to take the road to Ardentes."

"Oho!" thought the plowman. "I'm not letting you out of my sight—not even if I have to go round and round the Devil's Pool with you for a day and a night!"

"Wait a minute!" said Germain suddenly, staring at a clump of broom that was quivering in a peculiar way. "Hey there! Little Pierre, my boy, is that you?"

The boy recognized his father's voice and came bounding out of the broom like a young deer; but when he saw that Germain was in the farmer's company, he stopped and hesitated, apparently in alarm.

"Come here, Pierre! Come along, it's me!" cried the plowman, riding up to him and leaping down to take him in his arms. "Now then, where's little Marie?"

"She's over there. She's hiding because she's scared of that nasty dark man, and so am I."

"Well now, don't worry; I'm here. . . . Marie! Marie! It's me!"

Marie crawled out. As soon as she saw Germain, with the farmer close behind him, she rushed into his arms and clung to him as a little girl clings to her father.

"Oh, Germain!" she said, "you're a good honest man; you'll protect me; I'm not afraid when you're here!"

Germain shuddered. He looked at Marie. She was very pale, and her clothes had been torn by running through thorns when

she had fled into the thicket like a hunted doe. But there was no shame or despair in her face.

"Your master wants to talk to you," he said, continuing to watch her expression closely.

"Master!" she said proudly; "that man's no master of mine, and never will be! . . . You're my master, Germain. I want you to take me home with you. . . . I'll be your servant for nothing!"

The farmer had moved closer, pretending to be impatient.

"Here, girl," he said, "you forgot something when you left our place, and I'm returning it."

"Oh no, sir," little Marie answered, "there's nothing I forgot, and there's nothing I want from you."

"But listen to me," returned the farmer, "I need to tell you something. . . . Come here. . . . Don't be frightened. . . . Just a word or two. . . . "

"You can say it out loud—I won't have any secrets with you."

"Well, come and take your money, at least."

"My money? You don't owe me anything, thank God!"

"I thought as much," said Germain under his breath; "but never mind, Marie—listen to what he has to say. You can tell me afterwards; I'd like to hear that. I know what I'm doing. Go up to his horse—I won't lose sight of you."

Marie took three steps toward the farmer. He bent over the pommel of his saddle and said in a low voice, "Look here, girl, here's a nice shiny gold louis for you! You're not to say a word, you understand? I'll just tell everyone that I thought you weren't strong enough for the farm work. . . . And we won't say anything more about it. . . . In a while I'll come visiting you, and if you've kept quiet, I'll give you something more. . . . And then, if you decide to be more reasonable, you've only got to say the word, and I'll take you home with me, or else come and meet you after dark in the meadows. What kind of present would you like me to give you?"

"There's the present *I'm* giving *you*, sir—there!" little Marie replied aloud, and she threw the gold louis in his face as hard as she could. "Thank you very much! And when you do come and visit us, let me know first. All the boys in our neighborhood will give you a good welcome, because where I come from, everyone is very fond of gentlemen who try and take advantage of girls that don't have any money. You'll see, they'll be ready and waiting for you."

"You're a little liar and a stupid tattletale," said the farmer angrily, raising his stick and looking dangerous. "You're just trying to spread gossip and lies. But you won't get any money out of me; we all know what kind of a girl you are!"

Marie had drawn back in fear, but Germain sprang at the bridle of the farmer's horse and shook it violently.

"Now I see what's going on!" he said. "It's plain as daylight! Get down, man! Get down and we'll have a little talk together!"

The farmer wasn't keen to take up the quarrel. He spurred his horse in an effort to break free, and tried to strike the plowman's hands with his stick to make him let go. But Germain dodged the blow, grabbed him by the leg, dragged him from his horse and pulled him down into the ferns. The farmer got to his feet and defended himself vigorously, but Germain knocked him to the ground and held him down.

"You coward," said Germain, "I could give you a thrashing if I wanted! But I don't like hurting people, and besides, no amount of beating could beat any conscience into you. But you're not leaving this place till you get down on your knees and apologize to that girl."

The farmer was quite familiar with this sort of thing and tried to turn it into a joke. He declared that he hadn't done anything very wrong, since it was only a matter of words, and said he'd be glad to apologize as long as he could kiss and make up with the girl, have a pint of wine with them at the inn, and part good friends.

"You make me sick," said Germain, pushing the fellow's nose into the ground; "I never want to see your filthy face again. There! If you had any feelings left, you'd turn as red as a beetroot! And if you ever come to our part of the world, you'd better go down Shame Street!" ("Shame Street" is the path that turns away from the main street at the approach to a village, and runs around the outside of the town. People who want to avoid being seen because they're afraid of facing some well-deserved insult are said to take this path.)

He picked up the farmer's holly stick, broke it across his knee to show the strength of his wrists, and threw away the pieces in disgust.

Then, taking his son by one hand and little Marie by the other, he went away, still trembling with anger.

15. Back to the Farm

A quarter of an hour later they had crossed the heath and were trotting along the main road, with the Young Gray whinnying at every familiar object. Little Pierre told his father as much of the recent happenings as he could understand.

"When we got there," he said, "first we went to the sheepfold to look at the pretty sheep, and *that man* came out and spoke to *my* Marie. I was in the manger, I went there to play, and *that man* didn't see me. Then he said hello to my Marie and he gave her a kiss."

"You let him kiss you, did you, Marie?" said Germain, trembling with rage.

"I thought it was only politeness—I thought it was the way they do things in that place when you first arrive. Grandma at your home does the same—she kisses the girls that come and work for her, to show how she'll be taking care of them like their mother."

"And then after that," went on Little Pierre (who was rather proud of having a real adventure to relate), "*that man* said something naughty to you, something you told me never to say again or even remember, so I forgot it right away. But if Papa wants me to tell him what it was—"

"No thanks, Pierre, I don't want to hear it, and I don't want you to remember it ever."

"Well then, I'll just forget it again," replied the child. "And after that, *that man* looked angry because Marie told him she was going away. He said he'd give her anything she wanted—even a hundred francs! And my Marie got angry too. Then he went up to her, like he wanted to hurt her. I got scared, I screamed and I ran to Marie. Then *that man* said, 'What's that? Where did that boy come from? Get him out of here.' And he lifted up his stick to hit me, but my Marie stopped him, she said, 'We can have a talk later, sir, but first I need to take this boy to Fourche; then I can come back.' And as soon as he went out of the sheep pen, my Marie said to me, 'Let's run away, Pierre, let's get out of here quickly, because he's a bad man and he's trying to hurt us.' And then we went round behind the barns, and we crossed over a little meadow, and we went to Fourche looking for you. But you weren't there and they wouldn't let us stay and wait for you. And then *that*

man came after us, he was riding on his black horse, and we ran away, further away, and we went and hid in the woods. And then he came there too, and we heard him coming and we hid. And then, when he'd gone past, we started to run again and go back home. And then in the end you came, and you found us; and that's how everything happened. Isn't that right, Marie—I haven't forgotten anything?"

"No, Pierre, that's exactly right. And now, Germain, you'll have to be a witness for me and tell everyone back home that if I couldn't stay over there, it wasn't because I was too scared or too lazy."

"And, Marie," said Germain, "ask yourself whether a man of twenty-eight really is too old to stand up for a woman or give a bully a taste of his own medicine. I'd like to know whether Bastien, or any other good-looking boy ten years younger than me, wouldn't have been knocked to pieces by *that man*, as Little Pierre calls him. What do you think?"

"I think you've done me a very good turn, Germain, and I'll be grateful for it all my life."

"Is that all?"

"Papa," said the boy, "I forgot to tell little Marie what I promised. I didn't have the time yet. But I'll tell her when we're back home, and I'll tell my Grandma too."

This promise gave Germain food for thought. Now there would have to be some explanation to his relatives; he'd have to tell them his objections to the widow Guérin, without stating the other ideas that had made him look at her so carefully and so sternly. If you're happy and proud, it may seem easy to persuade other people to accept your happiness; but it isn't very pleasant to be criticized in one direction when you've been rejected in another.

Fortunately Little Pierre was fast asleep when they reached the farm, and Germain put him to bed without rousing him. Then he explained the situation as best he could. Père Maurice sat in the doorway on his three-legged stool and listened solemnly. He was disappointed with the result of the trip; but when Germain described the widow's systematic coquetry and asked his father-in-law whether he had the time to go courting every single Sunday of the year only to risk being shown the door at the end of it, the old man nodded his head sympathetically and said, "You're in the right, Germain; it couldn't be done."

And then, when Germain described how he'd been obliged to bring little Marie home so quickly to save her from a worthless employer's insults and perhaps violence, Père Maurice again gave an approving nod and said, "You did the right thing, Germain; it had to be done."

When Germain had finished his tale and given all his reasons, his father-in-law and mother-in-law looked at each other and emitted a long sigh of resignation. Then the head of the household stood up and said, "Ah well! God's will be done. Love can't be made to order."

"Come and have supper, Germain," said his mother-in-law. "It's a shame things didn't work out better, but still, it seems that wasn't what God wanted. We'll just have to look somewhere else."

"Yes," the old man added; "we'll go and look somewhere else, just as my wife says."

There was no further sound in the house; and when Little Pierre rose with the lark at dawn, he was no longer excited by the extraordinary events of the previous days; he became as calm as any other little country boy his age, forgot everything that had been running through his head, and thought only of playing with his brothers or acting like a "man" with the oxen and horses.

Germain too tried to forget, and plunged back into his work; but he was so sad and absentminded that everyone noticed. He didn't talk to little Marie, or even look at her; yet if anyone had asked him which meadow she was in, or which path she had taken, there wasn't a moment in the day when he couldn't have given the answer—had he chosen to do so. He hadn't dared to ask his relatives to take her on at the farm during the winter, even though he knew she must be badly in need of money. But she didn't suffer any hardship; and Mère Guillette never could understand how her little supply of firewood never ran out, and how her shed came to be full in the morning when she'd left it almost empty the previous night. It was the same with the wheat and potatoes. Someone would come in through the attic window and empty a sack onto the floor without waking anyone or leaving any trace. The old woman was both disconcerted and delighted. She told her daughter never to mention it; if anyone knew about the miracle that was happening at her house, she said, they'd believe she was a witch. She really did think that the devil had a hand in it, but she wasn't in any hurry to annoy him by calling for the

priest's exorcisms. There would be time enough for that, she told herself, when Satan came and asked for her soul in return for his blessings.

Little Marie had a better understanding of the situation, but she didn't dare say anything to Germain about it, in case it should reawaken his thoughts of marriage; so in his presence she acted as though she didn't notice anything.

16. Mère Maurice

One day Mère Maurice found herself alone in the orchard with Germain, and said to him in a kindly way, "I don't believe you're well, you poor boy. You're not eating as well as usual, you never laugh any more, and you're talking less and less. Has someone done something to upset you—have we done something ourselves, without knowing it or meaning it?"

"No, Mother," replied Germain, "you've always been as good to me as my own mother who brought me into the world; I'd be very ungrateful if I made any complaint about you or your husband or anyone here."

"Well then, you must be feeling upset about your wife's death all over again. You should be feeling less unhappy as the time passes, but you're feeling worse. You really ought to do what your father-in-law says—it's very sensible: you ought to get married again."

"Yes, Mother, that's what I think too. But none of the women you've suggested are right for me. I don't forget about my Catherine when I see them, I just think about her all the more."

"Well then, Germain, obviously we haven't managed to hit on the sort of person you like. So you'll have to help us and be absolutely frank with us. There must surely be some woman somewhere who is made for you—the Lord God never makes anyone without providing someone else to make him happy. So if you know the woman who is right for you, go ahead and marry her. It doesn't matter whether she is pretty or ugly, young or old, rich or poor—we've made up our minds, my husband and I, we'll agree to it; because we can't bear to see you so sad, and we'll never be happy unless you're happy."

"You're as good as the Lord God himself, Mother, and so is my father," Germain answered; "but all your kindness won't help me out of my troubles. The girl I'd like to marry simply won't have me."

"Is she too young then? It's silly to go and set your heart on a young girl."

"Well, yes, Mother, I *am* silly, I *have* set my heart on a young girl, and I know it's my own fault. I've done my best to stop thinking about her, but whether I'm working or resting or at Mass or in bed or with my children or you, I still keep thinking about her, I can't seem to think about anything else."

"It's as if you're under a spell, is it, Germain? Well then, there's only one cure; the girl will just have to change her mind and listen to you. I'll have to help and see what can be done. You'd better tell me where she is and who she is."

"But I wouldn't dare, Mother," said Germain; "you'd only make fun of me."

"I'm not going to make fun of you, Germain—you're unhappy, and I wouldn't want to make it any worse. Could it be Francette perhaps?"

"No, not at all, Mother."

"Or Rosette then?"

"No."

"You'd better tell me then, because if I have to run through every girl in the neighborhood, it could go on forever."

Germain bowed his head and couldn't bring himself to reply.

"All right," said Mère Maurice, "I'll leave you alone today, Germain; maybe tomorrow you'll trust me more, or maybe your sister-in-law will be better at asking you the right questions."

She picked up her basket and went away to spread the linen on the bushes.

Germain behaved like a child who makes up his mind when he sees that he's no longer the center of attention. He followed his mother-in-law and at length tremulously came out with the name "La Guillette's little Marie."

Mère Maurice was immensely surprised; Marie was the last girl she would have thought of. But she had enough tact to suppress her astonishment and keep her comments to herself. Then she saw that her silence was upsetting Germain, so she held out

her basket to him and said, "Well, is that any reason not to help me with my work? Here, carry this, and come and have a talk with me. Have you really thought it over, Germain? Have you really made up your mind?"

"Oh, but that isn't the situation at all, Mère Maurice. If I thought I had any chance of succeeding, then my mind would be made up. But she won't even listen to me, so I'll just have to make up my mind to get over it, if I can."

"And what if you can't?"

"Well, there's a limit to everything, Mère Maurice. When a horse is loaded too heavily, it falls. When a cow doesn't have enough to eat, it dies."

"You mean you'll die if you don't succeed? God forbid! I don't like to hear you saying that sort of thing—a man like you says what he thinks. You're a man with a big heart, Germain, and when a strong man shows any sign of weakness, it's dangerous. Come now, you mustn't lose hope. When a girl is poor and you're doing her a great honor by wanting to marry her, I can't believe she would refuse."

"Yes, but it's true; she did refuse."

"What are her reasons, then?"

"She says you've always been good to her and her family owes a lot to your family; she doesn't want to prevent me from marrying someone rich, because it would upset you."

"If that's what she says, it shows she's a good girl and wants to do the right thing. But that wouldn't help you, Germain—because I expect she says she's in love with you all the same, and she'd marry you if we let her?"

"That's the worst part of all. She says she doesn't have any feelings toward me at all."

"She might be saying one thing and thinking another, just to keep you away from her. If so, well, the girl deserves our affection; we'd best overlook her youth, since she has so much good sense."

"Oh yes?" said Germain, struck by a hope he'd never previously considered; "that would be very right and proper of her! But if she has as much sense as that, I'm afraid it really is because she doesn't have any feeling for me."

"Germain," said Mère Maurice, "I want you to promise me that you'll keep calm this whole week and not worry, and just eat

and sleep and be happy like you used to be. I'll talk to my husband, and if I get him to agree, you can find out how the girl really feels about you."

Germain promised, and the week went by. Père Maurice said not one word to him privately, and seemed not to suspect anything. The plowman tried to appear calm, but he was paler and more worried than ever.

17. Little Marie

At last, on Sunday morning, just after Mass, his mother-in-law asked him what encouragement his little friend had given him since the conversation in the orchard.

"Why, none at all," he replied; "I've never even spoken to her."

"Well, how do you expect to persuade her if you don't speak to her?"

"I only ever spoke to her once," Germain replied. "That was when we went to Fourche together; and ever since then, I never said a word to her. I was so hurt when she refused, I wouldn't want to hear her say again that she doesn't love me."

"Well, Germain, you must speak to her now; your father-in-law has said you can. Go on, make your move! I'm saying this because, if it has to be done, then I want it too. You can't stay uncertain forever."

Germain obeyed. He arrived at La Guillette's house looking dejected and hanging his head. Little Marie was alone by the fire, so deep in thought that she didn't hear him coming. When she saw him standing in front of her, she started from her chair in surprise and turned bright red.

"Little Marie," he said, sitting down beside her, "I know I'm going to upset and trouble you, but the people at home" (this being the customary way to describe the heads of the household) "want me to speak to you and ask you to marry me. You don't want it, I know; I'm quite prepared for that."

"Germain," little Marie answered, "are you really in love with me, then?"

"It bothers you, I know, but it isn't my fault. If you could change your mind, I'd be very happy, but I know I don't deserve that. Come on, look at me, Marie; am I so dreadful?"

"No, Germain," she replied, with a smile, "you're much better-looking than I am."

"Now don't make fun of me; look at me and be kind to me. I still have all my hair and all my teeth. You can see in my eyes that I love you. So look straight in my eyes—you'll see it written there, and any girl can read that kind of writing!"

Marie looked into Germain's eyes with her usual happy assurance; then, suddenly, she turned her face away and started to tremble.

"Lord in heaven!" said Germain. "I'm just frightening you; you're looking at me as if I was the Les Ormeaux farmer! Please don't be afraid of me—it hurts me too much. *I* won't say anything bad to you, *I* won't kiss you against your will. And if you want me to go away, all you have to do is point me to the door. Look, do I have to go away before you'll stop shaking?"

Marie held out her hand to him, but didn't turn her head, which was still facing the fire, and didn't utter a word.

"I understand," said Germain, "you feel sorry for me because you're so kind; you don't want to make me miserable; but you can't feel anything for me, I expect."

"Why are you saying such things, Germain?" little Marie replied after a while; "are you trying to make me cry?"

"You poor little girl! You do have a kind heart, I know, but you're not in love with me, you don't like me, and you're looking away because you don't want me to see it. And I—I wouldn't even dare to touch your hand! In the woods, when my boy was asleep, and you were asleep, I nearly kissed you then—just very gently. But I'd have died of shame sooner than ask you to kiss me, and I suffered as much that night as a man burning in a slow fire. And since that time I've dreamed about you every night, Marie—and how I've kissed you then! But all that time you haven't dreamt a single dream. And you know what I'm thinking now? I'm thinking that, if you turned round and looked at me the way that I'm looking at you, with your face close to mine, I'm thinking I'd drop dead with happiness. But you feel that such a thing would make you just die of anger and shame!"

Germain spoke as if in a dream, without hearing the words he was saying. Little Marie was still trembling; but as he was trembling even more, he no longer noticed it. Suddenly she turned around. She was in tears, and she looked at him reproachfully.

The poor plowman thought this was the last blow. Without waiting to hear his sentence, he rose to leave; but the girl stopped him by throwing her arms around him, and hid her face on his breast.

"Oh Germain!" she said, sobbing, "couldn't you tell that I love you?"

Germain would have lost his senses if his son hadn't restored them by galloping into the cottage on a stick; his little sister was riding behind him, and whipping their imaginary steed with a willow branch. Germain picked up the boy and put him in his bride's arms.

"There, you see," he told her; "by loving me, you've made more than one man happy!"

A Country Wedding (1846)

Designed to Follow *The Devil's Pool*

1. A Country Wedding

So ends the tale of Germain's marriage, as that "expert plowman" himself told it to me. Forgive me, kind reader, for not having managed to translate it better—because the plain old-fashioned language of the region that "I sing" (as people used to say) does indeed need a translation. These people speak a dialect that may be too French for us; since the days of Rabelais and Montaigne,[1] the progress of the language has lost us many of its old riches. That's the way with any form of progress, and we simply have to make the best of it. However, it's still a delight to hear those picturesque turns of phrase thriving in the ancient soil of central France—all the more so, because they really suit the good-natured placidity and entertaining garrulity of the people who use them. Touraine has preserved a number of valuable expressions handed down from our forefathers. But Touraine was civilized greatly during and after the Renaissance. It filled up with chateaux and highways and foreigners and bustle. Berry remained unchanged, and is, I think, the best preserved region to be found at the present day—apart from Brittany and one or two provinces in the very south of France. Some of its customs are so alien, so curious, that I hope I may entertain my kind readers for a little while longer with a detailed account of a country wedding—to take an example, Germain's, which I had the pleasure of attending some years ago.

Yes, everything passes, unfortunately! Even during my own lifetime, attitudes and customs in my village have changed more than they did for several hundred years before the French Revolution. Half the Celtic, pagan, and medieval ceremonies that I used to see in full force when I was a child have already vanished. In another year or two, perhaps, the straight lines of the railroads will run across our deep valleys, sweeping away our ancient traditions and wondrous legends in a single flash of lightning.

It happened in winter, around carnival time—the fittest and most convenient season for weddings in our part of the world. (There's hardly time in the summer, when farm work won't allow three days' delay—to say nothing of the additional days required for more or less laborious absorption of the mental and physical intoxication caused by such festivities.) I was sitting under the great mantelpiece of an oldfashioned kitchen fireplace, when pistol shots, dogs' yelps, and a shrill wail of bagpipes told me that the bride and groom were coming. Soon Père and Mère Maurice, Germain, and little Marie made their entry into the yard, followed by Jacques and his wife with the engaged couple's godparents and the most important relatives of both families.

As little Marie had not yet received the wedding presents (known as *livrées* ["deliveries"]), she was wearing the best of her own simple clothes: a thick dark dress, a white scarf with a big bright floral pattern, an apron of a rose-colored cotton very popular in those days but now out of fashion, a headdress of the whitest muslin in a style like Anne Boleyn's or Agnès Sorel's,[2] which has fortunately survived to the present day. She was fresh and smiling, not at all proud—though she would have had every reason to be. At her side was Germain, serious and affectionate like the young Jacob greeting Rachel at Laban's well.[3] Any other girl would have assumed an air of self-importance and conscious triumph; whatever your station in life may be, it counts for something if your good looks alone are enough to gain you a husband. Yet the girl's eyes were misty and glittering with emotion; you could see that she was very much in love and had no room to think about the opinions of other people. She hadn't relinquished her little air of determination, but everything about her reflected sincerity and good will; success hadn't gone to her head, and awareness of her own power hadn't made her selfish. Never have I seen so lovely a bride; when her friends asked her if she was

happy, she simply replied, "Well, naturally! I don't have any quarrels with the Lord God!"

Père Maurice was the spokesman; he was the one who stepped forward to offer the usual congratulations and issue the customary invitations. First he hung a beribboned laurel branch over the fireplace; this is known as the *exploit* ["summons"]—in other words, the letter of notification. Then he gave each of the guests a little cross made from a bit of blue ribbon with a bit of pink ribbon threaded through it (the pink being for the bride, and the blue for the groom). All the guests, male and female, have to keep these tokens till the wedding day, when the women wear them in their bonnets and the men in their buttonholes, as written invitations or tickets of admission.

Then Père Maurice delivered his little oration. He invited the head of the house and all his "company" (that is, all his children, relatives, friends, and servants) "to the blessing and the banquet and the fun and the dancing and everything that follows them." Nor did he fail to say, "I've come to do you the honor of summoning you." A very appropriate turn of phrase; it may seem wrong to us, but it conveys the idea of honoring those who are considered worthy to attend.

In spite of the generous scope of this invitation—which is handed out in the way we've described from house to house throughout the whole parish—the rules of politeness demand that only two people from each house should accept it: one head of the household to join the family group, and one of the children to join the general throng. Country people are very careful about matters of politeness.

When the invitations had been issued, the engaged couple and their relatives went back to have lunch at the farm together.

Little Marie continued to mind her three sheep on the common, and Germain went on tilling the soil as if nothing had happened.

On the afternoon before the appointed wedding day, at about two o'clock, the musicians arrived—in other words, the bagpiper and the hurdy-gurdy player. Their instruments were adorned with long fluttering ribbons, and they played a march suitable for the occasion; its tempo might have been too slow for feet that hadn't been brought up on it, but it suited perfectly the heavy clay soil and undulating roads of the region. Pistol shots, fired by the young

men and children, announced the start of the wedding. Little by little the guests assembled, and they began dancing on the lawn in front of the house to get into the spirit of the occasion. At sunset, strange preparations began; they divided into two groups, and after night had fallen, they went ahead with the ceremony of the *livrées.*

This took place at the bride's home, Mère Guillette's cottage. Mère Guillette took along her daughter, a dozen pretty young shepherdesses who were friends and relatives of her daughter, and two or three respectable married women who lived nearby; they were sharp tongued, quick at repartee, and strict guardians of ancient tradition. Then she chose a dozen good men and true from her friends and relations, and, last of all, the parish hemp dresser—a garrulous old man, and a fine speaker if ever there was one.

The role played in Brittany by the *bazvalan,* the village tailor, is filled in our part of the world by either the hemp dresser or the wool carder (and in many cases one man does both those jobs). He participates in every special event, whether grave or gay, because he is fundamentally a learned man and a good talker; on such occasions he always acts as spokesman and sees that certain formal rites that have been laid down since time immemorial are properly carried out. Itinerant jobs, which take a man into the heart of other families and never allow him to be totally preoccupied with his own, tend to give him a keen wit and the gift of the gab, and turn him into a singer and a storyteller.

A hemp dresser is a particularly skeptical fellow. He and another rural functionary, whom we'll meet in a moment—the gravedigger—are always the local freethinkers. They have talked about ghosts so often, and are so familiar with all the tricks of such evil spirits, that they have virtually lost all fear of them. All three of them—gravediggers, hemp dressers, and ghosts—do their work mainly at night. At night, too, the hemp dresser tells his spine-chilling tales. Allow me to digress for a moment . . .

When the hemp has been properly "done"—in other words, when it has been adequately soaked in running water and half dried on the riverbank—it is brought back to the yard and set upright in little sheaves. At dusk, those sheaves, with their outspread bases and tightly bunched heads, look rather like a long procession of little white ghosts on spindly legs, walking silently alongside the wall.

It is at the end of September, when the nights are still warm, that the hemp beating begins, by the pale moonlight. The hemp has been heated all day in the oven; at evening it is taken out to be beaten before it cools. This is done with a kind of trestle, surmounted by a wooden lever that falls into grooves and crushes the stalks without cutting them. Then you hear, at night in the countryside, the curt crisp sound of three quick blows. After that comes a silence, as the worker's arm moves the handful of hemp to crush it in a different place. And then the three blows are heard again; that's the other arm working the lever. And so it goes on, repeatedly, until the moon fades in the first light of dawn. This work lasts only a few days each year, so the dogs are not used to it; they yelp plaintively at every point of the compass.

In the countryside, this is the season of strange and unusual sounds. Migrating cranes go by, so high that even in broad daylight you can hardly see them. At night you can only hear them; and their harsh wailing voices, lost among the clouds, seem like a hail and farewell from tormented souls striving to find the way to heaven but doomed by an inexorable fate to fly close to the earth, not far above the dwellings of humanity. Yes, these migratory birds suffer strange doubts and mysterious worries during their aerial journey. Sometimes they lose track of the wind, when capricious cross currents clash or displace one another in the heights. Then—if this discomfiture happens during the daytime—you can see the leader drifting haphazardly in one breeze after another, eventually swinging around to the rear of the whole triangular phalanx, though a skilled maneuver of his companions soon rearranges them in the proper order behind him. Often, after a number of vain attempts, the wornout guide gives up trying to lead the little band of travelers; someone else comes forward, has his turn at the job, and then gives way to a third, who rediscovers the current and leads the procession onward in triumph. But what cries and protests and complaints, what savage curses and troubled queries are hurled back and forth in some unknown tongue by these winged pilgrims!

Sometimes, in the echoing night, you can hear these sinister noises whirling for quite a while above the housetops. And because you can't see anything, you involuntarily feel a kind of terror and unease in sympathy with them, until the whole lamenting flock vanishes in the vast expanse.

There are still other sounds that belong to this time of year. They arise mainly in the orchards. The fruit hasn't yet been picked, and thousands of unusual crackling noises make the trees seem like living souls. A branch creaks, bending beneath a weight that has suddenly reached its ultimate ripeness; or, alternatively, an apple drops and falls with a dull thud on the damp earth at your feet. Then you can hear some invisible creature running away, and rustling through the grass and foliage; it is the peasant's dog, that restless inquisitive prowler, both impudent and cowardly, slinking around everywhere, never sleeping, constantly on some unknown quest, skulking in the undergrowth, spying on you and then, at the sound of the fallen apple, taking flight because he thinks you're throwing a stone at him.

It is on nights like these—nights gray and cloudy—that the hemp-dresser tells his strange tales of will-o'-the-wisps and milk-white hares, of souls in torment and sorcerers turned into wolves, of witches' sabbaths at the crossroad and prophetic screech owls in the graveyard. I can remember passing the early hours of such a night around the busy crushing-trestles, whose relentless tapping would interrupt the hemp dresser's story just at its most frightening moment, so that our blood ran cold. Often, too, the worthy man would keep talking while he beat the hemp, and then we would miss four or five words—terrible words, no doubt—which we dared not make him repeat; and the gap would add a still more ghastly mystery to the mysteries of his story, which were already quite black enough. In vain might the servant girls warn us that it was getting very late to be outdoors, and that it was well past our bedtime; they themselves were dying to hear the rest too. And how frightened we felt afterwards, as we went back home through the village! How deep the church porch looked, how thick and black the old trees' shadows! As for the graveyard, we never saw it at all; we kept our eyes shut as we skirted it.

But the hemp dresser, like the sacristan, doesn't delight solely in frightening people; he also likes to make them laugh; he can be teasing or romantic at the right time, when he has to sing of love and marriage. He is the man who collects and memorizes all the oldest songs and hands them down to posterity. At a wedding, therefore, he is the man who is entrusted with the role which we'll see him playing when the "deliveries" were presented to little Marie.

2. The "Deliveries"

When everyone had gathered in the house, its doors and windows were shut with the utmost care; even the attic window was barricaded; boards and trestles, posts and tables were placed across all the entrances, as if the inhabitants were preparing to face a siege. And then, within the interior thus fortified, there was a solemn silence of anticipation, until singing and laughter and the sound of rustic musical instruments could be heard in the distance. That was the bridegroom's party: Germain at the head, and with him a joyous and close-knit throng formed by his most venturesome companions, his relatives, friends, and servants, and the gravedigger.

Yet as they came nearer to the house, they slowed down, began talking among themselves, and then fell silent. The girls barricaded inside the building had made little peepholes at the windows, through which they could see the enemy approach and draw up in battle array. A light cold rain was falling, which added to the piquancy of the situation, and a big fire was crackling in the fireplace. Marie would have preferred to cut short the inevitable slowness of this formal siege; she didn't like to see her bridegroom fretting away outside like that, but she had no say in such a matter, and so she simply had to act as if she shared the mischievous cruelty of her companions.

While the two armies were thus facing each other, a volley of shots outside set all the dogs in the neighborhood barking. The ones inside the house rushed yelping to the door, under the impression that the attack was real, and the little children began to cry and quake in spite of their mothers' vain attempts to reassure them. The whole scene was so well played that a stranger would have been quite taken in, and might well have got ready to defend himself against a band of murderous brigands.

Then the gravedigger, the bridegroom's bard and orator, stationed himself in front of the door and, in a doleful voice, exchanged the following words with the hemp dresser, who was looking out of the gable window over the same door:

GRAVEDIGGER: For the love of God, let us in, dear friends and neighbors!

HEMP DRESSER: Who are you? And what right do you have to call us your dear neighbors? We don't know you at all.

GRAVEDIGGER: We're good honest people, and we're in serious trouble. Don't be afraid of us, friends! Show us some hospitality. Sleet is coming down, our poor feet are frozen, and we've come so far that our clogs are all split.

HEMP DRESSER: If your clogs are all split, just look on the ground; you'll find a sprig of willow easily enough, and you can use that to make *arcelets* (little metal hoops, which are placed around split clogs to hold them together).

GRAVEDIGGER: Willow *arcelets* aren't very strong. You're just making fun of us, friends; you'd do much better to let us in. There's a good fire burning in there—I can see it; you must have set up the spit; the people inside must be slaking both body and soul. Let us poor pilgrims in, then; we'll die on your doorstep if you don't take pity on us.

HEMP DRESSER: Oho! You're pilgrims, are you? You didn't tell us that. And just what pilgrimage have you been on, if you don't mind my asking?

GRAVEDIGGER: We'll tell you that when you've let us in—we've come so far you wouldn't believe it.

HEMP DRESSER: Let you in? A likely story! We don't have any reason to trust you. Look here, have you come from Saint-Sylvain de Pouligny?[4]

GRAVEDIGGER: We've been at Saint-Sylvain de Pouligny, but we've been much further than that.

HEMP DRESSER: Then you've been as far as Sainte-Solange, have you?

GRAVEDIGGER: We certainly have been at Sainte-Solange; but we've been even further.

HEMP DRESSER: That's a lie; you've never been even as far as Sainte-Solange.

GRAVEDIGGER: We've been further; we've just come back from Santiago de Compostela.[5]

HEMP DRESSER: What pack of nonsense are you telling us? We've never heard of any such place. We can see well enough what you are: you're bad people, thieves, liars, no-hopers. Go and tell your tales somewhere else; we're on our guard, you'll never get in here.

GRAVEDIGGER: Do have some pity on us, you wretched man! You've guessed it: we're not pilgrims, we're just unlucky poachers, and the keepers are right behind us. And the police are after us

too, and if you don't hide us in that loft of yours, we'll be caught and sent to jail.

HEMP DRESSER: And who will prove that you really are what you're saying now? Already we've heard one lie that you haven't been able to keep up.

GRAVEDIGGER: If you let us in, we'll show you a nice bit of game that we've killed.

HEMP DRESSER: Show it right away, because we don't trust you.

GRAVEDIGGER: All right, open a door or window, and we'll pass the animal through to you.

HEMP DRESSER: Oh no you don't—we're not as foolish as all that! I'm looking at you through a little crack, and I can't see any hunters or game among you.

A young herdsman, a thickset lad of Herculean strength, had previously been in the thick of the throng, where he had remained unnoticed. Now he came forward and held up toward the gable a plucked goose on a strong iron spit, bedecked with straw tassels and ribbons.

"Very convincing that is!" exclaimed the hemp dresser, after he had cautiously put out a hand to feel the roast. "That's no quail or partridge; it isn't a hare or a rabbit; it's something like a goose or a turkey. Really, a fine lot of hunters you must be! You didn't need to run very far for *that* bit of game! Get out of here, you bunch of clowns! We've seen through all your lying—you can just go and cook your own supper at home; you won't get any of ours."

GRAVEDIGGER: But where in God's name are we going to cook this bird of ours? It's little enough for a big group of people like us. Besides, we don't have anywhere to do it—or any fire to do it with. All the doors are locked at this time of night, everyone's in bed; you're the only ones left, because you're having a wedding in your house, and you must be hard-hearted if you'll let us freeze to death out here. Let me ask you again, friends, please let us in. We won't cost you anything. You can see that we've brought our own roast—just give us a little bit of room by your fireside and a bit of fire to do the cooking, and we'll go away happy enough.

HEMP DRESSER: You think we've got room to spare in here? And what about the firewood—isn't that going to cost us anything?

GRAVEDIGGER: We've got a nice little bunch of straw here for burning, we'll be happy enough with that. Just let us put our spit across your fireplace, that's all.

HEMP DRESSER: No sir! We don't take any pity on the likes of you—all we feel is disgust. If you ask me, you're just drunk, you don't need anything at all, you only want to get in here and steal our fire and our girls.

GRAVEDIGGER: Well, if you won't listen to reason, we'll just have to force our way in.

HEMP DRESSER: Go ahead and try, if you want. We're pretty well locked up here, we're not afraid of you. And since you're just being insolent, we won't talk to you any more.

At that point the hemp dresser slammed the little window noisily, and climbed back down a ladder into the room below. Then he took the bride by the hand, and all the young people of both sexes joined them and began dancing and shouting with joy, while the married women sang in high-pitched tones and emitted great bursts of laughter to show their scorn and defiance for the attackers outside.

The besiegers, however, stormed and blustered; they fired pistols outside the doors, set all the dogs growling, banged at the walls, shook the shutters, and let out terrifying screams. In short, there was such a din that you couldn't hear yourself speak, and so much dust and smoke that you couldn't see a thing.

But this attack was merely bluff; it wasn't yet the moment for any breach of etiquette. If, prowling around the house, anyone happened to find an unguarded entrance, an opening of some kind, he could try to sneak in; and then, if the man carrying the spit managed to get his roast to the fire, the fireplace would admittedly be captured, the play would be over, and the bridegroom would be victorious.

But the house didn't have so many doors and windows that the usual precautions couldn't be taken; and no one would have presumed to use violence until the appointed hour of battle had come.

When his companions were tired of dancing and shouting, the hemp dresser decided it was time to give in. He climbed back up to his window, opened it cautiously, and greeted the frustrated assailants with a laugh.

"Well, well, boys," he said, "you're looking very crestfallen! You thought it would be the easiest job in the world to get in here, but now you can see how good our defenses really are. Still, we're starting to feel sorry for you—as long as you're willing to give up and accept our conditions."

GRAVEDIGGER: Then tell us, friends, what do we have to do before we can get to your fireplace?

HEMP DRESSER: You have to sing, friends—but you have to sing us a song we don't know and can't top with a better one.

"That won't be hard," said the gravedigger, and he began to bellow, "*When it was springtime, six months past*—"[6]

"—*I went walking on the growing grass,*" retorted the hemp dresser in slightly hoarse but fearsome tones. "You must be joking, you poor creatures, singing us an old thing like that! See, we've cut you off at the very first word!"

"*There was a prince's daughter*—"

"—*And she wanted to be wed,*" replied the hemp dresser. "Go on, go on, try something else! We know that one only too well."

GRAVEDIGGER: How about this one? *As I came back from Nantes*—

"—*I was all worn out, I was!* That one comes from my grandmother's days. Let's have something else!"

GRAVEDIGGER: *The other day I went out walking*—

HEMP DRESSER: —*Through a lovely wood!* That's silly, singing that one! Why, our little children wouldn't even bother to sing you the rest of it! What! Is that all you know?

GRAVEDIGGER: Oh, we can sing you so many that you'll run out of answers sooner or later.

This contest went on for a good hour. As the opponents were the two best singers in the region, and their repertoire seemed inexhaustible, it could easily have gone on all night—especially as the hemp dresser was malicious enough to let some of the laments go on for ten, twenty, or thirty verses, pretending by his silence that he was defeated. Then the bridegroom's party would

sing triumphantly at the tops of their voices, believing that this time at last the foe was beaten; but halfway through the final verse, the rough and croaky voice of the old hemp dresser would be heard bellowing out the last lines—after which he would shout, "You needn't have tired yourselves out singing such a long one, youngsters! We knew every word of it!"

Once or twice, however, the hemp dresser frowned and grimaced, and turned with a disappointed glance toward the listening women. The gravedigger was singing something so old that his adversary had forgotten it—or perhaps had never learned it; but then the good housewives would sing the triumphant refrain in nasal tones shriller than a seagull's, and then the gravedigger would be forced to surrender and try something different.

It would have taken too long to see which side would win. At last the bride's party announced that they would give in, as long as she was given a present worthy of her.

Then began the song of the "deliveries," sung to a solemn hymnlike tune.

The men outside chanted in unison, with bass voices:

> Open the door, darling Marie,
> Open the door to me.
> I've got fine gifts to give to you,
> My love, so let us through.

To which the women inside replied in high-pitched plaintive tones:

> My father's feeling full of woe,
> My mother's in a doleful state,
> And I'm too nice a girl to go
> And open up my door this late.

The men then repeated the first verse, changing the last line to:

> I've got a fine handkerchief for you.

But the women answered on behalf of the bride in the same words as before.

For twenty verses or more the men kept enumerating all the gifts in the "delivery," with a different object in the last line each

time: a fine *devanteau* (apron), fine ribbons, a cloth gown, lace, a gold cross, all the way down to "a hundred pins," which completed the modest list of wedding presents. The matrons' refusal could not be shaken; but at last the men decided to mention "a fine husband to give to you," and then the women replied by joining in the song and addressing the bride themselves:

> Open the door, darling Marie,
> Open the door to me.
> Here's a fine husband looking for you,
> My love, so let them through.

3. The Wedding

The hemp dresser immediately drew back the wooden bolt that barred the inside of the door. (In those days, that was still the only kind of lock found in most of our village houses.) The bridegroom's party burst into the bride's home—not without a struggle, however, because the boys billeted in the house, and even the old hemp dresser and the old women, felt duty-bound to defend the hearth. With the help of his supporters, the man carrying the spit had to reach the fireplace and place the roast on the fire. It was a true battle, although there were no actual blows and the conflict was not at all an angry one. Still, there was so much pushing and pressing, and so much self-esteem was at stake in this contest of strength, that the results could have been more serious than you might have thought from all the laughter and singing. The poor old hemp dresser, who fought like a lion, was pinned against the wall and crushed by the mass of people until he could scarcely draw breath. More than one fallen champion was unintentionally trampled underfoot, more than one of the hands clutching the spit was bloodied. These are dangerous games, and in recent times there have been such serious accidents that the people in our part of the country have decided to give up the "deliveries" ceremony. I think we've seen the last at Françoise Meillant's wedding—and even then the conflict was only feigned.[7]

That struggle was earnest enough at Germain's wedding, however. It was a point of honor for one side to invade, and for the other to defend, Mère Guillette's hearth. The huge iron spit was twisted like a corkscrew by the strong fists that fought for it.

A pistol shot set fire to some little sheaves of hemp on a wicker shelf near the ceiling. That incident created a diversion, and while people were scurrying to put out the budding fire, the gravedigger (who had climbed up into the attic unnoticed) came down the chimney and seized the spit—just at the moment when the herdsman, who was defending it beside the hearth, was lifting it above his head to stop anyone from snatching it away. Some time before the attack, the women had taken the precaution of putting out the fire for fear that someone might fall into it during the struggle and get burned. With the help of the herdsman, the mischievous gravedigger had no trouble gaining possession of the trophy and throwing it across the andirons. Done! Nobody was allowed to touch it now. He sprang into the middle of the room and lit a few remaining wisps of the straw that had been wrapped around the spit. That was supposed to represent the roasting of the goose—which was now in pieces, its limbs scattered all over the floor.

Then there was a great deal of laughter and boasting and bickering. Everyone showed the marks of the blows he had received; but the hand that had struck was often a friend's, so there were no complaints or quarrels. The hemp dresser was half flattened. He kept rubbing his back and saying that though it didn't really bother him, he objected to the trick his friend the gravedigger had played, and that if he hadn't been half dead, the fireplace wouldn't have been won so easily. The housewives swept the floor, and order was restored. The table was laid with jugs of new wine. Everyone had a drink and got their breath back; then the bridegroom was led into the middle of the room and armed with a stick. Now he had to undergo a new ordeal.

During the fight, the bride and three of her companions had been hidden by her mother, godmother, and aunts. The women had made the four girls sit on a bench in a far corner of the room, and had covered them with a big white sheet. The three companions had been chosen because they were the same size as Marie and wore bonnets of identical height; so, with the sheet shrouding them from head to foot, it was impossible to tell them apart.

The bridegroom was allowed to touch them only with the tip of his stick—and even then, only to point out which one he thought was his wife. He was allowed time to examine them, but only with his eyes; and the married women were stationed beside him,

watching closely to see that there was no cheating. If he guessed wrong, that evening he wouldn't be allowed to dance with his bride, but only with the girl he had mistakenly picked out.

When Germain found himself confronted with these identically shrouded ghosts, he was very much afraid of making a mistake; and indeed this did happen in many cases, because the precautions were always carried out meticulously. His heart thumped. Little Marie tried to take some deep breaths and flutter the cloth as best she could, but her quick-witted rivals did the same, poking the cloth with their fingers, so that there were just as many mysterious signals as there were girls under the drape. The square bonnets held up the drape so evenly that no shape of any face could be made out in its folds.

After hesitating for ten minutes, Germain shut his eyes, commended his soul to God, and put out the stick at random. He touched little Marie's forehead—and she threw off the sheet with a shout of victory. Then he was allowed to kiss her. He picked her up in his strong arms and carried her into the middle of the room, where the pair of them opened the dance, which went on until two in the morning.

Then the party broke up, to meet again at eight. A number of the young people had come from the surrounding regions, and there weren't enough beds for everyone, so each of the village girls shared her bed with two or three others, while the boys went and lay higgledy-piggledy in the hay of the farm loft. As you can well imagine, they didn't sleep much; they did nothing but hoot and tease each other and tell wild stories. At a proper wedding there have to be three sleepless nights; and you don't regret them.

They breakfasted on milky soup strongly seasoned with pepper to give them an appetite, because the wedding feast promised to be sumptuous; then, at the appointed time of departure, they gathered in the farm's courtyard. We have no parish of our own any more, so the company had to travel half a league away for the nuptial blessing. The weather was cool and fine, but the roads were in very bad condition, so each man was mounted on a horse, and a woman, young or old, was seated behind him. Germain set out on the Young Gray, who had been well groomed, newly shod, and decked with ribbons, and was now prancing and snorting fire. With his brother-in-law Jacques, he went to the cottage for his bride. Jacques took good Mère Guillette behind him on the Old

Gray, while Germain himself rode back to the farm courtyard in triumph with his dear little wife.

Then the joyous cavalcade set out, escorted by children who ran alongside firing pistols and startling the horses. Mère Maurice was seated in a little cart with Germain's three children and the fiddlers; they opened the procession with the sound of their music. Little Pierre looked so handsome that his old grandmother felt very proud of him. The impulsive boy, however, didn't stay long beside her. When they had to stop on the way at a difficult ford, he slithered away and begged his father to mount him in front on the Young Gray.

"A likely idea!" replied Germain. "We'd have to face some nasty jokes then! We can't possibly do it."

"I don't much care what people at Saint-Chartier[8] say," said little Marie. "Please do take him, Germain; I wouldn't be as proud of my wedding dress as I'd be of him!"

Germain gave in, and the handsome trio swept ahead through the procession, with the Young Gray galloping triumphantly.

And indeed, even though the people of Saint-Chartier were great mockers and tended to look down on the neighboring parishes that had been amalgamated with their own, they didn't feel at all inclined to laugh when they saw so handsome a bridegroom, so beautiful a bride, and a child whom a queen herself might have coveted. Little Pierre was wearing a cornflower-blue suit with a red waistcoat so short that it scarcely went down further than his chin. The village tailor had made the armholes so tight that the boy couldn't put his little arms together. And how proud he was! He had a round hat with black and gold braid and a peacock feather that stuck out perkily above a tuft of guinea-fowl feathers. His shoulder was covered in a bunch of flowers bigger than his head, with ribbons that fluttered down to his feet. The hemp dresser, who was also the local barber and hairdresser, had literally given him a basin haircut, putting a bowl over his head and clipping off anything that stuck out—an infallible method of guiding the scissors. Admittedly the poor boy didn't look as poetic in this garb as he did with his long hair blowing in the wind and his John the Baptist sheepskin coat; but he himself didn't think so, and everyone kept admiring him and saying that he looked quite the little man. His beauty triumphed over everything—and indeed what wouldn't the incomparable beauty of childhood triumph over?

His little sister Solange was wearing a woman's bonnet for the first time in her life, instead of the calico hood worn by little girls up to the age of two or three. And what a bonnet! It was taller and broader than the poor little creature herself! And how beautiful she thought she was! She didn't dare turn her head; she kept sitting bolt upright, and thinking that people would imagine she was the bride.

As for little Sylvain, he was still in long clothes and lay fast asleep in his grandmother's lap, not really knowing what a wedding was.

Germain looked at his children affectionately; and when they reached the town hall, he said to his bride, "I must say, Marie, I'm a bit happier coming here today than the time when I brought you back home from the Chanteloube woods and thought you'd never love me. I held you in my arms to lift you down then, just as I'm doing now, but I didn't think we'd ever be back on the poor dear Young Gray again with the boy on our knees. You know, I love you so much, and I love these poor little children so much, and I'm so glad you love me and them and my parents love you; and I'm so full of love for your mother and my friends and everyone here today, that I wish I had three or four hearts to hold it all. Really there isn't enough room in here for all this love and happiness. It gives me kind of a pain inside."

A crowd had gathered in front of the town hall and the church to look at the pretty bride. Why shouldn't we describe her dress? It suited her so well! Her fine muslin bonnet had lace-trimmed ribbons and was embroidered all over. In those days, country girls never allowed a single hair to be visible; even today it would be shameful and indecent if they let men see them bare-headed—though beneath their bonnets they hide magnificent rolls of hair, tied with white tapes to support the headdress. Yet they are allowed, nowadays, to leave a slender strand of hair exposed on their forehead; and it makes them look much prettier. Still, I do miss the classic headdress of my own era. The white lace against the skin had an old-fashioned purity that looked more solemn, in my opinion; when a face seemed beautiful in that setting, its beauty had a charm and simple majesty that are beyond description.

That was the style of headdress still worn by little Marie; and her brow was so white and pure that the whiteness of the linen could not overshadow it. She hadn't slept a wink all night; but the

morning air and especially the inner joy of a soul as untainted as the sky—and also a touch of hidden passion, which the modesty of girlhood kept in check—brought to her cheeks a glow as soft as peach blossoms in the first rays of the April dawn.

Her white scarf, chastely crossed on her breast, hid everything but the delicate curves of a neck like a turtledove's; her myrtle-green gown of fine cloth outlined her slender figure, which looked already perfect, though it would grow and develop further, since she was only seventeen. She wore a violet silk apron, with the bib that used to drape the breast so elegantly and modestly; our village girls have mistakenly done away with it. Today they may spread their scarfs more proudly, but their dress no longer has the delicate bloom of old-world purity that used to make them look like Holbein virgins.[9] Now they are more forward, more enticing. The good old style was more staid and severe, which made their few smiles seem more profound and closer to the ideal.

During the ceremony, Germain placed the customary *treizain* (thirty silver pieces) in the bride's hand. On her finger he placed a silver ring in a style that had not changed for centuries, though the latterday "gold band" has now replaced it. As they left the church, Marie asked him in a low voice, "Is it the ring I wanted—the one I asked you for, Germain?"

"Yes," he answered, "it's the one my Catherine was wearing when she died—the same ring for both my weddings."

"Thank you, Germain," said the young wife solemnly and emotionally. "I'll die with it on; and if I die before you do, keep it for your little Solange's wedding."

4. The Cabbage

They remounted and hastily rode back to Belair. The wedding feast was superb; interspersed with dancing and singing, it went on till midnight. The old people never left the table in fourteen hours. The gravedigger did the cooking, and very well he did it too—he was famous for it. Between courses he left his oven to have a song and a dance with the others. And yet he was an epileptic, poor old Bontemps! Who would have guessed it? He was as fresh and strong and cheerful as a young man. One evening, just as it was getting dark, we found him lying like a corpse, con-

torted by his illness, in a ditch. We carried him back home with us in a wheelbarrow, and spent the night looking after him. Three days later he was at a wedding, where he sang like a thrush, skipped like a lamb, and kicked up his heels in fine old style. When he left a wedding, he'd often be digging a grave or nailing a coffin. He did such things with due reverence, and it tinged him with a melancholy that brought on more attacks—though you would never have guessed it from his usual good mood. His wife was paralysed, and hadn't moved from her chair in twenty years. His mother is still alive at the age of 104. But he, poor man, so happy and kindly and amusing, fell last year from his loft into the street, and was killed. Presumably he had been seized by one of his terrible fits and, as he often did, had hidden in the hay to avoid frightening or upsetting his family. In that tragic way he ended a life as strange as his character—a mix of things sad and mad, gloomy and gay, through all of which he remained kindhearted and friendly.

But we've now come to the third day of the wedding—which is the most interesting of all, and has survived in every detail to the present day. We won't discuss the toast that is brought to the marriage bed; that's a very silly custom, which upsets the modesty of the bride and tends to corrupt that of the other young girls present. Besides, I think it's practiced in all the French provinces, and there's nothing distinctive about it in our part of the world.

Just as the "deliveries" ceremony symbolizes the conquest of the bride's heart and home, the cabbage ceremony symbolizes the fertility of marriage. This extraordinary performance originated with the Gauls, but it was gradually transformed by primitive Christianity, and by the Middle Ages had become a kind of mystery or humorous morality play. It begins at the end of breakfast on the day after the wedding.

During the breakfast, two boys—the liveliest and most quick-witted in the group—disappear. They go away and dress up, and then return escorted by dogs, children, music, and pistol shots. They represent a pair of beggars—husband and wife—dressed in the most wretched rags. The husband is the grubbier of the two: he has been debased by vice; the wife's misfortune and degradation have only been caused by her spouse's misconduct.

They are known as the "gardener" and "gardener's wife," and they claim that they have a duty to guard and tend the sacred cabbage. But the husband has a diversity of titles, all of which are

significant. He is also called the "straw man," because he wears a wig made of straw or hemp and his legs and part of his body are wrapped in straw to hide the nakedness that his rags could scarcely conceal. He also gives himself a paunch or a hunchback with straw or hay underneath his shirt. And the "rag man"—because he is clad in beggar's rags. And, finally, the "heathen"—which is more significant still, because, with his cynicism and debauchery, he is supposed to embody the antithesis of all Christian virtues.

He arrives with his face smeared in soot and wine dregs, and sometimes also wearing a grotesque mask. An old clog or a broken earthenware cup hangs from his waist on a bit of string, and he uses it to beg for wine. No one refuses him, and he pretends to drink, spilling the wine on the ground as a libation. At every step he takes, he falls down and rolls in the mud, acting as if he were stricken with the most shameful drunkenness. His poor wife keeps running after him, picking him up, calling for help, tearing the bristly hempen hairs that stick out beneath her dirty bonnet, weeping over her husband's degraded state, and hurling bitter reproaches at him.

"You wretch!" she says to him. "Now see where your wicked life has brought us! No matter how much I spin and work for you and mend your clothes, you just keep getting them torn and dirty again. You've eaten up what little money I had, our six boys and girls are in want, we're living in a stable with the animals; here we are, reduced to beggary, and you've got so ugly and repulsive and disgusting that very soon people will be throwing bread to us, like we were dogs. Please take pity on us, take pity on me, poor friends! I never deserved this; no woman ever had such a filthy disgusting husband. Help me pick him up, otherwise the carts will crush him like an old broken bottle, and I'll be a widow, and the grief of it will be the death of me, even though everyone might say it would be the best thing that could happen to me!"

That is how the gardener's wife plays her part, and she keeps up her laments throughout the entire performance. Yes, it really is a play—unscripted, improvised, acted outdoors, along the roads, across the fields, fed by whatever incidents may happen to arise—and everyone participates in it: wedding party and outsiders, guests and passersby. As we'll see, it goes on for three or four hours. The theme is always the same, but it is subject to infinite variations, which display the instinctive skill at mimicry, the rich comic inven-

tiveness, the fluency and flair for repartee and even innate eloquence of our country people.

The role of the gardener's wife is usually entrusted to a slim, beardless, fresh-faced man who can make the character seem very real and can act the wife's ludicrous despair so naturally that you feel amused and sad at the same time, just as if it were a true situation. Such thin beardless men are not rare in our country districts—and, remarkably enough, they are often the men most noted for muscular strength.

Once the wife's misfortunes have been presented, the young men of the wedding party entice her to have fun with them and leave her drunkard husband to fend for himself. They offer her their arms and lead her away. Little by little she starts to relax and enjoy herself, skipping about with one man after another, and behaving more and more shamelessly. A further "moral" there: the husband's misconduct provokes and causes the wife's.[10]

The heathen then emerges from his drunken stupor, looks around for his spouse, arms himself with a rope and a stick, and rushes after her. The others get him running, play hide and seek, hand the wife around from one man to another, try to amuse her and deceive her jealous husband. His "friends" try to get him drunk again. Finally he catches up with his unfaithful wife and threatens to beat her. The most realistic and most finely observed point in this parody of the woes of married life is that the jealous husband never attacks the men who are taking his wife away from him. He is very polite and well behaved with them; he wants to put all the blame on the guilty woman, because she is supposedly unable to fight back.

But just when he is lifting his stick and getting his rope ready to tie up the offender, all the men in the wedding party step in and throw themselves between the wedded pair. "Don't hit her! Don't ever hit your wife!" is the formula that is constantly repeated during scenes of this type. The husband is disarmed, forced to kiss and make up with his wife, and soon he appears to be more in love with her than ever. He goes away arm in arm with her, singing and dancing—until a new fit of drunkenness makes him roll on the ground again. Then it all starts afresh: the wife's lamentations, her despair, her enacted misbehavior, the husband's jealousy, the neighbors' intervention, and the reconciliation. All this contains an obtuse, even coarse, lesson, strongly redolent of

the play's medieval origins; but it always makes an impression—if not on the newlyweds, who are nowadays too sensible or too much in love to need it, at least on the children and teenagers. The heathen so disgusts and frightens the girls, as he chases them and pretends to try and kiss them, that there is nothing feigned about their flight from him. His dirty face and big stick (though it never does any harm) set the little children screaming. It's a comedy of manners of the most elementary, but also the most effective, type.

When this farce is well under way, the others start to go and get the cabbage. They bring a stretcher and place the heathen on it, arming him with a spade, a rope, and a large basket. Four strong men lift it onto their shoulders. His wife walks behind him; after her come the "elders" in a solemn, serious-looking band; then follow the rest of the wedding party, in couples, marching in time to the music. The pistol shots start again, and the dogs howl worse than ever at the sight of this filthy heathen borne aloft in triumph. The children scatter mock incense around him, using clogs on the ends of pieces of string as their censers.

But why the acclaim for so repellant a character? They are marching to win the sacred cabbage, an emblem of marital fertility, and only this drunken brute is allowed to touch the symbolic plant. Presumably this is derived from some pre-Christian mystery ritual, like the ancient Bacchanalia or the Saturnalia. The heathen, who is also the archetypal gardener, could possibly even be Priapus himself—the god of gardens and debauchery, a deity who must originally have been as chaste and serious as the mystery of reproduction, but who was gradually degraded by a licentiousness of morals and a perversion of ideas.[11]

However this may be, the triumphal procession finally reaches the bride's home and enters her garden. There the finest cabbage is chosen—no hasty task, because the elders hold a council and debate the matter interminably, each one pleading the cause of the cabbage he thinks most suitable. They put it to the vote, and when the choice has been made, the "gardener" ties his rope around the cabbage's stalk and walks as far away as the size of the garden will permit. His wife keeps watch to make sure that the sacred vegetable won't be damaged in any way when it falls.

Around the cabbage assemble the "clowns" of the wedding party: the hemp dresser, the gravedigger, the carpenter, the cobbler—in short, all those who spend their lives among other people

instead of working on the land themselves; this is supposed to make them (and indeed does make them) wittier and more talkative than the ordinary farm laborers. Using a spade, one of them digs a trench so deep that you'd think they were cutting down an oak tree. Another one puts a little wooden or cardboard clip on his nose like a pair of spectacles. He acts as "engineer"; he trots to and fro, devises a plan, keeps an eye on the workers, shifts the cords, fusses pedantically, cries out that they're going to spoil everything, stops and starts the job whenever he feels like it, and makes the whole thing as lengthy and silly as possible. Is this something that has been added to the ancient ceremony? Is it done to ridicule theoreticians in general (whom the tradition-minded country people mightily despise)? Or has it arisen from antagonism to the surveyors who survey the countryside and determine the taxes, or else to the bridge makers and highway builders who turn commons into roads and abolish the old skulduggeries so dear to the country people? Anyhow, this character in the play is called the "geometer," and he does his best to be an unbearable nuisance to the men with the picks and shovels.

It lasts for a quarter of an hour, this fuss and mummery over the task of moving the cabbage without cutting its roots or damaging it, while shovelfuls of dirt are thrown in the onlookers' faces (too bad for anyone who can't get out of the way quickly enough; be he king or bishop, he would still have to be baptized with earth). At last the heathen pulls on the rope, his wife holds out her apron, and the cabbage falls majestically amid the cheers of the spectators. Then the basket is brought, and the heathen couple deposit the cabbage in it as carefully and painstakingly as possible. It is packed with fresh earth and supported with sticks and strings, just as a town flower-girl would do with one of her finest potted camelias. Red apples are impaled on the ends of the sticks; sprigs of thyme and sage and laurel are placed all around; the whole thing is decked with ribbons and streamers; and the trophy is placed on the stretcher with the heathen, who has to keep it steady and prevent any mishaps. At last, marching in an orderly procession, they all leave the garden.

But when they have to pass through the gate—and again later, when they have to enter the courtyard of the bridegroom's house—an imaginary obstacle bars their way. The bearers stagger and cry out, move backward and forward, and pretend to collapse

under their burden, as if they have been repelled by some irresistible force. While this is happening, the onlookers call out to soothe or rouse the human yoke. "Steady, boy, steady! Go ahead, give it all you've got! Look out! Easy does it! Get down, the door's too low! Keep close, it's too narrow! A bit to the left; now right! Come on, put your backs into it, you're getting there!"

That is what happens in a year of good harvest, when the oxcart, brimming over with fodder or grain, is too wide or too high to pass through the doorway into the barn. That's how they shout at their sturdy animals to hold them back or urge them on; and so, by dint of skill and strenuous effort, they get the mountain of riches through the rustic triumphal arch unscathed. The last cart, known as the *gerbaude* ["sheaf cart"], is the one that specially requires these precautions. This is another festive occasion in the country; the last sheaf lifted from the last furrow is draped with ribbons and flowers (so, too, are the brows of the oxen and the plowman's goad) and is placed on top of the cart. Thus the difficult triumphal entry of the cabbage into the home is a similar emblem of prosperity and fertility.

When the cabbage is inside the bridegroom's courtyard, it is picked up and carried to the highest part of the house or barn. The burden must be carried, at whatever risk, to the most elevated point of the dwelling—whether it is a chimney or a gable or a dovecote higher than anything else. The heathen takes it all the way up, fixes it in position there, and waters it with a big jug of wine, while a volley of pistol shots and some exuberant gyrations from his wife mark the inauguration.

Immediately afterwards, the ceremony is repeated all over again. Another cabbage is dug out of the bridegroom's garden and carried up with the same rites onto the roof of the house that his bride has just forsaken to live with him. And there both trophies stay, until the wind and rain destroy the baskets and sweep away the cabbages. But they survive there long enough for the prediction made by the elders and matrons to have some chance of fulfillment. "Fine cabbage," they address it, "stay alive and flourish, so that our young bride can have a fine little baby before the year is out—because if you die too soon, you'll be sitting up there on her house like a sign of bad luck and barrenness."

By the time all these things have been done, the day is already far gone. The sole remaining task is to escort the newly-

weds' godparents back home. If these relatives-in-theory live far away, the whole wedding party accompanies them as far as the parish boundary, with music playing all the way. At that point, there is more dancing on the road, and then they kiss and part. After that, the heathen and his wife wash their faces and dress in decent clothes—unless their performance tired them out so much that they have been forced to go and take a nap.

At midnight on the third day of Germain's wedding, they were still singing and dancing and eating in the farmhouse at Belair. The elders couldn't budge from the table, and for good reason: they didn't regain the use of either their legs or their wits till the dawn began to glow next morning. Then, while they went quietly and shakily back home, Germain went out, feeling hale and hearty, to yoke his oxen, leaving his young wife to sleep on till daybreak. When the lark sang as it ascended toward heaven, it seemed to him like the voice of his own heart giving thanks to Providence. When the hoar frost glistened on the leafless bushes, it seemed to him like the white flowers that blossom in April before the leaves appear. The whole of Nature was smiling and serene in his eyes. Little Pierre had danced and frolicked so much the night before that he didn't come and help him with the oxen; but Germain was glad to be alone. He knelt in the furrow that he was about to plow, and uttered his morning prayer with such fervor that tears began to run down both his sweaty cheeks.

Far away you could hear the sound of the boys from neighboring villages. They were starting to make their way back home, and they kept singing, in voices now rather hoarse, the joyous songs of the night before.

Prefatory Note to *The Devil's Pool* (1851)

When I wrote *The Devil's Pool,* which began a series of country novels that I intended to group together as *Nights with the Hemp Dresser,*[1] I had no special plan or idea of doing anything revolutionary in literature. Nobody can bring about a revolution singlehanded; especially in the arts, the human race sometimes does such things almost unwittingly, because everyone contributes to them. Anyhow, this has no relevance to the novel of rural life. That has always existed, through different ages and in different forms—sometimes grandiose, sometimes mannered, sometimes artless. I've said before, and I must now say again, that pastoral life has been the ideal of city dwellers and even court dwellers in every era. I've done nothing new; I've simply followed civilized man's natural inclination to go back to the charms of primitive life. I have neither created nor tried to create any new language, nor have I striven for a new style, though a good number of literary magazines have made such claims about me.[2] Still, I know the truth about my own intentions better than anyone else can, and I'm constantly amazed that critics should keep looking for something that isn't there, when the simplest ideas and most commonplace incidents are all that inspire works of art. In the specific case of *The Devil's Pool,* as I said in its introductory chapter, a Holbein engraving that had struck me and a scene that I saw in real life at the same time, while the crops were being sown, were the only things that prompted me to write that little story, and I set it in the humble surroundings of my own daily walks. If you ask me what I was trying to do, I'll reply that I was trying to make something very touching and very simple—and that I didn't

entirely succeed to my own satisfaction. Certainly I've seen and felt the beauty of what is simple; but seeing it and depicting it are two different things! At best, an artist can only hope to incite those who have eyes to look for themselves. Look at the simple things, then, my dear city dwellers; look at the sky and the fields and the trees, and above all, at whatever is good and true in the country people themselves;[3] you'll see them a little in my book, you'll see them much better in the natural world.

Notes

Introduction

1. In practical terms, this meant that a novel was at least 50,000 words long: so, for example, E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings,* ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), 3. By that definition, *The Devil's Pool* (28,000 words) is a *nouvelle,* while *François le champi* and *La Petite Fadette* (each over 60,000 words) are novels.

2. She was working at the story by 14 January. George Sand, *Correspondance,* ed. Georges Lubin, 25 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1964–91), 2:225.

3. C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, "*La Mare-au-diable, La Petite Fadette, François le champi,* par George Sand," in *Causeries du lundi,* 15 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1857–62), 1:369.

4. Wladimir Karénine, *George Sand: Sa vie et ses œuvres,* 4 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1899–1926), 1:445–6. All English renderings in the introduction and notes are by the present translators.

5. Sand sent it to her publisher on 23 February. Sand, *Correspondance,* 3:286.

6. Karénine, 2:286.

7. Sand, *Correspondance,* 7:151–2.

8. Pierre Salomon, "Les Rapports de George Sand et de Pierre Leroux en 1845 d'après le prologue de *La Mare au diable,*" *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 48 (1948): 352–8. In *La Revue sociale* the text was substantially rewritten, presumably by Leroux or one of his assistants; Sand did not adopt any of these alterations when she issued the novel herself.

9. Eugène Delacroix, *Correspondance générale,* ed. André Joubin, 5 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1936), 2:276.

10. "Quite simply a little masterpiece" *(tout simplement un petit chef d'oeuvre)*—Sainte-Beuve, 1:353. "Certainly a masterpiece" *(certainement un chef d'oeuvre)*—Émile Zola, "George Sand," in *Œuvres complètes,* ed. Henri Mitterand, 12 vols. (Paris: Cercle du livre précieuse, 1966–70), 12:409.

11. Frédéric Chopin, *Correspondance de Frédéric Chopin,* ed. Bronislas Édouard Sydow and Suzanne and Denise Chainaye, 3 vols. (Paris: Richard Masse, 1981), 3:254–5.

12. Sand, *Correspondance,* 7:296.

13. "Mothers in Fashionable Society" seems to have been written either in December 1844 or in March 1845 (Sand, *Correspondance,* 6:747–8, 820). It was published in volume 2 of Hetzel's miscellany *Le Diable de Paris* in April 1845.

14. Sand, *Correspondance,* 3:391–2.

15. Jules Lemaître, "George Sand," in *Les Contemporains,* 8 vols. (Paris: Société Française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1887–1918), 4:167–8.

16. Zola, 12:401.

17. George Sand, *Théâtre complet,* 4 vols. (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1866), 2:357.

18. George Sand, *Impressions et souvenirs* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1873), 91–106.

19. Victor Hugo, *Les Contemplations,* ed. Léon Cellier (Paris: Garnier, 1969), 19–25.

20. George Sand, *Questions d'art et de littérature* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1878), 330.

21. Sand, *Impressions et souvenirs,* 103.

22. "Female liberation is based on the conquest—and, above all, the personal, idiosyncratic appropriation—of language." Sylvie Charron Witkin, "Les *Nouvelles* de George Sand: Fictions de l'étrangère," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 23 (1995): 366.

23. Sand, *Correspondance,* 8:401.

24. This hint of incest was fully apparent to the tale's early reviewers, who clearly found it the most unsettling thing in the whole work. Sand took the theme further in her next book, *François le champi.*

25. Sainte-Beuve, 1:351–70.

26. George Sand, *The Master Pipers,* trans. Rosemary Lloyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), xx.

Lavinia

1. The action is set expressively against the backdrop of the French Pyrenees, and the characters' chosen abodes are significantly stratified. Sir Lionel is staying at Bagnères-de-Bigorre (population in Sand's day about 7000), a fashionable spa town ("watering place") 774 kilometers (483 miles) south of Paris. Miss Ellis is further north on the edge of the Pyrenees—closer to civilization—at Luchon (Bagnères-de-Luchon, population over 3000), another fashionable spa town. Lavinia, by contrast, is

further south at Saint-Sauveur, a much smaller town in the very heart of the mountains, only 22 kilometers (14 miles) from the Spanish border. At the time of the tale, Saint-Sauveur and Luz (originally distinct villages 1500 meters [1 mile] apart, situated at the junction of the Gave de Gavarnie and the Gave de Pau) were already coalescing into a single community, Luz-Saint-Sauveur (combined population at the time about 1000).

2. The Italian painter Salvator Rosa (1615–73) was noted particularly for his spectacular handling of landscapes. The story's climactic thunderstorm in the mountains is a quintessential Salvator Rosa subject.

3. Luz is situated at an altitude of 720 meters (2300 feet); Bagnères-de-Bigorre is at 550 meters (1800 feet).

4. Beyond Luz, the road south leads through Gèdre to the Cirque de Gavarnie, one of the natural wonders of the Pyrenees, and a popular destination for sightseers. This is the road that Lavinia and her entourage will take later in the story.

5. According to legend, William Shakespeare held horses outside a London theater in the days before his success as a playwright.

6. Diana Vernon, one of Walter Scott's most remarkable characters, is the high-spirited, independent-minded heroine of his novel *Rob Roy* (1817).

7. Tarbes is a major town in the northern Pyrenees. Morangy has returned to civilization.

The Unknown God

The title is derived from the apostle Paul's words at Athens (Acts 17:23–5), which are repeatedly echoed in the story: "While I was passing by and seeing your idols, I found also an altar on which was written: 'To the unknown God.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is he served by human hands—as though he needed anything—since he is the one who gives life, and breath, and all things, to all." There are also recurrent echoes of Psalms 51:16–7 (Vulgate 50:18–9): "You take no delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifice for God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God, you will not despise."

1. The story is set during one of the very worst persecutions of Christians, in the last three years (302–5) of the reign of Diocletian. Pamphilus of Caesarea (martyred 309) is remembered as an outstanding scholar (a key figure in the transmission of Scripture texts) and as the friend and teacher of Eusebius; his visit to Rome is Sand's invention. English historians know him as "Pamphilus the presbyter" (the elder); in

French, Sand is able to use the same word *(prêtre)* for both "presbyter" and "priest" (etymologically they have the same root). The other two figures in this paragraph belong essentially to legend; here the storyteller is simply sketching in a couple of shadowy names evocative of the era and its troubles. According to the hagiographers, Quentin (Quintinus) was born in Rome and traveled to Gaul, where he was martyred around the year 300, while a relative of Diocletian called Gaius became bishop of Rome and lived in the catacombs for several years before his death in 296.

2. Psalms 130 (129 in the Vulgate), characterized by Eusebius as "the prayer of the martyrs"; Sand would also be thinking of its later use in the Roman Catholic Church at burials and in the Office for the Dead.

3. The catacombs were subterranean chambers connected by galleries and used as burial places in ancient times. By the reign of Diocletian they were predominantly used by Christians, and in times of persecution they became meeting places as well as burial places. Sand describes them in her 1837 essay "Une Visite aux catacombes" (George Sand, *Nouvelles Lettres d'un voyageur* [Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1877], 213–9). In matters of detail, however, the story is anachronistic; Sand's fourth-century catacomb is furnished like a nineteenth-century French village church.

4. Eusebius of Caesarea (died about 340), the author of the *Church History,* survived imprisonment during the persecutions and later played a prominent role in the Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century; he advocated (unsuccessfully) that the warring factions should keep to the simple language of Scripture and should avoid disputes about terminology not found in the Word of God. His position therefore has analogies with Sand's own.

5. In Classical mythology, the goddess Hebe acted as the gods' cupbearer, and ambrosia was their usual food. Lethe was a river of the underworld; its waters induced forgetfulness.

6. Leah was the unloved wife of the patriarch Jacob (Genesis 29:30–1). The name would ordinarily suggest a Jewish origin, though it might be pointed out that Judaizing customs were fashionable in some aristocratic circles in Imperial Rome.

7. Leah has appealed to the Roman goddesses of sexual love (Venus), marriage (Juno), wisdom (Pallas), and youth (Hebe), and to the boy god of love (Cupid). In Classical mythology, the cestus was a belt or girdle with magical powers of allurement, worn by Venus and borrowed by Juno to arouse the desire of her husband Jupiter (*Iliad* 14.187–223).

8. The towns of Amathusia (Amathus, on Cyprus) and Cnidus (now in Turkey) were sacred to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of sexual love (analogous to the Roman Venus).

9. In Roman religion, Vesta, goddess of the hearth and domesticity, was worshiped by a special order of virgin priestesses.

10. Aphrodite; her worship was centered on the island of Cythera and at Paphos on Cyprus.

11. In Classical mythology, the three-headed dog Cerberus guarded the entrance to the underworld; the Furies avenged crime and punished the guilty, both on earth and in the underworld. According to Leah, the world is now controlled by the gods of wealth (Plutus), revelry (Comus), and lust (Priapus).

12. In Classical mythology, Lucina was the goddess of childbirth (often identified with Juno, the protectress of marriage); Cypris was another name for Aphrodite, the goddess worshiped on Cyprus. Leah contrasts the Vestals, the virgin priestesses of Vesta, with the Maenads (Bacchantes), the priestesses (frequently represented as naked and disheveled) of Bacchus, god of wine.

13. In Classical mythology, Semele and Latona were seduced by Jupiter; the former was consumed by the fire of Jupiter's presence, the latter was driven from place to place by his wife Juno. Semele was indeed, as Leah says, a mortal woman; Latona, however, was an immortal goddess.

14. "The city of Saint Peter" is a stock designation of Rome, alluding to the legend that the apostle Peter spent his last years in the city and was martyred there, but in this context it assumes a thematic relevance, suggesting both the power of the new faith and the danger to those who believe in it.

15. Sand is recalling the recurrent Scriptural formula that believers "were baptized, confessing their sins." But sprinkling with "holy water" is another anachronism; in the Scriptures (and to Eusebius), baptism would have been immersion in ordinary water.

16. Leah is alluding to Diotima's discussion of love in Plato's *Symposium* (especially 210e–212a), which has often been seen as analogous to the teachings of Christ. "The Christian writers see by a clearer light and they have an intensity which is all their own, but the journey they describe is recognizably the same—the travel of the soul from temporality to eternity" (A. E. Taylor, *Plato,* 7th ed. [London: Methuen, 1960], 225).

Open Letter to Monsieur Nisard

The journalist Désiré Nisard (1806–88), a member of the Académie Française from 1850 onward, was famous for his hostility to any kind of literary innovation. Lubin's summary judgement is severe, but perhaps not unfair: "This strait-laced pedant, an admirer only of the Classics, understood nothing about his own era" (George Sand, *Œuvres autobiographiques,* ed. Georges Lubin, 2 vols. [Paris: Gallimard, 1970–71], 2:1496). Nisard's critical appraisal of George Sand's early novels appeared

in *La Revue de Paris* on 15 May 1836. He was more courteous to her than to most of her male colleagues, praising the beauty of her style but attacking what he regarded as the immorality of her work.

1. Excluding collaborative work, Sand had so far published eight novels: *Indiana* (1832), *Valentine* (1832), *Lélia* (1833), *Le Secrétaire intime* (1834), *Leone Leoni* (1834), *Jacques* (1834), *André* (1835), and *Simon* (1836). In this open defense, written for a popular magazine, she assumes no detailed knowledge of the novels themselves; she frames her remarks so that they will be easily understood by members of the general public, who might never previously have read any of her work.

2. Charles Perrault (1628–1703) and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy (1650–1705) were the authors of standard collections of fairytales.

3. The plot of Antoine-François Prévost's novel *Manon Lescaut* (1731) is largely concerned with sexual infidelity.

4. The Italian sculptor and autobiographer Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71) led a flamboyant and erratic life of the kind that naturally gives rise to legends.

5. Between 1830 and 1832, a schism developed among the followers of the pioneer socialist Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) on the question of marriage reform. Some of the extremists, who wished to abolish marriage and replace it with some new, radically different type of sexual relationship, unsuccessfully attempted to enlist Sand's support. She always firmly dissociated herself from such proposals. "What notion of the liberation of women do these ladies have?" she wrote in 1848. "Are they claiming to destroy marriage and make promiscuity official? If so, fine, I find their political aspirations very logical, but I must dissociate myself personally and absolutely from their cause; that side of it is quite repugnant to me." She went on to describe such a policy as a "disgraceful doctrine," which would "destroy the sacredness of earthly love" and "would simply play into the hands of those who accuse us socialists of wanting to destroy the family" (*Correspondance,* 8:401–2).

6. The Charter of 1830 had granted France a new constitution and a more democratic form of government; but left-wing activists were frequently accused of wanting to replace it with something more dangerous.

7. To illustrate what she means by "precise, logical" writing, Sand chooses two markedly contrasting examples: the orthodox Roman Catholic sermons of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) and the speculative political treatises of Charles de Montesquieu (1689–1755).

8. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1781–88) were long regarded as marking the ultimate permissible extreme of autobiographical frankness, which society would scarcely have tolerated from anyone else.

9. Sand is being ironic. The Regency (1715–23) and Directory (1795–99) eras had a reputation for sexual corruption and libertinism.

10. The chapter in question dealt with the rights and duties of marriage partners. Georges Lubin draws attention particularly to Article 212: "Marriage partners owe each other fidelity, support, and assistance."

11. The protagonist of Molière's comedy *Tartuffe* (1664–69) is a religious hypocrite who tries to obtain the property and seduce the wife of his benefactor. The play was initially denounced as blasphemous; its first two productions were banned, and numerous pamphlets and letters were written to support or condemn it. Molière's 1669 preface defending the propriety of his work provided Sand with a model for the defense of her own.

12. Aristophanes (fifth century B.C.E.) and Terence (died 159 B.C.E.) were major comic dramatists of Greece and Rome respectively.

13. Many of Plato's dialogues begin with Socrates asking for a definition of some concept; a listener attempts to provide an answer, but Socrates proceeds to demonstrate that the answer isn't a valid definition of the concept in question. Sand is thinking particularly of *Theaetetus* 146c–147c.

Mothers in Fashionable Society

1. Thomas Diafoirus is the conscientious but hopelessly gauche suitor in Molière's ever-popular comedy *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673). When he first meets his prospective bride, he addresses her with a complimentary speech that he had prepared for her mother.

2. The narrator is recalling some of the images traditionally used in medieval times as reminders of death—such as a man embracing a skeleton garbed in women's clothes, a skull on the dressing table where a woman is beautifying and bejeweling herself, and a skeleton leading people from all walks of life in a dance (the "Dance of Death"). In one woodcut of Holbein's *Simulachres & historiées faces de la mort* (1538; see note 1 to *The Devil's Pool,* below), a countess is being presented with fine clothes and ornaments by a servant, but Death, unnoticed, is fastening a necklace of bones around her throat at the same time. Sand would also have remembered Hamlet's address to the skull of Yorick: "Now get you to my Ladies Chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thicke, to this favour she must come."

3. A further allusion to the skeletons underlying the diamonds of fashionable society. In Revelation 6:1–8, the rider of the first (white) horse (elsewhere a symbol of Christ) "went forth conquering, and to conquer"; the second rider was allowed "to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another"; the third was accompanied by the words "a measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny" (relatively high prices for basic foodstuffs); the fourth rider "was

Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."

4. The art of the "old masters," in this case Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) and Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), is seen as documenting alternative ways of life and therefore offering alternative—and sometimes preferable—approaches to the problems that face humanity in any era. Sand would no doubt suggest that her own art might function in similar ways.

The Devil's Pool

In order to avoid offering a familiar work under an unfamiliar name, we have retained the standard English title (which dates from the nineteenth century, when translators commonly tended to bowdlerize and conventionalize Sand's works—other early renderings were *The Enchanted Pool* and *The Haunted Pool*). However, French *mare* suggests something less tidy and potentially more sinister than English "pool." *The Devil's Mere,* or perhaps even *The Devil's Swamp,* might have been truer to the spirit of the original.

1. The plowman picture and its accompanying quatrain were first published in *Les Simulachres & historiées faces de la mort* (1538; known in the English-speaking world as *The Dance of Death*), a series of woodcuts executed (probably by Hans Lützelburger) from drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger. The out-of-keeping Lazarus illustration is an anonymous later addition, and forms no part of Holbein's original series. In subsequent editions of *The Devil's Pool,* Sand heightened the quatrain's archaic spelling: at the very outset of the story, her readers are confronted with their own language in an alien dress.

2. God "did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

3. Between 1840 and 1848 France was governed by a strongly conservative cabinet that restricted suffrage to men of property and vigorously policed the country to suppress political unrest.

4. Sand is thinking of Dürer's woodcuts for *The Revelation to John* (1498), Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel (completed 1541), and Callot's and Goya's cycles on the horrors of war (*Misères de la guerre,* 1633, and *Desastres de la guerra,* 1810, respectively).

5. This is an artist's statement, not a philosopher's; it is painted with the complex, resonantly emotive words of art, not the precise, accurately bounded words of philosophy. All its key terms are richly freighted with associations, some of which may be traced back for many centuries; Sand is not framing a proposition, but placing her work in a context. From one standpoint, she is recalling the generations of commentary on a passage in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1460b): "Sophocles said that

he depicted people as they should be, whereas Euripides depicted them as they are." From another standpoint, she is setting her work in relation to contemporary trends. *Positif* ("concrete") is a word that means many things, but in 1845 it would inevitably have evoked the philosophy of Auguste Comte, whose *Cours de philosophie positive* had been completed three years earlier. Comte's positivism, with its attack on metaphysical speculation and its demand that philosophy be confined to matters of fact, was in many ways a French analogue of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism (Hippolyte Taine's widely read study of Mill was entitled *Le Positivisme anglais*); and Sand's critique of positivism in *The Devil's Pool* is therefore part of the same cultural movement as Dickens's critique of utilitarianism in *Hard Times* ("Now what I want is, Facts. . . . Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else"). Yet the writer whom Sand undoubtedly had most in mind, when she wrote her celebrated sentence, was not Euripides or Comte but Eugène Sue, the author of such popular sensation novels as *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843) and *Le Juif errant* (1844–45). Three months after the publication of *The Devil's Pool* she found time to look at Sue's latest book *(Martin)* and to report in a letter, "So far it has interest, characters drawn brutally, as always, but in strong, true colors. Scipio is very good and there's a depressing reality about his hideous peasants. Unluckily he constantly bows down to the demand for coarse events and crises, which will soon lure him away from these accents of truth. He doesn't see countryfolk in the same light as I do. Maybe the ones he has seen *are* as ugly as that. I wish you could study those of the Vallée Noire; then you'd acknowledge that I haven't been poetic in *The Devil's Pool,* but simply accurate." (*Correspondance,* 7:397–98.)

6. The amateurish warmth of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) is contrasted with the polished heartlessness of Restif de la Bretonne's *Le Paysan perverti* (1775) and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782).

7. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.458–59. These lines, probably the most famous in the poem, profoundly influenced eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European concepts of rural life: see the summary in L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 296–313. Sand was thus drawing on a tradition that would have been familiar to most of her early readers.

8. Many of Sand's early critics simply did not accept the existence of music beyond the "rules." In particular, her assertion that folksong involved microtonal intervals was frequently denied (Julien Tiersot declared authoritatively that "all the world's forms of music are based on the standard scale"). A representative plowing song from Sand's region is readily available in Marc Robine, *Anthologie de la chanson française: La Tradition* (Paris: Albin Michel and EPM, 1994), 378–80 (where the score is accompanied by a warning that such things are "almost impossible to notate

accurately") and disc 6, track 18 (a modern professional performance, without the trill and semitonal sharpening described in the story).

9. The terms *Père* and *Mère* (literally "Father" and "Mother") are frequently applied in popular French usage to senior members of the community (compare English "Father Christmas" and "Old Mother Hubbard").

10. The action is set in the vicinity of George Sand's home at Nohant. The villages of Fourche and Bel Air ("Belair" in the story) are respectively 12 kilometers (7 miles) northwest and 2 kilometers (1 mile) north of Nohant; Magnet (the story's "Le Magnier") is a sixteenth-century chateau 1.5 kilometers east of Fourche, and there was indeed a tavern called "Le Point du jour" ("The Break of Day") at Corlay, 7 kilometers (4 miles) northwest of Nohant. The Devil's Pool is located in the Bois de Chanteloube, about 3 kilometers (2 miles) east of Fourche; but it and its surroundings are now sadly changed. Les Ormeaux is fictitious.

11. Another popular idiom, which is still current in some parts of France: the definite article (in this instance *la*) is placed before the name of a familiar person.

12. Midsummer (24 June) and Martinmas (11 November) were traditional days for hiring farmhands.

13. Jeannie is a man's name.

14. The French text moves subtly back and forth between *Petit-Pierre* ("Little Pierre," a nickname) and *le petit Pierre* ("little Pierre," a description). Marie, significantly, is never *Petite-Marie,* though she is often *la petite Marie* or even *la petite fille* ("the little girl"): she may look like a child, but she must be named like an adult.

15. Germain has drifted too far north. Presles and La Sépulture are on the south side of the Chanteloube woods; Ardentes is much further north.

16. The social changes introduced by the French Revolution have had relatively little impact in this part of the country; half a century after the introduction of metric measurements, the local inhabitants still tend to calculate in old-fashioned feet and pints.

17. Again an everyday phrase is invested with significance by its context. The hardships of the Scriptural patriarch Job, like those of Marie, were undeserved—and reversible. The allusion should be read in the light of the story's opening chapter ("Lazarus must leave his dunghill").

A Country Wedding

The manuscript was headed "La Noce de Campagne pour faire suite à La Mare au Diable" ("A Country Wedding, designed to follow *The Devil's Pool*"), and the title "La Noce de campagne" was also used when the work was first published in serial form. When it was reprinted in the

same volume as *The Devil's Pool,* it was entitled merely "Appendix"; but for the sake of clarity in the context of the present collection, we have preferred to translate the manuscript title.

1. Many of the archaic words found in the works of the major French Renaissance prose writers François Rabelais (died 1553) and Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) were preserved in the dialect of George Sand's local region; Louise Vincent, *La Langue et le style rustiques de George Sand dans les romans champêtres* (Paris: Champion, 1916), 42, provides a partial list. Most of Sand's middle-class Parisian contemporaries would have regarded such words not as "riches" but as marks of ignorance, ill breeding, or linguistic incompetence.

2. Anne Boleyn (died 1536) was the mistress and, later, the second wife of Henry VIII; Agnès Sorel (1422–50) was the mistress of the French king Charles VII. With the passage of the centuries, the garb of fashionable beauties at late medieval and Renaissance courts has become the dress of a poor but respectable village maiden.

3. "And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept" (Genesis 29:11).

4. Saint-Sylvain de Pouligny is fictitious, but villages with similar names are common in the region: Pouligny-Saint-Martin is 13 kilometers (8 miles) south of George Sand's home at Nohant, Pouligny-Notre-Dame 16 kilometers (10 miles) south, and Pouligny-Saint-Pierre about 70 kilometers (45 miles) west.

5. The questioning has moved further and further afield. Sainte-Solange (the supposed burial place of the local patron saint), about 100 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Nohant, was the major place of pilgrimage in the region; Santiago de Compostela (the supposed burial place of the apostle James the son of Zebedee), in northwestern Spain, was for many centuries the most famous place of pilgrimage in western Europe. The hemp dresser's professed ignorance of the latter site is outrageously parochial; but *The Devil's Pool* has already shown that the inhabitants of Belair regard even Les Ormeaux, less than 10 kilometers (6 miles) away, as a foreign country ("Do boys mind the sheep, on farms in this part of the world?").

6. The gravedigger's and hemp dresser's songs are actual Berrichon folksongs documented by Louise Vincent, *George Sand et le Berry,* 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1919), 2:275–78, and have analogues in many other parts of France.

7. Françoise Meillant, a servant in George Sand's household, married Jean Aucante at Saint-Chartier on 12 September 1843.

8. The village of Saint-Chartier is located about 3 kilometers (2 miles) north of Nohant.

9. Approaching the finale of the Appendix to *The Devil's Pool,* Sand returns to the artist whose work introduced the story's prologue.

She would probably be thinking in particular of Holbein's well-known Meyer or Darmstadt Madonna (1526).

10. These remarks may be compared with those on the same subject in the letter to Nisard (pp. 70–2 above).

11. In ancient Rome, the Bacchanalia and Saturnalia were traditionally licentious festivals in honor of Bacchus and Saturn; Priapus was the ithyphallic god of gardens and sexuality, son of Bacchus (the god of wine) and Venus (the goddess of love).

Prefatory Note to *The Devil's Pool*

1. When she mentions a "series of country novels" beginning with *The Devil's Pool,* Sand would be thinking also of *François le champi* (1847–48) and *La Petite Fadette* (1848–49). Some years later she included a hemp dresser in *Les Maîtres sonneurs* (1853); but that novel belongs largely to a different genre.

2. This statement is aimed, in particular, at Sainte-Beuve's assertion (already cited in our introduction) that the central scenes of *The Devil's Pool* "have no match or model in any idyll, either ancient or modern" (Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi,* 1:358).

3. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Bibliography

Blair, Lisa M. *George Sand's "Nouvelles": Reflections, Perceptions and the Self.* New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Bourdet-Guillerault, Henri. *George Sand: Ce qu'elle croyait.* Marseilles: Éditions Rijois, 1979.

Bowman, Frank Paul. "George Sand, le Christ et le royaume." *Cahiers de l'association internationale des études françaises* 28 (1976): 243–62.

Chopin, Frédéric. *Correspondance de Frédéric Chopin.* Ed. Bronislas Édouard Sydow and Suzanne and Denise Chainaye. 3 vols. Paris: Richard Masse, 1981.

Delacroix, Eugène. *Correspondance générale.* Ed. André Joubin. 5 vols. Paris: Plon, 1936.

Dezalay, A. "L'Écriture du labyrinthe dans *La Mare au diable.*" *Cahiers des amis de Valéry Labaud* 32 (1995): 161–74.

Didier, Béatrice. *George Sand écrivain.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings.* Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1974.

Godwin-Jones, Robert. "The Representation of Economic Reality in George Sand's Rural Novels." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 12 (1979): 53–60.

———. *Romantic Vision: The Novels of George Sand.* Birmingham, Ala.: Summa Publications, 1995.

Grimm, Reinhold R. "Les Romans champêtres de George Sand." *Romantisme* 16 (1977): 64–70.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Contemplations.* Ed. Léon Cellier. Paris: Garnier, 1969.

Karénine, Wladimir. *George Sand: Sa vie et ses œuvres.* 4 vols. Paris: Plon, 1899–1926.

Lacassagne, Jean-Pierre. "George Sand et la 'vérité sociale.'" *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 76 (1976): 541–77.

———. *Histoire d'une amitié: Pierre Leroux et George Sand, d'après une correspondance inédite 1836–66.* Paris: Klincksieck, 1973.

Lemaître, Jules. "George Sand." In *Les Contemporains,* 4:154–68. 8 vols. Paris: Société Française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1887–1918.

Mozet, Nicole. *George Sand écrivain de romans.* Paris: Christian Pirot, 1997.

Naginski, Isabelle Hoog. *George Sand: Writing for Her Life.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Powell, David A. *George Sand.* Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990.

Robine, Marc. *Anthologie de la chanson française: La Tradition.* Paris: Albin Michel and EPM, 1994.

Sainte-Beuve, C.-A. "*La Mare-au-diable, La Petite Fadette, François le champi,* par George Sand." In *Causeries du lundi,* 1:351–70. 15 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1857–62.

Salomon, Pierre. "Les Rapports de George Sand et de Pierre Leroux en 1845 d'après le prologue de *La Mare au diable.*" *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 48 (1948): 352–58.

Sand, George. *Correspondance.* Ed. Georges Lubin. 25 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1964–91.

———. "Le Dieu inconnu." In *Les Sept Cordes de la lyre.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1870. 251–78.

———. *Impressions et souvenirs.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1873.

———. *Lettres d'un voyageur.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1857.

———. *Lucrezia Floriani, Lavinia.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1857.

———. *La Mare au diable.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1856.

———. *La Mare au diable, François le champi.* Ed. Pierre Salomon and Jean Maillon. Paris: Garnier, 1956.

———. *The Master Pipers.* Trans. Rosemary Lloyd. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

———. "Les Mères de famille dans le beau monde." In *Isidora,* 255–67. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1861.

———. *Nouvelles.* Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1861.

———. *Nouvelles.* Ed. Ève Sourian. Paris: Des Femmes, 1986.

———. *Nouvelles Lettres d'un voyageur.* Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1877.

———. *Œuvres autobiographiques.* Ed. Georges Lubin. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1970–71.

———. *Questions d'art et de littérature.* Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1878.

———. *Théâtre complet.* 4 vols. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1866.

Schor, Naomi. *George Sand and Idealism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Taylor, A. E. *Plato.* 7th ed. London: Methuen, 1960.

Vermeylen, Pierre. *Les Idées politiques et sociales de George Sand.* Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1985.

Vernois, Paul. *Le Roman rustique de George Sand à Ramuz: Ses tendances et son évolution (1860–1925).* Paris: Nizet, 1962.

Vincent, Louise. *George Sand et le Berry.* 2 vols. Paris: Champion, 1919.

———. *La Langue et le style rustiques de George Sand dans les romans champêtres.* Paris: Champion, 1916.

Wilkinson, L. P. *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Survey.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Wingård Vareille, Kristina. *Socialité, sexualité et les impasses de l'histoire: L'évolution de la thématique sandienne d'Indiana (1832) à Mauprat (1837).* Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1987.

Witkin, Sylvie Charron. "Les *Nouvelles* de George Sand: Fictions de l'étrangère." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 23 (1995): 365–72.

Zola, Émile. "George Sand." In *Œuvres complètes,* 12:389–413. Ed. Henri Mitterand. 12 vols. Paris: Cercle du livre précieuse, 1966–70.