ÉMILE ZOLA

THE FORTUNE OF THE ROUGONS

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

"The Fortune of the Rougons" is the initial volume of the Rougon-Macquart series. Though it was by no means M. Zola's first essay in fiction, it was undoubtedly his first great bid for genuine literary fame, and the foundation of what must necessarily be regarded as his life-work. The idea of writing the "natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire," extending to a score of volumes, was doubtless suggested to M. Zola by Balzac's immortal "Comedie Humaine." He was twenty-eight years of age when this idea first occurred to him; he was fifty-three when he at last sent the manuscript of his concluding volume, "Dr. Pascal," to the press. He had spent five-and-twenty years in working out his scheme, persevering with it doggedly and stubbornly, whatever rebuffs he might encounter, whatever jeers and whatever insults might be directed against him by the ignorant, the prejudiced, and the hypocritical. Truth was on the march and nothing could stay it; even as, at the present hour, its march, if slow, none the less continues athwart another and a different crisis of the illustrious novelist's career.

It was in the early summer of 1869 that M. Zola first began the actual writing of "The Fortune of the Rougons." It was only in the following year, however, that the serial publication of the work commenced in the columns of "Le Siecle," the Republican journal of most influence in Paris in those days of the Second Empire. The Franco-German war interrupted this issue of the story, and publication in book form did not take place until the latter half of 1871, a time when both the war and the Commune had left Paris exhausted, supine, with little or no interest in anything. No more unfavourable moment for the issue of an ambitious work of fiction could have been found. Some two or three years went by, as I well remember, before anything like a revival of literature and of public interest in literature took place. Thus, M. Zola launched his gigantic scheme under auspices which would have made many another man recoil. "The Fortune of the Rougons," and two or three subsequent volumes of his series, attracted but a moderate degree of attention, and it was only on the morrow of the publication of "L'Assommoir" that he awoke, like Byron, to find himself famous.

As previously mentioned, the Rougon-Macquart series forms twenty volumes. The last of these, "Dr. Pascal," appeared in 1893. Since then M. Zola has written "Lourdes," "Rome," and "Paris." Critics have repeated *ad nauseam* that these last works constitute a new departure on M. Zola's part, and, so far as they formed a new series, this is true. But the suggestion that he has in any way repented of the Rougon-Macquart novels is ridiculous. As he has often told me of recent years, it is, as far as possible, his plan to subordinate his style and methods to his subject. To have written a book like "Rome," so largely devoted to the ambitions of the Papal See, in the same way as he had written books dealing with the drunkenness or other vices of Paris, would have been the climax of absurdity.

Yet the publication of "Rome," was the signal for a general outcry on the part of English and American reviewers that Zolaism, as typified by the Rougon-Macquart series, was altogether a thing of the past. To my thinking this is a profound error. M. Zola has always remained faithful to himself. The only difference that I perceive between his latest work, "Paris," and certain Rougon-Macquart volumes, is that with time, experience and assiduity, his genius has expanded and ripened, and that the hesitation, the groping for truth, so to say, which may be found in some of his earlier writings, has disappeared.

At the time when "The Fortune of the Rougons" was first published, none but the author himself can have imagined that the foundation-stone of one of the great literary monuments of the century had just been laid. From the "story" point of view the book is one of M. Zola's very best, although its

construction – particularly as regards the long interlude of the idyll of Miette and Silvere – is far from being perfect. Such a work when first issued might well bring its author a measure of popularity, but it could hardly confer fame. Nowadays, however, looking backward, and bearing in mind that one here has the genius of M. Zola's lifework, "The Fortune of the Rougons" becomes a book of exceptional interest and importance. This has been so well understood by French readers that during the last six or seven years the annual sales of the work have increased threefold. Where, over a course of twenty years, 1,000 copies were sold, 2,500 and 3,000 are sold to-day. How many living English novelists can say the same of their early essays in fiction, issued more than a quarter of a century ago?

I may here mention that at the last date to which I have authentic figures, that is, Midsummer 1897 (prior, of course, to what is called "L'Affaire Dreyfus"), there had been sold of the entire Rougon-Macquart series (which had begun in 1871) 1,421,000 copies. These were of the ordinary Charpentier editions of the French originals. By adding thereto several *editions de luxe* and the widely-circulated popular illustrated editions of certain volumes, the total amounts roundly to 2,100,000. "Rome," "Lourdes," "Paris," and all M. Zola's other works, apart from the "Rougon-Macquart" series, together with the translations into a dozen different languages – English, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Danish, Portuguese, Bohemian, Hungarian, and others – are not included in the above figures. Otherwise the latter might well be doubled. Nor is account taken of the many serial issues which have brought M. Zola's views to the knowledge of the masses of all Europe.

It is, of course, the celebrity attaching to certain of M. Zola's literary efforts that has stimulated the demand for his other writings. Among those which are well worthy of being read for their own sakes, I would assign a prominent place to the present volume. Much of the story element in it is admirable, and, further, it shows M. Zola as a genuine satirist and humorist. The Rougons' yellow drawing-room and its habitues, and many of the scenes between Pierre Rougon and his wife Felicite, are worthy of the pen of Douglas Jerrold. The whole account, indeed, of the town of Plassans, its customs and its notabilities, is satire of the most effective kind, because it is satire true to life, and never degenerates into mere caricature.

It is a rather curious coincidence that, at the time when M. Zola was thus portraying the life of Provence, his great contemporary, bosom friend, and rival for literary fame, the late Alphonse Daudet, should have been producing, under the title of "The Provencal Don Quixote," that unrivalled presentment of the foibles of the French Southerner, with everyone nowadays knows as "Tartarin of Tarascon." It is possible that M. Zola, while writing his book, may have read the instalments of "Le Don Quichotte Provencal" published in the Paris "Figaro," and it may be that this perusal imparted that fillip to his pen to which we owe the many amusing particulars that he gives us of the town of Plassans. Plassans, I may mention, is really the Provencal Aix, which M. Zola's father provided with water by means of a canal still bearing his name. M. Zola himself, though born in Paris, spent the greater part of his childhood there. Tarascon, as is well known, never forgave Alphonse Daudet for his "Tartarin"; and in a like way M. Zola, who doubtless counts more enemies than any other literary man of the period, has none bitterer than the worthy citizens of Aix. They cannot forget or forgive the rascally Rougon-Macquarts.

The name Rougon-Macquart has to me always suggested that splendid and amusing type of the cynical rogue, Robert Macaire. But, of course, both Rougon and Macquart are genuine French names and not inventions. Indeed, several years ago I came by chance upon them both, in an old French deed which I was examining at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. I there found mention of a Rougon family and a Macquart family dwelling virtually side by side in the same village. This, however, was in Champagne, not in Provence. Both families farmed vineyards for a once famous abbey in the vicinity of Epernay, early in the seventeenth century. To me, personally, this trivial discovery meant a great deal. It somehow aroused my interest in M. Zola and his works. Of the latter I had then only glanced through two or three volumes. With M. Zola himself I was absolutely unacquainted. However, I took the liberty to inform him of my little discovery; and afterwards I read

all the books that he had published. Now, as it is fairly well known, I have given the greater part of my time, for several years past, to the task of familiarising English readers with his writings. An old deed, a chance glance, followed by the great friendship of my life and years of patient labour. If I mention this matter, it is solely with the object of endorsing the truth of the saying that the most insignificant incidents frequently influence and even shape our careers.

But I must come back to "The Fortune of the Rougons." It has, as I have said, its satirical and humorous side; but it also contains a strong element of pathos. The idyll of Miette and Silvere is a very touching one, and quite in accord with the conditions of life prevailing in Provence at the period M. Zola selects for his narrative. Miette is a frank child of nature; Silvere, her lover, in certain respects foreshadows, a quarter of a century in advance, the Abbe Pierre Fromont of "Lourdes," "Rome," and "Paris." The environment differs, of course, but germs of the same nature may readily be detected in both characters. As for the other personages of M. Zola's book – on the one hand, Aunt Dide, Pierre Rougon, his wife, Felicite, and their sons Eugene, Aristide and Pascal, and, on the other, Macquart, his daughter Gervaise of "L'Assommoir," and his son Jean of "La Terre" and "La Debacle," together with the members of the Mouret branch of the ravenous, neurotic, duplex family – these are analysed or sketched in a way which renders their subsequent careers, as related in other volumes of the series, thoroughly consistent with their origin and their up-bringing. I venture to asset that, although it is possible to read individual volumes of the Rougon-Macquart series while neglecting others, nobody can really understand any one of these books unless he makes himself acquainted with the alpha and the omega of the edifice, that is, "The Fortune of the Rougons" and "Dr. Pascal."

With regard to the present English translation, it is based on one made for my father several years ago. But to convey M. Zola's meaning more accurately I have found it necessary to alter, on an average, at least one sentence out of every three. Thus, though I only claim to edit the volume, it is, to all intents and purposes, quite a new English version of M. Zola's work.

E. A. V. MERTON, SURREY: August, 1898.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I wish to explain how a family, a small group of human beings, conducts itself in a given social system after blossoming forth and giving birth to ten or twenty members, who, though they may appear, at the first glance, profoundly dissimilar one from the other, are, as analysis demonstrates, most closely linked together from the point of view of affinity. Heredity, like gravity, has its laws.

By resolving the duplex question of temperament and environment, I shall endeavour to discover and follow the thread of connection which leads mathematically from one man to another. And when I have possession of every thread, and hold a complete social group in my hands, I shall show this group at work, participating in an historical period; I shall depict it in action, with all its varied energies, and I shall analyse both the will power of each member, and the general tendency of the whole.

The great characteristic of the Rougon-Macquarts, the group or family which I propose to study, is their ravenous appetite, the great outburst of our age which rushes upon enjoyment. Physiologically the Rougon-Macquarts represent the slow succession of accidents pertaining to the nerves or the blood, which befall a race after the first organic lesion, and, according to environment, determine in each individual member of the race those feelings, desires and passions – briefly, all the natural and instinctive manifestations peculiar to humanity – whose outcome assumes the conventional name of virtue or vice. Historically the Rougon-Macquarts proceed from the masses, radiate throughout the whole of contemporary society, and ascend to all sorts of positions by the force of that impulsion of essentially modern origin, which sets the lower classes marching through the social system. And thus the dramas of their individual lives recount the story of the Second Empire, from the ambuscade of the Coup d'Etat to the treachery of Sedan.

For three years I had been collecting the necessary documents for this long work, and the present volume was even written, when the fall of the Bonapartes, which I needed artistically, and with, as if by fate, I ever found at the end of the drama, without daring to hope that it would prove so near at hand, suddenly occurred and furnished me with the terrible but necessary denouement for my work. My scheme is, at this date, completed; the circle in which my characters will revolve is perfected; and my work becomes a picture of a departed reign, of a strange period of human madness and shame.

This work, which will comprise several episodes, is therefore, in my mind, the natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire. And the first episode, here called “The Fortune of the Rougons,” should scientifically be entitled “The Origin.”

EMILE ZOLA PARIS, July 1, 1871.

CHAPTER I

On quitting Plassans by the Rome Gate, on the southern side of the town, you will find, on the right side of the road to Nice, and a little way past the first suburban houses, a plot of land locally known as the Aire Saint-Mittre.

This Aire Saint-Mittre is of oblong shape and on a level with the footpath of the adjacent road, from which it is separated by a strip of trodden grass. A narrow blind alley fringed with a row of hovels borders it on the right; while on the left, and at the further end, it is closed in by bits of wall overgrown with moss, above which can be seen the top branches of the mulberry-trees of the Jas-Meiffren – an extensive property with an entrance lower down the road. Enclosed upon three sides, the Aire Saint-Mittre leads nowhere, and is only crossed by people out for a stroll.

In former times it was a cemetery under the patronage of Saint-Mittre, a greatly honoured Provencal saint; and in 1851 the old people of Plassans could still remember having seen the wall of the cemetery standing, although the place itself had been closed for years. The soil had been so glutted with corpses that it had been found necessary to open a new burial-ground at the other end of town. Then the old abandoned cemetery had been gradually purified by the dark thick-set vegetation which had sprouted over it every spring. The rich soil, in which the gravediggers could no longer delve without turning up some human remains, was possessed of wondrous fertility. The tall weeds overtopped the walls after the May rains and the June sunshine so as to be visible from the high road; while inside, the place presented the appearance of a deep, dark green sea studded with large blossoms of singular brilliancy. Beneath one's feet amidst the close-set stalks one could feel that the damp soil reeked and bubbled with sap.

Among the curiosities of the place at that time were some large pear-trees, with twisted and knotty boughs; but none of the housewives of Plassans cared to pluck the large fruit which grew upon them. Indeed, the townspeople spoke of this fruit with grimaces of disgust. No such delicacy, however, restrained the suburban urchins, who assembled in bands at twilight and climbed the walls to steal the pears, even before they were ripe.

The trees and the weeds with their vigorous growth had rapidly assimilated all the decomposing matter in the old cemetery of Saint-Mittre; the malaria rising from the human remains interred there had been greedily absorbed by the flowers and the fruit; so that eventually the only odour one could detect in passing by was the strong perfume of wild gillyflowers. This had merely been a question of a few summers.

At last the townspeople determined to utilise this common property, which had long served no purpose. The walls bordering the roadway and the blind alley were pulled down; the weeds and the pear-trees uprooted; the sepulchral remains were removed; the ground was dug deep, and such bones as the earth was willing to surrender were heaped up in a corner. For nearly a month the youngsters, who lamented the loss of the pear-trees, played at bowls with the skulls; and one night some practical jokers even suspended femurs and tibias to all the bell-handles of the town. This scandal, which is still remembered at Plassans, did not cease until the authorities decided to have the bones shot into a hole which had been dug for the purpose in the new cemetery. All work, however, is usually carried out with discreet dilatoriness in country towns, and so during an entire week the inhabitants saw a solitary cart removing these human remains as if they had been mere rubbish. The vehicle had to cross Plassans from end to end, and owing to the bad condition of the roads fragments of bones and handfuls of rich mould were scattered at every jolt. There was not the briefest religious ceremony, nothing but slow and brutish cartage. Never before had a town felt so disgusted.

For several years the old cemetery remained an object of terror. Although it adjoined the main thoroughfare and was open to all comers, it was left quite deserted, a prey to fresh vegetable growth. The local authorities, who had doubtless counted on selling it and seeing houses built upon it, were

evidently unable to find a purchaser. The recollection of the heaps of bones and the cart persistently jolting through the streets may have made people recoil from the spot; or perhaps the indifference that was shown was due to the indolence, the repugnance to pulling down and setting up again, which is characteristic of country people. At all events the authorities still retained possession of the ground, and at last forgot their desire to dispose of it. They did not even erect a fence round it, but left it open to all comers. Then, as time rolled on, people gradually grew accustomed to this barren spot; they would sit on the grass at the edges, walk about, or gather in groups. When the grass had been worn away and the trodden soil had become grey and hard, the old cemetery resembled a badly-levelled public square. As if the more effectually to efface the memory of all objectionable associations, the inhabitants slowly changed the very appellation of the place, retaining but the name of the saint, which was likewise applied to the blind alley dipping down at one corner of the field. Thus there was the Aire Saint-Mittre and the Impasse Saint-Mittre.

All this dates, however, from some considerable time back. For more than thirty years now the Aire Saint-Mittre has presented a different appearance. One day the townspeople, far too inert and indifferent to derive any advantage from it, let it, for a trifling consideration, to some suburban wheelwrights, who turned it into a wood-yard. At the present day it is still littered with huge pieces of timber thirty or forty feet long, lying here and there in piles, and looking like lofty overturned columns. These piles of timber, disposed at intervals from one end of the yard to the other, are a continual source of delight to the local urchins. In some places the ground is covered with fallen wood, forming a kind of uneven flooring over which it is impossible to walk, unless one balance one's self with marvellous dexterity. Troops of children amuse themselves with this exercise all day long. You will see them jumping over the big beams, walking in Indian file along the narrow ends, or else crawling astride them; various games which generally terminate in blows and bellowings. Sometimes, too, a dozen of them will sit, closely packed one against the other, on the thin end of a pole raised a few feet from the ground, and will see-saw there for hours together. The Aire Saint-Mittre thus serves as a recreation ground, where for more than a quarter of a century all the little suburban ragamuffins have been in the habit of wearing out the seats of their breeches.

The strangeness of the place is increased by the circumstance that wandering gipsies, by a sort of traditional custom always select the vacant portions of it for their encampments. Whenever any caravan arrives at Plassans it takes up its quarters on the Aire Saint-Mittre. The place is consequently never empty. There is always some strange band there, some troop of wild men and withered women, among whom groups of healthy-looking children roll about on the grass. These people live in the open air, regardless of everybody, setting their pots boiling, eating nameless things, freely displaying their tattered garments, and sleeping, fighting, kissing, and reeking with mingled filth and misery.

The field, formerly so still and deserted, save for the buzzing of hornets around the rich blossoms in the heavy sunshine, has thus become a very rowdy spot, resounding with the noisy quarrels of the gipsies and the shrill cries of the urchins of the suburb. In one corner there is a primitive saw-mill for cutting the timber, the noise from which serves as a dull, continuous bass accompaniment to the sharp voices. The wood is placed on two high tressels, and a couple of sawyers, one of whom stands aloft on the timber itself, while the other underneath is half blinded by the falling sawdust, work a large saw to and fro for hours together, with rigid machine-like regularity, as if they were wire-pulled puppets. The wood they saw is stacked, plank by plank, along the wall at the end, in carefully arranged piles six or eight feet high, which often remain there several seasons, and constitute one of the charms of the Aire Saint-Mittre. Between these stacks are mysterious, retired little alleys leading to a broader path between the timber and the wall, a deserted strip of verdure whence only small patches of sky can be seen. The vigorous vegetation and the quivering, deathlike stillness of the old cemetery still reign in this path. In all the country round Plassans there is no spot more instinct with languor, solitude, and love. It is a most delightful place for love-making. When the cemetery

was being cleared the bones must have been heaped up in this corner; for even to-day it frequently happens that one's foot comes across some fragment of a skull lying concealed in the damp turf.

Nobody, however, now thinks of the bodies that once slept under that turf. In the daytime only the children go behind the piles of wood when playing at hide and seek. The green path remains virginal, unknown to others who see nought but the wood-yard crowded with timber and grey with dust. In the morning and afternoon, when the sun is warm, the whole place swarms with life. Above all the turmoil, above the ragamuffins playing among the timber, and the gipsies kindling fires under their cauldrons, the sharp silhouette of the sawyer mounted on his beam stands out against the sky, moving to and fro with the precision of clockwork, as if to regulate the busy activity that has sprung up in this spot once set apart for eternal slumber. Only the old people who sit on the planks, basking in the setting sun, speak occasionally among themselves of the bones which they once saw carted through the streets of Plassans by the legendary tumbrel.

When night falls the Aire Saint-Mittre loses its animation, and looks like some great black hole. At the far end one may just espy the dying embers of the gipsies' fires, and at times shadows slink noiselessly into the dense darkness. The place becomes quite sinister, particularly in winter time.

One Sunday evening, at about seven o'clock, a young man stepped lightly from the Impasse Saint-Mittre, and, closely skirting the walls, took his way among the timber in the wood-yard. It was in the early part of December, 1851. The weather was dry and cold. The full moon shone with that sharp brilliancy peculiar to winter moons. The wood-yard did not have the forbidding appearance which it wears on rainy nights; illumined by stretches of white light, and wrapped in deep and chilly silence, it spread around with a soft, melancholy aspect.

For a few seconds the young man paused on the edge of the yard and gazed mistrustfully in front of him. He carried a long gun, the butt-end of which was hidden under his jacket, while the barrel, pointed towards the ground, glittered in the moonlight. Pressing the weapon to his side, he attentively examined the square shadows cast by the piles of timber. The ground looked like a chess-board, with black and white squares clearly defined by alternate patches of light and shade. The sawyers' tressels in the centre of the plot threw long, narrow fantastic shadows, suggesting some huge geometrical figure, upon a strip of bare grey ground. The rest of the yard, the flooring of beams, formed a great couch on which the light reposed, streaked here and there with the slender black shadows which edged the different pieces of timber. In the frigid silence under the wintry moon, the motionless, recumbent poles, stiffened, as it were, with sleep and cold, recalled the corpses of the old cemetery. The young man cast but a rapid glance round the empty space; there was not a creature, not a sound, no danger of being seen or heard. The black patches at the further end caused him more anxiety, but after a brief examination he plucked up courage and hurriedly crossed the wood-yard.

As soon as he felt himself under cover he slackened his pace. He was now in the green pathway skirting the wall behind the piles of planks. Here his very footsteps became inaudible; the frozen grass scarcely crackled under his tread. He must have loved the spot, have feared no danger, sought nothing but what was pleasant there. He no longer concealed his gun. The path stretched away like a dark trench, except that the moonrays, gliding ever and anon between the piles of timber, then streaked the grass with patches of light. All slept, both darkness and light, with the same deep, soft, sad slumber. No words can describe the calm peacefulness of the place. The young man went right down the path, and stopped at the end where the walls of the Jas-Meiffren form an angle. Here he listened as if to ascertain whether any sound might be coming from the adjoining estate. At last, hearing nothing, he stooped down, thrust a plank aside, and hid his gun in a timber-stack.

An old tombstone, which had been overlooked in the clearing of the burial-ground, lay in the corner, resting on its side and forming a high and slightly sloping seat. The rain had worn its edges, and moss was slowly eating into it. Nevertheless, the following fragment of an inscription, cut on the side which was sinking into the ground, might still have been distinguished in the moonlight: "*Here lieth.. Marie.. died.*" The finger of time had effaced the rest.

When the young man had concealed his gun he again listened attentively, and still hearing nothing, resolved to climb upon the stone. The wall being low, he was able to rest his elbows on the coping. He could, however, perceive nothing except a flood of light beyond the row of mulberry-trees skirting the wall. The flat ground of the Jas-Meiffren spread out under the moon like an immense sheet of unbleached linen; a hundred yards away the farmhouse and its outbuildings formed a still whiter patch. The young man was still gazing anxiously in that direction when, suddenly, one of the town clocks slowly and solemnly struck seven. He counted the strokes, and then jumped down, apparently surprised and relieved.

He seated himself on the tombstone, like one who is prepared to wait some considerable time. And for about half an hour he remained motionless and deep in thought, apparently quite unconscious of the cold, while his eyes gazed fixedly at a mass of shadow. He had placed himself in a dark corner, but the beams of the rising moon had gradually reached him, and at last his head was in the full light.

He was a strong, sturdy-looking lad, with a fine mouth, and soft delicate skin that bespoke youthfulness. He looked about seventeen years of age, and was handsome in a characteristic way.

His thin, long face looked like the work of some master sculptor; his high forehead, overhanging brows, aquiline nose, broad flat chin, and protruding cheek bones, gave singularly bold relief to his countenance. Such a face would, with advancing age, become too bony, as fleshless as that of a knight errant. But at this stage of youth, with chin and cheek lightly covered with soft down, its latent harshness was attenuated by the charming softness of certain contours which had remained vague and childlike. His soft black eyes, still full of youth, also lent delicacy to his otherwise vigorous countenance. The young fellow would probably not have fascinated all women, as he was not what one calls a handsome man; but his features, as a whole, expressed such ardent and sympathetic life, such enthusiasm and energy, that they doubtless engaged the thoughts of the girls of his own part – those sunburnt girls of the South – as he passed their doors on sultry July evenings.

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

As the neighbouring clock struck the half hour, he suddenly started from his reverie. Perceiving that the white moonlight was shining full upon him, he gazed anxiously ahead. Then he abruptly dived back into the shade, but was unable to recover the thread of his thoughts. He now realised that his hands and feet were becoming very cold, and impatience seized hold of him. So he jumped upon the stone again, and once more glanced over the Jas-Meiffren, which was still empty and silent. Finally, at a loss how to employ his time, he jumped down, fetched his gun from the pile of planks where he had concealed it, and amused himself by working the trigger. The weapon was a long, heavy carbine, which had doubtless belonged to some smuggler. The thickness of the butt and the breech of the barrel showed it to be an old flintlock which had been altered into a percussion gun by some local gunsmith. Such firearms are to be found in farmhouses, hanging against the wall over the chimney-

piece. The young man caressed his weapon with affection; twenty times or more he pulled the trigger, thrust his little finger into the barrel, and examined the butt attentively. By degrees he grew full of youth enthusiasm, combined with childish frolicsomeness, and ended by levelling his weapon and aiming at space, like a recruit going through his drill.

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

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

Silvere dropped his gun and bounded on to the tombstone.

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

Before he could stretch out his arms, however, a girl's head appeared above the wall. With singular agility the damsel had availed herself of the trunk of a mulberry-tree, and climbed aloft like a kitten. The ease and certainty with which she moved showed that she was familiar with this strange spot. In another moment she was seated on the coping of the wall. Then Silvere, taking her in his arms, carried her, though not without a struggle, to the seat.

"Let go," she laughingly cried; "let go, I can get down alone very well." And when she was seated on the stone slab she added:

"Have you been waiting for me long? I've been running, and am quite out of breath."

Silvere made no reply. He seemed in no laughing humour, but gazed sorrowfully into the girl's face. "I wanted to see you, Miette," he said, as he seated himself beside her. "I should have waited all night for you. I am going away at daybreak to-morrow morning."

Miette had just caught sight of the gun lying on the grass, and with a thoughtful air, she murmured: "Ah! so it's decided then? There's your gun!"

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

Then, as Miette could not remove her eyes from the weapon which he had so foolishly left on the grass, he jumped up and again hid it among the woodstacks.

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

He spoke the word brothers with youthful emphasis.

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

Miette listened to Silvere, her eyes meantime gazing in front of her, without observing anything.

"'Tis well," she said, when he had finished speaking. And after a fresh pause she continued: "You warned me, yet I still hoped… However, it is decided."

Neither of them knew what else to say. The green path in the deserted corner of the wood-yard relapsed into melancholy stillness; only the moon chased the shadows of the piles of timber over the grass. The two young people on the tombstone remained silent and motionless in the pale light. Silvere had passed his arm round Miette's waist, and she was leaning against his shoulder. They exchanged no kisses, naught but an embrace in which love showed the innocent tenderness of fraternal affection.

Miette was enveloped in a long brown hooded cloak reaching to her feet, and leaving only her head and hands visible. The women of the lower classes in Provence – the peasantry and workpeople – still wear these ample cloaks, which are called pelisses; it is a fashion which must have lasted for ages. Miette had thrown back her hood on arriving. Living in the open air and born of a hotblooded race, she never wore a cap. Her bare head showed in bold relief against the wall, which the moonlight whitened. She was still a child, no doubt, but a child ripening into womanhood. She had reached that adorable, uncertain hour when the frolicsome girl changes to a young woman. At that stage of life a

bud-like delicacy, a hesitancy of contour that is exquisitely charming, distinguishes young girls. The outlines of womanhood appear amidst girlhood's innocent slimness, and woman shoots forth at first all embarrassment, still retaining much of the child, and ever and unconsciously betraying her sex. This period is very unpropitious for some girls, who suddenly shoot up, become ugly, sallow and frail, like plants before their due season. For those, however, who, like Miette, are healthy and live in the open air, it is a time of delightful gracefulness which once passed can never be recalled.

Miette was thirteen years of age, and although strong and sturdy did not look any older, so bright and childish was the smile which lit up her countenance. However, she was nearly as tall as Silvere, plump and full of life. Like her lover, she had no common beauty. She would not have been considered ugly, but she might have appeared peculiar to many young exquisites. Her rich black hair rose roughly erect above her forehead, streamed back like a rushing wave, and flowed over her head and neck like an inky sea, tossing and bubbling capriciously. It was very thick and inconvenient to arrange. However, she twisted it as tightly as possible into coils as thick as a child's fist, which she wound together at the back of her head. She had little time to devote to her toilette, but this huge chignon, hastily contrived without the aid of any mirror, was often instinct with vigorous grace. On seeing her thus naturally helmeted with a mass of frizzy hair which hung about her neck and temples like a mane, one could readily understand why she always went bareheaded, heedless alike of rain and frost.

Under her dark locks appeared her low forehead, curved and golden like a crescent moon. Her large prominent eyes, her short tip-tilted nose with dilated nostrils, and her thick ruddy lips, when regarded apart from one another, would have looked ugly; viewed, however, all together, amidst the delightful roundness and vivacious mobility of her countenance, they formed an ensemble of strange, surprising beauty. When Miette laughed, throwing back her head and gently resting it on her right shoulder, she resembled an old-time Bacchante, her throat distending with sonorous gaiety, her cheeks round like those of a child, her teeth large and white, her twists of woolly hair tossed by every outburst of merriment, and waving like a crown of vine leaves. To realise that she was only a child of thirteen, one had to notice the innocence underlying her full womanly laughter, and especially the child-like delicacy of her chin and soft transparency of her temples. In certain lights Miette's sun-tanned face showed yellow like amber. A little soft black down already shaded her upper lip. Toil too was beginning to disfigure her small hands, which, if left idle, would have become charmingly plump and delicate.

Miette and Silvere long remained silent. They were reading their own anxious thoughts, and, as they pondered upon the unknown terrors of the morrow, they tightened their mutual embrace. Their hearts communed with each other, they understood how useless and cruel would be any verbal plaint. The girl, however, could at last no longer contain herself, and, choking with emotion, she gave expression, in one phrase, to their mutual misgivings.

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

Silvere made no reply, but, half-stifling, and fearing lest he should give way to tears like herself, he kissed her in brotherly fashion on the cheek, at a loss for any other consolation. Then disengaging themselves they again lapsed into silence.

After a moment Miette shuddered. Now that she no longer leant against Silvere's shoulder she was becoming icy cold. Yet she would not have shuddered thus had she been in this deserted path the previous evening, seated on this tombstone, where for several seasons they had tasted so much happiness.

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

"Shall we walk about a little?" the young man asked her. "It's not yet nine o'clock; we can take a stroll along the road."

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

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

They rose from the tombstone, and were soon hidden in the shadow of a pile of planks. Here Miette opened her cloak, which had a quilted lining of red twill, and threw half of it over Silvere's shoulders, thus enveloping him as he stood there close beside her. The same garment cloaked them both, and they passed their arms round each other's waist, and became as it were but one being. When they were thus shrouded in the pelisse they walked slowly towards the high road, fearlessly crossing the vacant parts of the wood-yard, which looked white in the moonlight. Miette had thrown the cloak over Silvere, and he had submitted to it quite naturally, as though indeed the garment rendered them a similar service every evening.

The road to Nice, on either side of which the suburban houses are built, was, in the year 1851, lined with ancient elm-trees, grand and gigantic ruins, still full of vigour, which the fastidious town council has replaced, some years since, by some little plane-trees. When Silvere and Miette found themselves under the elms, the huge boughs of which cast shadows on the moonlit footpath, they met now and again black forms which silently skirted the house fronts. These, too, were amorous couples, closely wrapped in one and the same cloak, and strolling in the darkness.

This style of promenading has been instituted by the young lovers of Southern towns. Those boys and girls among the people who mean to marry sooner or later, but who do not dislike a kiss or two in advance, know no spot where they can kiss at their ease without exposing themselves to recognition and gossip. Accordingly, while strolling about the suburbs, the plots of waste land, the footpaths of the high road – in fact, all these places where there are few passers-by and numerous shady nooks – they conceal their identity by wrapping themselves in these long cloaks, which are capacious enough to cover a whole family. The parents tolerate these proceedings; however stiff may be provincial propriety, no apprehensions, seemingly, are entertained. And, on the other hand, nothing could be more charming than these lovers' rambles, which appeal so keenly to the Southerner's fanciful imagination. There is a veritable masquerade, fertile in innocent enjoyments, within the reach of the most humble. The girl clasps her sweetheart to her bosom, enveloping him in her own warm cloak; and no doubt it is delightful to be able to kiss one's sweetheart within those shrouding folds without danger of being recognised. One couple is exactly like another. And to the belated pedestrian, who sees the vague groups gliding hither and thither, 'tis merely love passing, love guessed and scarce espied. The lovers know they are safely concealed within their cloaks, they converse in undertones and make themselves quite at home; most frequently they do not converse at all, but walk along at random and in silence, content in their embrace. The climate alone is to blame for having in the first instance prompted these young lovers to retire to secluded spots in the suburbs. On fine summer nights one cannot walk round Plassans without coming across a hooded couple in every patch of shadow falling from the house walls. Certain places, the Aire Saint-Mittre, for instance, are full of these dark "dominoes" brushing past one another, gliding softly in the warm nocturnal air. One might imagine they were guests invited to some mysterious ball given by the stars to lowly lovers. When the weather is very warm and the girls do not wear cloaks, they simply turn up their over-skirts. And in the winter the more passionate lovers make light of the frosts. Thus, Miette and Silvere, as they descended the Nice road, thought little of the chill December night.

They passed through the slumbering suburb without exchanging a word, but enjoying the mute delight of their warm embrace. Their hearts were heavy; the joy which they felt in being side by side was tinged with the painful emotion which comes from the thought of approaching severance, and it seemed to them that they could never exhaust the mingled sweetness and bitterness of the silence which slowly lulled their steps. But the houses soon grew fewer, and they reached the end of the Faubourg. There stands the entrance to the Jas-Meiffren, an iron gate fixed to two strong pillars; a low row of mulberry-trees being visible through the bars. Silvere and Miette instinctively cast a glance inside as they passed on.

Beyond the Jas-Meiffren the road descends with a gentle slope to a valley, which serves as the bed of a little rivulet, the Viorne, a brook in summer but a torrent in winter. The rows of elms still extended the whole way at that time, making the high road a magnificent avenue, which cast a broad band of gigantic trees across the hill, which was planted with corn and stunted vines. On that December night, under the clear cold moonlight, the newly-ploughed fields stretching away on either hand resembled vast beds of greyish wadding which deadened every sound in the atmosphere. The dull murmur of the Viorne in the distance alone sent a quivering thrill through the profound silence of the country-side.

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

"I had great difficulty in getting away this evening," she said. "My uncle wouldn't let me go. He had shut himself up in a cellar, where he was hiding his money, I think, for he seemed greatly frightened this morning at the events that are taking place."

Silvere clasped her yet more lovingly. "Be brave!" said he. "The time will come when we shall be able to see each other freely the whole day long. You must not fret."

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

As she spoke these last words, her voice broke into a sob. Silvere interrupted her somewhat harshly. "Be quiet," he said. "You promised not to think about it. It's no crime of yours… We love each other very much, don't we?" he added in a gentler tone. "When we're married you'll have no more unpleasant hours."

"I know," murmured Miette. "You are so kind, you sustain me. But what am I to do? I sometimes have fears and feelings of revolt. I think at times that I have been wronged, and then I should like to do something wicked. You see I pour forth my heart to you. Whenever my father's name is thrown in my face, I feel my whole body burning. When the urchins cry at me as I pass, 'Eh, La Chantegreil,' I lose all control of myself, and feel that I should like to lay hold of them and whip them."

After a savage pause she resumed: "As for you, you're a man; you're going to fight; you're very lucky."

Silvere had let her speak on. After a few steps he observed sorrowfully: "You are wrong, Miette; yours is bad anger. You shouldn't rebel against justice. As for me, I'm going to fight in defence of our common rights, not to gratify any personal animosity."

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

Then, as Silvere remained silent, she perceived that she had displeased him. Her feverishness subsided, and she whispered in a supplicating tone: "You are not angry with me, are you? It's your departure which grieves me and awakens such ideas. I know very well you are right – that I ought to be humble."

Then she began to cry, and Silvere, moved by her tears, grasped her hands and kissed them.

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

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

"Do you think I'm much happier than you?" Silvere at last inquired, resuming the conversation in spite of himself. "If my grandmother had not taken care of me and educated me, what would have

become of me? With the exception of my Uncle Antoine, who is an artisan like myself, and who taught me to love the Republic, all my other relations seem to fear that I might besmirch them by coming near them."

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

"God is my witness," he continued, "that I do not envy or hate anybody. But if we triumph, I shall have to tell the truth to those fine gentlemen. Uncle Antoine knows all about this matter. You'll see when we return. We shall all live free and happy."

Then Miette gently led him on, and they resumed their walk.

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

Her smile was not altogether free from a tinge of bitterness. She was thinking, perhaps, how easily Silvere abandoned her to go and scour the country-side. But the lad gravely replied: "You are my wife, to whom I have given my whole heart. I love the Republic because I love you. When we are married we shall want plenty of happiness, and it is to procure a share of that happiness that I'm going way to-morrow morning. You surely don't want to persuade me to remain at home?"

"Oh, no!" cried the girl eagerly. "A man should be brave! Courage is beautiful! You must forgive my jealousy. I should like to be as strong-minded as you are. You would love me all the more, wouldn't you?"

After a moment's silence she added, with charming vivacity and ingenuousness: "Ah, how willingly I shall kiss you when you come back!"

This outburst of a loving and courageous heart deeply affected Silvere. He clasped Miette in his arms and printed several kisses on her cheek. As she laughingly struggled to escape him, her eyes filled with tears of emotion.

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

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

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

Silvere smiled as he again took her round the waist. Then they continued to descend the hill, no longer fearing inquisitive glances, for they had not met a living soul since passing the last houses. They nevertheless remained enveloped in the long pelisse, which seemed, as it were, a natural nest for their love. It had shrouded them on so many happy evenings! Had they simply walked side by side, they would have felt small and isolated in that vast stretch of country, whereas, blended together as they were, they became bolder and seemed less puny. Between the folds of the pelisse they gazed upon the fields stretching on both sides of the road, without experiencing that crushing feeling with which far-stretching callous vistas oppress the human affections. It seemed to them as though they had brought their house with them; they felt a pleasure in viewing the country-side as from a window, delighting in the calm solitude, the sheets of slumbering light, the glimpses of nature vaguely distinguishable beneath the shroud of night and winter, the whole of that valley indeed, which while charming them could not thrust itself between their close-pressed hearts.

All continuity of conversation had ceased; they spoke no more of others, nor even of themselves. They were absorbed by the present, pressing each other's hands, uttering exclamations at the sight of some particular spot, exchanging words at rare intervals, and then understanding each other but little, for drowsiness came from the warmth of their embrace. Silvere forgot his Republican enthusiasm;

Miette no longer reflected that her lover would be leaving her in an hour, for a long time, perhaps for ever. The transports of their affection lulled them into a feeling of security, as on other days, when no prospect of parting had marred the tranquility of their meetings.

They still walked on, and soon reached the little crossroad mentioned by Miette – a bit of a lane which led through the fields to a village on the banks of the Viorne. But they passed on, pretending not to notice this path, where they had agreed to stop. And it was only some minutes afterwards that Silvere whispered, "It must be very late; you will get tired."

"No; I assure you I'm not at all tired," the girl replied. "I could walk several leagues like this easily." Then, in a coaxing tone, she added: "Let us go down as far as the meadows of Sainte-Claire. There we will really stop and turn back."

Silvere, whom the girl's rhythmic gait lulled to semi-somnolence, made no objection, and their rapture began afresh. They now went on more slowly, fearing the moment when they would have to retrace their steps. So long as they walked onward, they felt as though they were advancing to the eternity of their mutual embrace; the return would mean separation and bitter leave-taking.

The declivity of the road was gradually becoming more gentle. In the valley below there are meadows extending as far as the Viorne, which runs at the other end, beneath a range of low hills. These meadows, separated from the high-road by thickset hedges, are the meadows of Sainte-Claire.

"Bah!" exclaimed Silvere this time, as he caught sight of the first patches of grass: "we may as well go as far as the bridge."

At this Miette burst out laughing, clasped the young man round the neck, and kissed him noisily.

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

The road to Nice ran up in front of them, along the opposite slope of the valley. But they could only see a small portion of it, as it takes a sudden turn about half a mile from the bridge, and is lost to view among the wooded hills. On looking round they caught sight of the other end of the road, that which they had just traversed, and which leads in a direct line from Plassans to the Viorne. In the beautiful winter moonlight it looked like a long silver ribbon, with dark edgings traced by the rows of elms. On the right and left the ploughed hill-land showed like vast, grey, vague seas intersected by this ribbon, this roadway white with frost, and brilliant as with metallic lustre. Up above, on a level with the horizon, lights shone from a few windows in the Faubourg, resembling glowing sparks. By degrees Miette and Silvere had walked fully a league. They gazed at the intervening road, full of silent admiration for the vast amphitheatre which rose to the verge of the heavens, and over which flowed bluish streams of light, as over the superposed rocks of a gigantic waterfall. The strange and colossal picture spread out amid deathlike stillness and silence. Nothing could have been of more sovereign grandeur.

Then the young people, having leant against the parapet of the bridge, gazed beneath them. The Viorne, swollen by the rains, flowed on with a dull, continuous sound. Up and down stream, despite the darkness which filled the hollows, they perceived the black lines of the trees growing on the banks; here and there glided the moonbeams, casting a trail of molten metal, as it were, over the water, which glittered and danced like rays of light on the scales of some live animal. The gleams darted with a mysterious charm along the gray torrent, betwixt the vague phantom-like foliage. You might have thought this an enchanted valley, some wondrous retreat where a community of shadows and gleams lived a fantastic life.

This part of the river was familiar to the lovers; they had often come here in search of coolness on warm July nights; they had spent hours hidden among the clusters of willows on the right bank,

at the spot where the meadows of Sainte-Claire spread their verdant carpet to the waterside. They remembered every bend of the bank, the stones on which they had stepped in order to cross the Viorne, at that season as narrow as a brooklet, and certain little grassy hollows where they had indulged in their dreams of love. Miette, therefore, now gazed from the bridge at the right bank of the torrent with longing eyes.

"If it were warmer," she sighed, "we might go down and rest awhile before going back up the hill." Then, after a pause, during which she kept her eyes fixed on the banks, she resumed: "Look down there, Silvere, at that black mass yonder in front of the lock. Do you remember? That's the brushwood where we sat last Corpus Christi Day."

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

This was the spot where they had first ventured to kiss each other on the cheek. The remembrance just roused by the girl's words brought both of them a delightful feeling, an emotion in which the joys of the past mingled with the hopes of the morrow. Before their eyes, with the rapidity of lightening, there passed all the delightful evenings they had spent together, especially that evening of Corpus Christi Day, with the warm sky, the cool willows of the Viorne, and their own loving talk. And at the same time, whilst the past came back to their hearts full of a delightful savour, they fancied they could plunge into the unknown future, see their dreams realised, and march through life arm in arm – even as they had just been doing on the highway – warmly wrapped in the same cloak. Then rapture came to them again, and they smiled in each other's eyes, alone amidst all the silent radiance.

Suddenly, however, Silvere raised his head and, throwing off the cloak, listened attentively. Miette, in her surprise, imitated him, at a loss to understand why he had started so abruptly from her side.

Confused sounds had for a moment been coming from behind the hills in the midst of which the Nice road wends its way. They suggested the distant jolting of a procession of carts; but not distinctly, so loud was the roaring of the Viorne. Gradually, however, they became more pronounced, and rose at last like the tramping of an army on the march. Then amidst the continuous growing rumble one detected the shouts of a crowd, strange rhythmical blasts as of a hurricane. One could even have fancied they were the thunderclaps of a rapidly approaching storm which was already disturbing the slumbering atmosphere. Silvere listened attentively, unable to tell, however, what were those tempest-like shouts, for the hills prevented them from reaching him distinctly. Suddenly a dark mass appeared at the turn of the road, and then the "Marseillaise" burst forth, formidable, sung as with avenging fury.

"Ah, here they are!" cried Silvere, with a burst of joyous enthusiasm.

Forthwith he began to run up the hill, dragging Miette with him. On the left of the road was an embankment planted with evergreen oaks, up which he clambered with the young girl, to avoid being carried away by the surging, howling multitude.

When he had reached the top of the bank and the shadow of the brushwood, Miette, rather pale, gazed sorrowfully at those men whose distant song had sufficed to draw Silvere from her embrace. It seemed as if the whole band had thrust itself between them. They had been so happy a few minutes before, locked in each other's arms, alone and lost amidst the overwhelming silence and discreet glimmer of the moon! And now Silvere, whose head was turned away from her, who no longer seemed even conscious of her presence, had eyes only for those strangers whom he called his brothers.

The band descended the slope with a superb, irresistible stride. There could have been nothing grander than the irruption of those few thousand men into that cold, still, deathly scene. The highway became a torrent, rolling with living waves which seemed inexhaustible. At the bend in the road fresh masses ever appeared, whose songs ever helped to swell the roar of this human tempest. When the last battalions came in sight the uproar was deafening. The "Marseillaise" filled the atmosphere as if blown through enormous trumpets by giant mouths, which cast it, vibrating with a brazen clang, into every corner of the valley. The slumbering country-side awoke with a start – quivering like a beaten drum resonant to its very entrails, and repeating with each and every echo the passionate notes of the

national song. And then the singing was no longer confined to the men. From the very horizon, from the distant rocks, the ploughed land, the meadows, the copses, the smallest bits of brushwood, human voices seemed to come. The great amphitheatre, extending from the river to Plassans, the gigantic cascade over which the bluish moonlight flowed, was as if filled with innumerable invisible people cheering the insurgents; and in the depths of the Viorne, along the waters streaked with mysterious metallic reflections, there was not a dark nook but seemed to conceal human beings, who took up each refrain with yet greater passion. With air and earth alike quivering, the whole country-side cried for vengeance and liberty. So long as the little army was descending the slope, the roar of the populace thus rolled on in sonorous waves broken by abrupt outbursts which shook the very stones in the roadway.

Silvere, pale with emotion, still listened and looked on. The insurgents who led the van of that swarming, roaring stream, so vague and monstrous in the darkness, were rapidly approaching the bridge.

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

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

The head of the column had already arrived in front of the young people. The little army was more orderly than one would have expected from a band of undisciplined men. The contingents from the various towns and villages formed separate battalions, each separated by a distance of a few paces. These battalions were apparently under the orders of certain chiefs. For the nonce the pace at which they were descending the hillside made them a compact mass of invincible strength. There were probably about three thousand men, all united and carried away by the same storm of indignation. The strange details of the scene were not discernible amidst the shadows cast over the highway by the lofty slopes. At five or six feet from the brushwood, however, where Miette and Silvere were sheltered, the left-hand embankment gave place to a little pathway which ran alongside the Viorne; and the moonlight, flowing through this gap, cast a broad band of radiance across the road. When the first insurgents reached this patch of light they were suddenly illumined by a sharp white glow which revealed, with singular distinctness, every outline of visage or costume. And as the various contingents swept on, the young people thus saw them emerge, fiercely and without cessation, from the surrounding darkness.

As the first men passed through the light Miette instinctively clung to Silvere, although she knew she was safe, even from observation. She passed her arm round the young fellow's neck, resting her head against his shoulder. And with the hood of her pelisse encircling her pale face she gazed fixedly at that square patch of light as it was rapidly traversed by those strange faces, transfigured by enthusiasm, with dark open mouths full of the furious cry of the "Marseillaise." Silvere, whom she felt quivering at her side, then bent towards her and named the various contingents as they passed.

The column marched along eight abreast. In the van were a number of big, square-headed fellows, who seemed to possess the herculean strength and naïve confidence of giants. They would doubtless prove blind, intrepid defenders of the Republic. On their shoulders they carried large axes, whose edges, freshly sharpened, glittered in the moonlight.

"Those are the woodcutters of the forests of the Seille," said Silvere. "They have been formed into a corps of sappers. At a signal from their leaders they would march as far as Paris, battering down the gates of the towns with their axes, just as they cut down the old cork-trees on the mountain."

The young man spoke with pride of the heavy fists of his brethren. And on seeing a band of labourers and rough-bearded men, tanned by the sun, coming along behind the woodcutters, he continued: "That is the contingent from La Palud. That was the first place to rise. The men in blouses are labourers who cut up the cork-trees; the others in velveteen jackets must be sportsmen, poachers, and charcoal-burners living in the passes of the Seille. The poachers knew your father, Miette. They

have good firearms, which they handle skilfully. Ah! if all were armed in the same manner! We are short of muskets. See, the labourers have only got cudgels!"

Miette, still speechless, looked on and listened. As Silvere spoke to her of her father, the blood surged to her cheeks. Her face burnt as she scrutinised the sportsmen with a strange air of mingled indignation and sympathy. From this moment she grew animated, yielding to the feverish quiver which the insurgents' songs awakened.

The column, which had just begun the "Marseillaise" afresh, was still marching down as though lashed on by the sharp blasts of the "Mistral." The men of La Palud were followed by another troop of workmen, among whom a goodly number of middle class folks in great-coats were to be seen.

"Those are the men of Saint-Martin-de-Vaulx," Silvere resumed. "That *bourg* rose almost at the same time as La Palud. The masters joined the workmen. There are some rich men there, Miette; men whose wealth would enable them to live peacefully at home, but who prefer to risk their lives in defence of liberty. One can but admire them. Weapons are very scarce, however; they've scarcely got a few fowling-pieces. But do you see those men yonder, Miette, with red bands round their left elbows? They are the leaders."

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

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

Miette was now leaning forward, in order to see more of the little bands described to her by the young man. The quiver she felt rose from her bosom to her throat. Then a battalion larger and better disciplined than the others appeared. The insurgents composing it were nearly all dressed in blue blouses, with red sashes round their waists. One would have thought they were arrayed in uniform. A man on horseback, with a sabre at his side, was in the midst of them. And most of these improvised soldiers carried guns, probably carbines and old muskets of the National Guard.

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

He had no time to take breath. "Ah! see, here are the country people!" he suddenly cried.

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

Silvere, who recognised the parties by their leaders, enumerated them in feverish tones. "The contingent from Chavanoz!" said he. "There are only eight men, but they are strong; Uncle Antoine knows them. Here's Nazeres! Here's Poujols! They're all here; not one has failed to answer the summons. Valqueyras! Hold, there's the parson amongst them; I've heard about him, he's a staunch Republican."

He was becoming intoxicated with the spectacle. Now that each battalion consisted of only a few insurgents he had to name them yet more hastily, and his precipitancy gave him the appearance of one in a frenzy.

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

His voice was husky with emotion as he finished naming these men, who seemed to be borne away by a whirlwind as fast as he enumerated them. Erect, with glowing countenance, he pointed out the several contingents with a nervous gesture. Miette followed his movements. The road below attracted her like the depths of a precipice. To avoid slipping down the incline she clung to the young man's neck. A strange intoxication emanated from those men, who themselves were inebriated with clamour, courage, and confidence. Those beings, seen athwart a moonbeam, those youths and those men in their prime, those old people brandishing strange weapons and dressed in the most diverse costumes, from working smock to middle class overcoat, those endless rows of heads, which the hour and the circumstances endowed with an expression of fanatical energy and enthusiasm, gradually appeared to the girl like a whirling, impetuous torrent. At certain moments she fancied they were not of themselves moving, that they were really being carried away by the force of the "Marseillaise," by that hoarse, sonorous chant. She could not distinguish any conversation, she heard but a continuous volume of sound, alternating from bass to shrill notes, as piercing as nails driven into one's flesh. This roar of revolt, this call to combat, to death, with its outbursts of indignation, its burning thirst for liberty, its remarkable blending of bloodthirsty and sublime impulses, unceasingly smote her heart, penetrating more deeply at each fierce outburst, and filling her with the voluptuous pangs of a virgin martyr who stands erect and smiles under the lash. And the crowd flowed on ever amidst the same sonorous wave of sound. The march past, which did not really last more than a few minutes, seemed to the young people to be interminable.

Truly, Miette was but a child. She had turned pale at the approach of the band, she had wept for the loss of love, but she was a brave child, whose ardent nature was easily fired by enthusiasm. Thus ardent emotions had gradually got possession of her, and she became as courageous as a youth. She would willingly have seized a weapon and followed the insurgents. As the muskets and scythes filed past, her white teeth glistened longer and sharper between her red lips, like the fangs of a young wolf eager to bite and tear. And as she listened to Silvere enumerating the contingents from the country-side with ever-increasing haste, the pace of the column seemed to her to accelerate still more. She soon fancied it all a cloud of human dust swept along by a tempest. Everything began to whirl before her. Then she closed her eyes; big hot tears were rolling down her cheeks.

Silvere's eyelashes were also moist. "I don't see the men who left Plassans this afternoon," he murmured.

He tried to distinguish the end of the column, which was still hidden by the darkness. Suddenly he cried with joyous exultation: "Ah, here they are! They've got the banner – the banner has been entrusted to them!"

Then he wanted to leap from the slope in order to join his companions. At this moment, however, the insurgents halted. Words of command ran along the column, the "Marseillaise" died out in a final rumble, and one could only hear the confused murmuring of the still surging crowd. Silvere, as he listened, caught the orders which were passed on from one contingent to another; they called the men of Plassans to the van. Then, as each battalion ranged itself alongside the road to make way for the banner, the young man reascended the embankment, dragging Miette with him.

"Come," he said; "we can get across the river before they do."

When they were on the top, among the ploughed land, they ran along to a mill whose lock bars the river. Then they crossed the Viorne on a plank placed there by the millers, and cut across the meadows of Sainte-Claire, running hand-in-hand, without exchanging a word. The column threw a dark line over the highway, which they followed alongside the hedges. There were some gaps in the hawthorns, and at last Silvere and Miette sprang on to the road through one of them.

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

"Why, it's Chantegreil," at last said one of the men from the Faubourg of Plassans, "the niece of Rebufat, the *meger*[1] of the Jas-Meiffren."

"Where have you sprung from, gadabout?" cried another voice.

Silvere, intoxicated with enthusiasm, had not thought of the distress which his sweetheart would feel at the jeers of the workmen. Miette, all confusion, looked at him as if to implore his aid. But before he could even open his lips another voice rose from the crowd, brutally exclaiming:

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

At this Miette turned dreadfully pale.

"You lie!" she muttered. "If my father did kill anybody, he never thieved!"

And as Silvere, pale and trembling more than she, began to clench his fists: "Stop!" she continued; "this is my affair."

Then, turning to the men, she repeated with a shout: "You lie! You lie! He never stole a copper from anybody. You know it well enough. Why do you insult him when he can't be here?"

She drew herself up, superb with indignation. With her ardent, half-wild nature she seemed to accept the charge of murder composedly enough, but that of theft exasperated her. They knew it, and that was why folks, from stupid malice, often cast the accusation in her face.

The man who had just called her father a thief was merely repeating what he had heard said for many years. The girl's defiant attitude only incited the workmen to jeer the more. Silvere still had his fists clenched, and matters might have become serious if a poacher from the Seille, who had been sitting on a heap of stones at the roadside awaiting the order to march, had not come to the girl's assistance.

"The little one's right," he said. "Chantegreil was one of us. I knew him. Nobody knows the real facts of his little matter. I always believed in the truth of his deposition before the judge. The gendarme whom he brought down with a bullet, while he was out shooting, was no doubt taking aim at him at the time. A man must defend himself! At all events Chantegreil was a decent fellow; he committed no robbery."

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

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

Miette had never before heard anyone speak well of her father. He was generally referred to as a beggar, a villain, and now she found good fellows who had forgiving words for him, and declared him to be an honest man. She burst into tears, again full of the emotion awakened in her by the "Marseillaise;" and she bethought herself how she might thank these men for their kindness to her in misfortune. For a moment she conceived the idea of shaking them all by the hand like a man. But her heart suggested something better. By her side stood the insurgent who carried the banner. She touched the staff, and, to express her gratitude, said in an entreating tone, "Give it to me; I will carry it."

The simple-minded workmen understood the ingenuous sublimity of this form of gratitude.

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

However, a woodcutter remarked that she would soon get tired, and would not be able to go far.

"Oh! I'm quite strong," she retorted proudly, tucking up her sleeves and showing a pair of arms as big as those of a grown woman. Then as they handed her the flag she resumed, "Wait just a moment."

Forthwith she pulled off her cloak, and put it on again after turning the red lining outside. In the clear moonlight she appeared to be arrayed in a purple mantle reaching to her feet. The hood resting on the edge of her chignon formed a kind of Phrygian cap. She took the flag, pressed the staff to her bosom, and held herself upright amid the folds of that blood-coloured banner which waved

[1] A *meger* is a farmer in Provence who shares the expenses and profits of his farm with the owner of the land.

behind her. Enthusiastic child that she was, her countenance, with its curly hair, large eyes moist with tears, and lips parted in a smile, seemed to rise with energetic pride as she turned it towards the sky. At that moment she was the virgin Liberty.

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

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

They would have cheered her for a long time yet had not the order to resume the march arrived. Whilst the column moved on, Miette pressed Silvere's hand and whispered in his ear: "You hear! I shall remain with you. Are you glad?"

Silvere, without replying, returned the pressure. He consented. In fact, he was deeply affected, unable to resist the enthusiasm which fired his companions. Miette seemed to him so lovely, so grand, so saintly! During the whole climb up the hill he still saw her before him, radiant, amidst a purple glory. She was now blended with his other adored mistress – the Republic. He would have liked to be in action already, with his gun on his shoulder. But the insurgents moved slowly. They had orders to make as little noise as possible. Thus the column advanced between the rows of elms like some gigantic serpent whose every ring had a strange quivering. The frosty December night had again sunk into silence, and the Viorne alone seemed to roar more loudly.

On reaching the first houses of the Faubourg, Silvere ran on in front to fetch his gun from the Aire Saint-Mittre, which he found slumbering in the moonlight. When he again joined the insurgents they had reached the Porte de Rome. Miette bent towards him, and with her childish smile observed: "I feel as if I were at the procession on Corpus Christi Day carrying the banner of the Virgin."

CHAPTER II

Plassans is a sub-prefecture with about ten thousand inhabitants. Built on a plateau overlooking the Viorne, and resting on the north side against the Garrigues hills, one of the last spurs of the Alps, the town is situated, as it were, in the depths of a cul-de-sac. In 1851 it communicated with the adjoining country by two roads only, the Nice road, which runs down to the east, and the Lyons road, which rises to the west, the one continuing the other on almost parallel lines. Since that time a railway has been built which passes to the south of the town, below the hill which descends steeply from the old ramparts to the river. At the present day, on coming out of the station on the right bank of the little torrent, one can see, by raising one's head, the first houses of Plassans, with their gardens disposed in terrace fashion. It is, however, only after an uphill walk lasting a full quarter of an hour that one reaches these houses.

About twenty years ago, owing, no doubt, to deficient means of communication, there was no town that had more completely retained the pious and aristocratic character of the old Provencal cities. Plassans then had, and has even now, a whole district of large mansions built in the reigns of Louis XIV. and Louis XV., a dozen churches, Jesuit and Capuchin houses, and a considerable number of convents. Class distinctions were long perpetuated by the town's division into various districts. There were three of them, each forming, as it were, a separate and complete locality, with its own churches, promenades, customs, and landscapes.

The district of the nobility, called Saint-Marc, after the name of one of its parish churches, is a sort of miniature Versailles, with straight streets overgrown with grass, and large square houses which conceal extensive gardens. It extends to the south along the edge of the plateau. Some of the mansions built on the declivity itself have a double row of terraces whence one can see the whole valley of the Viorne, a most charming vista much vaunted in that part of the country. Then on the north-west, the old quarter, formed of the original town, rears its narrow, tortuous lanes bordered with tottering hovels. The Town-Hall, the Civil Court, the Market, and the Gendarmerie barracks are situated here. This, the most populous part of the Plassans, is inhabited by working-men and shop-keepers, all the wretched, toiling, common folk. The new town forms a sort of parallelogram to the north-east; the well-to-do, those who have slowly amassed a fortune, and those engaged in the liberal professions, here occupy houses set out in straight lines and coloured a light yellow. This district, which is embellished by the Sub-Prefecture, an ugly plaster building decorated with rose-mouldings, numbered scarcely five or six streets in 1851; it is of quite recent formation, and it is only since the construction of the railway that it has been growing in extent.

One circumstance which even at the present time tends to divide Plassans into three distinct independent parts is that the limits of the districts are clearly defined by the principal thoroughfares. The Cours Sauvaire and the Rue de Rome, which is, as it were, a narrow extension of the former, run from west to east, from the Grand'-Porte to the Porte de Rome, thus cutting the town into two portions, and dividing the quarter of the nobility from the others. The latter are themselves parted by the Rue de la Banne. This street, the finest in the locality, starts from the extremity of the Cours Sauvaire, and ascends northwards, leaving the black masses of the old quarter on its left, and the light-yellow houses of the new town on its right. It is here, about half-way along the street, that stands the Sub-Prefecture, in the rear of a small square planted with sickly trees; the people of Plassans are very proud of this edifice.

As if to keep more isolated and shut up within itself, the town is belted with old ramparts, which only serve to increase its gloom and render it more confined. These ridiculous fortifications, preyed upon by ivy and crowned with wild gillyflowers, are about as high and as thick as the walls of a convent, and could be demolished by gunshot. They have several openings, the principal of which, the Porte de Rome and the Grand'-Porte, afford access to the Nice road and the Lyons road, at the other

end of town. Until 1853 these openings were furnished with huge wooden two-leaved gates, arched at the top, and strengthened with bars of iron. These gates were double-locked at eleven o'clock in summer, and ten o'clock in winter. The town having thus shot its bolts like a timid girl, went quietly to sleep. A keeper, who lived in a little cell in one of the inner corners of each gateway, was authorised to admit belated persons. But it was necessary to stand parleying a long time. The keeper would not let people in until, by the light of his lantern, he had carefully scrutinised their faces through a peep-hole. If their looks displeased him they had to sleep outside. This custom of locking the gates every evening was highly characteristic of the spirit of the town, which was a commingling of cowardice, egotism, routine, exclusiveness, and devout longing for a cloistered life. Plassans, when it had shut itself up, would say to itself, "I am at home," with the satisfaction of some pious bourgeois, who, assured of the safety of his cash-box, and certain that no noise will disturb him, duly says his prayers and retires gladly to bed. No other town, I believe, has so long persisted in thus incarcerating itself like a nun.

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

The nobility virtually cloister themselves. Since the fall of Charles X. they scarcely ever go out, and when they do they are eager to return to their large dismal mansions, and walk along furtively as though they were in a hostile country. They do not visit anyone, nor do they even receive each other. Their drawing-rooms are frequented by a few priests only. They spend the summer in the chateaux which they possess in the environs; in the winter, they sit round their firesides. They are, as it were, dead people weary of life. And thus the gloomy silence of a cemetery hangs over their quarter of the town. The doors and windows are carefully barricaded; one would think their mansions were so many convents shut off from all the tumult of the world. At rare intervals an abbe, whose measured tread adds to the gloomy silence of these sealed houses, passes by and glides like a shadow through some half-opened doorway.

The well-to-do people, the retired tradesmen, the lawyers and notaries, all those of the little easy-going, ambitious world that inhabits the new town, endeavour to infuse some liveliness into Plassans. They go to the parties given by the sub-prefect, and dream of giving similar entertainments. They eagerly seek popularity, call a workman "my good fellow," chat with the peasants about the harvest, read the papers, and walk out with their wives on Sundays. Theirs are the enlightened minds of the district, they are the only persons who venture to speak disparagingly of the ramparts; in fact, they have several times demanded of the authorities the demolition of those old walls, relics of a former age. At the same time, the most sceptical among them experience a shock of delight whenever a marquis or a count deigns to honour them with a stiff salutation. Indeed, the dream of every citizen of the new town is to be admitted to a drawing-room of the Saint-Marc quarter. They know very well that their ambition is not attainable, and it is this which makes them proclaim all the louder that they are freethinkers. But they are freethinkers in words only; firm friends of the authorities, they are ready to rush into the arms of the first deliverer at the slightest indication of popular discontent.

The group which toils and vegetates in the old quarter is not so clearly defined as the others. The labouring classes are here in a majority; but retail dealers and even a few wholesale traders are to be found among them. As a matter of fact, Plassans is far from being a commercial centre; there is only just sufficient trade to dispose of the products of the country – oil, wine, and almonds. As for industrial labour, it is represented almost entirely by three or four evil-smelling tanyards, a felt hat manufactory, and some soap-boiling works, which last are relegated to a corner of the Faubourg. This little commercial and industrial world, though it may on high days and holidays visit the people

of the new district, generally takes up its quarters among the operatives of the old town. Merchants, retail traders, and artisans have common interests which unite them together. On Sundays only, the masters make themselves spruce and foregather apart. On the other hand, the labouring classes, which constitute scarcely a fifth of the population, mingle with the idlers of the district.

It is only once a week, and during the fine weather, that the three districts of Plassans come together face to face. The whole town repairs to the Cours Sauvaire on Sunday after vespers; even the nobility venture thither. Three distinct currents flow along this sort of boulevard planted with rows of plane-trees. The well-to-do citizens of the new quarter merely pass along before quitting the town by the Grand'-Porte and taking the Avenue du Mail on the right, where they walk up and down till nightfall. Meantime, the nobility and the lower classes share the Cours Sauvaire between them. For more than a century past the nobility have selected the walk on the south side, which is bordered with large mansions, and is the first to escape the heat of the sun; the lower classes have to rest content with the walk on the north, where the cafes, inns, and tobacconists' shops are located. The people and the nobility promenade the whole afternoon, walking up and down the Cours without anyone of either party thinking of changing sides. They are only separated by a distance of some seven or eight yards, yet it is as if they were a thousand leagues away from each other, for they scrupulously follow those two parallel lines, as though they must not come in contact here below. Even during the revolutionary periods each party kept to its own side. This regulation walk on Sunday and the locking of the town gates in the evening are analogous instances which suffice to indicate the character of the ten thousand people inhabiting the town.

Here, amidst these surroundings, until the year 1848, there vegetated an obscure family that enjoyed little esteem, but whose head, Pierre Rougon, subsequently played an important part in life owing to certain circumstances.

Pierre Rougon was the son of a peasant. His mother's family, the Fouques, owned, towards the end of the last century, a large plot of ground in the Faubourg, behind the old cemetery of Saint-Mittre; this ground was subsequently joined to the Jas-Meiffren. The Fouques were the richest market-gardeners in that part of the country; they supplied an entire district of Plassans with vegetables. However, their name died out a few years before the Revolution. Only one girl, Adelaide, remained; born in 1768, she had become an orphan at the age of eighteen. This girl, whose father had died insane, was a long, lank, pale creature, with a scared look and strange ways which one might have taken for shyness so long as she was a little girl. As she grew up, however, she became still stranger; she did certain things which were inexplicable even to the cleverest folk of the Faubourg, and from that time it was rumoured that she was cracked like her father.

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

Scarcely a year then elapsed before the young widow caused unheard-of scandal. It became known, as an indisputable fact, that she had a lover. She did not appear to make any secret of it; several persons asserted that they had heard her use endearing terms in public to poor Rougon's successor. Scarcely a year of widowhood and a lover already! Such a disregard of propriety seemed monstrous out of all reason. And the scandal was heightened by Adelaide's strange choice. At that time there dwelt at the end of the Impasse Saint-Mittre, in a hovel the back of which abutted on the Fouques' land, a man of bad repute, who was generally referred to as "that scoundrel Macquart." This man would vanish for weeks and then turn up some fine evening, sauntering about with his hands in his pockets and whistling as though he had just come from a short walk. And the women sitting at their doorsteps as he passed: "There's that scoundrel Macquart! He has hidden his bales and his gun in some hollow of the Viorne." The truth was, Macquart had no means, and yet ate and drank like a happy drone during his short sojourns in the town. He drank copiously and with fierce obstinacy. Seating himself alone at a table in some tavern, he would linger there evening after evening, with his eyes stupidly fixed on his glass, neither seeing nor hearing anything around him. When the landlord closed his establishment, he would retire with a firm step, with his head raised, as if he were kept yet more erect by inebriation. "Macquart walks so straight, he's surely dead drunk," people used to say, as they saw him going home. Usually, when he had had no drink, he walked with a slight stoop and shunned the gaze of curious people with a kind of savage shyness.

Since the death of his father, a journeyman tanner who had left him as sole heritage the hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre, he had never been known to have either relatives or friends. The proximity of the frontiers and the neighbouring forests of the Seille had turned this singular, lazy fellow into a combination of smuggler and poacher, one of those suspicious-looking characters of whom passers-by observe: "I shouldn't care to meet that man at midnight in a dark wood." Tall, with a formidable beard and lean face, Macquart was the terror of the good women of the Faubourg of Plassans; they actually accused him of devouring little children raw. Though he was hardly thirty years old, he looked fifty. Amidst his bushy beard and the locks of hair which hung over his face in poodle fashion, one could only distinguish the gleam of his brown eyes, the furtive sorrowful glance of a man of vagrant instincts, rendered vicious by wine and a pariah life. Although no crimes had actually been brought home to him, no theft or murder was ever perpetrated in the district without suspicion at once falling upon him.

And it was this ogre, this brigand, this scoundrel Macquart, whom Adelaide had chosen! In twenty months she had two children by him, first a boy and then a girl. There was no question of marriage between them. Never had the Faubourg beheld such audacious impropriety. The stupefaction was so great, the idea of Macquart having found a young and wealthy mistress so completely upset the gossips, that they even spoke gently of Adelaide. "Poor thing! She's gone quite mad," they would say. "If she had any relatives she would have been placed in confinement long ago." And as they never knew anything of the history of those strange amours, they accused that rogue Macquart of having taken advantage of Adelaide's weak mind to rob her of her money.

The legitimate son, little Pierre Rougon, grew up with his mother's other offspring. The latter, Antoine and Ursule, the young wolves as they were called in the district, were kept at home by Adelaide, who treated them as affectionately as her first child. She did not appear to entertain a very clear idea of the position in life reserved for these two poor creatures. To her they were the same in every respect as her first-born. She would sometimes go out holding Pierre with one hand and Antoine with the other, never noticing how differently the two little fellows were already regarded.

It was a strange home. For nearly twenty years everyone lived there after his or her fancy, the children like the mother. Everything went on free from control. In growing to womanhood, Adelaide had retained the strangeness which had been taken for shyness when she was fifteen. It was not that she was insane, as the people of the Faubourg asserted, but there was a lack of equilibrium between her nerves and her blood, a disorder of the brain and heart which made her lead a life out of the

ordinary, different from that of the rest of the world. She was certainly very natural, very consistent with herself; but in the eyes of the neighbours her consistency became pure insanity. She seemed desirous of making herself conspicuous, it was thought she was wickedly determined to turn things at home from bad to worse, whereas with great naivete she simply acted according to the impulses of her nature.

Ever since giving birth to her first child she had been subject to nervous fits which brought on terrible convulsions. These fits recurred periodically, every two or three months. The doctors whom she consulted declared they could do nothing for her, that age would weaken the severity of the attacks. They simply prescribed a dietary regimen of underdone meat and quinine wine. However, these repeated shocks led to cerebral disorder. She lived on from day to day like a child, like a fawning animal yielding to its instincts. When Macquart was on his rounds, she passed her time in lazy, pensive idleness. All she did for her children was to kiss and play with them. Then as soon as her lover returned she would disappear.

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

The smuggler would come very irregularly, almost always unexpectedly, to Plassans. Nobody ever knew what life the lovers led during the two or three days he spent there at distant intervals. They used to shut themselves up; the little dwelling seemed uninhabited. Then, as the gossips had declared that Macquart had simply seduced Adelaide in order to spend her money, they were astonished, after a time, to see him still lead his wonted life, ever up hill and down dale and as badly equipped as previously. Perhaps the young woman loved him all the more for seeing him at rare intervals, perhaps he had disregarded her entreaties, feeling an irresistible desire for a life of adventure. The gossips invented a thousand fables, without succeeding in giving any reasonable explanation of a connection which had originated and continued in so strange a manner. The hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre remained closed and preserved its secrets. It was merely guessed that Macquart had probably acquired the habit of beating Adelaide, although the sound of a quarrel never issued from the house. However, on several occasions she was seen with her face black and blue, and her hair torn away. At the same time, she did not display the least dejection or grief, nor did she seek in any way to hide her bruises. She smiled, and seemed happy. No doubt she allowed herself to be beaten without breathing a word. This existence lasted for more than fifteen years.

At times when Adelaide returned home she would find her house upside down, but would not take the least notice of it. She was utterly ignorant of the practical meaning of life, of the proper value of things and the necessity for order. She let her children grow up like those plum-trees which sprout along the highways at the pleasure of the rain and sun. They bore their natural fruits like wild stock which has never known grafting or pruning. Never was nature allowed such complete sway, never did such mischievous creatures grow up more freely under the sole influence of instinct. They rolled

among the vegetables, passed their days in the open air playing and fighting like good-for-nothing urchins. They stole provisions from the house and pillaged the few fruit-trees in the enclosure; they were the plundering, squalling, familiar demons of this strange abode of lucid insanity. When their mother was absent for days together, they would make such an uproar, and hit upon such diabolical devices for annoying people, that the neighbours had to threaten them with a whipping. Moreover, Adelaide did not inspire them with much fear; if they were less obnoxious to other people when she was at home, it was because they made her their victim, shirking school five or six times a week and doing everything they could to receive some punishment which would allow them to squall to their hearts' content. But she never beat them, nor even lost her temper; she lived on very well, placidly, indolently, in a state of mental abstraction amidst all the uproar. At last, indeed, this uproar became indispensable to her, to fill the void in her brain. She smiled complacently when she heard anyone say, "Her children will beat her some day, and it will serve her right." To all remarks, her utter indifference seemed to reply, "What does it matter?" She troubled even less about her property than about her children. The Fouques' enclosure, during the many years that this singular existence lasted would have become a piece of waste ground if the young woman had not luckily entrusted the cultivation of her vegetables to a clever market-gardener. This man, who was to share the profits with her, robbed her impudently, though she never noticed it. This circumstance had its advantages, however; for, in order to steal the more, the gardener drew as much as possible from the land, which in the result almost doubled in value.

Pierre, the legitimate son, either from secret instinct or from his knowledge of the different manner in which he and the others were regarded by the neighbours, domineered over his brother and sister from an early age. In their quarrels, although he was much weaker than Antoine, he always got the better of the contest, beating the other with all the authority of a master. With regard to Ursule, a poor, puny, wan little creature, she was handled with equal roughness by both the boys. Indeed, until they were fifteen or sixteen, the three children fraternally beat each other without understanding their vague, mutual hatred, without realising how foreign they were to one another. It was only in youth that they found themselves face to face with definite, self-conscious personalities.

At sixteen, Antoine was a tall fellow, a blend of Macquart's and Adelaide's failings. Macquart, however, predominated in him, with his love of vagrancy, his tendency to drunkenness, and his brutish savagery. At the same time, under the influence of Adelaide's nervous nature, the vices which in the father assumed a kind of sanguinary frankness were in the son tinged with an artfulness full of hypocrisy and cowardice. Antoine resembled his mother by his total want of dignified will, by his effeminate voluptuous egotism, which disposed him to accept any bed of infamy provided he could lounge upon it at his ease and sleep warmly in it. People said of him: "Ah! the brigand! He hasn't even the courage of his villainy like Macquart; if ever he commits a murder, it will be with pin pricks." Physically, Antoine inherited Adelaide's thick lips only; his other features resembled those of the smuggler, but they were softer and more prone to change of expression.

In Ursule, on the other hand, physical and moral resemblance to the mother predominated. There was a mixture of certain characteristics in her also; but born the last, at a time when Adelaide's love was warmer than Macquart's, the poor little thing seemed to have received with her sex a deeper impress of her mother's temperament. Moreover, hers was not a fusion of the two natures, but rather a juxtaposition, a remarkably close soldering. Ursule was whimsical, and displayed at times the shyness, the melancholy, and the transports of a pariah; then she would often break out into nervous fits of laughter, and muse lazily, like a woman unsound both in head and heart. Her eyes, which at times had a scared expression like those of Adelaide, were as limpid as crystal, similar to those of kittens doomed to die of consumption.

In presence of those two illegitimate children Pierre seemed a stranger; to one who had not penetrated to the roots of his being he would have appeared profoundly dissimilar. Never did child's nature show a more equal balance of the characteristics of its parents. He was the exact mean between

the peasant Rougon and the nervous Adelaide. Paternal grossness was attenuated by the maternal influence. One found in him the first phase of that evolution of temperaments which ultimately brings about the amelioration or deterioration of a race. Although he was still a peasant, his skin was less coarse, his face less heavy, his intellect more capacious and more supple. In him the defects of his father and his mother had advantageously reacted upon each other. If Adelaide's nature, rendered exquisitely sensitive by her rebellious nerves, had combated and lessened Rougon's full-bodied ponderosity, the latter had successfully prevented the young woman's tendency to cerebral disorder from being implanted in the child. Pierre knew neither the passions nor the sickly ravings of Macquart's young whelps. Very badly brought up, unruly and noisy, like all children who are not restrained during their infancy, he nevertheless possessed at bottom such sense and intelligence as would always preserve him from perpetrating any unproductive folly. His vices, his laziness, his appetite for indulgence, lacked the instinctiveness which characterised Antoine's; he meant to cultivate and gratify them honourably and openly. In his plump person of medium height, in his long pale face, in which the features derived from his father had acquired some of the maternal refinement, one could already detect signs of sly and crafty ambition and insatiable desire, with the hardness of heart and envious hatred of a peasant's son whom his mother's means and nervous temperament had turned into a member of the middle classes.

When, at the age of seventeen, Pierre observed and was able to understand Adelaide's disorders and the singular position of Antoine and Ursule, he seemed neither sorry nor indignant, but simply worried as to the course which would best serve his own interests. He was the only one of the three children who had pursued his studies with any industry. When a peasant begins to feel the need of instruction he most frequently becomes a fierce calculator. At school Pierre's playmates roused his first suspicions by the manner in which they treated and hooted his brother. Later on he came to understand the significance of many looks and words. And at last he clearly saw that the house was being pillaged. From that time forward he regarded Antoine and Ursule as shameless parasites, mouths that were devouring his own substance. Like the people of the Faubourg, he thought that his mother was a fit subject for a lunatic asylum, and feared she would end by squandering all her money, if he did not take steps to prevent it. What gave him the finishing stroke was the dishonesty of the gardener who cultivated the land. At this, in one day, the unruly child was transformed into a thrifty, selfish lad, hurriedly matured, as regards his instincts, by the strange improvident life which he could no longer bear to see around him without a feeling of anguish. Those vegetables, from the sale of which the market-gardener derived the largest profits, really belonged to him; the wine which his mother's offspring drank, the bread they ate, also belonged to him. The whole house, the entire fortune, was his by right; according to his boorish logic, he alone, the legitimate son, was the heir. And as his riches were in danger, as everybody was greedily gnawing at his future fortune, he sought a means of turning them all out – mother, brother, sister, servants – and of succeeding immediately to his inheritance.

The conflict was a cruel one; the lad knew that he must first strike his mother. Step by step, with patient tenacity, he executed a plan whose every detail he had long previously thought out. His tactics were to appear before Adelaide like a living reproach – not that he flew into a passion, or upbraided her for her misconduct; but he had acquired a certain manner of looking at her, without saying a word, which terrified her. Whenever she returned from a short sojourn in Macquart's hovel she could not turn her eyes on her son without a shudder. She felt his cold glances, as sharp as steel blades pierce her deeply and pitilessly. The severe, taciturn demeanour of the child of the man whom she had so soon forgotten strangely troubled her poor disordered brain. She would fancy at times that Rougon had risen from the dead to punish her for her dissoluteness. Every week she fell into one of those nervous fits which were shattering her constitution. She was left to struggle until she recovered consciousness, after which she would creep about more feebly than ever. She would also often sob the whole night long, holding her head in her hands, and accepting the wounds that Pierre dealt her with resignation,

as if they had been the strokes of an avenging deity. At other times she repudiated him; she would not acknowledge her own flesh and blood in that heavy-faced lad, whose calmness chilled her own feverishness so painfully. She would a thousand times rather have been beaten than glared at like that. Those implacable looks, which followed her everywhere, threw her at last into such unbearable torments that on several occasions she determined to see her lover no more. As soon, however, as Macquart returned she forgot her vows and hastened to him. The conflict with her son began afresh, silent and terrible, when she came back home. At the end of a few months she fell completely under his sway. She stood before him like a child doubtful of her behaviour and fearing that she deserves a whipping. Pierre had skilfully bound her hand and foot, and made a very submissive servant of her, without opening his lips, without once entering into difficult and compromising explanations.

When the young man felt that his mother was in his power, that he could treat her like a slave, he began, in his own interest, to turn her cerebral weakness and the foolish terror with which his glances inspired her to his own advantage. His first care, as soon as he was master at home, was to dismiss the market-gardener and replace him by one of his own creatures. Then he took upon himself the supreme direction of the household, selling, buying, and holding the cash-box. On the other hand, he made no attempt to regulate Adelaide's actions, or to correct Antoine and Ursule for their laziness. That mattered little to him, for he counted upon getting rid of these people as soon as an opportunity presented itself. He contented himself with portioning out their bread and water. Then, having already got all the property in his own hands, he awaited an event which would permit him to dispose of it as he pleased.

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

Pierre got rid of Ursule in a still more unexpected manner. A journeyman hatter of the Faubourg, named Mouret, conceived a real affection for the girl, whom he thought as white and delicate as any young lady from the Saint-Marc quarter. He married her. On his part it was a love match, free from all sordid motives. As for Ursule, she accepted the marriage in order to escape a home where her eldest brother rendered life intolerable. Her mother, absorbed in her own courses, and using her remaining energy to defend her own particular interests, regarded the matter with absolute indifference. She was even glad of Ursule's departure from the house, hoping that Pierre, now that he had no further cause for dissatisfaction, would let her live in peace after her own fashion. No sooner had the young people been married than Mouret perceived that he would have to quit Plassans, if he did not wish to hear endless disparaging remarks about his wife and his mother-in-law. Taking Ursule with him, he accordingly repaired to Marseilles, where he worked at his trade. It should be mentioned that he had not asked for one sou of dowry. When Pierre, somewhat surprised by this disinterestedness, commenced to stammer out some explanations, Mouret closed his mouth by saying that he preferred to earn his wife's bread. Nevertheless the worthy son of the peasant remained uneasy; Mouret's indifference seemed to him to conceal some trap.

Adelaide now remained to be disposed of. Nothing in the world would have induced Pierre to live with her any longer. She was compromising him; it was with her that he would have liked to make a start. But he found himself between two very embarrassing alternatives: to keep her, and thus, in a measure, share her disgrace, and bind a fetter to his feet which would arrest him in his ambitious flight; or to turn her out, with the certainty of being pointed at as a bad son, which would have robbed him of the reputation for good nature which he desired. Knowing that he would be in want of everybody, he desired to secure an untarnished name throughout Plassans. There was but one method to adopt, namely, to induce Adelaide to leave of her own accord. Pierre neglected nothing to accomplish this end. He considered his mother's misconduct a sufficient excuse for his own hard-heartedness. He punished her as one would chastise a child. The tables were turned. The poor woman cowered under the stick which, figuratively, was constantly held over her. She was scarcely forty-two years old, and already had the stammerings of terror, and vague, pitiful looks of an old woman in her dotage. Her son continued to stab her with his piercing glances, hoping that she would run away when her courage was exhausted. The unfortunate woman suffered terribly from shame, restrained desire and enforced cowardice, receiving the blows dealt her with passive resignation, and nevertheless returning to Macquart with the determination to die on the spot rather than submit. There were nights when she would have got out of bed, and thrown herself into the Viorne, if with her weak, nervous, nature she had not felt the greatest fear of death. On several occasions she thought of running away and joining her lover on the frontier. It was only because she did not know whither to go that she remained in the house, submitting to her son's contemptuous silence and secret brutality. Pierre divined that she would have left long ago if she had only had a refuge. He was waiting an opportunity to take a little apartment for her somewhere, when a fortuitous occurrence, which he had not ventured to anticipate, abruptly brought about the realisation of his desires. Information reached the Faubourg that Macquart had just been killed on the frontier by a shot from a custom-house officer, at the moment when he was endeavouring to smuggle a load of Geneva watches into France. The story was true. The smuggler's body was not even brought home, but was interred in the cemetery of a little mountain village. Adelaide's grief plunged her into stupor. Her son, who watched her curiously, did not see her shed a tear. Macquart had made her sole legatee. She inherited his hovel in the Impasse Saint-Mittre, and his carbine, which a fellow-smuggler, braving the balls of the custom-house officers, loyally brought back to her. On the following day she retired to the little house, hung the carbine above the mantelpiece, and lived there estranged from all the world, solitary and silent.

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

For several months already he had cast his eyes on a certain Felicite Puech, the daughter of an oil-dealer. The firm of Puech & Lacamp, whose warehouses were in one of the darkest lanes of the old quarter, was far from prosperous. It enjoyed but doubtful credit in the market, and people talked vaguely of bankruptcy. It was precisely in consequence of these evil reports that Pierre turned his batteries in this direction. No well-to-do trader would have given him his daughter. He meant to appear on the scene at the very moment when old Puech should no longer know which way to turn;

he would then purchase Felicite of him, and re-establish the credit of the house by his own energy and intelligence. It was a clever expedient for ascending the first rung of the social ladder, for raising himself above his station. Above all things, he wished to escape from that frightful Faubourg where everybody reviled his family, and to obliterate all these foul legends, by effacing even the very name of the Fouques' enclosure. For that reason the filthy streets of the old quarter seemed to him perfect paradise. There, only, he would be able to change his skin.

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

He learnt some fine things from him. According to the lawyer, his hands were completely tied. His mother alone could alienate the property, and he doubted whether she would. But what he did not know, what came as a heavy blow to him, was that Ursule and Antoine, those young wolves, had claims on the estate. What! they would despoil him, rob him, the legitimate child! The lawyer's explanations were clear and precise, however; Adelaide, it is true, had married Rougon under the common property system; but as the whole fortune consisted of land, the young woman, according to law, again came into possession of everything at her husband's death. Moreover, Macquart and Adelaide had duly acknowledged their children when declaring their birth for registration, and thus these children were entitled to inherit from their mother. For sole consolation, Pierre learnt that the law reduced the share of illegitimate children in favour of the others. This, however, did not console him at all. He wanted to have everything. He would not have shared ten sous with Ursule and Antoine.

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

When Pierre had secured the fifty thousand francs he married Felicite Puech with as little delay as possible. Felicite was a short, dark woman, such as one often meets in Provence. She looked like one of those brown, lean, noisy grasshoppers, which in their sudden leaps often strike their heads against the almond-trees. Thin, flat-breasted, with pointed shoulders and a face like that of a pole-cat, her features singularly sunken and attenuated, it was not easy to tell her age; she looked as near fifteen as thirty, although she was in reality only nineteen, four years younger than her husband. There was much feline slyness in the depths of her little black eyes, which suggested gimlet holes. Her low, bumpy forehead, her slightly depressed nose with delicate quivering nostrils, her thin red lips and prominent chin, parted from her cheeks by strange hollows, all suggested the countenance of an artful dwarf, a living mask of intrigue, an active, envious ambition. With all her ugliness, however, Felicite possessed a sort of gracefulness which rendered her seductive. People said of her that she could be pretty or ugly as she pleased. It would depend on the fashion in which she tied her magnificent hair; but it depended still more on the triumphant smile which illumined her golden complexion when she thought she had got the better of somebody. Born under an evil star, and believing herself ill-used by fortune, she was generally content to appear an ugly creature. She did not, however, intend to abandon the struggle, for she had vowed that she would some day make the whole town burst with envy, by an insolent display of happiness and luxury. Had she been able to act her part on a more spacious stage, where full play would have been allowed her ready wit, she would have quickly brought her dream to pass. Her intelligence was far superior to that of the girls of her own station and education. Evil tongues asserted that her mother, who had died a few years after she was born, had, during the early period of her married life, been familiar with the Marquis de Carnavant, a young nobleman of the Saint-Marc quarter. In fact, Felicite had the hands and feet of a marchioness, and, in this respect, did not appear to belong to that class of workers from which she was descended.

Her marriage with Pierre Rougon, that semi-peasant, that man of the Faubourg, whose family was in such bad odour, kept the old quarter in a state of astonishment for more than a month. She let people gossip, however, receiving the stiff congratulations of her friends with strange smiles. Her calculations had been made; she had chosen Rougon for a husband as one would choose an accomplice. Her father, in accepting the young man, had merely had eyes for the fifty thousand francs which were to save him from bankruptcy. Felicite, however, was more keen-sighted. She looked into the future, and felt that she would be in want of a robust man, even if he were somewhat rustic, behind whom she might conceal herself, and whose limbs she would move at will. She entertained a deliberate hatred for the insignificant little exquisites of provincial towns, the lean herd of notaries' clerks and prospective barristers, who stand shivering with cold while waiting for clients. Having no dowry, and despairing of ever marrying a rich merchant's son, she by far preferred a peasant whom she could use as a passive tool, to some lank graduate who would overwhelm her with his academical superiority, and drag her about all her life in search of hollow vanities. She was of opinion that the woman ought to make the man. She believed herself capable of carving a minister out of a cow-herd. That which had attracted her in Rougon was his broad chest, his heavy frame, which was not altogether wanting in elegance. A man thus built would bear with ease and sprightliness the mass of intrigues which she dreamt of placing on his shoulders. However, while she appreciated her husband's strength and vigour, she also perceived that he was far from being a fool; under his coarse flesh she had divined the cunning suppleness of his mind. Still she was a long way from really knowing her Rougon; she thought him far stupider than he was. A few days after her marriage, as she was by chance fumbling in the drawer of a secretaire, she came across the receipt for fifty thousand francs which Adelaide had signed. At sight of it she understood things, and felt rather frightened; her own natural average honesty rendered her hostile to such expedients. Her terror, however, was not unmixed with admiration; Rougon became in her eyes a very smart fellow.

The young couple bravely sought to conquer fortune. The firm of Puech & Lacamp was not, after all, so embarrassed as Pierre had thought. Its liabilities were small, it was merely in want of

ready-money. In the provinces, traders adopt prudent courses to save them from serious disasters. Puech & Lacamp were prudent to an excessive degree; they never risked a thousand crowns without the greatest fear, and thus their house, a veritable hole, was an unimportant one. The fifty thousand francs that Pierre brought into it sufficed to pay the debts and extend the business. The beginnings were good. During three successive years the olive harvest was an abundant one. Felicite, by a bold stroke which absolutely frightened both Pierre and old Puech, made them purchase a considerable quantity of oil, which they stored in their warehouse. During the following years, as the young woman had foreseen, the crops failed, and a considerable rise in prices having set in, they realised large profits by selling out their stock.

A short time after this haul, Puech & Lacamp retired from the firm, content with the few sous they had just secured, and ambitious of living on their incomes.

The young couple now had sole control of the business, and thought that they had at last laid the foundation of their fortune. “You have vanquished my ill-luck,” Felicite would sometimes say to her husband.

One of the rare weaknesses of her energetic nature was to believe herself stricken by misfortune. Hitherto, so she asserted, nothing had been successful with either herself or her father, in spite of all their efforts. Goaded by her southern superstition, she prepared to struggle with fate as one struggles with somebody who is endeavouring to strangle one. Circumstances soon justified her apprehensions in a singular manner. Ill-luck returned inexorably. Every year some fresh disaster shook Rougon’s business. A bankruptcy resulted in the loss of a few thousand francs; his estimates of crops proved incorrect, through the most incredible circumstances; the safest speculations collapsed miserably. It was a truceless, merciless combat.

“You see I was born under an unlucky star!” Felicite would bitterly exclaim.

And yet she still struggled furiously, not understanding how it was that she, who had shown such keen scent in a first speculation, could now only give her husband the most deplorable advice.

Pierre, dejected and less tenacious than herself, would have gone into liquidation a score of times had it not been for his wife’s firm obstinacy. She longed to be rich. She perceived that her ambition could only be attained by fortune. As soon as they possessed a few hundred thousand francs they would be masters of the town. She would get her husband appointed to an important post, and she would govern. It was not the attainment of honours which troubled her; she felt herself marvellously well armed for such a combat. But she could do nothing to get together the first few bags of money which were needed. Though the ruling of men caused her no apprehensions, she felt a sort of impotent rage at the thought of those inert, white, cold, five-franc pieces over which her intriguing spirit had no power, and which obstinately resisted her.

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

It should be mentioned that, from the very first years of their married life, they had a numerous family, which in the long run became a heavy burden to them. In the course of five years, from 1811 to 1815, Felicite gave birth to three boys. Then during the four ensuing years she presented her husband with two girls. These had but an indifferent welcome; daughters are a terrible embarrassment when one has no dowry to give them.

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

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

When Felicite spoke of sending them to college, he got angry. Latin was a useless luxury, it would be quite sufficient if they went through the classes of a little neighbouring school The young woman, however, persisted in her design. She possessed certain elevated instincts which made her take a great pride in surrounding herself with accomplished children; moreover, she felt that her sons must never remain as illiterate as her husband, if she wished to see them become prominent men. She fancied them all three in Paris in high positions, which she did not clearly define. When Rougon consented, and the three youngsters had entered the eighth class, Felicite felt the most lively satisfaction she had ever experienced. She listened with delight as they talked of their professors and their studies. When she heard her eldest son make one of his brothers decline *Rosa, a rose*, it sounded like delicious music to her. It is only fair to add that her delight was not tarnished by any sordid calculations. Even Rougon felt the satisfaction which an illiterate man experiences on perceiving his sons grow more learned than himself. Then the fellowship which grew up between their sons and those of the local big-wigs completed the parents' gratification. The youngsters were soon on familiar terms with the sons of the Mayor and the Sub-Prefect, and even with two or three young noblemen whom the Saint-Marc quarter had deigned to send to the Plassans College. Felicite was at a loss how to repay such an honour. The education of the three lads weighed seriously on the budget of the Rougon household.

Until the boys had taken their degrees, their parents, who kept them at college at enormous sacrifices, lived in hopes of their success. When they had obtained their diplomas Felicite wished to continue her work, and even persuaded her husband to send the three to Paris. Two of them devoted themselves to the study of law, and the third passed through the School of Medicine. Then, when they were men, and had exhausted the resources of the Rougon family and were obliged to return and establish themselves in the provinces, their parents' disenchantment began. They idled about and grew fat. And Felicite again felt all the bitterness of her ill-luck. Her sons were failing her. They had ruined her, and did not return any interest on the capital which they represented. This last blow of fate was the heaviest, as it fell on her ambition and her maternal vanity alike. Rougon repeated to her from morning till night, "I told you so!" which only exasperated her the more.

One day, as she was bitterly reproaching her eldest son with the large amount of money expended on his education, he said to her with equal bitterness, "I will repay you later on if I can.

But as you had no means, you should have brought us up to a trade. We are out of our element, we are suffering more than you."

Felicite understood the wisdom of these words. From that time she ceased to accuse her children, and turned her anger against fate, which never wearied of striking her. She started her old complaints afresh, and bemoaned more and more the want of means which made her strand, as it were, in port. Whenever Rougon said to her, "Your sons are lazy fellows, they will eat up all we have," she sourly replied, "Would to God I had more money to give them; if they do vegetate, poor fellows, it's because they haven't got a sou to bless themselves with."

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

At the period now referred to the eldest, Eugene, was nearly forty years old. He was a man of middle height, slightly bald, and already disposed to obesity. He had his father's face, a long face with broad features; beneath his skin one could divine the fat to which were due the flabby roundness of his features, and his yellowish, waxy complexion. Though his massive square head still recalled the peasant, his physiognomy was transfigured, lit up from within as it were, when his drooping eyelids were raised and his eyes awoke to life. In the son's case, the father's ponderousness had turned to gravity. This big fellow, Eugene, usually preserved a heavy somnolent demeanour. At the same time, certain of his heavy, languid movements suggested those of a giant stretching his limbs pending the time for action. By one of those alleged freaks of nature, of which, however, science is now commencing to discover the laws, if physical resemblance to Pierre was perfect in Eugene, Felicite on her side seemed to have furnished him with his brains. He offered an instance of certain moral and intellectual qualities of maternal origin being embedded in the coarse flesh he had derived from his father. He cherished lofty ambitions, possessed domineering instincts, and showed singular contempt for trifling expedients and petty fortunes.

He was a proof that Plassans was perhaps not mistaken in suspecting that Felicite had some blue blood in her veins. The passion for indulgence, which became formidably developed in the Rougons, and was, in fact, the family characteristic, attained in his case its highest pitch; he longed for self-gratification, but in the form of mental enjoyment such as would gratify his burning desire for domination. A man such as this was never intended to succeed in a provincial town. He vegetated there for fifteen years, his eyes turned towards Paris, watching his opportunities. On his return home he had entered his name on the rolls, in order to be independent of his parents. After that he pleaded from time to time, earning a bare livelihood, without appearing to rise above average mediocrity. At Plassans his voice was considered thick, his movements heavy. He generally wandered from the question at issue, rambled, as the wiseacres expressed it. On one occasion particularly, when he was pleading in a case for damages, he so forgot himself as to stray into a political disquisition, to such a point that the presiding judge interfered, whereupon he immediately sat down with a strange smile. His client was condemned to pay a considerable sum of money, a circumstance which did not, however, seem to cause Eugene the least regret for his irrelevant digression. He appeared to regard his speeches as mere exercises which would be of use to him later on. It was this that puzzled and disheartened Felicite. She would have liked to see her son dictating the law to the Civil Court of Plassans. At last she came to entertain a very unfavourable opinion of her first-born. To her mind this lazy fellow would never be the one to shed any lustre on the family. Pierre, on the contrary, felt absolute confidence in him, not that he had more intuition than his wife, but because external appearances sufficed him, and he flattered himself by believing in the genius of a son who was his living image. A month prior to the Revolution of February, 1848, Eugene became restless; some

special inspiration made him anticipate the crisis. From that time forward he seemed to feel out of his element at Plassans. He would wander about the streets like a distressed soul. At last he formed a sudden resolution, and left for Paris, with scarcely five hundred francs in his pocket.

Aristide, the youngest son, was, so to speak, diametrically opposed to Eugene. He had his mother's face, and a covetousness and slyness of character prone to trivial intrigues, in which his father's instincts predominated. Nature has need of symmetry. Short, with a pitiful countenance suggesting the knob of a stick carved into a Punch's head, Aristide ferretted and fumbled everywhere, without any scruples, eager only to gratify himself. He loved money as his eldest brother loved power. While Eugene dreamed of bending a people to his will, and intoxicated himself with visions of future omnipotence, the other fancied himself ten times a millionaire, installed in a princely mansion, eating and drinking to his heart's content, and enjoying life to the fullest possible extent. Above all things, he longed to make a rapid fortune. When he was building his castles in the air, they would rise in his mind as if by magic; he would become possessed of tons of gold in one night. These visions agreed with his indolence, as he never troubled himself about the means, considering those the best which were the most expeditious. In his case the race of the Rougons, of those coarse, greedy peasants with brutish appetites, had matured too rapidly; every desire for material indulgence was found in him, augmented threefold by hasty education, and rendered the more insatiable and dangerous by the deliberate way in which the young man had come to regard their realisation as his set purpose. In spite of her keen feminine intuition, Felicite preferred this son; she did not perceive the greater affinity between herself and Eugene; she excused the follies and indolence of her youngest son under the pretext that he would some day be the superior genius of the family, and that such a man was entitled to live a disorderly life until his intellectual strength should be revealed.

Aristide subjected her indulgence to a rude test. In Paris he led a low, idle life; he was one of those students who enter their names at the taverns of the Quartier Latin. He did not remain there, however, more than two years; his father, growing apprehensive, and seeing that he had not yet passed a single examination, kept him at Plassans and spoke of finding a wife for him, hoping that domestic responsibility would make him more steady. Aristide let himself be married. He had no very clear idea of his own ambitions at this time; provincial life did not displease him; he was battening in his little town – eating, sleeping, and sauntering about. Felicite pleaded his cause so earnestly that Pierre consented to board and lodge the newly-married couple, on condition that the young man should turn his attention to the business. From that time, however, Aristide led a life of ease and idleness. He spent his days and the best part of his nights at the club, again and again slipping out of his father's office like a schoolboy to go and gamble away the few louis that his mother gave him clandestinely.

It is necessary to have lived in the depths of the French provinces to form an idea of the four brutifying years which the young fellow spent in this fashion. In every little town there is a group of individuals who thus live on their parents, pretending at times to work, but in reality cultivating idleness with a sort of religious zeal. Aristide was typical of these incorrigible drones. For four years he did little but play ecarte. While he passed his time at the club, his wife, a fair-complexioned nerveless woman, helped to ruin the Rougon business by her inordinate passion for showy gowns and her formidable appetite, a rather remarkable peculiarity in so frail a creature. Angele, however, adored sky-blue ribbons and roast beef. She was the daughter of a retired captain who was called Commander Sicardot, a good-hearted old gentleman, who had given her a dowry of ten thousand francs – all his savings. Pierre, in selecting Angele for his son had considered that he had made an unexpected bargain, so lightly did he esteem Aristide. However, that dowry of ten thousand francs, which determined his choice, ultimately became a millstone round his neck. His son, who was already a cunning rogue, deposited the ten thousand francs with his father, with whom he entered into partnership, declining, with the most sincere professions of devotion, to keep a single copper.

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

Pierre was short of money at the time, and accepted, not, however, without some uneasiness at Aristide's disinterestedness. The latter calculated that it would be years before his father would have ten thousand francs in ready money to repay him, so that he and his wife would live at the paternal expense so long as the partnership could not be dissolved. It was an admirable investment for his few bank-notes. When the oil-dealer understood what a foolish bargain he had made he was not in a position to rid himself of Aristide; Angele's dowry was involved in speculations which were turning out unfavourably. He was exasperated, stung to the heart, at having to provide for his daughter-in-law's voracious appetite and keep his son in idleness. Had he been able to buy them out of the business he would twenty times have shut his doors on those bloodsuckers, as he emphatically expressed it. Felicite secretly defended them; the young man, who had divined her dreams of ambition, would every evening describe to her the elaborate plans by which he would shortly make a fortune. By a rare chance she had remained on excellent terms with her daughter-in-law. It must be confessed that Angele had no will of her own – she could be moved and disposed of like a piece of furniture.

Meantime Pierre became enraged whenever his wife spoke to him of the success their youngest son would ultimately achieve; he declared that he would really bring them to ruin. During the four years that the young couple lived with him he stormed in this manner, wasting his impotent rage in quarrels, without in the least disturbing the equanimity of Aristide and Angele. They were located there, and there they intended to remain like blocks of wood. At last Pierre met with a stroke of luck which enabled him to return the ten thousand francs to his son. When, however, he wanted to reckon up accounts with him, Aristide interposed so much chicanery that he had to let the couple go without deducting a copper for their board and lodging. They installed themselves but a short distance off, in a part of the old quarter called the Place Saint-Louis. The ten thousand francs were soon consumed. They had everything to get for their new home. Moreover Aristide made no change in his mode of living as long as any money was left in the house. When he had reached the last hundred-franc note he felt rather nervous. He was seen prowling about the town in a suspicious manner. He no longer took his customary cup of coffee at the club; he watched feverishly whilst play was going on, without touching a card. Poverty made him more spiteful than he would otherwise have been. He bore the blow for a long time, obstinately refusing to do anything in the way of work.

In 1840 he had a son, little Maxime, whom his grandmother Felicite fortunately sent to college, paying his fees clandestinely. That made one mouth less at home; but poor Angele was dying of hunger, and her husband was at last compelled to seek a situation. He secured one at the Sub-Prefecture. He remained there nearly ten years, and only attained a salary of eighteen hundred francs per annum. From that time forward it was with ever increasing malevolence and rancour that he hungered for the enjoyments of which he was deprived. His lowly position exasperated him; the paltry hundred and fifty francs which he received every month seemed to him an irony of fate. Never did man burn with such desire for self-gratification. Felicite, to whom he imparted his sufferings, was by no means grieved to see him so eager. She thought his misery would stimulate his energies. At last, crouching in ambush as it were, with his ears wide open, he began to look about him like a thief seeking his opportunity. At the beginning of 1848, when his brother left for Paris, he had a momentary idea of following him. But Eugene was a bachelor; and he, Aristide, could not take his wife so far without money. So he waited, scenting a catastrophe, and ready to fall on the first prey that might come within his reach.

The other son, Pascal, born between Eugene and Aristide, did not appear to belong to the family. He was one of those frequent cases which give the lie to the laws of heredity. During the evolution of a race nature often produces some one being whose every element she derives from her own creative powers. Nothing in the moral or physical constitution of Pascal recalled the Rougons. Tall, with a grave and gentle face, he had an uprightness of mind, a love of study, a retiring modesty which contrasted strangely with the feverish ambitions and unscrupulous intrigues of his relatives. After acquitting himself admirably of his medical studies in Paris, he had retired, by preference, to

Plassans, notwithstanding the offers he received from his professors. He loved a quiet provincial life; he maintained that for a studious man such a life was preferable to the excitement of Paris. Even at Plassans he did not exert himself to extend his practice. Very steady, and despising fortune, he contented himself with the few patients sent him by chance. All his pleasures were centred in a bright little house in the new town, where he shut himself up, lovingly devoting his whole time to the study of natural history. He was particularly fond of physiology. It was known in the town that he frequently purchased dead bodies from the hospital grave-digger, a circumstance which rendered him an object of horror to delicate ladies and certain timid gentlemen. Fortunately, they did not actually look upon him as a sorcerer; but his practice diminished, and he was regarded as an eccentric character, to whom people of good society ought not to entrust even a finger-tip, for fear of being compromised. The mayor's wife was one day heard to say: "I would sooner die than be attended by that gentleman. He smells of death."

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

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

Pascal, who preferred to laugh whenever he was called upon to feel annoyed, replied cheerfully, but not without a sting of irony: "Oh, you need not be frightened, I shall never drive you to the verge of bankruptcy; when any of you are ill, I will attend you for nothing."

Moreover, though he never displayed any repugnance to his relatives, he very rarely saw them, following in this wise his natural instincts. Before Aristide obtained a situation at the Sub-Prefecture, Pascal had frequently come to his assistance. For his part he had remained a bachelor. He had not the least suspicion of the grave events that were preparing. For two or three years he had been studying the great problem of heredity, comparing the human and animal races together, and becoming absorbed in the strange results which he obtained. Certain observations which he had made with respect to himself and his relatives had been, so to say, the starting-point of his studies. The common people, with their natural intuition, so well understood that he was quite different from the other Rougons, that they invariably called him Monsieur Pascal, without ever adding his family name.

Three years prior to the Revolution of 1848 Pierre and Felicite retired from business. Old age was coming on apace; they were both past fifty and were weary enough of the struggle. In face of their ill fortune, they were afraid of being ultimately ruined if they obstinately persisted in the fight. Their sons, by disappointing their expectations, had dealt them the final blow. Now that they despaired of ever being enriched by them, they were anxious to make some little provision for old age. They

retired with forty thousand francs at the utmost. This sum provided an annual income of two thousand francs, just sufficient to live in a small way in the provinces. Fortunately, they were by themselves, having succeeded in marrying their daughters Marthe and Sidonie, the former of whom resided at Marseilles and the latter in Paris.

After they had settled their affairs they would much have liked to take up their abode in the new town, the quarter of the retired traders, but they dared not do so. Their income was too small; they were afraid that they would cut but a poor figure there. So, as a sort of compromise, they took apartments in the Rue de la Banne, the street which separates the old quarter from the new one. As their abode was one of the row of houses bordering the old quarter, they still lived among the common people; nevertheless, they could see the town of the richer classes from their windows, so that they were just on the threshold of the promised land.

Their apartments, situated on the second floor, consisted of three large rooms – dining-room, drawing-room, and bedroom. The first floor was occupied by the owner of the house, a stick and umbrella manufacturer, who had a shop on the ground floor. The house, which was narrow and by no means deep, had only two storeys. Felicite moved into it with a bitter pang. In the provinces, to live in another person's house is an avowal of poverty. Every family of position at Plassans has a house of its own, landed property being very cheap there. Pierre kept the purse-strings well tied; he would not hear of any embellishments. The old furniture, faded, worn, damaged though it was, had to suffice, without even being repaired. Felicite, however, who keenly felt the necessity for this parsimony, exerted herself to give fresh polish to all the wreckage; she herself knocked nails into some of the furniture which was more dilapidated than the rest, and darned the frayed velvet of the arm-chairs.

The dining-room, which, like the kitchen, was at the back of the house, was nearly bare; a table and a dozen chairs were lost in the gloom of this large apartment, whose window faced the grey wall of a neighbouring building. As no strangers ever went into the bedroom, Felicite had stowed all her useless furniture there; thus, besides a bedstead, wardrobe, secretaire, and wash-stand, it contained two cradles, one perched atop of the other, a sideboard whose doors were missing, and an empty bookcase, venerable ruins which the old woman could not make up her mind to part with. All her cares, however, were bestowed upon the drawing-room, and she almost succeeded in making it comfortable and decent. The furniture was covered with yellowish velvet with satin flowers; in the middle stood a round table with a marble top, while a couple of pier tables, surmounted by mirrors, leant against the walls at either end of the room. There was even a carpet, which just covered the middle of the floor, and a chandelier in a white muslin cover which the flies had spotted with black specks. On the walls hung six lithographs representing the great battles of Napoleon I. Moreover, the furniture dated from the first years of the Empire. The only embellishment that Felicite could obtain was to have the walls hung with orange-hued paper covered with large flowers. Thus the drawing room had a strange yellow glow, which filled it with an artificial dazzling light. The furniture, the paper, and the window curtains were yellow; the carpet and even the marble table-tops showed touches of yellow. However, when the curtains were drawn the colours harmonised fairly well and the drawing-room looked almost decent.

But Felicite had dreamed of quite a different kind of luxury. She regarded with mute despair this ill-concealed misery. She usually occupied the drawing-room, the best apartment in the house, and the sweetest and bitterest of her pastimes was to sit at one of the windows which overlooked the Rue de la Banne and gave her a side view of the square in front of the Sub-Prefecture. That was the paradise of her dreams. That little, neat, tidy square, with its bright houses, seemed to her a Garden of Eden. She would have given ten years of her life to possess one of those habitations. The house at the left-hand corner, in which the receiver of taxes resided, particularly tempted her. She contemplated it with eager longing. Sometimes, when the windows of this abode were open, she could catch a glimpse of rich furniture and tasteful elegance which made her burn with envy.

At this period the Rougons passed through a curious crisis of vanity and unsatiated appetite. The few proper feelings which they had once entertained had become embittered. They posed as victims of evil fortune, not with resignation, however, for they seemed still more keenly determined that they would not die before they had satisfied their ambitions. In reality, they did not abandon any of their hopes, notwithstanding their advanced age. Felicite professed to feel a presentiment that she would die rich. However, each day of poverty weighed them down the more. When they recapitulated their vain attempts – when they recalled their thirty years' struggle, and the defection of their children – when they saw their airy castles end in this yellow drawing-room, whose shabbiness they could only conceal by drawing the curtains, they were overcome with bitter rage. Then, as a consolation, they would think of plans for making a colossal fortune, seeking all sorts of devices. Felicite would fancy herself the winner of the grand prize of a hundred thousand francs in some lottery, while Pierre pictured himself carrying out some wonderful speculation. They lived with one sole thought – that of making a fortune immediately, in a few hours – of becoming rich and enjoying themselves, if only for a year. Their whole beings tended to this, stubbornly, without a pause. And they still cherished some faint hopes with regard to their sons, with that peculiar egotism of parents who cannot bear to think that they have sent their children to college without deriving some personal advantage from it.

Felicite did not appear to have aged; she was still the same dark little woman, ever on the move, buzzing about like a grasshopper. Any person walking behind her on the pavement would have thought her a girl of fifteen, from the lightness of her step and the angularity of her shoulders and waist. Even her face had scarcely undergone any change; it was simply rather more sunken, rather more suggestive of the snout of a pole-cat.

As for Pierre Rougon, he had grown corpulent, and had become a highly respectable looking citizen, who only lacked a decent income to make him a very dignified individual. His pale, flabby face, his heaviness, his languid manner, seemed redolent of wealth. He had one day heard a peasant who did not know him say: "Ah! he's some rich fellow, that fat old gentleman there. He's no cause to worry about his dinner!" This was a remark which stung him to the heart, for he considered it cruel mockery to be only a poor devil while possessing the bulk and contented gravity of a millionaire. When he shaved on Sundays in front of a small five-sou looking-glass hanging from the fastening of a window, he would often think that in a dress coat and white tie he would cut a far better figure at the Sub-Prefect's than such or such a functionary of Plassans. This peasant's son, who had grown sallow from business worries, and corpulent from a sedentary life, whose hateful passions were hidden beneath naturally placid features, really had that air of solemn imbecility which gives a man a position in an official salon. People imagined that his wife held a rod over him, but they were mistaken. He was as self-willed as a brute. Any determined expression of extraneous will would drive him into a violent rage. Felicite was far too supple to thwart him openly; with her light fluttering nature she did not attack obstacles in front. When she wished to obtain something from her husband, or drive him the way she thought best, she would buzz round him in her grasshopper fashion, stinging him on all sides, and returning to the charge a hundred times until he yielded almost unconsciously. He felt, moreover, that she was shrewder than he, and tolerated her advice fairly patiently. Felicite, more useful than the coach fly, would sometimes do all the work while she was thus buzzing round Pierre's ears. Strange to say, the husband and wife never accused each other of their ill-success. The only bone of contention between them was the education lavished on their children.

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

CHAPTER III

In that closed, sequestered town of Plassans, where class distinction was so clearly marked in 1848, the commotion caused by political events was very slight. Even at the present day the popular voice sounds very faintly there; the middle classes bring their prudence to bear in the matter, the nobility their mute despair, and the clergy their shrewd cunning. Kings may usurp thrones, or republics may be established, without scarcely any stir in the town. Plassans sleeps while Paris fights. But though on the surface the town may appear calm and indifferent, in the depths hidden work goes on which it is curious to study. If shots are rare in the streets, intrigues consume the drawing-rooms of both the new town and the Saint-Marc quarter. Until the year 1830 the masses were reckoned of no account. Even at the present time they are similarly ignored. Everything is settled between the clergy, the nobility, and the bourgeoisie. The priests, who are very numerous, give the cue to the local politics; they lay subterranean mines, as it were, and deal blows in the dark, following a prudent tactical system, which hardly allows of a step in advance or retreat even in the course of ten years. The secret intrigues of men who desire above all things to avoid noise requires special shrewdness, a special aptitude for dealing with small matters, and a patient endurance such as one only finds in persons callous to all passions. It is thus that provincial dilatoriness, which is so freely ridiculed in Paris, is full of treachery, secret stabs, hidden victories and defeats. These worthy men, particularly when their interests are at stake, kill at home with a snap of the fingers, as we, the Parisians, kill with cannon in the public thoroughfares.

The political history of Plassans, like that of all little towns in Provence, is singularly characteristic. Until 1830, the inhabitants remained observant Catholics and fervent royalists; even the lower classes only swore by God and their legitimate sovereigns. Then there came a sudden change; faith departed, the working and middle classes deserted the cause of legitimacy, and gradually espoused the great democratic movement of our time. When the Revolution of 1848 broke out, the nobility and the clergy were left alone to labour for the triumph of Henri V. For a long time they had regarded the accession of the Orleanists as a ridiculous experiment, which sooner or later would bring back the Bourbons; although their hopes were singularly shaken, they nevertheless continued the struggle, scandalised by the defection of their former allies, whom they strove to win back to their cause. The Saint-Marc quarter, assisted by all the parish priests, set to work. Among the middle classes, and especially among the people, the enthusiasm was very great on the morrow of the events of February; these apprentice republicans were in haste to display their revolutionary fervour. As regards the gentry of the new town, however, the conflagration, bright though it was, lasted no longer than a fire of straw. The small houseowners and retired tradespeople who had had their good days, or had made snug little fortunes under the monarchy, were soon seized with panic; the Republic, with its constant shocks and convulsions, made them tremble for their money and their life of selfishness.

Consequently, when the Clerical reaction of 1849 declared itself, nearly all the middle classes passed over to the Conservative party. They were received with open arms. The new town had never before had such close relations with the Saint-Marc quarter: some of the nobility even went so far as to shake hands with lawyers and retired oil-dealers. This unexpected familiarity kindled the enthusiasm of the new quarter, which henceforward waged bitter warfare against the republican government. To bring about such a coalition, the clergy had to display marvellous skill and endurance. The nobility of Plassans for the most part lay prostrate, as if half dead. They retained their faith, but lethargy had fallen on them, and they preferred to remain inactive, allowing the heavens to work their will. They would gladly have contented themselves with silent protest, feeling, perhaps, a vague presentiment that their divinities were dead, and that there was nothing left for them to do but rejoin them. Even at this period of confusion, when the catastrophe of 1848 was calculated to give them a momentary

hope of the return of the Bourbons, they showed themselves spiritless and indifferent, speaking of rushing into the melee, yet never quitting their hearths without a pang of regret.

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

The shrewdest politicians of Plassans, those who led the reactionary movement, did not scent the approach of the Empire until very much later. Prince Louis Napoleon's popularity seemed to them a mere passing fancy of the multitude. His person inspired them with but little admiration. They reckoned him a nonentity, a dreamer, incapable of laying his hands on France, and especially of maintaining his authority. To them he was only a tool whom they would make use of, who would clear the way for them, and whom they would turn out as soon as the hour arrived for the rightful Pretender to show himself.[2] However, months went by, and they became uneasy. It was only then that they vaguely perceived they were being duped: they had no time, however, to take any steps; the Coup d'Etat burst over their heads, and they were compelled to applaud. That great abomination, the Republic, had been assassinated; that, at least, was some sort of triumph. So the clergy and the nobility accepted accomplished facts with resignation; postponing, until later, the realisation of their hopes, and making amends for their miscalculations by uniting with the Bonapartists for the purpose of crushing the last Republicans.

[2] The Count de Chambord, "Henri V."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.