



George Sand

The
Bagpipers

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Historical Novel

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TO M. EUGÈNE LAMBERT

MY DEAR CHILD,—As you like to hear me relate the tales told by the peasants at our *veillées*,—I mean the watch-nights of my youth, when I had time to listen to them,—I shall try to recall the story of Étienne Depardieu, and piece together the scattered fragments of it still remaining in my memory. It was told to me by the man himself during several of the *breyage* evenings,—a name given, as you know, to the late hours of the night spent in grinding hemp, when those present relate their village chronicles. It is long since Père Depardieu slept the sleep of the just, and he was quite old when he told me this story of the naïve adventures of his youth. For this reason I shall try to let him speak for himself, imitating his manner as closely as I can. You will not blame me for insisting on so doing, because you know from experience that the thoughts and emotions of a peasant cannot be rendered in our own style of language without making them unnatural and giving them a tone of even shocking affectation.

You also know by experience, that the peasantry guess or comprehend much more than we believe them capable of understanding; and you have often been struck with their sudden insight, which, even in matters of art, has an appearance of revelation. If I were to tell you in my language and yours certain things which you have heard and understood in theirs, you would find those very things so unlike what is natural to these people that you would accuse me of unconsciously putting something of my own into the relation, and of attributing to the peasantry

reflections and feelings which they could not have. It suffices to introduce into the expression of their ideas a single word that is not in their vocabulary to raise a doubt as to whether the idea itself emanated from them. But when we listen to their speech, we at once observe that although they may not have, like us, a choice of words suited to every shade of thought, yet they assuredly have words enough to formulate what they think and to describe what strikes their senses.

Therefore it is not, as some have reproachfully declared, for the petty pleasure of producing a style hitherto unused in literature, and still less to revive ancient forms of speech and old expressions which all the world knows and is familiar with, that I have bound myself to the humble task of preserving to Étienne Depardieu's tale the local color that belongs to it. It is, rather, because I find it impossible to make him speak as we do without distorting the methods by which his mind worked when he expressed himself on points with which he was not familiar, and as to which he evidently had a strong desire both to understand and to make himself understood.

If, in spite of the care and conscientiousness which I shall put into this task, you find that my narrator sometimes sees too clearly or too deeply into the subjects he takes up, you must blame the weakness of my presentation. Forced as I am to choose among our familiar terms of speech such only as all classes can understand, I voluntarily deprive myself of those that are most original and most expressive; but, at any rate, I shall endeavor to employ none which would be unknown to the peasant who tells the tale, and who (far

superior in this to the peasant of to-day) did not pride himself on using words that were unintelligible to both his hearers and himself.

I dedicate this novel to you, my dear Eugène, not to give you a proof of motherly affection, which you do not need to make you feel at home in my family, but to leave with you, after I am gone, a point of contact for your recollections of Berry, which has now become, in a way, the land of your adoption. You will hereafter recall that you said, at the time I was writing it: "By the bye, it will soon be ten years since I came here, intending to spend a month. I must be thinking of leaving." And as I did not see the why and the wherefore, you explained to me that, being a painter, you had worked ten years among us to observe and feel nature, and that it was now necessary you should go to Paris and seek discipline of thought and the experience of others. I let you go; but on condition that you would return to us every summer. Do not forget your promise. I send this book, a distant echo of our bagpipes, to remind you that the trees are budding, the nightingales have come, and the great spring-tide festival of nature is beginning in the fields.

GEORGE SAND.

NOHANT, April, 1853.

FIRST EVENING

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I was not born yesterday, said Père Étienne in 1828. I came into the world, as near as I can make out, in the year 54 or 55 of the last century. But not remembering much of my earlier years, I shall only tell you about myself from the time of my first communion, which took place in '70 in the parish church of Saint-Chartier, then in charge of the Abbé Montpéron, who is now very deaf and broken down.

This was not because our own parish of Nohant was suppressed in those days; but our curate having died, the two churches were united for a time under the ministry of the priest of Saint-Chartier, and we went every day to be catechised,—that is, I and my little cousin and a lad named Joseph, who lived in the same house with my uncle, with a dozen other children of the neighborhood.

I say "my uncle" for short, but he was really my great-uncle, the brother of my grandmother, and was named Brulet; hence his little granddaughter and only heir was called Brulette, without any mention whatever of her Christian name, which was Catherine.

Now, to tell you at once about things as they were, I soon felt that I loved Brulette better than I was obliged to do as a cousin; and I was jealous because Joseph lived in the same house, which stood about a stone's throw distant from the last houses in the village and rather more than three quarters of a mile from mine,—so that he could see her at

all times, while I saw her only now and then, till the time when we met to be catechised.

I will tell you how it happened that Brulette's grandfather and Joseph's mother lived under the same roof. The house belonged to the old man, and he let a small part of it to the woman, who was a widow with only one child. Her name was Marie Picot, and she was still marriageable, being little over thirty, and bearing traces in her face and figure of having been in her day a very pretty woman. She was still called by some people "handsome Mariton,"—which pleased her very much, for she would have liked to marry again. But possessing nothing except her bright eyes and her honest tongue, she thought herself lucky to pay a low price for her lodging and get a worthy and helpful old man for a landlord and neighbor,—one too who wouldn't worry her, but might sometimes help her.

Père Brulet and the widow Picot, called Mariton, had thus lived in each other's good graces for about a dozen years; that is, ever since the day when Brulette's mother died in giving birth to her, and Mariton had taken charge of the infant with as much love and care as if it had been her own.

Joseph, who was three years older than Brulette, remembered being rocked in the same cradle; and the baby was the first burden ever trusted to his little arms. Later, Père Brulet, noticing that his neighbor had her hands full with the care of the two as they grew stronger, took Joseph into his part of the house; and so it came to pass that the little girl slept with the widow, and the little boy with the old man.

All four, however, ate together. Mariton cooked the meals, kept the house, made over and darned the clothes, while the old man, who was still sturdy enough to work, went out by the day and paid the greater part of the household expenses. He did not do this because he was well-off and his living was bound to be good accordingly, but because the widow was kind and amiable, and excellent company; and Brulette considered her so much like a mother that my uncle grew to treat her as a daughter, or at any rate as a daughter-in-law.

Nothing in the world was ever prettier or sweeter than the little girl under Mariton's bringing up. The woman loved cleanliness, and kept herself as spick and span as her means allowed; and she had early taught Brulette to do the same. At the age, therefore, when children usually roll in the dirt like little animals, the darling was so clean and dainty in all her ways that everybody wanted to kiss her; but she was already very chary of her favors, and would never be familiar unless quite sure of her company.

When she was twelve years old she was really, at times, like a little woman; and if, carried away by the liveliness of her years, she did forget herself so far as to play while being catechised, she soon caught herself up, even more, it seemed to me, out of self-respect than for the sake of religion.

I don't know if any of us could have told why, but all of us lads, unlike enough when it came to catechising, felt the difference that there was between Brulette and the other little girls.

I must own that some in the class were rather big boys. Joseph was fifteen and I was sixteen, which our parents and the curate declared was a disgrace to us. Such backwardness certainly did prove that Joseph was too lazy to study, and I too lively to give my mind to it. In fact, for three years he and I had been rejected from the class; and if it had not been for the Abbé Montpéron, who was less particular than our old curate, I suppose we might have continued so to this day.

However, it is only fair to confess that boys are always younger in mind than girls; and you will find in every Confirmation class just this difference between the two species,—the males being already strong, grown lads, and the females still small, hardly old enough to wear the coif.

As for knowledge, we were all about alike; none of us knew how to read, still less to write, and we only learned what we did just as the little birds learn to sing, without knowing either notes or Latin, by dint only of using their ears. But all the same, Monsieur le curé knew very well which of the flock had the quickest minds, and which of them remembered what he said. The cleverest head among the girls was little Brulette's, and the stupidest of all the stupid boys was Joseph.

Not that he was really duller than the rest, but he was quite unable to listen and so get a smattering of things he did not understand; and he showed so little liking for instruction that I was surprised at him,—I who could take hold of my lessons fast enough when I managed to keep still, and quiet down my lively spirits.

Though Brulette scolded him for it sometimes, she never got anything out of him but tears of vexation.

"I am not worse than others," he would say; "I don't want to offend God; but words don't come right in my memory, and I can't help it."

"Yes, you can," replied the little one, who already took a tone of ordering him about; "you can if you choose. You can do whatever you like; but you let your mind run after all sorts of things,—it is no wonder Monsieur l'abbé calls you 'Joseph the absent-minded.'

"He can call me so if he likes," answered Joseph. "I don't understand what it means."

But the rest of us understood very well, and turned it into our own childish language by calling him José l'ébervigé [literally, the bewildered, the staring-eyed]; a name which stuck to him, to his great disgust.

Joseph was a melancholy child, with a puny body and a mind turned inward. He never left Brulette, and was very submissive to her; nevertheless, she said he was as obstinate as a mule, and found fault with him all the time. Though she did not say much to me about my lawless, do-nothing ways, I often wished she would take as much notice of me as she did of him. However, in spite of the jealousy he caused me, I cared more for José than for my other comrades, because he was one of the weakest, and I one of the strongest. Besides, if I had not stood up for him, Brulette would have blamed me. When I told her that she loved him more than she did me, who was her cousin, she would say,

—

"It is not on his account; it is because of his mother, whom I love better than I do either of you. If anything happened to him, I should not dare go home; for as he never thinks of what he is about, she charged me to think for both, and I try not to forget it."

I often hear our betters say: "I went to school with such a one; he was my college companion." We peasants, who never went to school in my young days, we say, "I was catechised with such a one; that's my communion comrade." Then is the time we make our youthful friendships, and sometimes, too, the hatreds that last a lifetime. In the fields, at work, or at the festivals, we talk and laugh together, and meet and part; but at the catechism classes, which last a year, and often two, we must put up with each other's company, and even help each other five or six hours a day. We always started off together in a body every morning across the fields and meadows, beside the coverts and fences, and along the foot-paths; and we came back in the evening anyhow, as it pleased the good God, for we took advantage of our liberty to run where we chose, like frolicking birds. Those who liked each other's company stayed together; the disagreeable ones went alone, or banded in twos and threes to tease and frighten the rest.

Joseph had his ways; they were neither horrid nor sulky, and yet they were not amiable. I never remember seeing him really enjoying himself, nor really frightened, nor really contented, nor really annoyed with anything that ever happened to us. In our fights he never got out of the way, and he usually received blows which he did not know how to

return; but he made no complaint. You might have supposed he did not feel them.

When we loitered to play some game, he would sit or lie down at a little distance and say nothing, answering wide of the mark if we spoke to him. He seemed to be listening or looking at something which the others could not perceive; that's why he was thought to be one of those who "see the wind." Sometimes, when Brulette, who knew his crotchets, but would not explain them, called him, he did not answer. Then she would begin to sing,—that was sure to wake him up, as a whistle is sure to stop people from snoring.

To tell you why I attached myself to a fellow who was such poor company is more than I am able to do; for I was just the opposite myself. I could not do without companions, and I was always listening and observing others; I liked to talk and question, felt dull when I was alone, and went about looking for fun and friendship. Perhaps that was the reason why, pitying the serious, reserved boy, I imitated Brulette, who would shake him up sometimes,—which did him more good than it did her, for in fact she indulged his whims much more than she controlled them. As far as words went she ordered him about finely, but as he never obeyed her it was she (and I through her) who followed in his wake and had patience with him.

The day of our first communion came at last; and, returning from church, I made such strong resolutions not to give way to my lawlessness any more that I followed Brulette home to her grandfather's house, as the best example I could lay hold of to guide me.

While she went, at Mariton's bidding, to milk the goat, Joseph and I stayed talking with his mother in my uncle's room.

We were looking at the devotional images which the curate had given us in remembrance of the sacrament,—or rather I was, for Joseph was thinking of something else, and fingered them without seeing what they were. So the others paid no attention to us; and presently Mariton said to her old neighbor, alluding to our first communion,—

"Well, it is a good thing done, and now I can hire my lad out to work. I have decided to do what I told you I should."

My uncle shook his head sadly, and she continued:

"Just listen to one thing, neighbor. My José has got no mind. I know that, worse luck! He takes after his poor deceased father, who hadn't two ideas a week, but who was a well-to-do and well-behaved man, for all that. Still, it is an infirmity to have so little faculty in your head, because if ill-luck has it that a man marries a silly wife, everything goes to the bad in a hurry. That's why I said to myself, when I saw my boy growing so long in the legs, that his brain would never feed him; and that if I could only leave him a little sum of money I should die happy. You know the good a few savings can do. In our poor homes it is everything. Now, I have never been able to lay by a penny, and I do suppose I'm not young enough to please a man, for I have not remarried. Well, if that's so, God's will be done! I am still young enough to work; and so I may as well tell you, neighbor, that the innkeeper at Chartier wants a servant. He pays good wages,—thirty crowns a year! besides perquisites, which come to half as much again. With all that,

strong and lively as I know I am, I shall have made my fortune in ten years. I can take my ease in my old days, and leave a little something to my poor boy. What do you say to that?"

Père Brulet thought a little, and then replied,—

"You are wrong, neighbor; indeed you are wrong!"

Mariton thought too; and then, understanding what the old man meant, she said,—

"No doubt, no doubt. A woman is exposed to blame in a country inn; even if she behaves properly, people won't believe it. That's what you meant, isn't it? Well, but what am I to do? Of course it deprives me of all chance of re-marrying; but we don't regret what we suffer for our children,—indeed, sometimes we rejoice in it."

"There is something worse than suffering," said my uncle,— "there is shame; and that recoils upon the children."

Mariton sighed.

"Yes," she said, "a woman is exposed to daily insults in a house of that kind. She must always be on the look-out to defend herself. If she gets angry, that injures the custom, and her masters don't like it."

"Some of them," said the old man, "try to find handsome and good-humored women like you to help sell their liquors; a saucy maid is often all an inn-keeper needs to do a better business than his neighbors."

"I know that," said Mariton; "but a woman can be gay and lively, and quick to serve the guests, without allowing herself to be insulted."

"Bad language is always insulting," said Père Brulet; "and it ought to cost an honest woman dear to get accustomed to

such ways. Think how mortified your son will be when he hears the carters and the bagmen joking with his mother."

"Luckily he's simple," said Mariton, looking at Joseph.

I looked at him too, and I was surprised that he did not hear a word of what his mother was saying in a voice loud enough for me to catch every word. I gathered from that that he was "hearing thick," as we said in those days, meaning one who was hard of hearing.

Joseph got up presently and went after Brulette, who was in her little goat-pen, which was nothing more than a shed made of planks stuffed with straw, where she kept about a dozen animals.

He flung himself on a pile of brushwood; and having followed him (for fear of being thought inquisitive if I stayed behind), I saw that he was crying inside of him, though there were no tears in his eyes.

"Are you asleep, José?" said Brulette; "if not, why are you lying there like a sick sheep? Come, give me those sticks you are lying on; I want the leaves for my goats."

So saying, she began to sing,—but very softly, because it wasn't the thing to make a racket on the day of her first communion.

I fancied her song had the usual effect of drawing Joseph from his dreams, for he rose, and went away. Then Brulette said to me,—

"What is the matter? He seems worse than usual."

"I think he must have heard that he is to be hired out and leave his mother," I replied.

"He expected it," said Brulette; "isn't it the custom for all of us to go out to service as soon as we have received the

sacrament? If I were not lucky enough to be my grandfather's only child, I should have to leave home and earn my living as others do."

Brulette did not seem much distressed at the thought of parting from Joseph; but when I told her that Mariton was also going to hire herself out and live far away, she began to sob, and rushing into the house, she flung herself on Mariton's neck, drying out,—

"Is it true, darling, that you are going to leave me?"

"Who told you that?" asked Mariton. "It is not decided."

"Yes, it is," cried Brulette; "you said so, and you want to hide it from me."

"As some inquisitive boys don't know how to hold their tongue," said Mariton, with a severe glance at me, "I must tell you all. Yes, my child, you must bear it like a brave and sensible girl who has given her soul to the good God this very day."

"Papa," said Brulette, turning to her grandfather, "how can you consent to let her go? Who is to take care of you?"

"You, my child," replied Mariton; "you are now old enough to do your duty. Listen to me,—and you too, neighbor; for here is something I have not yet told you."

Taking the little girl on her knee, while I stood between my uncle's legs (for his grieved look drew me to him), Mariton continued to reason, first with one, and then with the other.

"If it had not been for the friendship I owe you," she said, "I ought long ago to have left Joseph here and paid his board while I went out to service and laid by a little money. But I felt I was bound to bring you up, my Brulette, till you made

your first communion, because you are the youngest, and because a girl wants a mother longer than a boy. I hadn't the heart to leave you as long as you couldn't do without me. But now, you see, the time has come; and if anything can reconcile you to losing me, it is that you will soon feel useful to your grandfather. I have taught you how to manage a household and all that a good girl ought to know for the service of her parents and family. You'll practise it for my sake and to do credit to my teaching. It will be my pride and consolation to hear people tell how my Brulette takes good care of her grandfather, and manages his money like a little woman. Come, be brave, and don't deprive me of the little courage that I have got; for if you feel badly at my departure, I feel worse than you. Remember that I am leaving Père Brulet, who has been the best of friends to me, and my poor José, who will hear hard things said of his mother and his home. But my duty bids me do it, and you wouldn't wish me to go against that?"

Brulette cried till evening, and could not help Mariton in anything; but when she saw her hiding her tears as she cooked the supper, the girl flung her arms round her foster-mother's neck and vowed to do as she had taught her; and thereupon set to work with a will.

They sent me to find Joseph, who had forgotten (not for the first time, nor for the last either) that he ought to come home and get his supper like other people.

I found him in a corner all alone, dreaming and gazing at the ground as if his eyes would take root in it. Contrary to his usual custom, he did let me drag a few words out of him, in which, as I thought, there was more annoyance than grief.

He was not surprised at having to go out to service, knowing that he was now old enough, and could not do otherwise; but without showing that he had overheard his mother's plans, he complained that nobody loved him or thought him capable of doing good work.

I could not get him to explain himself any farther; and all that evening—for I stayed to say my prayers with him and with Brulette—he seemed to sulk, while Brulette, on the contrary, was full of kindness and caresses for everybody.

Soon after this, Joseph was hired out as a laborer to Père Michel on the estate of Aulnières.

Mariton went to work at an inn called the Bœuf Couronné, kept by Benoit at Saint-Chartier.

Brulette remained with her grandfather, and I with my parents, who had a small property and kept me at home to help them cultivate it.

The day of my first communion affected my spirits. I had made great efforts to bring myself into thoughts that were suitable to my age; and the catechising with Brulette had also changed me. Thoughts of her were always mixed up, I don't know how, with those I tried to give to the good God; and all the while that I was growing in grace as to my behavior, my head was running on follies of love which were beyond her years, and even for mine they were a little ahead of the proper season.

About this time my father took me to the fair at Orval, near Saint-Armand, to sell a brood-mare; and for the first time in my life I was away from home. My mother observed that I did not sleep or eat enough to support my growth, which was faster than customary in our part of the country,

and my father thought a little amusement would do me good. But I did not find as much in seeing the world and new places as I should have done six months earlier. I had a foolish, languishing desire to look at the girls, without daring to say a word to them; then I thought of Brulette, whom I fancied I could marry, for the sole reason that she was the only one I was not afraid of, and I reckoned her age and mine over and over again,—which didn't make the time go any faster than the good God had marked it on his clock.

As I rode back on the crupper behind my father on another mare which we had bought at the fair, we met, in a dip of the road, a middle-aged man who was driving a little cart laden with furniture, the which, being drawn by nothing better than a donkey, had stuck fast in the mud, and couldn't go on. The man was beginning to lighten the load by taking off part of it; and my father, seeing this, said to me,—

"Let us get down, and help a neighbor out of his trouble."

The man thanked us; and then, as if speaking to his cart, he said,—

"Come, little one, wake up; I shouldn't like to upset you."

When he said that, I saw, rising from a mattress, a pretty little girl, apparently about fifteen or sixteen years old, who rubbed her eyes, and asked what had happened.

"The road is bad, daughter," said the man, taking her up in his arms. "Come, I can't let you get your feet wet,—for you must know," he added, turning to my father, "she is ill with fever from having grown so fast. Just see what a rampant vine she is for a girl of eleven and a half!"

"True as God," said my father; "she is a fine sprig of a girl, and pretty as the sunshine, though the fever has rather paled her. But that will go off; feed her up, and she won't sell the worse for it."

When my father said this his head was still full of the talk of the horse-dealers at the fair. But seeing that the girl had left her sabots in the cart, and that it would be no easy matter to find them, he said to me,—

"Here! you are strong enough to hold the little girl for a while."

Then, putting her into my arms, he harnessed our mare into the place of the useless donkey, and pulled the cart out of the mud-hole. But there was another quagmire farther on, as my father knew, having gone that road several times; so calling to me to come on, he walked in front with the peasant, who was twisting his ass's ears.

I carried the great girl and looked at her with amazement; for though she was a head taller than Brulette, I could see by her figure that she was no older.

She was white and slender as a wax taper, and her black hair, breaking loose from a little cap made in the fashion of other parts, which had been rumped as she slept, fell over my breast and almost down to my knees. I had never seen anything so perfect as her pale face, her clear blue eyes fringed with thick lashes, her gentle, tired air, and even a perfectly black mark at one corner of her mouth, which made her beauty something strange and never to be forgotten.

She seemed so young that my heart said nothing to me, though it was close to hers; yet it was not so much her want

of years, perhaps, as the languor of her illness that made her appear so childish. I did not speak to her, and walked along without thinking her heavy; but I took pleasure in looking at her, the same pleasure that one feels at the sight of any fine thing, whether it be a girl or a woman, a flower or a fruit.

As we neared the second mud-hole, where her father and mine began, the one to urge his horse, the other to shove the wheel, the little girl spoke to me in a language which made me laugh, for I did not understand a word of it. She was surprised at my surprise, and then she spoke in the language we all speak.

"Don't strain yourself carrying me," she said; "I can walk very well without sabots; I am as much used to it as others."

"Yes, but you are ill," said I; "and I could carry four like you. What country do you belong to? That was a queer language you spoke just now."

"What country?" she said. "I don't belong to any country; I come from the woods, that's all. And you, where do you come from?"

"Ah! my little fairy, if you belong to the woods, I belong to the fields," I answered, laughing.

I was going to question her further, when her father came and took her from me.

"Well," he said, shaking hands with my father, "I thank you, my good people. And you, little one, kiss the kind lad who has carried you like a load of game."

The child did as she was bid; she was not old enough to be coy, and thinking no harm, she made no difficulty. She kissed me on both cheeks, saying: "Thanks to you, my fine

carrier;" then, passing into her father's arms, she was laid on her mattress, and seemed about to go to sleep again, without minding the jolts or thinking about the risks of the journey.

"Good-bye again!" said her father, taking me by the knee, to mount me on the mare's crupper. "A fine lad!" he remarked to my father, looking me over, "and as forward for the age you say he is as my little girl is for hers."

"He is a little the worse for it in the way of health," answered my father; "but, God willing, work will soon cure him. Excuse us if we go on before you; we have far to go, and I want to get home before night."

Thereupon my father struck his heels into the mare, which trotted off, while I, looking back, saw the man turn his cart to the right, and go off in another direction.

I was soon thinking of something else, but a recollection of Brulette coming into my head, I remembered the free kisses the little girl had given me, and wondered why Brulette always slapped me when I tried to get a kiss from her; then, as the ride was long, and I had got up before daylight, I fell asleep behind my father, mixing up in my tired head, I'm sure I don't know how, the faces of the two little girls.

My father pinched me to wake up, for he felt my weight on his shoulders, and was afraid I should tumble off. I asked him who those people we had met were.

"Which of them do you mean?" he said, laughing at my sleepy way. "We have met more than five hundred since morning."

"Those with the cart and donkey," I replied.

"Oh!" said he, "well, faith, I don't know; I never thought to ask. Probably they come from either La Marche or Champagne, for they speak with a foreign accent; but I was so busy watching to see if the mare was good at the collar that I didn't take notice of much else. She does pull very well, and didn't hang back at all; I think she will prove serviceable, and that I have not paid too dear for her."

From that time on (the trip having certainly done me good) I got better and better, and took a liking for work. My father gave me first the care of the mare, then that of the garden, and finally that of the field; and, little by little, I came to take pleasure in digging, planting, and harvesting.

By that time my father was a widower, and seemed anxious to let me benefit by the property my mother had left me. So he gave me a share in all our little profits, and wished for nothing so much as to see me turn out a good farmer. It was not long before he found I had a relish for the life; for if youth needs courage to deprive itself of pleasure in the service of others, it needs none at all to work for its own interests, above all when they are in common with those of a worthy family, honest in the division of profits, and agreeing well as to the work.

I still continued rather fond of gossiping and amusing myself on Sundays. But no one blamed me for that at home, because I was a good worker during the week. Such a life brought me health of body and good-humor, and a little more sense in my head than I gave promise of at first. I forgot all the vaporings of love, for nothing keeps you so quiet as to sweat with a spade from sunrise to sunset; and when night comes, those who have had to do with the

heavy, rich soil of our parts (the hardest mistress there is), amuse themselves best by going to sleep, to be ready for the morrow.

That is how I peacefully reached the age when it is allowable to think, not of little girls, but of grown-up ones; and at the very first stirring of such ideas, I found my cousin Brulette still fixed, above all others, in my inclinations.

Living alone with her grandfather, Brulette had done her best to be older than her years in sense and courage. But some children are born with the gift or the fate of being always petted and cared for. Mariton's former lodging was let to Mère Lamouche, of Vieilleville, who was poor, and was therefore ready to serve the Brulets as though they paid her wages, hoping thereby to get a hearing when she declared herself unable to pay the rent. It so turned out; and Brulette, finding that the new neighbor helped her, forestalled her, and made things comfortable for her, had time and ease to grow in mind and beauty without much effort of soul or body.

SECOND EVENING

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Little Brulette was now called "handsome Brulette," and was much talked of in our country-side; for within the memory of man no prettier girl or finer eyes or slimmer waist or rosier cheek or hair of brighter gold had ever been seen; her hand was like satin, and her foot as dainty as a young lady's.

All that tells you plain enough that my cousin did not work very hard; she never went out in bad weather, took care to shade herself from the sun, did not wash the clothes, and made no use of her limbs to tire them.

Perhaps you will think she was idle? Not at all. She did everything that she could not help doing fast and well. She had too much good sense not to keep order and neatness in the household and take the best care of her grandfather, as in duty bound. Moreover, she liked finery too well not to do a good bit of sewing; but as to hard work, she never so much as heard of it. There was no occasion that she should, and therefore it can't be said she was to blame.

There are some families where toil and nothing else comes early to warn young people that life is not so much a question of amusement in this low world as of earning a living among their fellows. But in Père Brulet's home there was little to do to make both ends meet. The old man was only in the seventies, and being a good workman, very clever at cutting stone (which, you know, is quite a science in these parts), steady, and much in demand by every one,

he earned a good living; and, thanks to the fact of being a widower with no one to support but his granddaughter, he had laid by quite a little sum against illness or accident. Fortunately he kept his health, so that, without riches, he was never in want.

My father, however, declared that Brulette loved ease and comfort too well; meaning by that, that she might have to come down to other things when it was time for her to marry. He agreed with me that she was as sweet and amiable in her ways as in her person; but he would not encourage me to court her in marriage. She was too poor, he said, to be a lady, and he often declared that a wife should be either rich or very full of energy. "At first sight, I like one as well as the other," he would say; "though perhaps, on second thoughts, I would rather have the energy than the money. But Brulette has not enough of either to tempt a wise man."

I knew my father was right; but my cousin's sweet eyes and gentle speech had more influence over me than he could have, and over other young fellows too,—for you must know that I was not the only one. From the time she was fifteen she was surrounded with striplings like me, whom she knew how to restrain and order about as she had done in her childish days. You might say she was born proud, and knew her value long before compliments had given her an idea of it. She loved praise and submission, and while she never allowed any one to make free with her, she was very willing they should love her timidly. I, like a good many others, was filled with the strongest desire to please her,

and at the same time I was often annoyed to find myself only one of a crowd.

Two of us, however, were privileged to talk to her rather more intimately, and to walk home with her when we met at a dance, or after church. I mean Joseph Picot and I. But we gained little or nothing by that; and perhaps, without saying so, we laid the blame to each other.

Joseph was still on the farm at Aulnières, about a mile and a half from Brulette's house, and half that distance from mine. He was a mere laborer. Though he was not really handsome, some, who did not object to a melancholy face, might think him so. His face was lean and yellow, and his brown hair, falling straight from his head and down his cheeks, made him even more puny in appearance. Nevertheless, he was not ill-made, nor ungraceful in body, and there was something in his closed jaw which always seemed to me the reverse of weakness. He was thought ill because he moved slowly and had none of the gayety of youth; but seeing him often, as I did, I knew it was his nature to be so, and that he really was not suffering at all.

He was, however, a very poor laborer of the soil, not over careful with cattle, and far from agreeable in temper. His wages were the lowest that were ever paid to a plough-boy, and people were surprised that his master still kept him; for nothing prospered with him, either in the stable or the fields, and he was so sullen when reproved that no one could do anything with him. But Père Michel declared that he never gave any angry answer, and he preferred those who submitted without a word, even if they did have sulky looks, to those who deceived you with flattery.

His faithfulness and the contempt he showed at all times for injustice made his master respect him, though he often remarked what a pity it was that an honest, upright lad had such soft muscles and a mind so indifferent to his work. But he kept him for what he was worth, from habit, and also out of consideration for Père Brulet, who was one of Père Michel's earliest friends.

In what I have said of Joseph you will readily see that he could not please the girls. Indeed, they never looked at him, except to wonder why they never caught his eye, which was large and clear as an owl's and never seemed to see anything.

Yet I was always jealous of him, because Brulette paid him more attention than she gave to any one else, and obliged me to do the same. She no longer lectured him, and openly accepted his temper as God made it, without getting angry or seeming at all annoyed. She forgave him his want of gallantry, and even politeness,—two things which she exacted from the rest of us. He might do all sorts of stupid things,—such as sit down on a chair if she left it for a moment, and oblige her to find another; or neglect to pick up her balls of wool when they rolled away; or break a bodkin or some other sewing utensil,—he might do all such things, and she would never say an impatient word to him; whereas she scolded and ridiculed me if I did a tenth part of them.

Then, she took care of him as if he were a brother. She kept a bit of meat put by for him when he came to see her, and made him eat it whether he was hungry or not, telling him he ought to strengthen his stomach and make blood.