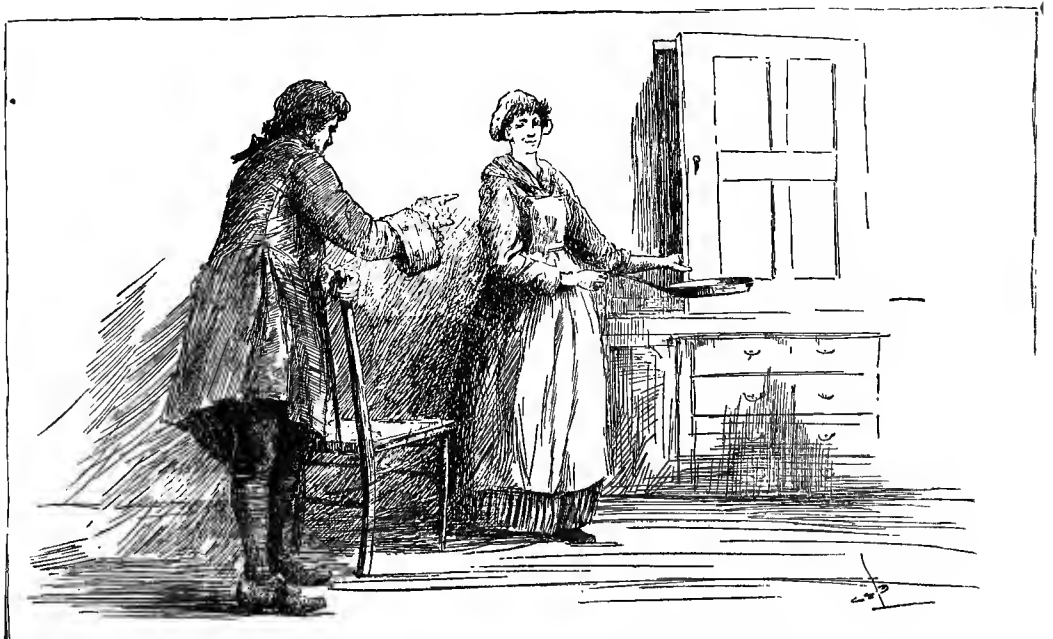

"YOU ARE PUTTING TOO MUCH BUTTER IN THAT OMELET."

BELLE-PLANTE AND CORNELIUS

BY

CLAUDE TILLIER

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

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INTRODUCTION.

One cannot have too much of Claude Tillier. He stands forth in bold relief as an eloquent example of the rugged, honest style of the past, made more effective by virtue of contrast with the conventional, artificial style of to-day. He appeals to us with an old gospel newly interpreted—the gospel of humanity. He calls a spade a spade, and speaks from the heart. Others have done the former, but so few, comparatively speaking, have done the latter that Tillier is almost unique. He speaks of liberty of mind and conscience, where others would tightly shackle heart and soul. His is a voice from out the vistas of the past, heard faintly, if at all, until now; and the voice, like an inward monitor, says, "There is more happiness for man in mind than in matter."

"A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country." How true this was of the gifted but unfortunate author of "My Uncle Benjamin" and "Belle-Plante and Cornelius," who was born in an

obscure town in one of the provinces of France; who was a philosopher in childhood; who cried "Vive l'Empereur" at school; who fought against the Spaniards in a distasteful cause under the laws of conscription; who taught a communal school; who won local fame as a pamphleteer; who fought cowled and tinselled corruption in high places; who was ignored by Paris because he was provincial, and who died in obscurity on October twelfth, eighteen hundred and forty-four, at the age of forty-three years! The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune were his; his country gave checks to proud ambition, and his people forgot him. It is a melancholy truth that the rewards of the truly great do not come until after death, and Tillier was no exception. He was clearly in advance of his time. He was fitted for the millennial age, wherein men shall listen and believe and be content; but, by some error of Karmic disposition, he crept into this breathing world of ours all too soon for himself and those whom he sought to teach and to discipline. His portion was blows, his penalty oblivion, and his destiny a practical joke upon genius. He was enough of a satirist to concentrate the fierce hatred and determined opposition of a clerical cabal and a political clique; but he was too much of a

sage to be appreciated at his true value. Noah was reviled; John the Baptist was met with scorn; Luther was persecuted; the record of the world is punctuated by the martyrdom of thinkers. Tillier, therefore, was a repetition of history, wherein those who were born to warn, to cheer, to free and to save were neither honored nor believed until they spoke from the dim recesses of their tombs.

It was Tillier's misfortune that he was born in France, which has all the unreason and forgetfulness of a child, and that he saw the light too early. Nevertheless, upon the white sands of time he left footprints, which, half obliterated by the waves of years and the rush of hurrying feet, were discovered before they disappeared forever. A mere chance visit to a bookstall led to the resurrection of "My Uncle Benjamin"—that delightful chronicle of the misadventures, good deeds and sage soliloquies of the *bon vivant* Rathery—and the rehabilitating of Tillier in the worth originally screened from the world by the dust and smoke of conflict. Justice was tardy, but none the less certain. "My Uncle Benjamin," in a newer and brighter garb than the tailor of Clamecy could have made, was again placed before mankind.

The effect was not without phases of interest, in-

dicating the infinite variety of taste. Those who read a book for mere incident were bored; those who would drape a faultless Psyche in ugly flannels lifted their hands and eyes at the bold freedom of the author's pen; but those who read for the sake of the truths which lie like jewels in the rich mines of an honest author's paragraphs, tossed aside hectic sentiment, doctrinal polemics and the like and hailed Tillier as a new draught of old wine, meat after *blanc mange*, philosophy after puerility. One could read Tillier again and again, and still find new beauties upon each page.

But the best was yet to come. "My Uncle Benjamin," while it established the author upon a firm basis of merit, was not the full expression of the powers of his pen. A man like Tillier could not have stopped there, writing "Finis" after wit and satire alone. He was a mine to be developed, and the lead unearthed "Belle-Plante and Cornelius," which now for the first time reaches the American public, and in a handsomer form than poor Tillier e'er dreamed that book of his would one day be given.

As a story, "Belle-Plante and Cornelius" may not have the direct human interest of "My Uncle Benjamin;" but, as a keen and sympathetic study of

the fair ideal and the bald real, of the higher and baser instincts of man, of the diversity of types, of the compensations of genius, and of the charms of the muck-rake, it ranks far above the other book. Belle-Plante and his brother Cornelius are as undeniable types of to-day and of every age as are Dives and Lazarus. Belle-Plante represents the spirit of greed which nurses the real because of its intrinsic value as a marketable commodity. Cornelius stands for the Sisyphus who toils up the slope which leads to the heights of fame, hampered at every step, strained at every point and frequently borne backward by the weight of the commonplace. Belle-Plante is the plodder; Cornelius is the poet. Belle-Plante is the world, which exacts every farthing of tribute ere it will listen to the dreaming Cornelius. Belle-Plante is humanity, which steals the fruits of genius and leaves Cornelius penniless. Cornelius is Tillier, but slightly idealized, while Belle-Plante is the ill fortune which robbed the world of a philosopher. In refusing to give his brother meat and drink, Belle-Plante merely gives the highest expression to commercial benevolence.

Tillier says: "My opinion is that man is a machine made expressly for sorrow." The reader will do well to turn to "My Uncle Benjamin" and

read the sermon of which this sentence is the comprehensive text. The truth then uttered was amplified into Cornelius, who, lured on by his ideals, pursues a mirage. This is pessimism, and the world loves optimism. Perhaps; but pessimism is a truth, and optimism is only a creed. Truths are eternal; creeds are not alway truths. Belle-Plante prospers over the muck-rake, while Cornelius wins nothing save a woman's love and an uncertain fate. It is so in life, albeit pessimism is frowned upon and life is regarded as the joyous ante-chamber to an infinitely and monotonously happy beyond. If the latter were true, then this life would be an anti-climax or heaven a superfluity; but it is not, as Tillier demonstrates in his quaint fashion. The only ray of sunshine, aside from that which is generated in the heart of genius and shines only there, is that Belle-Plante's wealth cannot win the love of Cornelius' betrothed. In fine, gold cannot buy honest love. That is the silver lining of the cloud of pessimism.

FRANKLYN W. LEE.

BELLE-PLANTE AND CORNELIUS.

CHAPTER I.

I BEG you to believe that I am neither an inspector of primary schools nor a director of indirect taxes; therefore I am not acquainted with all the villages of Nièvre; yet I would willingly bet with the first of the aforesaid functionaries who might come along that the prettiest of all these villages is Armes. Armes is on the road from Clamecy to Avallon, twenty-two miles from Avallon and two steps from Clamecy, which continually attracts it and will finally absorb it as the earth absorbs an imprudent aerolite which ventures too close. If you light your cigar at the last houses of the suburb called Bethléem, it will not go out before you reach Armes. You, then, who live within a dozen miles of Clamecy, go to see Armes, if you have not yet seen it; and, if you know how to handle a crayon and have an album, take your album with you. I answer for it that you will not regret your money;

and, moreover, if you do regret it, although counsellors are not payers, I, Claude Tillier, will reimburse you.

I love the spring with its pink and white bushes; I love the summer with its fallow fields encircled with bright verdure; I love also the winter with its dark trees, whose frost-covered heads make them look like judges wearing powdered wigs; but more than all, I love those warm, moist days of autumn, when the sun is bald and without polish, and when a flaky cloud, like white floating down, fills all the space between earth and sky; when the trees, mountains, and hamlets look gray and misty, as if reflected by a dull mirror, and when the country resembles an elysian landscape; when the green of the woods is tinged with brown and red, and when long trails of yellow leaves are borne upon the streams like a funeral procession; when, in short, feverish and consumptive nature still wears a smile, but that weak smile which sometimes remains on the lips of the dead. Now then, start from Clamecy on one of those delightfully fine days. I tell you this because then the float is over, and the Yonne is rid of those great piles of grayish logs which give its valley the odor of mould and the prosaic aspect of a lumber-yard.

As far as the Maladrerie, an old hospital for lepers, now abolished and of which nothing is left but the chapel, the road goes on prosaically between a trimmed hedge and a field of lucern; it goes on without thinking of anything, looking neither to right nor to left, and thoroughly tired of the burden imposed upon it by the department of roads and bridges; but opposite the Maladrerie it suddenly awakens from its somnolence, turns abruptly to the left, and enters upon the ridge of one of those high mountains whose chain, after crossing the entire department of Nièvre, buries itself gradually, and finally disappears altogether in the gravel of the department of Yonne. Here the road is a magnificent terrace, which, from an elevation of one hundred and fifty feet, casts a proud and haughty look upon the valley. At your feet the Yonne, continually agitated by the gravel falling from the road, like an ox tormented by flies, winds its way slowly through its meadow-land, and the trees for market, falling pell-mell down the rough hillsides, come to bathe their roots in the green and sleeping waters of the river.

At your left rises, like a huge dilapidated wall, the second tier of the mountain. At the foot of this gigantic ruin runs and flees before you a long

line of houses which serve as a suburb to the village. For Armes is no shabby and miserable peasant: like those marquises who desire pages, it has its suburb, like a city. All its houses are new; they all have a red roof and green blinds; all a vine which envelops them with its large leaves and in summer makes them a beautiful green front; they are not, like those of our streets, glued together by a common wall; they are separated from each other by little gardens, by great undivided walnut-trees which mingle their branches over the roofs, by oaks fallen from the summit of the mountain with detached sections of rock. On seeing them so adorned and so coquettish, you are reminded of peasant women in their Sunday costumes, walking hand in hand.

Plants of all sorts grow between the stones loosened from the rock, and with every breath of wind shower their flowers and insects upon the roofs. About midway of this avenue of houses you come to the pass of Armes, the first of that long series of passes which make the Yonne artificially navigable a few hours in the week. The river, stopped suddenly by this gate which the lumber dealers have shut in its face, overflows noisily over the green and grassy stones, and falls in two white sheets

into the pit. The rest of the river passes through a pretty mill-race which skirts the road. Its bed is clean and free of reeds; but on its banks grow in profusion those high amphibious plants which have half of their roots in the water and the other half in the earth. After turning a little mill, entirely hidden under two elms, it hastens to rejoin the maternal bed.

Nothing is more pleasing than the islet formed between the mill-race and the river: the Yonne seems to press it lovingly in its arms, as a mother holds her baby; it reminds you of a blossoming branch in the middle of a vessel filled with water; it consists of clumps of alders, willows, hazel-trees, and Italian poplars, separated from each other by a thousand rivulets which overflow from the mill-race. If there are two of you, and you have sweet confidences to share, do not take refuge under this verdure; in the first place, the miller's bull-dog might bite you; in the next place, all these flowing, falling, rushing waters, talking or shouting among the roots of these trees, all these twittering birds, and this eternal chatter of the mill which would not break off its tictac for M. Dupin in person, would stifle your best words on your lips.

Here we are at Armes. You are in the village

square. If you wish to speak to the mayor, this is the place where he lives, as well as the principal personages of the vicinity. These houses affect an air of importance, like their masters; for like master, like house, is as true as like master, like man. Many of them have balconies, and some are decorated with the aristocratic Venetian blind.

Are you thirsty? Here is a big spring which gushes forth at one end of the square. To be sure, this water is not as good as Burgundy; but it is famous for miles around on account of its clearness, and you could not drink cooler. After stopping in a large sheltered pool, in which the ducks and the children of the village paddle about, it goes on freely, rippling over the gravel of the road; but, when almost at the end of its course, it falls into a trap which the brewer has set for it and permits itself to be bottled. Thus it is that all the impulses of liberty to which one abandons himself in his youth often change into servility on the arrival of old age.

Poor spring! you have allowed yourself to be tempted by the agreeable bitterness of boiled barley and hops; but, instead of going into tubs to be maltreated in a hundred ways by college-scouts, was it not better to wander between green branches, to

fling your flakes of foam upon the overhanging grasses, to form delightful eddies at the roots of the willows, to reflect the sky, and to murmur with these twittering birds? You believed in a merry destiny; but what will come of it all? When your foam has sparkled for a few moments in a beautiful flash of crystal, what will be your dwelling-place? A hideous bladder, and then they—you understand, they—at the corner of a column! May this serve as a lesson to those who toady to power!

You cannot help sketching in your album the high peak which overlooks the village. Two narrow valleys creep up each of its flanks like two stairways, reminding you of the steps to a gigantic castle in abandonment. Often on its bushy summit you notice the appearance, like the statues that they place on the frontal of an edifice, of an old woman tending her cow or a little shepherd singing, whose song, torn by the wind, reaches you in shreds.

At Armes, then, in 1780, lived a certain Belle-Plante—Monsieur Belle-Plante to some, and Master Belle-Plante to others. As he was rich and a churchwarden, the priest, the mayor, and many others called him Monsieur Belle-Plante; but, as he was a farmer, the peasants said Master Belle-Plante for short, unless they had some favor to ask of him.

But I who have nothing to ask of Monsieur or Master Belle-Plante, what shall I call him? I think it prudent, before deciding for one or the other of these two titles, to examine their respective worth. In the first place, what does the title Monsieur signify? Does it express, as the possessive pronoun would seem to indicate, any dependence whatever on the part of him who gives it upon him to whom it is given? But in that case why does a master call his valet Monsieur, unless it be said that in many circumstances the master is dependent upon the valet? Does it indicate social superiority? Then why is it that the minister gives his shoemaker and his tailor the title Monsieur? Does it come from the word *senior*, elder, as is maintained by those who haunt the dictionaries and run after etymologies? But how happens it then that a father calls his son Monsieur when he has torn his trousers or his books? Thus the word Monsieur is accused and convicted of lacking common sense. It is a big imbecile who takes off his hat to everybody, who stops everybody, and who has nothing to say to them. It rebels against definition. Monsieur Napoleon Landais, Napoleon though he is, would not make it mean anything. I can as well say Monsieur to my horse as to my tailor, just as

my tailor can as well say Monsieur to his goose as to the editor of "L'Association." I vote for its exclusion from the dictionary. So I shall say Master Belle-Plante. Now that this difficulty is settled, we can enter upon the matter before us.

Master Belle-Plante hired five or six small farms, which did not prevent him from cultivating the fine lands which were his own property. His wife had left him two boys: François Belle-Plante, whom they called Belle-Plante for short, because he was the elder, and our friend Cornelius.

CHAPTER II.

It was a dirty and rainy morning in the month of March. Belle-Plante and Cornelius were walking along the Clamecy road, one carrying a large hare over his shoulder, the other swinging in his hand a bundle of books suspended by a string. They were going to school. Belle-Plante was strongly built; he had four solid limbs of which a plough could have been made, a nose not too ill-shapen, a mouth which was not absolutely too large, little gray eyes with which he saw as well as with large black eyes; but he had no heart, or at least only one of those hearts of ice which the warm breezes of youth cannot melt. He was one of those dense organizations to which nature has given good weight, in which bones, flesh, and muscles have not been spared, but in which electricity is totally lacking. At the age of sixteen Belle-Plante was a man made for egoism and cunning, he loved nobody; he had but one passion, that of accumulation; he would have dismounted from his horse to pick up a pin; he would have given his soul to the devil for

a franc, and certainly the devil would have been the dupe. Nevertheless, because he was as clean and neat as a six-franc piece, mothers held him up as an example to their sons.

Cornelius was just the opposite of Belle-Plante. He was a handsome youth, slender and straight, with a high forehead as smooth as ivory, large flaming eyes, and brown hair which fell in careless disorder, like a tuft of honeysuckle along a wall; he was good, loving, generous; he had tears and big pennies for all sorts of wretchedness. Saint Martin has been canonized for having given a beggar half his cloak; on such an occasion, our friend Cornelius would have given the whole of his. Nevertheless our friend Cornelius is in hell; for neither the priest, nor M. Guillerand, nor Master Belle-Plante's big whip, had ever been able to induce him to make his first communion. Moreover, he had a keen and precocious mind; in him developed one of those bold and inquiring intellects which wish to know everything, to analyze everything, to fathom everything. He would master a big book in a day, and, when he had started in pursuit of a truth—of a truth within his reach, of course—he was like a hound on the trail of a hare: he did not slacken his pace until he had run it down.

He was desperately absent-minded: he was al ways dreaming, calculating, comparing. Whe his father sent him to the fields, he lay down in th grass and looked at the sky; consequently he neve returned without an indictment on his back or with out having lost two or three cows. It was told o him—though I can scarcely credit it—that one day his father having sent him to the cellar, he cam back with the neck of the bottle in his hand, with out having noticed that he had knocked off the res against a step. All this led Master Belle-Plante t say that Cornelius was the most idiotic fellow in th neighborhood. Moreover, he was exemplarily in different to all that was envelope, exterior, surface. He said that it was always their worst pills whic the apothecaries wrapped in silver leaf, and he paid no more heed to his dress than an onion pays to it peel. He was constantly unbuttoned; his coat wa in rags; where there was no hole, you could be sur that there was a grease spot. It was necessary t dress him anew from top to toe every year; conse quently Couture, the tailor, was the only person i Armes who held him in any esteem.

Belle-Plante had respectfully spread his handker chief over his felt hat to keep it from the rain, an had turned up the bottoms of his pantaloons wit

quite religious care, though they were made of nothing but linsey-woolsey. This, moreover, was one of the thousand recommendations given him on her death-bed by his mother, all of whose avarice he had inherited, either to the prejudice or to the advantage of Cornelius; and, whether it was muddy or dusty, he never failed in this duty. As for Cornelius, he had spread nothing, turned up nothing, save his stockings, which kept falling about his heels with an obstinacy that filled him with despair. Belle-Plante, before putting down his foot, chose, like the cat, the driest spot in the road. Cornelius, on the contrary, went straight ahead like a royal route, paying no heed to the mud-puddles scattered along the road, and even without seeing them; consequently Cornelius was as dirty as a poodle.

The two brothers walked side by side, like two soldiers in the ranks, without speaking to each other, each absorbed in his own reflections. Belle-Plante was the first to break the silence.

"What are you thinking about, savant?" (this was the nickname given to Cornelius in the village) said he to his brother, roughly slapping him on the shoulder.

"None of your clownishness, Belle-Plante, I beg

of you. If we had been in the city, I should have thought that a tile had fallen on my shoulder."

"All right, Monsieur propriety; we will abstain in future from this clownishness. But what were you thinking about just now?"

"I was calculating how many yards of gummed taffeta it would take to shelter all the highways in the kingdom from the rain."

"Indeed, they are afraid of dampness, the highways; and the cross-roads, savant, would you do nothing for them? Are they more to be despised than the highways, or less subject to rheumatism?"

"We would cover the cross-roads with ticking."

"That's right: honor to whom honor is due; but how about the money with which to do this? You would have to invent a gold-mine."

"That is not necessary, Belle-Plante; we would increase the taxes, that's all."

"You are very generous with others' money, savant! It is easy to see that you do not count on becoming a proprietor. The taxes are already quite heavy enough as they are, without adding to them!"

"Heavy, I admit, but not because they are too high: it is because they are ill-spent that they are heavy. When the taxes are well spent; when the

public functionaries do not save vast domains out of their salaries; when they do not place in foreign banks the capital which they receive from the State —the money taken from the taxpayers comes back to them, as the water which the sun has taken away from the earth comes back to it in the form of rain. The higher the taxes, if they are well spent, the happier the people."

"That is another of those stupidities which you savants call paradoxes."

"No, my dear fellow, it is not a paradox; it is a good and beautiful truth. Imagine an immense roof under which all the inhabitants of France walk. The tall men will carry it almost entirely; but what will the short carry? Nothing. Such is the tax; light on the poor man, it weighs on the rich alone. Suppose that His Very Christian Majesty were to execute great public works in each locality, what would be the share of the expense borne by each laborer? A few *sous;* and to him will come back the best part of the money spent. He will have sown a grain of corn to harvest an ear. Our philosophers seek the means of improving the condition of the lower classes of society; if this means exists, it must be found in the well-advised disposition of well-distributed taxes. To force the rich man to

furnish labor to the poor man—that is the whol problem."

"Well-distributed taxes! I see what you ar coming at, savant. You would like us proprietor to pay everything, and the poor man nothing. An why should the rich pay for the poor? Tell me that According to your system, the government woul have to sell its salt, its gunpowder, its tobacco, fo three hundred francs a pound to the millionaire and for a *sou* a pound to the day laborer. I main tain, for my part, that in a well-organized societ taxes should be paid so much a head, as in the taver each one pays his scot, as in the theatre each on pays for his seat."

"That would be in the highest degree unjust Belle-Plante; for almost all social expenditures ar made for the benefit of the rich. The poor man ha no need of rural constables, for he has no estates t guard; no need of policemen—the destitution o his hut is an excellent lock which the thieves woul never think of picking; no need of courts, for h who has nothing has no law-suits; no need of pris ons, for they are made for him; no need of a army—in time of war the army takes his childre from him, and in time of peace it prevents him fron being the strongest; no need of such resplenden

royalty—the king does not invite him to his festivities, and it is not upon him that he bestows pensions from his privy purse; no need of the four faculties of the university, for his children do not study Latin; no need of libraries, for he does not know how to read; no need of canals and highways, for he has never anything but a beggar's sack to carry; no——"

"*Et cetera!*" exclaimed Belle-Plante, insolently; "for my part, I am thinking of more serious things. I am figuring how much we shall get for this hare at the fair."

"But this hare does not belong to us," replied Cornelius, promptly; "you know very well that my father makes a present of it to Monsieur Guillerand."

"Monsieur Guillerand! Monsieur Guillerand! It would be a pity to have it pass before the red face of that old glutton, who sends to the pastry-cook's for a tart as soon as he has the smallest coin."

"What concern is it of yours if Monsieur Guillerand likes tarts?"

"To be sure, Cornelius, it is no concern of ours; but do we not pay Monsieur Guillerand? He would be very lucky if all his pupils were as prompt as we are in paying his bills. Look at those wretched

Ducrocs, who wear cloth coats all the week, and owe him for three years' schooling."

"And, according to you, the fact that the Ducrocs owe him for three years' schooling is a good reason why we should rob him of his hare."

"I do not say that, Cornelius; but don't you understand, you who have so much wit, according to Monsieur Guillerand, that, if we give him this hare, we shall do him more harm than good: he will invite to breakfast that scamp of a Benjamin Rathery, that drunkard Page, that gulf Arthus, who swallows a calf's head like so much soup; they will drink thirty bottles of his best wine; they will empty all his decanters; then they will take him to the café, they will put on his wig with the wrong side in front, as they did the other day, so that he will not know his face from the back of his head, and, on reaching home again, he will beat Madame Guillerand, that excellent woman who always asks mercy for us when he thrashes us."

"So it is in Monsieur Guillerand's interest that you take possession of his hare?"

"In his interest clearly understood, Cornelius. If you were charged to hand a freshly-ground dagger or a pistol all primed to a child, would you give it to him?"

"In the first place, I would not undertake such a commission. Do you know that with such arguments as that we should no longer be obliged to pay anybody? And who made you the judge of Monsieur Guillerand's interest? If he wishes to invite Monsieur Benjamin Rathery, Monsieur Page, Monsieur Arthus, to breakfast; if he wishes them to drink his wine; if he wishes to get drunk—does that affect you? By what right would you interfere? Here is a man of brains, who desires to throw himself into the water; you, who are only a fool, divine his design, and you stop him; do you not see that you are guilty toward him of an arbitrary act, that you invade his individual liberty? If this man wishes to drown himself, he has good reasons. Does he not know better than you what he ought to do? Why do you substitute your free will for his? If I were judge, I would sentence you to pay him damages. You stop him because he does ill, you say. But what proves to you that he is doing ill? If you think it ill in me to shave off my beard or to cut my corns, does that give you a right to prevent me?"

"But," said Belle-Plante, "we do not make such astonishing progress in your Monsieur Guillerand's school."

"Speak for yourself, Belle-Plante, I beg of you.

But is it his fault if you make no progress in his school? Instead of going to your lessons, you go to market to see how and at what price hay and oats are selling, and when you are given money to buy pens, you write with old stubs that you pick up under the table, and you put the money in your pocket."

"It does very well for you to talk, you who took to pieces Monsieur Guillerand's cuckoo clock on Saturday, and at the very time when he was teaching us the catechism, impious wretch!"

"What good does the catechism do one? I much prefer analyzing the cuckoo. Now that I have made its autopsy, I understand its connection with the mechanism of a clock."

"Yes, but you have lost a wheel, and the bird will sing no more."

"Well, we are rid of its intolerable screech. It had a fine voice, your cuckoo!"

"All the same, my father has to pay for it as if it were a tenor. Much good, indeed, does it do your brothers and sisters that you understand the mechanism of a cuckoo! Do you know that it means twenty francs taken out of our legitimate portion?"

"Sordid soul!" cried Cornelius, swinging his bundle of books around his head like a sling, "you de-

serve—but no, it is not your fault that you are thus organized. Did I reproach you when you poisoned our ass in trying to purge her?"

"Oh, do not get angry, Cornelius," said Belle-Plante, who was as saving of his epidermis as of his money; "the blows that you would give me would do you no good, and those that you would receive would do you harm. Instead of quarrelling like two grown persons, let us come back to our hare."

"Well, to come back to our hare; I tell you that in right this little quadruped belongs to Monsieur Guillerand, and I will not suffer him to be wronged in the matter; that is my way of looking at it."

"Yes, and a fine way of looking at it it is! I tell you, my poor savant, with all the wit that Monsieur Guillerand attributes to you, you will never be able to look out for your interests."

"Look out for one's interests! That is what they all say; they have no other phrase on their lips; for them it is an axiom of morality; little care they for honor, probity, justice, provided they look out for their interests! But the wolf too, when he kills the lamb, looks out for his interests! And what good does it do a miser to look out for his interests?"

"Why, he lays up money."

"And again I ask: the money which he lays up, what good does it do him? The money that one lays up! why, it is money demonetized! If your strong-box is to remain irrevocably closed, it makes little difference whether you throw into it golden coins or bits of old crockery. There are people whom we decorate with the name of sages; well, if we were to say to those people: 'You shall pass the rest of your days in a cold, dark cell; for bed you shall have only the mouldy earth; you shall live on hard bread and foul water; this arch just above the ground shall be your sky; spring and winter shall pass over your head without your noticing it; your wife shall die, your children marry without your knowledge; you shall hear no other sound than the steps of your jailer on the stairway and the grinding of your lock; but you shall receive one hundred francs a day,' they would figure that at the end of thirty years they would have laid up one million one hundred and ninety-six thousand francs, and they would accept the bargain joyfully. And in your opinion, Belle-Plante, are generations anything else than caravans that travel from the cradle to the grave? Each one expends upon the journey the treasure of joy which God has given him: young girls have bare shoulders, young men have

flaming eyes and lips moist with kisses; they go away together, dancing over the flowery greenswards by the roadside; the aged pluck and let fall into their cup the withered roses of their crown, and the decrepit are gently lulled, with half-closed eyes, by the swinging of their litter; but the miser —do you know what he does? He fills a sack with stones, he carries it from night till morning on his shoulders, and on his arrival deposits it at the edge of his grave."

"That is all very well, savant; but suppose one falls sick?"

"Well, he goes to the hospital."

"And suppose one becomes infirm, lame, one-armed, blind, and cannot work?"

"He goes to his nearest relative, to his father, to his sister, and asks of them a place at the corner of their hearth."

"Very well! But suppose they will not receive him?"

"Then he spits upon the threshold of their door, and goes to beg his bread."

"Yes, and a fine condition that is, a very honorable condition—that of a beggar!"

"And what have you to say against the beggars? The lowest of beggars is happier than the richest

of misers. If the beggar has a *sou*, he enjoys it; but though the miser had a million, he would not enjoy a single farthing of it. Do you know what a beggar is, Belle-Plante? He is a man who does not sow and who yet has bread, a man who builds no houses and who has a roof, a man who has no money at interest and who has an income, a man who has no clothing-merchant or tailor and who has clothes. Independence is the greatest of blessings; that you cannot deny; well, is not the beggar the most independent of all men? He is not fastened to the soil by the roots of a profession; when he finds it uncomfortable where he is, he takes his sack and goes elsewhere. He is like the bird that flies straight ahead and finds, wherever he stops, grains to eat and a green branch for shelter. The greatest and the richest have duties from which they cannot free themselves, occupations which they cannot postpone. You yourself, when you hear the rain beating against your shutters, or the wind howling in your chimney, would quite as soon remain in bed as go into the fields; nevertheless the dogs are barking, the servants trampling in the yard: there is no rest, out you must go; but he, the beggar, has no duties to tyrannize over him, no occupations to push him on. He is like the cat which we feed,

and of which we ask nothing. No one can harness him to an odious task; he does only what he likes. If he is a poet, he sits in the sun and makes verses; if he is of a mechanical turn of mind, he traces in the dust, with his stick, the plan of a machine which will change the face of the world; if he is a dethroned king, he dreams of a treatise on the polity of nations."

"But," said Belle-Plante, shrugging his shoulders, "how about the vermin that devour him?"

"Well, what of it? He scratches himself."

"But observe, Cornelius, I have supposed him to be one-armed."

"Then he rubs himself against a wall, like an ass troubled by the flies. To scratch one's self! Why, that is a felicity peculiar to the beggar, and forbidden to the rich! If the king knew the pleasure that there is in scratching one's self, he would want vermin too. Create in a man a continual need and give him the means of satisfying it, and he will be the happiest of all beings. As for me, I am not ambitious: if God will grant me the favor of a little pimple that shall itch throughout the centuries, and leave me one finger with which to scratch it, I will ask no other paradise."

Belle-Plante, contrary to his custom, allowed

Cornelius to go his own pace. Meanwhile he was hunting for an argument such as would have an influence upon his mind. When he thought that he had found what he wanted, he stopped him short.

"Permit me, Cornelius; I have a little objection to offer. You say that in right this little quadruped on my shoulder here belongs to Monsieur Guillerand; but your steel rod which he confiscated the other day, in right did that belong to him?"

"By no means," answered Cornelius, whose clear, straightforward mind never rebelled against a solid argument; "to confiscate is not to acquire; that is written in all the codes. Looked at in that light, this would be a restitution on the part of Monsieur Guillerand."

"Evidently," said Belle-Plante. "It is the Carnival season, the time consecrated to gluttony and folly; there are a multitude of epicures in search of game; we shall easily sell our hare for three francs ten *sous*, and perhaps something besides."

"My steel rod cost me thirty *sous*," said Cornelius; "then I shall have to give him back five *sous*; or, that the article may change in nature as little as possible, I will buy him five or six larks."

"That's right; short reckonings make long friends," said Belle-Plante, fully determined to see that Cornelius should have nothing to restore.

"But," said Cornelius, "I have an objection to offer."

"What is it?" asked Belle-Plante, burying his hands in his pockets majestically, and looking at him as a victor looks at the crowd from the height of his car of triumph.

"It is that I am in no humor to remain for an hour in the market, planted by the side of your hare like a stake; my biographer would be sure to refer to it."

"Indeed it would be a stain upon your name! But rest easy, you will have nothing to do but pocket your money. I, who have nothing to fear from biographers, will charge myself with the task, especially as you would give your hare to the first cook who might come along to haggle for it, or perhaps to the first beggar who should excite your pity in the street."

On reaching the bridge of Chiches, the two brothers separated. Belle-Plante took the road to the market, and Cornelius went to wait upon the promenade. An hour later Belle-Plante came back, jingling coin in his hands.

"Here!" said he to Cornelius, giving him a handful of *sous*, "there is your share."

Our friend Cornelius would not have suspected the good faith even of a sheriff's officer. If he distrusted his brother, I beg of you not to bear him ill will on that account; it was because he knew him, for men with lofty and generous souls distrust only those whom they know. So Cornelius began to count his money.

"'Tis not worth while counting it," said Belle-Plante; "you have twenty-five *sous* for your share."

"That is not right," said Cornelius; "half of seventy is thirty-five."

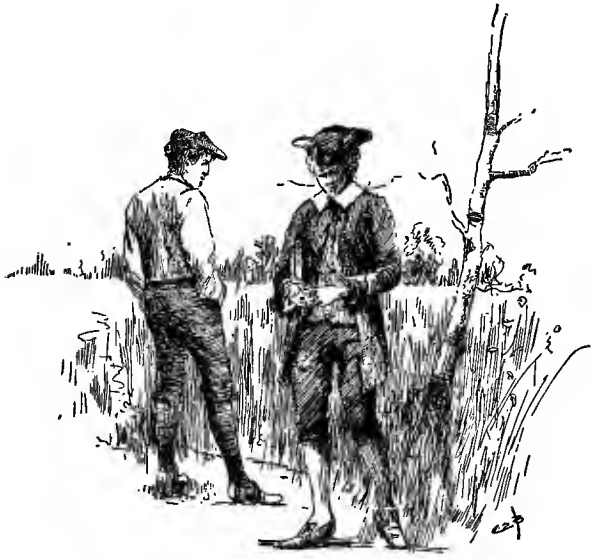
"Yes, but forty-nine *sous* was all that I could get for our hare. I have given you half a *sou* more than your share; but with a brother one does not figure too closely."

The fact was that Belle-Plante had sold the hare for four francs, and even then the wretch had put with the money of the good Cornelius a counterfeit which he had been keeping for eighteen months.

"But," said Cornelius, "I thought that hares brought a higher price."

"The error of a savant whose nose is always plunged in his books! Besides, our hare was as

thin as a teal; you did not notice that, Cornelius. I would bet that he was fifty years old. He must



CORNELIUS AGAIN COUNTED HIS SOUS.

have been some old hare, who had had a difficulty with his master and given him the slip."

Cornelius again began to count his *sous*.

CHAPTER III.

CORNELIUS, as we said, had again begun to count his *sous*. Another minute, perhaps another second, and he would find the unfortunate counterfeit. There was only one way of avoiding this catastrophe—that of drawing our learned friend into a scientific discussion. Belle-Plante, who was a little Hannibal in the matter of strategy, was equal to the emergency.

"I never saw so many hares in the market," said he. "If the invention of gunpowder was fatal to anybody, it certainly was to the hares. Do you not think that in the end the poachers will destroy this honest race of herbivora?"

Cornelius, on hearing these words from Belle-Plante, quickly stuffed his money into his pocket.

"Destroy a race of herbivora?" he cried, after collecting his thoughts for a moment; "the question is very serious, and——"

"Well," said Belle-Plante, satisfied with having attained his object, and foreseeing the shower of arguments which would be poured upon him, "since

the question is so serious, let us assume that I have said nothing about it."

"Not at all," said Cornelius; "it is too late to retract, and I should be a wretch if I should allow it. You said that the hunters would finally destroy a race of herbivora. I take note of your words."

"Perhaps you will not sue me for damages if I refuse to listen to you?"

"Undoubtedly not; but you opened the wine, and you must drink it. Do you believe, Belle-Plante, in spontaneous generation?"

"What is spontaneous generation? Is it an animal that goes upon the water?"

"I ask you if you believe that the earth contains within its bosom a creative power which can produce beings without the aid of any other action."

"I do not seek difficulties where there are none. I believe that to make a calf it takes a bull and a cow, and a bean to make a pod of beans."

"So you believe that there are beans because God, after having made a bean, amused himself by planting it in the earth; that there are calves because, after having made a bull, he extracted one of its ribs while it was asleep and made a cow therefrom?"

"Oh, you bore me with your cows and your beans!"

"So much the better if I bore you! I bore you, then you listen to me. I will profit by the attention which you are willing to grant me to ask you if you believe in the deluge."

"What comes of believing in the deluge?"

"Many advantages which it would take too long to enumerate now; but tell me, do you believe in the deluge?"

"Well, yes, I believe in the deluge."

"Then, the deluge having made a clean sweep of all beings, if you do not believe in spontaneous generation, you will have to admit that Noah must have procured, either by himself or through his correspondents, a pair of the most microscopic insects, the sex of which he had previously verified, as well as the seed of the plants the most——"

"If I had known as much," said Belle-Plante, "I would not have believed in the deluge."

"Well, I pass the deluge; but you will be no further advanced for that, my poor friend. It is proved, according to recent discoveries in geology, that the earth has passed through different periods. At first it was in the gaseous state, floating in space like an immense whirlwind of dust; then incandescent; then as soft and warm as a baked apple. The materials that form its nucleus have re-

mained in a state of ebullition; but the upper layers gradually cooling off, it has become what it is to-day—a state which I might compare to that of a hard egg which is not entirely cooked, and of which the yolk is still liquid."

"Oh!" said Belle-Plante, "do you intend to continue long in that vein?"

"Why, what I have yet to say will take a good hour and a half."

"Well, I can tell you that I am in no humor to give an hour and a half gratis to listening to you."

"You wish to practise an extortion, Belle-Plante; that is hardly delicate on your part. But how much do you ask for an hour and a half of your attention?"

"Five *sous;* do you think that that would be too much?"

"Here are six," said Cornelius, "and I go on."

"Fool!" said Belle-Plante to himself; "I am sorry I didn't ask him ten."

"The inhabitants of the earth, when it was in a gaseous state," continued Cornelius, "could scarcely have been more than animated bladders swimming in the atmosphere. When it had passed into the incandescent state, the animals and vegetables must have been able to live in a roasted condition.

Thus, instead of an' ox, one would have seen an enormous piece of roast beef, browsing off of fried herbs in the prairie, and the apple trees, instead of fruit, must have produced compotes. My opinion differs perhaps from that of the geologists, but——"

"One moment, Cornelius; I make the stipulation that I shall be permitted to yawn. If you refuse me this distraction, I warn you that I shall be obliged to charge you a higher price."

"You can yawn as much as you like, provided you listen. You understand that the animals that exist to-day have not been able——"

"That is understood in advance; let us pass the animals that exist to-day; do me that favor, my good brother."

"Well, I pass them then. They will tell me perhaps——"

"If you intend to answer all that they may tell you, there is no reason why you should ever finish."

"All right, then, I leap over all objections, and enter into the heart of the discussion. I know very well that a male hare and a female hare produce leverets. I see clearly the bean which I have planted come up from the earth, blossom, and procreate a

pod of young beans; but then who can affirm that there are no hares born spontaneously in the furrows, and that there are no beans that have neither father nor mother?"

"Oh! Cornelius, what nonsense are you giving me now?"

"Why, my dear fellow, that's a paradox; if you were to read Jean-Jacques Rousseau, you would find many others. But I pass to more positive arguments. Suppose at the summit of the mountain A, a hole B, which the rains from heaven have filled with water. At the end of a fortnight a multitude of little frogs, which I will designate by the letters A^1, B^1, all of the same size, as if born at the same time, are splashing about in this mud. Who, then, amused himself in carrying frog-spawn to the top of this mountain?"

"Mercy!" said Belle-Plante, indulging in a yawn of the widest dimensions, "I prefer to give you back a *sou* and have you end."

"Recreant!" cried Cornelius. "And what would you do then if you were listening to a funeral oration? The bargain is concluded and must be carried out. Suppose, again, a prince just born. All those near him are clean and free of all baseness; nevertheless, immediately his hair begins to grow,

this head must wear a diadem. Do you hear me, Belle-Plante?

"'Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre
N'en défend pas nos Rois.'"

"Who, then, scattered over this consecrated chief this unclean dust? Again, here is a young man, healthy and strong, killed with the stroke of a sword. They enclose his body in a leaden coffin, well and duly soldered; nevertheless——"

Here Cornelius perceived that his audience had taken flight.

"Ho there, Belle-Plante! come back; only two or three more sentences, and I am done. For so small a matter you should not break your engagements."

But Belle-Plante was already far away.

"The brigand!" cried Cornelius; "he has stolen my conclusion; but I will find him again to-night."

That afternoon, in fact, the two brothers met again on their way home.

"So!" said Cornelius, "you played me a dirty trick this morning; I had paid you in advance to listen to me until the end, and you ran away like a scamp."

"What!" answered Belle-Plante, with a roguish

air, "then you noticed that I had disappeared? Well, you see, you were too tiresome, my dear fellow. I had rather thresh wheat an hour than listen to you five minutes."

"Well, then, you are going to return my money."

"Yes, rely upon it; why did you pay me in advance? That will teach you not to let go of your cow before the cowherd has blown his horn."

"Well, you are a thief."

"What do I care whether you call me a thief, now that I have your six *sous?*"

The idea that he had been robbed did not trouble Cornelius, but that, after being robbed, he should be made sport of was more insolence than he could stand. He rushed upon Belle-Plante, seized him by the collar, and shook him until it seemed as if his ears would fall off.

"Release me, Cornelius, I beg of you," said Belle-Plante, "you will tear me to pieces. You see that I do not defend myself; it would be an act of cowardice which your biographer would mention, if you were to beat a person who refuses to defend himself."

And, as Cornelius continued to shake him like a tree which one wishes to relieve of its fruit, he shouted:

"Cain! Do you wish, then, to kill your brother? Help! Murder! He is disjointing me! He is killing me! I shall be terribly sick after this!"

"Give me back my money!" cried Cornelius, in a voice of thunder.

"Well, I will listen to your conclusion; will that satisfy you?"

"My money! my money! When I should once get started, you would slink away again."

"I give you my word of honor, and my most sacred word of honor too, that I will listen to you conscientiously as long as you see fit to talk."

"Your word of honor, Belle-Plante! Your word of honor and the clack of this mill are to me the same thing."

A luminous idea came to Cornelius: he seized Belle-Plante's hat.

"Now," said he, "I will continue our discussion on spontaneous generation; but in my turn I give you my word of honor that, if you show the least sign of wishing to escape, if you do not remain within eighteen inches of my person, if you yawn, if you shrug your shoulders, if you cough, if you sneeze—in short, if you manifest the least impatience, I will throw your hat into the Yonne, and put a stone in it that it may sink more quickly."

"Soon," said Belle-Plante, "you will stop people on the highway and present a pistol at their throat to make them listen to you."

"Not so much argument," said Cornelius; "attention, I begin."

Happily for Belle-Plante, they were just then joined by the little Desallemagnes, who was on her way home from the fair with Jeanne, her servant, and mounted on Madelon, her donkey. As soon as she was near Cornelius, she said:

"Jeanne, stop Madelon, that I may get down. I wish to take a walk with Monsieur Cornelius."

"Oh, fie!" said the good Jeanne, a girl of twelve, "to take a walk in company with a young man!"

"And what harm is there in that, my good Jeanne? I know girls a head taller than I who dance all night with young people; and besides, these young people are not their neighbors, as Monsieur Cornelius is ours."

Cornelius was gallant when he wished to be. He stopped Madelon, took Louise in his arms, and placed her as gently as possible on the ground.

"Well," said the little girl, smoothing her hair, which Madelon's rather rapid pace had disarranged, and repairing the disorder of her dress like a co-

quette of twenty years, "did you have a good time at the fair, Monsieur Cornelius?"

"Very good, Louise; here, see what I bought you."

"What!" said Louise, hastily removing with her little trembling hands the wrapper from a roll of ribbons, "you thought of me? How kind you are, Monsieur Cornelius."

"And you, Louise, did you think of your friend Cornelius?"

"Oh! yes, almost all day, and if I bought you nothing, it is because my father would not give me any money."

"Monsieur Cornelius has been cheated," said Jeanne, after examining the ribbon; "it is faded and out of fashion."

"Well," said Cornelius, "if this ribbon doesn't suit Louise, let her make garters of it, and I shall be perfectly satisfied."

"What are you talking about?" said Louise. "Why, this ribbon is charming! You have excellent taste, Monsieur Cornelius. I shall put on your ribbon on Sunday to go to high mass."

"In that case," said Cornelius, "I shall go to high mass too."

"Yes, come," said Louise; "there will be no

sermon, and I will keep a place for you in our pew."

"Little nuisance!" said Jeanne to herself; "there are no longer any children. I must tell Monsieur Desallemagnes."

"And you," said Belle-Plante, whom this conversation tormented, "what did you buy for yourself, savant?"

"Here," said Cornelius; "guess what this is."

"God forgive me, I believe it is a piece of old iron."

"Poor simpleton! it is a rod of magnetic iron. I will bet that at your age you do not know the property of the magnet."

"I much prefer to know what should be given to an ox when he has the colic."

"Well, I know, Monsieur Cornelius," said Louise, in a joyful tone; "the magnet attracts iron, and with it compasses are made. See, I do not forget what you teach me."

"Thank you, Louise," said Cornelius.

"You would do much better, mademoiselle, to ask Jeanne to teach you to make cream cheeses."

"You are very polite, Monsieur Belle-Plante," said Louise, with a pretty pout.

"You will observe, Louise, that Belle-Plante does not pretend to make axioms."

"I make better axioms than you. Though you should be as learned as Monsieur Guillerand himself, how much better off would you be?"

"Say rather as learned as the Abbé Nollet, imbecile! Why, then, they would say, in speaking of me, the learned, the illustrious, the profound Cornelius; kings would send me snuff-boxes; they would erect a statue to me in the public square of Armes, and the mayor, in his scarf and escorted by firemen, would deliver a discourse. You think that is not worth studying for?"

"Glory," said the sententious Belle-Plante, "is not eaten with oil and vinegar. It is not through the ears that one grows fat. A savant out at elbows, though he were as profound as the well of Varvoucille, and a mouldy book are the same thing. Go tell the baker to give you a loaf of bread on credit, since you are the inventor of gunpowder, and you will see what answer he will make. You will be far advanced when you have on the public square of Armes a statue in Chevroche stone!"

"In marble, if you please, Belle-Plante."

"Well, in marble then, savant; that will not prevent the flies from specking your august nose, or the dogs from lifting their feet along your pedestal."

"I recognize you there, Monsieur Belle-Plante," said Louise, "you who sell the apples and walnuts of your breakfast to the village children."

"And do you think me wrong, mademoiselle? That is the way to look out for one's interests. I had rather be called the rich Belle-Plante than the profound Belle-Plante. If I am not spoken of in the works on mechanics, they will speak of me at the fairs, in the markets, at the auction sales; if the savants take off their hats to Cornelius, the bankers will bow before the signature of Belle-Plante, and that is much better. That is something finer than a statue to be erected to you when you are dead! The difference between our two glories will be that your Cornelius will be able to enjoy his only in his coffin, while I shall enjoy mine during my life. You would be far advanced, you, Mademoiselle Desallemagnes, if during your sleep a bouquet of roses were to be attached to your night-cap and taken away again before you were awake."

"All the same," said Louise, "I should always prefer to be the wife of a savant rather than the wife of a ploughman."

"And I," said Belle-Plante, "would much rather marry a good knitter than a learned woman."

"You," said Cornelius, "would marry the Abbé

Nollet in person if he would bring you a dowry of fifty thousand francs."

"But he would further stipulate," added Louise, "that the learned Abbé should learn to knit."

Just then they reached the entrance to the village.

Jeanne, who thought much of propriety, obliged Louise to mount her donkey again.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW weeks later, M. Guillerand, making a pretext of desiring to inform himself regarding the health of Master Belle-Plante, in whom he felt the keenest and most disinterested interest, invited himself to breakfast at the farm.

If I were under contract to supply *feuilletons* by the square yard, I would follow the example of a sign painter whom I knew, who, being paid at so much a letter, wrote the word *épicier* (grocer) in the following fashion: *haipissier;* I should describe M. Guillerand to you from the upper extremity of his three-cornered hat to the lower extremity of his ribbed worsted stockings, stopping a reasonable time at the intermediate objects; but, alas! such is not the case; ink and paper grow dearer every day, and I have the disadvantage of furnishing them. So you will picture M. Guillerand to yourself as you like; I give you full liberty in this respect, simply telling you that his face was enormously red in the middle.

M. Guillerand breakfasted with a very good ap-

petite, as he always did when he breakfasted with others; but the devil, who had a grudge against him because he was the honor of our choir, put it into the head of Master Belle-Plante to ask him if he was satisfied with François.

"Perfectly satisfied; one could not be more so, Monsieur Belle-Plante! You must remember that last year he took seven first prizes, to say nothing of the second prizes which give the right only to a simple crown."

"I remember, Monsieur Guillerand, and I thank you much, but——"

"What, Monsieur Belle-Plante, you thank me! And for what do you thank me, if you please? If it is for the zeal which I have shown in instructing your son in *belles-lettres*, informing his mind, that is, in adorning his mind—a devil of a phrase! I can never express it exactly—and informing his heart, I receive your thanks with pleasure, and I will even say with pride, for they are merited; but if it is for a favor that I am supposed to have accorded to your son, I repudiate them as an insult; yes, Monsieur, as an insult. To say that favors can be bought at my school! You are not aware, Monsieur Belle-Plante, of the pain that you give me! Really, you do not know me. Far from me those guilty

compliances which most of my fellow-teachers, and I will even say, all my fellow-teachers, show toward their pupils. I had rather die than lend myself to such baseness."

"I am well convinced of it, Monsieur Guillerand; but how does it happen that all your scholars take prizes?"

"How does it happen, Monsieur? My reply is as simple as it is natural; because they all deserve them. And it is that which has given my establishment the reputation which it enjoys throughout the kingdom and beyond. With us there are no feeble subjects, no first or last, no laggards: all my scholars go together and at the same pace; and if there were one who, for any cause whatever, could not follow the others, I would dismiss him though he were a prince of the blood. Yes, Monsieur Belle-Plante, I would get rid of him as in Sparta they got rid of the deformed and unhealthy children by throwing them into the Eurotas. Are you satisfied, Monsieur Belle-Plante?"

"I shall be better satisfied when you have told me how François gets along."

The sweat began to appear upon the schoolmaster's face, but the few scattered drops of water were the only indication of his anxiety. You could

certainly place him, like common men, in a very embarrassing situation, but disconcert him never.

"I repeat, Monsieur Belle-Plante, that I am very well satisfied with Monsieur François; he is far advanced for his age."

Now it should be remembered that François was sixteen.

"He is very strong in the catechism."

"Let us see," said the farmer. "Come, François, my boy, why did God create you and put you into the world?"

"To buy cheap and sell dear, my papa."

"Good! very good! bravo, François!" shouted Monsieur Guillerand. "See, Monsieur Belle-Plante, with what confidence he answers; he is a real Levite. I must have him join the cathedral choir, as I joined it myself. To your son's health, Monsieur Belle-Plante! You have a little white wine there which is by no means bad; is it of your own growing, Monsieur Belle-Plante?"

The farmer had taken it into his head that he would question his son, and there was no way of inducing him to abandon his purpose.

"Truly," said he, "François did not make a bad answer; 'to buy cheap and sell dear'—if that is not

in the catechism, they ought to put it there. But still it seems to me that it is not there."

"Pardon me, Monsieur Belle-Plante, it is there; your desires have been anticipated; they have put it there. You see, the catechism has been much changed since you went to school. 'To love him, serve him, and thereby to obtain eternal life.' Oh, to be sure, that is no longer there! Eternal life is out of fashion; it is no longer in our morals. This reform is due to the writings of Arouet Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Have you read Voltaire and Jean-Jacques, Monsieur Belle-Plante? Voltaire, now there was a philosopher for you! but Jean-Jacques is a logician who has no common sense, a moralist who flies into a passion over nothing, a writer who is always in a sweat."

"Possibly, Monsieur Guillerand; but how is François on figures?"

"Oh! far advanced, Monsieur Belle-Plante; one could not be further advanced at his age; fractions have no secrets for him; he is one of my best mathematicians."

"Well, François," said Master Belle-Plante, "do me this little sum; a man has two eyes; they put out one; how many has he left?"

"He is one-eyed," said François.

"Good! very good!" shouted Monsieur Guillerand, who was stifling in his greatcoat; "well, are you satisfied now, Monsieur Belle-Plante? A total expressed by an adjective—how elegant that is! How pretty it is! Only your children, Monsieur Belle-Plante, can find such answers. Monsieur d'Alembert of the Encyclopædia could not have answered better."

"To tell the truth, Monsieur Guillerand, I should be better satisfied if François had calculated that for me with figures."

"Well, François, my friend, calculate it with figures since your father pushes his requirements to that point. A man has two eyes; they put out one; from two take one; you understand me!"

François took a piece of charcoal, and after scribbling a few figures on the tile floor opened his mouth very wide and said: "Three."

Monsieur Guillerand burst into a violent fit of coughing; but he could not prevent this unfortunate total from reaching the ears of Master Belle-Plante.

"Very good, François!" said he; "and you, Monsieur Guillerand, I congratulate you on the way in which you teach arithmetic to your pupils."

"Permit me, Monsieur Belle-Plante, I teach my

pupils to calculate in *francs, sous* and *deniers;* but you ask your son a question in physics, natural history, physiology, what not. How do you expect calculation to get a grip upon such incongruities? A man has two eyes; they put out one; what relation, I ask you, has that with arithmetic? Do you think that it was to solve such questions that the Arabs invented numerals? 'He is one-eyed,' your son answers you. That is a clear, square, precise reply, which shows in François a great power of observation. At his age, you, Monsieur Belle-Plante, perhaps would have answered, 'He is blind,' and yet it is on me that you shower your reproaches. 'I congratulate you, Monsieur Guillerand, on the way in which you teach arithmetic to your pupils!' That expression is a crime, Monsieur Belle-Plante. Is not the teacher's profession sufficiently painful in itself without——"

"Come, let us not get angry, Monsieur Guillerand; if François does not know how to calculate, well we will buy him a ready reckoner."

"That's right; let us not get angry, Monsieur Belle-Plante; let us drink, let us eat, let us breakfast, as Horace says, and let us talk no more about education. When life offers us here and there a rose to smell, let us not brutally strip it of its leaves

with our own hands. This ham is perfect, Monsieur Belle-Plante."

"A little patience, Monsieur Guillerand; I should like to know how François reads.'

"Very well; indeed, one cannot read better, Monsieur Belle-Plante. He reads very fluently in Latin. Have you any Latin authors here?"

"I have the psalms of David somewhere."

"Bad Latin that, Monsieur Belle-Plante! It would spoil your son's pronunciation."

"Well, I have just received a letter from Clamecy; I should be much pleased to have François read it to me (*me la lise*)."

"*Me la lût*, Monsieur Belle-Plante; let us speak French, if you please. Not that one may not be a very honest man and yet be guilty of errors in grammar; but, you see, in my capacity of teacher, I am obliged to enforce respect for the language. To commit a solecism in presence of a schoolmaster is like blaspheming in presence of a priest; and Monsieur the Curé, who esteems me highly, recently said to me on this subject——"

"Come, François, read me this letter, and make haste."

François, grumbling, took the letter, and, drawing near the window, began:

"Mon—, Mons—, Monsi—, Monsieur——"

"Very good," said Monsieur Guillerand; "courage, François!"

"Monsieur Bette—, Botte—, Butte—, Bitte——"

"Monsieur Belle-Plante, imbecile!" cried the farmer. "You natural-born ass, you do not know how to read even your own name! I reiterate my compliments, Monsieur Guillerand."

The unfortunate schoolmaster seized the letter, and, having glanced over it, cried:

"Indeed, I am not astonished that François is unable to decipher this: it is a letter from my friend Page; I am the only person in the bailiwick who can read his writing. Just imagine, Monsieur Belle-Plante, the sheriff lately sent for me to read a note of two lines which this lawyer had addressed to him. And yet you were going to get angry with me! Poor humanity! that's the way we all are; we judge first and compare afterward."

"But I can read this letter very well," said the farmer.

"Then I congratulate you, Monsieur Belle-Plante. I will call upon my friend to-morrow expressly to inform him that you can read his scribbling. He will be delighted to know that there are two men in the vicinity capable of deciphering his fly-tracks."

"All the same it appears," said the farmer, "that Belle-Plante can read only Latin. Those who have dealings with him will have to be notified that they must write to him in that language. But how does he write? He never brings me his copy-books."

"What, François!" said Monsieur Guillerand, relieved of an enormous weight by this information, "you refuse your worthy father the satisfaction of judging for himself of your progress in penmanship! That is not right, my friend. I declare to you, Monsieur Belle-Plante, that François has one of the prettiest hands in my establishment; the mayor's son, young Christophe, does not write as well as François, by any means. I would give six francs out of my own pocket to have you see his handwriting; your paternal heart would thrill with joy. Say, François, why do you not show your copy-books to your father?"

"Because I sell them to the butter merchant," said François.

"Good! very good!" cried Monsieur Guillerand. "How fortunate you are, Monsieur Belle-Plante, to have a son who sells his copy-books to the butter merchant! At so tender an age, to have such a disposition to order and economy! Are you aware that that is not common, my dear Monsieur? Oh!

it is in vain to talk, order and economy will always be the best of all the sciences. A brilliant fortune which we suppose to rest on a firm foundation ends in bankruptcy, and common people ask how that happened. But it is a very simple thing. The owner of this fortune was lacking in order and economy; it has evaporated, no one knows how, like a vase from which the water oozes through an unperceived crack."

"What you say is true," said the farmer; "but, if François is not a great scholar, I hope that you are better satisfied with Cornelius."

"I am as well satisfied with Monsieur Cornelius as with Monsieur François, save that the former has not the same disposition to order and economy that his brother has. On the other hand, he excels in taking a clock to pieces; an apprentice who had been three years in a shop could not do it better."

"I understand," said the farmer; "you wish to remind me that I owe you eighteen francs for the cuckoo which the scamp spoiled for you."

"No, Monsieur Belle-Plante, I do not wish to remind you of anything at all; I should be in despair if you were to attribute to me such an intention. You will pay me when you find it convenient, and I could consent to receive your money only in case

you were determined to acquit yourself of this bagatelle directly."

"Since that suits you," said the farmer, "I will count out your eighteen francs."

And, pulling from his pocket a big leather bag, he placed a louis on the table.

"There are six francs coming back to you," said Monsieur Guillerand; "if you like, Monsieur Belle-Plante, the balance shall stand for the first wheel that Monsieur Cornelius may lose."

"Not at all," said the farmer; "if Cornelius maltreats your cuckoo again, you will have to settle the matter with him. Whatever he finds he takes to pieces; you must cure him of this mania, Monsieur Guillerand."

"It is very wrong, Monsieur Cornelius," said Monsieur Guillerand, "to take to pieces what you cannot put together again. Do you know why the machinery of this world goes so badly, why it sometimes moves so fast that we have violets in the month of January, and at other times so slow that we have snow at Easter? It is because the devil, in trying to take it to pieces, has got it out of order."

Just then a servant brought in a roast hare of exquisite flavor; at sight of this M. Guillerand's

face shone like a field of grass after a shower, for he liked nothing so well as roast hare except stewed hare. But Cornelius and Belle-Plante, who were nibbling their bread at the corner of the fire, although they too were very fond of hare, did not share his joy.

"There comes a dish," said Cornelius to Belle-Plante, "which will bring us misfortune; if you say so, we will draw lots to see who shall pay for the two."

"Give me five *sous*," said Belle-Plante, "and I take upon myself the responsibility of the whole affair."

Cornelius raised three fingers, and closed the others.

"I understand; you have only three *sous*, you prodigal; well, give me the three at any rate, and owe me two."

Cornelius nodded assent, and the contract was as solid as if it had been drawn by a notary.

"Wait!" said Belle-Plante, "let us understand one another; it is included in the bargain that your claim of six *sous* on account of the spontaneous generation difficulty is abandoned."

Cornelius, with a second nod, assented to this proposition.

"How do you like this hare?" said the farmer to his guest.

"Excellent, Monsieur Belle-Plante; irreproachable, sublime; my friend Arthus himself would relish it. It's a pity to eat it in Lent; it is a dish fit for the Carnival."

"And the hare that I sent you lately, were you satisfied with it?"

"How! what!" cried M. Guillerand, palpitating with emotion; "what hare are you talking about?"

"Why, about a hare that I sent you by François. Is it possible that you did not receive it?"

"Alas! no," said M. Guillerand, in deep dismay, "I did not receive it."

"Possibly it has passed out of your mind; I am very sure that I sent it to you."

"What, Monsieur Belle-Plante, that has passed out of my mind! Do such things, then, pass out of your mind? A good hare stew, such as Madame Guillerand knows how to make, or a good roast, larded as she lards them, marks an epoch in the year! We say, in speaking of an event, that it happened the day before or the day after the day when we ate that good hare. Oh! Monsieur Belle-Plante, if you had sent me a hare, I should have held you in eternal gratitude."

"Here, François! here, Cornelius! come here, you scamps! What did you do with my hare that I ordered you to take to Monsieur Guillerand?"

"It was stolen from me," said François.

"What, unfortunate!" exclaimed M. Guillerand, "my hare was stolen from you! Have a care how you answer: I have a little finger which knows everything."

"Well, yes, it was stolen from me," replied François, with imperturbable coolness; "ask Cornelius; he is a more reliable witness than your little finger."

But Cornelius did not say a word, for he had paid that he might not be obliged to lie.

"And how was it stolen from you, you scamp?" exclaimed M. Guillerand.

"Why, as one steals a hare—by laying hands on it."

"But the particulars."

"Well," said François, who by this time had concocted his romance, "I had stopped in a ditch, and had placed my hare by the roadside. A man who passed laid hands upon it and ran away with it."

"Great imbecile! to allow a hare intended for me to be stolen! Why, you ought to have cried: 'Stop thief!'"

"And so we did, both of us, Cornelius and I, and I am still hoarse in consequence; but the thief fled as if it had been the hare that was running away with him."

"It would serve you right, Monsieur François, if I were to make you (*que je vous fasse*) pay for the hare."

"*Que je vous fisse*," said Cornelius. "This time it is the priest himself who blasphemes."

"True, most true, Monsieur Cornelius. You see, Monsieur Belle-Plant, that is what we Latinists call a *lapsus linguæ*—that is, a slip of the tongue. How strong this little Cornelius is on syntax! In his presence one must be careful!

"'Maxima debetur puero reverentia.'

"If you see fit, Monsieur Belle-Plante, to send me a pair of chickens to compensate me for the hare that has been stolen, I beg you to entrust Monsieur Cornelius with the errand. Now, if it were a clock, I would not say as much."

The farmer listened to this discussion with a very paternal air and in silent attention. From time to time, to enlighten his conscience, he poured himself a bumper, religiously administering one like it to M. Guillerand.

"The case has been sufficiently heard," he cried, rising. "I condemn François."

"Permit me, Monsieur Belle-Plante," exclaimed M. Guillerand. "I condemn, I condemn! that is soon said. But you, who condemn François for having allowed a hare to be stolen from him, did you never in your life allow anything to be stolen from you? That is like all parents; they chastise in their children the wrongs of which they themselves are guilty. The father whips his son because he smokes, and he himself takes snuff; the mother scolds her daughter because she has broken a porcelain cup, and she herself, the day before, broke a tea-set. Men are so constituted; they desire liberty for themselves and the most absolute dependence for their subordinates. The Romans talked of nothing but liberty, and they threw their slaves to the fish. Nowhere is the right of the strongest exercised as despotically as under the paternal roof; the most legitimate tastes, instincts, passions, in children, are always sacrificed to the caprice of parents. They expect their young ones at the age of eight to behave like grown persons. These remarks are not meant for you, of course, Monsieur Belle-Plante; but then, whom has François wronged? You? No, since you have consented to deprive yourself of your

hare for my sake. Me? Still less; I should be far advanced to-day for having eaten a hare-stew a fortnight ago. Come, François is not at all disposed to allow himself to be cheated; that I know very well. If he has been robbed, you may be sure that it was not his fault. Now, if it were Monsieur Cornelius, it might be different."

"All that is very fine," said the farmer; "but one cannot be in the right when he has allowed a hare to be stolen from him: those are my principles. François must be chastised."

"Barbarous man! brute!" cried M. Guillerand. "Must I, a schoolmaster, plead for your son? Permit me to address to you the lines which Abner addresses to Mathan in the tragedy of 'Athalie':

"'Eh quoi! Mathan, d'un prêtre est-ce l'a le langage?
Moi, nourri dans la guerre aux horreurs du carnage,
Des vengeances des rois ministre rigoureux
C'est moi qui prête ici ma voix aux malheureux!'"

"What does that Latin mean, Monsieur Guillerand," said the farmer.

"Latin! you are joking, Monsieur Belle-Plante. What! you are in your own house, and do not know yourself? But do not be embarrassed, it is not your fault; there are, in fact, two languages in France—one for we men of letters, the other for the mob of

natives. But the truth is that those are French verses, and magnificent ones too. I would give my vineyard in Chaumes to have written one hemistich of them. What do you think of them, Monsieur Cornelius?"

"For my part," said Cornelius, "I would rather have invented the wheelbarrow."

"The wheelbarrow! Are you mad, Monsieur Cornelius? A fine bauble is the wheelbarrow to be compared to the verses of Racine!"

"Yes, the wheelbarrow, Monsieur Guillerand, the wheelbarrow!"

"How original this little Cornelius is! If he saw a crowd going over a bridge, he would swim across the river to be different from the rest. But what do you find to criticise in these verses?"

"There are too many words for one idea, Monsieur Guillerand, and these words are too magnificent for so common an idea. They remind one of the Mancanares, which has thirty arches and bestrides only a brook."

"The Mancanares, a little river at Madrid; you see, Monsieur Belle-Plante, how strong Cornelius is in geography."

"When one has a letter of two lines to write," said Cornelius, "he does not put it on a sheet of

royal paper. Would you, Monsieur Guillerand, take thirty yards of black tress to make a ribbon for your cue?"

"That, Monsieur Belle-Plante, is what we dialecticians call an argument *ad hominem*. Go ask Depouilly if he has scholars in his school who can make arguments *ad hominem*. Go on, Monsieur Cornelius, although the opinion which you utter is contrary to that of our century, which admires Racine, and even to my own, I am sure that your father has the greatest pleasure in listening to us."

"*Nourri dans la guerre* (nourished in war)," continued Cornelius; "a disagreeable figure, because it is drawn from animal life, and furthermore it is lacking in accuracy. We might say of an athlete, nourished for struggle, for pugilism, because athletes are subjected to an especial régime fitted to their profession; but what do we give a soldier to eat in order to accustom him to the *horreurs du carnage* (horrors of carnage)? Moreover, this hemistich is weak in that it signifies the same thing as the first. Why did not Abner, instead of trumpeting four verses for us, simply say: 'I who am a soldier?' The antithesis would have been more striking. If you separate by a periphrase or two the objects which you compare, they are too far

from one another; the contrast is not perceived, or at least it becomes much less evident. Everybody knows very well that a soldier is a man who makes war, and that war is carnage. Why, then, all this ridiculous array of words? To write three times, 'I am a soldier,' or to say it three times in different ways, is it not the same thing? Racine here resembles an awkward waiter of whom I ask a glass of rum, and who pours it for me into a decanter of water. The periphrase, with our poets, is generally a valet who goes to the cellar by way of the attic. That the periphrase may be of good quality, it must exhibit the object under a new and picturesque image, it must make it stand out amid the words that frame it, it must illuminate it like a flash; otherwise, it is only a vain excrescence upon the discourse, a useless string of words which entangle the phrase and hamper its progress. In general, I find that our poets are too sparing of ideas and too prodigal of words. Almost all verses are made of sonorous phrases, whose only merit is harmony. The poets are extremely satisfied with themselves when they have said *courser* instead of *horse*, or *saltpetre* instead of *gunpowder;* they think that they have done wonders when they have wrapped a trivial and commonplace idea in a pompous period.

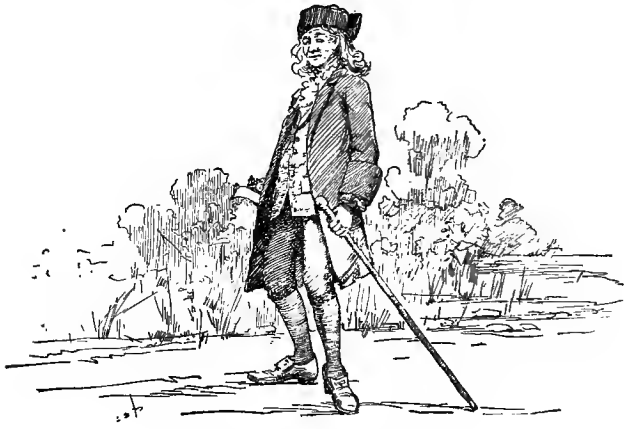
But then this poor idea resembles those common persons of all sorts whom we meet everywhere in society, dressed like gentlemen. If you have only a pickled herring to offer me, do not present it on a silver plate. Poetry consists in figures, in sentiment, not in music. I am tempted to beg those poor martyrs of rhyme and the cæsura, who run after harmonious words, to play me their pieces on the sweet flute. The style of these people is too bombastic; they do not know how to avoid the trivial without falling into the inflated. There are things the simplicity of which should not be spoiled by a misplaced nobility of expression. Would the rose be more beautiful if you were to gild its leaves? And this decaying willow, which droops over the mill, would it be more poetical if you were to scrape the moss off it and pull up the long grasses that hang around its old trunk?"

"The devil!" said M. Guillerand, "I would not like my friend Fleury, the professor of rhetoric, to hear Monsieur Cornelius; he would have a fever; he would quarrel with me beyond hope of reconciliation. He lately expelled a poor pupil from his class because he had the weakness to yawn at the thirtieth line in the first scene of 'Athalie.' Do you know what there is of truth in what Monsieur

Cornelius has just said? I like, myself, this bold logic which attacks accredited things, this somewhat revolutionary independence of thought which does not admit the infallibility of the masters. '*The master has said it,*' is the most stupid phrase that ever came from a man's lips. He who knows only what has been taught him is a poor devil. At the mayor's, at the sheriff's, where I often go, I meet a multitude of people who give me a whole treatise on rhetoric if I enter upon a literary discussion with them. They have been told that such a thing is good, and they repeat it. These people come from the University in a straight line; but this absolute instruction is not mine, Monsieur Belle-Plante. I leave to my pupils complete liberty of thought; I say to them: 'Look with your eyes, listen with your ears, judge with your minds;' and it is in this way, Monsieur Belle-Plante, that men are made. I am delighted that you have heard Monsieur Cornelius; it will give you an idea of the instruction which my pupils receive. When the Duke of Nivernais, who is a very estimable *littérateur*, and who always sends me his fables to get my opinion of them, comes to Clamecy, I wish to present Monsieur Cornelius to him."

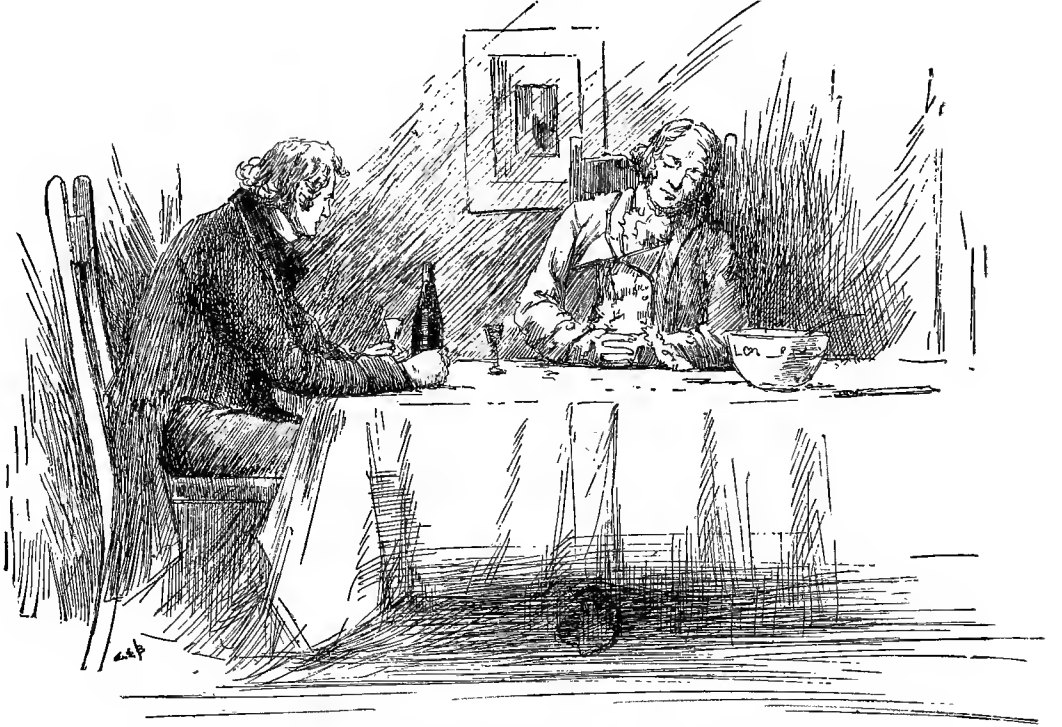
But Master Belle-Plante, to charm away the *ennui*

of a discussion which he did not understand, had begun to doze. The two brothers, profiting by his sleep, took flight, like two birds escaped from the net of the fowler. As for M. Guillerand, seeing that he had no companion left, he ordered the servant to go to the cellar, and quietly set himself to finish the stew, while waiting for Master Belle-Plante to wake up. An hour later François and



THE DRUNKEN SCHOOLMASTER.

Cornelius met him on the Clamecy road, carrying a pair of chickens at the end of his cane, and going hither and thither, forward and back, like a vessel beaten by the storm. His chickens, understanding the danger which threatened them in the



BUT MASTER BELLE-PLANTE, TO CHARM AWAY THE ENNUI, HAD BEGUN TO DOZE.

hands of such a man, filled the air with the most distressing kirikikis.

"He will fall into the Yonne," said Cornelius to Belle-Plante; "he must be guided as far as the Maladrerie."

"Why does he get drunk?" said Belle-Plante, as people say, under such circumstances, who, to avoid helping you, are very glad to find you in the wrong, and he returned to the house; but he was punished for his hardness of heart. When he arrived, his father was in a terrible humor because he had lost an ox; he remembered the affair of the hare, and chastised the scamp as he deserved.

CHAPTER V.

A YEAR afterward, Belle-Plante and Cornelius left school. According to M. Guillerand, as we have already seen, Belle-Plante was a great scholar. It is certainly very painful to us to arraign the authority of this great schoolmaster, who was the friend of my uncle Benjamin; but the truth before anything, before M. Guillerand, and even before my uncle. The fact is that Belle-Plante, in the matter of reading, was a real gentleman; as a penman, he stood no higher in the esteem of his fellow-citizens; the only French word that he knew how to write correctly was *Belle-Plante*, and even in that word his B always resembled a retort. Furthermore, far from regarding his ignorance as an imperfection, he gloried in it; he pretended that there was a saving of more than a hundred francs a year in not knowing how to read or write.

When one knows how to read, he said, one reads; now, to read one must buy books; then, one is obliged, for a thousand reasons, to subscribe to the agricultural journal edited by lawyers, by a multi-

tude of people who haven't a piece of land as big as a pocket-handkerchief, and who carry on their experiments in flower-pots. That is not all; it is necessary to subscribe to this one's pamphlet, published for the benefit of the poor; to that one's work, in parts, on the history of the neighborhood; to the poetical essays of a third, whose beginnings must be encouraged. One spends a bag of money, and in exchange receives a heap of paper sheets fit only to serve as wrappers for cutlets broiled in paper. This has the further disadvantage of leading you to eat cutlets, which cost twelve *sous* a pound. In the fourth place, when you know how to read and write, you receive a pile of letters which the writers, for propriety's sake, take care not to stamp. Now it is a friend, to whom you have hardly said good-day, who consults you as to the probable rise or fall in oats; now it is another friend, who, never having what he needs, asks you to lend him a sack of seed; another time it is a charlatan chemist, who offers you a marvellous dressing, perfectly healthy and without odor, which is bound to triple the product of your land—he will make it with orange-flowers for the ladies who cultivate their lands themselves should they condescend to honor him with their patronage. One must lose his time and use up his

candles in answering all this trash, under penalty of being put down by his neighbors as a savage, as a wolf, or as some other animal destitute of manners. Then, when one has read others, he wishes to be read in his turn. He is very glad to demonstrate to the small public of the neighborhood that he has made interesting experiments on grass, that he is a skilful irrigator, an unparalleled fattener of cattle, and a man of wit in the bargain. One orders of the printer a pretty little glory in pica, at so much a page, and for his money gets laughed at by a multitude of people who have nothing to do but to make sport of others. For my part, if this mania ever seizes me, I will apply at once to the preconizer, and thus get out of it as cheaply as possible. In the matter of knowledge, we do not need the superfluous; that which is not necessary is always a burden. The grocer's wife, for instance, knows music; she buys a piano, she goes to the opera, she deafens her husband from morning till night, and meantime her kettle boils over or her roast burns.

But, though Belle-Plante was illiterate, he possessed by way of compensation a fine assortment of bucolic acquirements; he handled the goad in a thoroughly artistic fashion; he was very competent

to make a litter for the oxen and to care for them when sick. He knew his horse, moreover, from hoof to horns; a jockey could not have deceived him, and in fact he was smart enough to deceive the jockeys themselves—two qualities alike precious for a man engaged in commerce.

He knew as well as the Liége almanac when it was time to plough the ground a second time or to hoe, in what month barley should be cut, and in what season wheat should be sown. Moreover, the economy of the kitchen had no secrets for him; he would have made a brilliant competition for the position of manager of a hospital or warden of a prison; in a week he would have made a monk grow thin; he would have told you almost to an ounce how much butter is required to season a bushel of potatoes.

At first he aided his father in the management of his farms, and worked wonders of activity and avarice. He was twenty-two years old when his father died. The old man had a stroke of apoplexy one morning when getting ready to lead two oxen to the Clamecy fair. There was in Belle-Plante the stuff to make two attorneys, and out of the pieces could have been made a good process-server. He did not amuse himself in uttering loud cries; there

would be time enough later to weep for his father. He seized all the promissory notes in his father's portfolio, and then, to fulfil his last intention, led to Clamecy the two oxen destined for the market, and with them all those which were in the stable. He made haste to get the notes discounted and to sell the oxen; then, like a good son, he quickly returned to Armes to put the author of his days in his coffin. The next day, the judicial authorities came to affix the seals, as was their duty; but never was an operation more useless. Consequently from that time Belle-Plante entertained a sovereign contempt for the seals; he said that they were a lock on an empty strong-box. He cleverly profited by the interest inspired by his orphaned condition to secure a renewal of the five or six leases which his father possessed and at lower figures; then the poor orphan began to exploit the paternal inheritance. As we have seen, to simplify things a litle, he had taken possession of all the movable valuables upon which he could lay his hands. As for the lands, he divided them into two portions, one including the good and the other the bad, and, profiting by a blank power of attorney which Cornelius had sent him, he awarded the bad to him.

One can easily see that with a man of Belle-

Plante's character and probity, receipts must exceed expenditures. Now, when he had laid up some money, he bought a piece of land adjoining his own and to his liking; he was on the track of small proprietors in debt who were obliged to sell for cash in order to relieve themselves of embarrassment, and he secured their real estate for a piece of bread, as they say at Clamecy. Thus he secured for himself, furrow by furrow, as they weave a piece of cloth thread by thread, a very fine property. But in his opinion it was not well to own lands which one is not able to manage himself. When, therefore, the extent of his fields was sufficient to absorb his entire activity, he constituted himself the village banker, and, as he never lent at more than twenty per cent., he called himself the resource of the country. Moreover, he did not suspect that this conduct was at all reprehensible, and if you called him an unworthy man of wealth, he would have been as astonished as Murat, in our day, at hearing himself called a coward.

As for Cornelius, pushed on by the demon of science, after having left M. Guillerand, he had gone to Paris. His love for Louise did not stop him, and Louise herself, full of confidence in his genius, urged him to pursue the course of his high destiny.

Father Desallemagnes was very rich. He was not precisely a miser, but he placed a high value on money. Cornelius, with his passion for knowledge, which he took for a disguised love of laziness, did not seem to him a very desirable match. Nevertheless, he promised his daughter that, as soon as Cornelius, by some important discovery, had won a place among the savants of the country, he would accept him as his son-in-law. This promise had doubled Cornelius' ardor; he made haste to learn geometry and algebra, and he applied them to mechanics before giving them a chance to cool off. In the first place, he was struck by the high rate of cab fares; he thought that he could render a great service to his country by placing locomotion by vehicle within the reach of all purses.

To replace the thousands of horses, whose proud gallop spatters mud upon pedestrians, he had devised a little car, which was to work without the aid of any quadruped. I have in my archives a plan of this ingenious locomotive, and I can give the mechanism of it to our readers. To the axle was fixed a sort of circular staircase in the form of a drum. Cornelius maintained that a man, by bringing his whole weight to bear upon the steps of this drum, could impart to the wheels a sufficient

impulse to carry a passenger and his baggage, provided this baggage was only a small bundle. Our learned friend had no doubt of his success. If, after paying the workmen's bills, he had had money enough left to pay for his wedding-coat, he would have bought it. He had but one fear—that the cab-drivers, being quarrelsome and turbulent people, might rise in riot against his discovery and tear him and his little cart to pieces. Unhappily this fear had not the smallest foundation; Cornelius himself was obliged to admit, after trying his carriage, that the coachman would advance much farther and expend much less sweat in carrying his passenger on his shoulders than in thus drawing him.

This failure did not discourage him. He broiled cutlets with the remains of his little car, and began to search for something else. He remembered that the metal rods to which the disk of a pendulum is attached elongate under the influence of heat and contract in a cold temperature. The inequality of the oscillations produced by these variations in length seemed to him intolerable. French clockmakers had no heart to have allowed this abuse to endure so long; it was necessary that he, Cornelius Belle-Plante, should come into the world in order that the universe might know the exact time. He

succeeded in making a clock which performed its functions without a pendulum. It was a magnificent, pleasing, elegant clock, bound to have a superb effect on a parlor mantel. Unhappily the shining qualities of this clock were offset by a little fault; never could Cornelius make it go more than three minutes. What consoled him was that he had at least remedied for three minutes the defect which he desired to abolish; that was something at any rate. Cornelius banished the unfortunate clock to the attic, lest the sight of it might discourage him, and plunged again into his meditations. He reflected upon the embarrassment in which French ladies would find themselves if a war with England should arise, and colonial sugars captured on the way should no longer reach our ports. What! those gross and fleshy mistresses, those puffy-cheeked young misses, those long ladies of over-sea, as dry and stiff as a broomstick, should have all the sugar they wanted, and our lovely French women should be reduced to the insipid sweetness of licorice paste? This thought gave Cornelius the greater indignation because Louise drank coffee every morning for breakfast. So he established himself at Belleville, and began to make sugar out of spinach. This time he succeeded perfectly; his sugar, which he

called Belle-Plante sugar in honor of his father, had the lustre and sweetness of cane sugar. He sent a sample to Louise, who found it excellent, and who expected every moment to see Cornelius, his head surrounded with the grand halo of a savant, enter her house and ask her hand in marriage. Unfortunately there was a little difficulty in the way of the execution of Cornelius' idea—namely, that it took the product of three beds of spinach to sweeten one cup of coffee.

You think perhaps that these unlucky attempts discouraged Cornelius. Do not be deceived; he had one of those rectilinear wills which never deviate. If I were charged with the task of striking a medal in honor of our savant, I would represent him to you under the emblem of a steamboat going up a river, throwing around it in the form of spray the waves which try to arrest its course, and waving proudly in the air its plume of smoke.

Cornelius had given himself his word of honor that he would make a great discovery, and nothing less than the destruction of all the wood and iron in France could have caused him to fail in his engagement. For this, moreover, he had two excellent reasons: the first was that he could marry Louise only on this condition; the second, that glory

is not trash, François Belle-Plante to the contrary notwithstanding.

It must be a very fine thing, this applause that one hears in posterity, this to-morrow resplendent with sunlight that one sees shining after the dark and rainy day of life! How sweet it must be to enjoy the possession of one of those names which generations transmit through a long series of centuries, as the departing sentinel transmits the countersign to the sentinel who comes; to be conscious that the time which passes, and which in passing mows down old towers, throws castles to the ground, and turns cities into fields of grass, does not touch your name, cannot cut off an accent, is unable even to wipe a dot off an *i*! The insects, from their blade of grass, undoubtedly pity the caterpillar which painfully traces its way through the dust; but if they knew that it must become a butterfly, would they not envy it? Do not believe those who tell you that glory is but smoke; they say it only to console themselves for their obscurity. All men have a horror of annihilation; they do not wish to be extinguished like a candle in a puff of wind; those who cannot be admired wish at least to be mourned; from the child who writes his name upon a wall to the old man who orders a statue placed over his

grave, all love glory and wish their share of fame.

For my part, if the devil, to tempt me, were to say to me: "Fall upon your knees and worship me; you shall have cellars full of gold, coffers full of diamonds, bank-notes enough to break a mule's back; you shall have castles everywhere, woods on all the mountains, vineyards on all the hills, fields in all the plains; you shall have horses of all colors, all qualities, all breeds; you shall have women of every sort—dark, light, red, white, pink, black, and copper-color; you shall have those who dance like fairies; you shall have those who sing like a lyre; you shall have those who talk like an orator; you shall have those who write plays, elegies, memoirs, prefaces; and you shall have those who embroider slippers; you shall have those with long braided hair, who wrap themselves in a veil, like meat that one wishes to keep from the flies, and who promenade majestically in velvet and in silk; and you shall have those who beam in the sunlight and who frisk about gayly and gracefully in stuff and woolen muslin"—if the devil were to say this to me, I would do as Jesus did on a similar occasion; I would send him . . . further. If, on the other hand, Monsieur Dupin, who is not the devil,

were to say to me on election day: "Give me your vote, and you shall have mayors' scarfs, policemen's belts, judges' robes, magistrates' caps, cabinet-ministers' berets, sub-prefects' embroidered collars, bridges, departmental roads, church rood-lofts, more crosses of honor than you want, statues of saints, bells, well-bound books, and even a copy of my works," I would answer him as I would answer the devil: "King of Clamecy, no, I thank you." But if he were to say to me, he who so ingeniously discovered Jean Rouvet, the inventor of rafting: "Give me your vote, and I will tell the cabinet-minister that you invented the Yonne; then I will have a bust of you cast in bronze by subscription, to be placed opposite that of Jean Rouvet," I would answer him: "Your majesty, there is my vote, and if I had thirty, they should be at your service; only I beg you not to make me resemble Napoleon, and not to place your name in gilt letters on the side."

But to come back to Cornelius. There was talk at that time of a war with neighboring powers. These bellicose rumors stimulated the genius of our learned friend. He began to meditate on the means of assuring victory to France, and he made his exterminating car. Now, this exterminating car was

armed with pikes, swords, espadons and demi-espadons, Catalan knives, and English razors. Oh! it was a terrible machine; it makes me shudder even to describe it. With the exterminating car of Cornelius an entire regiment could be cut to pieces in five minutes. This car was presented to the public minister, who found it to his liking and complimented the inventor. Cornelius was already at the height of his hopes; but a mischievous joker in the artillery corps took it upon himself to say that but one thing had been forgotten—to write on the front of this hash-machine: "By order of the King, it is forbidden to the enemy to fire a shot at this car." This witticism altered the minister's mind, and the exterminating car was hissed. Cornelius, as one might surmise, was not a little indignant at this joke; but as he had good sense, he finally recognized its justice, and besides, the war-clouds, which had for some time obscured our political horizon, had disappeared. So he disarmed his car, sold the blades to the cutler by the pound, and used the carcass for firewood. Thus perished of a miserable death, crushed by a malicious jest, this formidable machine which was to have given France the empire of the world.

So far Cornelius had had a magnificent existence,

an accidental existence in which the poverty of to-morrow contrasted with the poverty of yesterday, and which I cannot better compare than to those days of March so full of brilliant sunshine and gloomy showers. Like a great king, he showed himself a protector of the sciences and the arts. He lived in the Rue Saint-Jacques, in an old dingy hotel, which was the rendezvous of poets in search of a publisher, physicians on the track of a great discovery, mathematicians in pursuit of a professorship. The owner of this respectable establishment might very well have adopted as a sign: *A savant in rags.* The four sides of this edifice enclosed a little yard about the size of a soap-box, which, from the top floor, somewhat resembled a chimney-flue. Cornelius had two rooms at the top of this old structure; his windows opened on a roof whose gutters served him as a terrace, and sometimes, armed with his air-gun, he gave himself the pleasure of hunting, to the prejudice of the cats who came there to sleep in the sunshine and of the birds who came there to lay in a supply of insects. Always at his bread and salt he had two or three of the learned personages of whom we have spoken above. When he had sold a piece of land to Belle-Plante, which happened regularly whenever he made a discovery, he

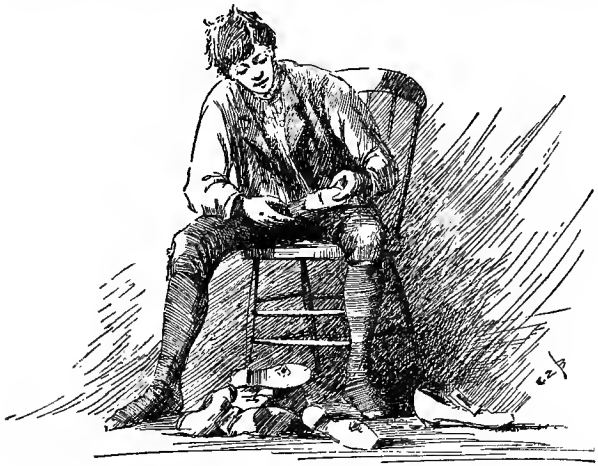
took them to dine magnificently at a neighboring restaurant, and then was prodigal of ample beefsteaks and tall bottles of Bordeaux.

Such a dinner as that, seasoned with a well-sustained discussion, was to Cornelius the joy of joys. But this golden dew soon evaporated; for Cornelius kept nothing for himself. He was like the tree that abandons its fruits to whoever will take them. Then he returned to lay the cloth at his own domicile. The provision-dealers in the neighborhood gave him credit to a certain extent, and, as he paid with promptness and without dispute as soon as he came into possession of funds, never did this resource fail him. Then he dispatched his friends to his purveyors; the poet brought from the green-grocer's a Savoy cabbage, the physician obtained from the butcher a breast of mutton, the mathematician came back from the baker's with a long roll, which he sometimes, in a fit of absent-mindedness, used as a cane; the grocer supplied sugar and brandy to make a punch. Our friend, who was very skilful and happy in the application of chemistry to the culinary art, began to prepare the dinner; then, when his stew was well started, he set the physician on guard by the side of the kettle, who watched it as if it were a retort; he sent the poet to take a

walk in the Jardin des Plantes, and the mathematician to bury himself until the dinner hour in the darkest depths of geometry. But when the credit which he enjoyed had attained its maximum, he dismissed his friends until further orders; he wrote to Belle-Plante offering to sell him a new piece of land, and, pending the arrival of his funds, he embraced the economic method of life peculiar to the dormouse; he spent eighteen hours in bed, dreaming as well as sleeping, and rose in the afternoon only to dine off a two-pound loaf; for God, who creates compensations for all miseries as for all joys, who causes the birth of flowers amid the thorns as he puts thorns amid the flowers, sent him an appetite that increased in proportion as his table was more poverty-stricken and bare.

Cornelius had preserved a profound contempt for the charlatanism of dress; he never had more than one black coat, and that was on his shoulders; when he found that he was out at elbows, he ordered another, and it had to be ready the next day. If this catastrophe happened to him during a time when he was short of money, he abstained from going out; for his black coat was his emblem, and, out of respect for science, he did not wish a savant to be pointed at in the street. As for his boots, when

there were holes in them, but never before, he threw them into a corner of the attic of which he was in possession, and certainly, in this sort of cemetery, there was a magnificent assortment for a cobbler. But just as in great crises they summon again into activity functionaries previously condemned for rea-



HE CHOSE FROM HIS DISCARDED SHOES THOSE WHICH HAD THE SMALLEST HOLES.

sons of reform, he was forced, in the time of his pressing need, to have recourse to this heap of decrepitudes; he chose from his discarded shoes those which had the smallest holes, and obliged them to brave once more the mud of the street and the sharp corners of the pavement.

For the rest, Cornelius passed with much ease from the superabundant joys of wealth to the privations of poverty; if he welcomed wealth like a friend whose hands we press on his arrival, he tolerated poverty like a disagreeable visitor to whom one dares not say that he is a bore; he compared life to the entire year, which has four seasons through which it is necessary to pass, or to an equation which has two terms, in one of which appears the sign *minus*, and the other of which contains the sign *plus*. His exterminating car had almost completed his ruin. He had nothing left but a rather sorry farm, which his first invention would devour; but that made no difference to him. The only thing that disturbed him was that he ardently desired to see Louise again, and that he did not wish to return to Armes without having begun his fortune and his glory. So he went to work again at fresh expense, and soon he was on the track of a magnificent discovery; but it was necessary to spend much money to arrive at a result. So he wrote to Louise to sell his farm to Belle-Plante, who always paid cash, and to send him the proceeds directly; but he did not tell her to what use he intended to put them, for he was not sure of her discretion, and he was terribly afraid that his idea might be stolen.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW mornings afterward a messenger presented himself to the porter of the savant's residence with a bag of money and a ham, the whole addressed to Cornelius. The poet Versidor, tormented by insomnia like Ahasuerus of old, happened to be in the porter's lodge. In spite of the unseasonable hour, he ascended the five stories that separated him from his friend Cornelius to tell him the good news.

It was eight o'clock on a December day; the sun had risen in ill-humor, its brow veiled with crape; a thick fog had settled over Paris, and was weeping silently upon the roofs. It was hardly light in Cornelius' room, although, among the inhabitants of the valley of the Seine, he was one of the nearest to the sky, and had not the smallest curtain to his windows, beyond perhaps a few spider-webs. The noise that the poet made in entering caused Cornelius to waken with a start.

"You make as much disturbance," said he to Versidor, "as a flight of alexandrines. What brings you here so early?"

It occurred to Versidor, who was facetious by nature and by profession (he wrote comic operas), to play upon friend Cornelius what we Frenchmen in the year of grace 1843 would call a good farce.

"What, so early! You are joking, my generous Mæcenas. Did you take opium yesterday?"

"Why do you ask?" said Cornelius.

"Because what you take for the coming day is nothing but the falling night."

"The falling night!" cried Cornelius in dismay; "and I am invited to dine at four o'clock at the Abbé Nollet's with a company of savants."

"Then, if you do not wish to arrive in the midst of the dessert, you will have to practise superhuman diligence."

"If I get there at the dessert," said Cornelius, "that will be time enough; the discussion seldom commences to get serious earlier than that."

"The devil! for a man who has kept himself on an allowance for a week, you have a very disinterested stomach. However, with a good dessert and a discussion, provided it be a literary discussion, one can live till breakfast; but make haste, for it is half past four."

Cornelius threw himself out of bed and began to dress; but when he started to put on his coat he

noticed with sorrow that there was a hole in the elbow.

"Versidor," said he to the poet, "lend me your coat."

"My coat!" answered Versidor; "why! that is satire on your part, cutting irony! It is at least two months since I made a spencer of it."

"Poor Versidor!"

"Why poor Versidor? Of what use are coat-tails when one has nothing to put in the pockets?"

"That logic will do for a poet," said Cornelius; "but, then, go get me our physician's coat."

"It is a long time, Cornelius, since the physician's coat found a harbor from the storms of life; it is in the pawn-shop. We breakfasted off it at the Vendanges de Bourgogne one sunny day."

"And was I at the breakfast?"

"To be sure you were, and you were even the principal cause of. It was a breakfast that we organized to take your mind off the death of your exterminating car. You remember, the car that——"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Cornelius. "Then I will take Césariès' coat out of pawn when I receive my funds from Clamecy. But the mathematician's coat?"

"The mathematician's coat, less fortunate than that of Césariès, has fallen into a state of deplorable degradation; it now performs the functions of a rag. Pantagoras uses it to clean his blackboard; but he has a dressing-gown; if you could get along with that——"

"Yes, go get his dressing-gown; I will tell the Abbé Nollet that it is a frock coat."

"That's right, and, if he doubts it, you will prove it to him."

Versidor went to get Pantagoras' dressing-gown, and Cornelius put it on. As he was going out, Versidor said to him:

"But do you intend to go to dine at the Abbé Nollet's in slippers?"

"Why not? Cannot one discuss as well in slippers as in boots?"

"I do not know. However, you would make the Abbé Nollet believe that they are boots. But have you no boots, then?"

"I have, and I have not; that is to say, I have many that are good for nothing, but not a pair that are good."

"That's too bad; in the matter of boots, quantity does not make up for quality; but come, let us look in your archives; we certainly shall find a

pair of boots there which may go to dine in the city."

Cornelius went up to the attic with the poet. He hit upon a pair of boots which seemed suitable, although, like the others, they had holes in them; in them he buried his shins, without distrust, without reservation, like a man entering his own premises. A little cry was heard.

"What!" said Versidor, "is there a voice in your boots?"

"That is not a voice; it is a poor mouse, which I fear I have stifled."

The good Cornelius plunged his hand into the boot which had cried out, and pulled out a big rat, probably attracted to this spot by an old sock that had been forgotten. Versidor, at sight of it, burst out laughing.

"You laugh at that, you comic-opera poet; then you have no feeling; never will you know how to treat passion."

"Then you believe in metempsychosis?"

"Does one need to believe in metempsychosis to have pity for a suffering creature?"

"For a rat?"

"Yes, for a rat. Do you keep your pity then for a limping alexandrine?"

"As I have little to expend, I keep it for my fellows."

"Your fellows? What does that signify? So, if you were lame, you would feel more pity for a lame man who should break his leg than for another?"

"Undoubtedly, because the lame man would need his leg more than another."

"You dodge the question. But, if you were a hunchback, and a hunchback should break his leg?"

"Still I should have more pity for him than I should have for a dog."

"And you would sooner give a piece of bread to a hungry man than to a dog who had had no breakfast?"

"Without doubt."

"Why so?"

"I don't know. Go ask the physician who dissects dogs every day."

"Well, I will tell you why; you give your bread to the man because some day he may return it to you, whereas you are very sure that the dog will not return it. So, you see, our most generous sentiments are nothing more than egotism."

Cornelius put on his boots and went down stairs with Versidor. He was about to take his hat; but

the night before, preoccupied with his great discovery, supposing he was laying his hat on the commode, he had put it in the very middle of the wash-bowl.

"The devil!" said Cornelius; "this is annoying."

"Your felt hat must have been terribly thirsty; there isn't a drop of water left in the bowl."

"Versidor, you, who in your comic operas are so fertile in expedients, must find me another hat."

"In the residence of the savants it is not easy to find one that is suitable; but there is a theologian down stairs whom I know; he is undoubtedly at work at his commentaries on Saint Augustine. I will go after his three-cornered hat."

"But will he lend it to you?"

"Of course. With him is not Christian charity a duty? This austere headpiece will go very well with your costume."

"And what difference does it make what a man wears on his head?"

"You are right; one can discuss as well in a hat that is three-cornered as in a hat that is round. Do you wish me to bring you the reverend's skull-cap lest you may take cold?"

Versidor went for the three-cornered hat, which fortunately was at liberty, and Cornelius started for

the Abbé Nollet's. He crossed the streets, looking neither to the right nor to the left, ransacking his mind for problems to lay before his learned companions, and for arguments with which to solve them. When he rang at the door of the illustrious Abbé, the porter had not yet risen.

"The Abbé Nollet!" said Cornelius, as soon as the door was half open.

"In bed," answered the porter, whose eyes were still half closed.

"Is he sick, perchance?"

"No, he is in very good health."

"Then how does it happen that he has gone to bed so early? Could he have been making sport of me when he invited me to dinner?"

"To breakfast, you mean."

"To dinner, porter, to dinner! I guess I know what I am talking about."

"Then you are mad," answered the porter, closing the door in his face; "I might have suspected it from your costume."

Just then all the clocks struck eight, and Cornelius recognized that the comical poet had made him play the rôle of a noble father. He returned to the residence of the savants with long strides, and this time by the shortest road and without deviation,

firmly resolved to cure Versidor of his propensity to play practical jokes. The latter was awaiting him in the porter's lodge.

"Well, I told you, Cornelius," he cried laughing with all his might, "that you would get there too late."

"Yes, but I come back soon enough to chastise you, my wicked joker, and——"

"Here," said Versidor, handing him his bag, "first count this money; if we go upon the field of honor, and the affair should be settled in advance, at least we shall have something to breakfast upon."

The sight of this bag, which was larger than he expected, dissipated Cornelius' ill-humor. He went up to his room with Versidor, and emptied his bag upon a table. There was a letter at the bottom of it. He seized it, and, having unfolded it, felt a thrill of joy at seeing that it was filled from the top of the first page to the bottom of the last with Louise's close, fine handwriting.

"You count the money," said he to Versidor, "and then go and pay those whom we owe; and you will tell our savants not to breakfast—a very useless recommendation for half of them—because we shall breakfast together."

Having given his orders, he fled rather than went

away. He entered a restaurant, called for a bottle of Bordeaux and a private room, and, when he had been served, he locked the door. It was always thus that he read Louise's letters. This letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR CORNELIUS:—I send you the money for your farm, with the biggest ham that I have been able to steal from my father."

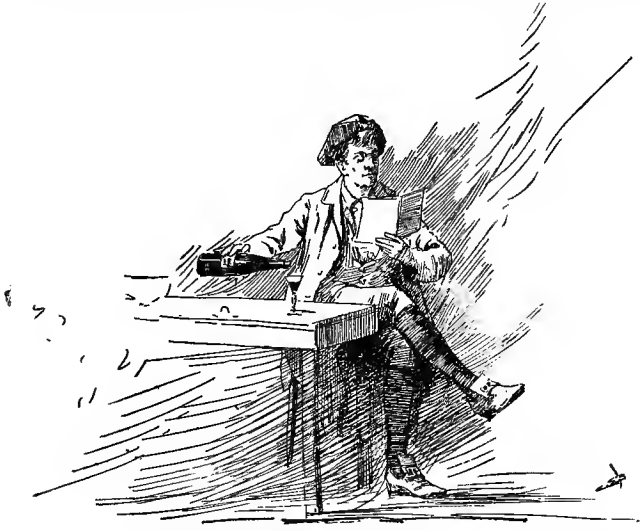
"Good Louise!" said Cornelius, taking a swallow of Bordeaux, "she thinks of everything; it is a pity that her ham didn't get here a week sooner."

"You had strongly advised me, oh! strongly advised, I admit, to sell your farm to Belle-Plante in order, you said, that it might not go out of the family. This reason did not seem to me peremptory, and it was not worthy of you, my savant. What matters it to your father, in the paradise of farmers where he now is, whether his Vaux-Rouges land belongs to Peter or to Paul, and whether grass or potatoes are grown upon it? Do you think, moreover, that he keeps a very affectionate memory of Belle-Plante, who gave him such a small funeral and was unwilling to go to the expense of a black cross for his grave?"

"Belle-Plante is indeed a wretch," said Cornelius, taking a second swallow of Bordeaux; "if I were

as rich as he, our father should have a pyramid over his grave."

"To sell to Belle-Plante is to wish to be duped; and I, in your interest, and also through my pride as a negotiator, did not wish to be his dupe; he



CORNELIUS READING LOUISE'S LETTER.

would give me for your farm only twelve hundred francs, and offered as much as this, he claimed, only because you were his brother."

"If I had been only his cousin," thought Cornelius, "undoubtedly I should have had to return him the money."

"But Father Tardieu offered me three thousand five hundred; by this bargain you gained two thousand three hundred francs; this reason seemed to me much better than yours, and I mocked at your will as if I were already your wife. In vain will you argue upon this subject; you will not cause me to repent. Oh, my poor savant, with your pointed beard and your name that ends in *us*, you do not frighten me. You have too much philosophy to have a little reason, and I must have some for you. I warn you of one thing—that, when we are married, I shall guide our bark. You shall lie in the bow, you shall look at the sky, you shall listen to the singing of the birds, you shall surprise young girls among the flowery reeds, or you shall fish for little red fish, if that suits you better."

"Where does she go for her metaphors?" said Cornelius. "I did not know that there were red fish in the river of life."

"Belle-Plante is angry with me; he goes about everywhere complaining that I have lost him a good bargain. This man has the conscience of an idiot; he does not understand the simplest honesty; he offered me a pair of ear-rings if I would let him have the land for twelve hundred francs. He was perfectly amazed, and perhaps has not yet recovered from his amazement, to think that I should refuse so magnificent a bribe.

"By the way, Cornelius, I must tell you some news. Belle-Plante—yes, Belle-Plante—is courting me! You will say that I am a coquette, who thinks that everybody is smitten with her. In the first place, observe, Cornelius, that I do not say that Belle-Plante is smitten with me. Then, even though he were, what would that prove in favor of my beauty? Belle-Plante does not understand beauty in women; he has sometimes said: 'This is a beautiful cow;' 'This is a beautiful mare;' but never has he said: 'This is a beautiful woman.' Furthermore, to him beauty is a redhibitory vice rather than a reason for preference. I am sure that if he could give me the small-pox, he would do so; I have heard him say that a beautiful woman's dress is a permanent cause of expense to her husband. In this view, it is necessary to put a beautiful portrait in a gilt frame."

"And who begins with himself," said Cornelius. "As far as that goes, Belle-Plante is not wrong."

"You will ask me what proof I have that Belle-Plante is courting me. You know that there is nothing more difficult to prove than that which is true; they easily prove that God does not exist, but no one can prove that He exists. Here, however, are my presumptions: Belle-Plante comes to see us oftener than it is necessary; then, whereas with others he pretends to be poor, to us he talks only of his acres,

of his oxen, of the notes that he has in his portfolio, and that for entire hours. Now, the other day, during this interesting conversation, I was singing.

"'You are very polite to sing,' said my father, 'while Monsieur Belle-Plante is talking.'

"'Would you prefer, dear father,' I answered, 'that I should go to sleep?'

"'That's always the way with you,' said my father, 'you do not like serious conversation.'

"'In truth,' I answered, 'all this is very tiresome. Monsieur François ought to bring his strong-box here every evening and jingle it in our ears; that would amount to the same thing.'

"Belle-Plante went away instantly, and I thought that I was rid of him; but the next day he came back again."

"I will rid you of him, Louise," said Cornelius; "rest easy."

"A more serious presumption than the others—for you have taught me, my savant, to keep my best arguments for the last—is that Belle-Plante wanted to hold a child with me over the baptismal font. Now, just imagine Belle-Plante throwing his money into the holy-water basin of the church without a motive! It is needless to say that I refused this ridiculous proposition; but my father was present.

"'Why,' said he, 'are you unwilling to stand as godmother with Monsieur Belle-Plante?'

"Some time ago he began to call Belle-Plante monsieur.

"I was not in a humor to be impertinent that day; so I answered that I had no dress suitable for the ceremony.

"'Well,' answered my father, 'go and select one at Bonteint's, as handsome a one as you like; I will pay for it.'

"'But,' I replied, 'I know the value that Monsieur Belle-Plante places upon money, and I would not like to lead him into expense.'

"'What, mademoiselle! I place a high value upon money?' said Belle-Plante. 'Who told you so? I place no value upon money, except when it is necessary; only I know how to spend it properly; you will see how the bells will ring for us. If it is necessary to spend two six-franc pieces, I will spend them.'

"'Two six-franc pieces, Monsieur Belle-Plante! It is easy to see that you have never been a godfather, or else that you were not a magnificent godfather. In the first place, I must have twelve pairs of gloves at thirty *sous* a pair; that makes eighteen francs.'

"'Well,' said Belle-Plante, with a somewhat surly air, 'we will spend eighteen francs; we have the money.'

"'Then it is proper that you should offer me a satin sash costing six francs; that makes twenty-four already. It is absolutely essential that you

should buy me a bouquet of white roses; but that costs almost nothing; if you apply to Mademoiselle Blanzy, you can get it for fifteen francs. Besides that, there must be a twelve-franc handkerchief for the nurse.'

"'Say a three-franc handkerchief,' said my father. 'You are too exacting; in my time one could be a godfather for six francs.'

"'Things are done to-day in a nobler style, dear father. You understand that I cannot allow Monsieur Belle-Plante to be stingy, for godfather and godmother are morally bound up with one another.'

"'Well,' said my father, 'Monsieur Belle-Plante will spend all that is necessary, as he has very clearly told you; he has the money to do it; but I wish you to stand godmother with him.'

"'My dear Monsieur Desallemagnes,' said Belle-Plante, 'I see that this disturbs your daughter, and I no longer insist.'

"'But I insist,' answered my father. 'I have taken it into my head that she shall stand godmother with you, and so she shall.'

"'Then I withdraw; it would fill me with despair to cause Mademoiselle Louise the slightest sorrow.'

"'Your proposition,' said I, when I saw that Belle-Plante was drawing off, 'far from causing me sorrow, honors me. Only I feared that you would dislike to spend so much money; but since you have decided to do things properly——'

"'No, mademoiselle, I see that this would be a

sacrifice which you would make in my behalf, and I am not enough of an egotist to accept it. I go straightway to tell Bouchard that I cannot stand godfather for his child.'

"'Then you will have the fairness not to say to him that I refused to stand godmother with you.'

"The next day at breakfast my father returned to the subject of the baptism; I had done wrong in not accepting Belle-Plante's invitation; all the girls in the village would have been proud of such an honor; he was the best match in the neighborhood. I was mischievous enough not to say a word. My father was displeased at my silence.

"'Well,' he said to me, 'how long, then, does it take to become a great man?'

"I made no answer.

"'It seems to me,' he went on, 'that your Cornelius is in no hurry about achieving fame. Look at the difference between a savant and a good farmer: Cornelius sells his lands, and Belle-Plante buys them.'

"My silence was choking me.

"'The difference between Belle-Plante and Cornelius,' I answered, 'is that Belle-Plante reaps and that Cornelius is still sowing; another difference between them is that, if Cornelius is poor, it is because he has a great mind and a noble heart, and his hand is open to all the unfortunate; whereas, if Belle-Plante is rich, it is because he has robbed his brother, and robbed all the poor people who have

been obliged to appeal to him. And what is the man who would like to be rich in such a fashion? What is the woman who would like to share this shameful wealth and transmit it as an inheritance to her children? But God has made use of the very avarice of Belle-Plante to punish him for his extortions; Belle-Plante will be always the basest and most miserable of the peasants of this village. Bah! Your Belle-Plante is a pig with golden bristles.'

"My father bit his lips and went away.

"So, you see, Cornelius, the promise which my father has given us holds but by a thread; I am expecting every moment to be called upon to marry Belle-Plante, but I know very well what I will answer. I am my father's daughter, but I am not his slave; he did not buy me at the fair like one of his oxen; I did not grow in his furrows like one of his ears of corn. Let him take the fortune which comes to me from my mother; let him take it all, if he will; but make me renounce you, Cornelius! Oh, no, Monsieur Desallemagnes, that shall not be; church-warden though you are, that shall not be. If you become rich, Cornelius, if your name, as yet unknown, shall be illuminated with glory, come and get me; if you remain poor and obscure, wait for me. I am yours, yours, do you understand? I cannot live without you any more than the leaf can live without the branch, any more than the rose can live removed from its stem. Life, you see, is a litter; we must carry it together."

"Bravo, Louise! bravo!" shouted Cornelius.

"Monsieur," said the waiter, knocking lightly at the door, "you called. What do you wish?"

"That you should go away, and directly," answered Cornelius.

"Nevertheless, make haste to become a great man. You ought already, idler though you are, to have a halo around your head as big as a rainbow. Do not place too much trust in what I have just said; fear that I may allow myself to be tempted by the merry life which Belle-Plante promises me. Jeanne, who was a servant in his house, and whom he discharged—poor girl—because she had too good an appetite, tells marvellous things about him. In the first place, his servants eat with him; or, to speak more exactly, he eats with his servants. The vegetables of the poor are the only ones allowed upon his table; he is especially fond of the bean, because this sober and frugal vegetable carries its own seasoning with it. He has beef broth only on the day dedicated to the local patron saint. Consequently at his house there are no cramps, no stomach-aches, no indigestion; besides, these meals, already so agreeable in themselves, are seasoned with the most pleasing conversation. Belle-Plante talks of nothing but the miserable weather and the difficulty of making both ends meet; if it rains, he cries that the crops are going to be drowned; if it is a sunny day, he says that they are going to be roasted.

One of his favorite theses is that garlic and shallot, being vegetables which nature has been careful to spice itself, should be eaten without salt, or else that the less oil a salad contains the better it is. He even goes so far as to say that oil is a slow poison.

"In the third place, our asparagus grows as thin and slender as knitting-needles. In vain do I watch it and water it and feed it with compost; nothing has any effect. He, on the contrary, has beautiful asparagus. It is true that not a bunch of it gets into his kitchen; but at least I shall have the advantage of going in company with a donkey to sell them in the market, as well as the grapes from his trellises and the fruits from his orchard; that, you will admit, will furnish me agreeable amusement. So far Belle-Plante has taken these duties upon himself. Why, then, does not the good God, to save him this embarrassment, cause coin to grow upon the branches of his trees?

"In the fourth place, Belle-Plante eats at home as seldom as possible; when he is offered a glass of wine anywhere, he calls for the loaf under pretext of breaking a crust, and thus manages to dine with his host, who thought he was simply inviting him to take some refreshment. You can see how that will simplify my duty as cook.

"But there is another reason why you should hasten to succeed: you have a second rival; and this rival is no one less than Panuche—the brilliant sex-

ton, Panuche—who presents himself, backed by the priest. The holy man's reasons for desiring me to marry Panuche I do not wish to divine; for a long time he has beset my father with his recommendations of Panuche. Monsieur Desallemagnes, being church-warden, dares not say no; but, as Panuche is little to his liking, he does not say yes. Meanwhile the priest does not get discouraged; he courts me in behalf of Panuche, while the latter is digging in his garden. Must we not help one another? Making an excuse of having to talk to the church-warden about vestry affairs, he always comes to the house at a time when he is sure not to find him, and then he does me the honor to talk with me. But guess what he says to me, Cornelius. He tells me—and doubtless in the interest of Panuche—that I have the eyes of a gazelle, a neck of ivory, the hand of a goddess; in short, he is an Abbé Bernis in prose. The other day he so far emancipated himself as to kiss my goddess' hand, and I very respectfully requested him not to repeat the performance; but it seems that it takes a bishop's order to oblige him to be prudent. Yesterday, while I was leaning over my work, he took me by surprise, and stole—for I can give no other name to his ugly act—a big kiss from my lips. I was so amazed that I did not have the presence of mind to box his ears. But let Monsieur Bernis come back; and, priest though he is and church-warden though my father is, he will find the blow ready and hot. If he ex-

pects to excuse himself by saying that he took my lips for a rose and could not resist the desire to taste its perfume, he is mistaken. Let him persist in taking my lips for a rose, and I will show him that the rose has thorns.

"Do you understand, savant—you who understand everything—how it is that there are women who abandon themselves to a priest? A priest, Cornelius! Why, there is nothing so lugubrious as a priest! Their black gown casts a reflection of mourning on everything that surrounds them; they smell of the mouldy dust of the church; there radiates from them an icy something that resembles the emanations from vaults. It seems to me that their presence ought to be enough to wither a bouquet upon one's bosom. There are priests who are handsome; there are some who are amiable. And why should there not be? But the beauty of those who are handsome is like that of a gloomy statue over a grave, and the smile of those who are amiable resembles a tuft of flowering plants growing out of the hollow of a death's-head. Really, Cornelius, when this black man says sweet things to me, I feel as if I had suddenly heard a serpent singing like a nightingale, or had seen a black frog assume the wings of a butterfly, and, flying away from its reeds, settle upon the flowers. You see, Cornelius, if I had the misfortune to love a priest, I should be afraid, whenever we happened to be together in a lonely spot, that the devil might come to seize him

in my arms, or that the fire of hell might communicate to his gown. I should always fear lest his kisses might leave a scar upon my cheek.

"And yet, why should not priests love like other men? Has an angel, while they were asleep, taken their heart from their breast and replaced it with a stone? Is it more reasonable to say to a priest 'You shall not love,' than to say it to a tailor or a shoemaker? No, I will never believe that God, who is the author of all good sense, has made a precept so senseless. In fact, is chastity really a virtue? What sort of a virtue is that which is useful to no one, which subjects those who practise it to endless struggles and to the tortures of the martyr, and which, if everybody practised it, would bring the world to an end?

"If it is pleasing to God that priests do not marry, it must be displeasing to him that other men marry; now, if it is only by offending him that the interminable garland of the generations can be continued, why does he not cause men to grow upon the branches of oaks and women to bloom upon the branches of rose-trees? Of what does happiness in this world consist, Cornelius? Of satisfied desires; I had rather have a glowing coal in the middle of my heart than an unsatisfied desire. Those old abbés of the councils, those old mitred bishops, with their pointed beards, would have believed themselves damned forever if they had put a man in a boiler even for five minutes; but they confine the priests

all their lives in celibacy as in a fiery boiler! They make their youth a gridiron!

"You hate priests, Cornelius; I pity them. Those who are jealous of them are very foolish, and those who gratuitously insult them are very cruel! At what price have they gained this tile-covered roof, smoking gloriously amid roofs of thatch? How these unfortunates must suffer when they see a young and pretty woman leaning on her husband's arm, or a pink baby extend its little white arms to its father from its cradle! Their divine Master suffered but a day; but their passion is felt at every hour and throughout their life. Yet for whom do they suffer? Of what use is this burning crown of thorns which is put upon their head? Of what use this gall and vinegar which they are made to drink? When in the full vigor of their spring, when the stormy flood of the passions mounts and boils within them, they are reduced to the condition of old men—not their heads alone, but their hearts are tonsured.

"Is it not painful, Cornelius, to think that this severing by the scissors of these black or brown locks means the mowing down of all the flowers of their life, leaving them only the dry stalks of old age! That month of love, that month so sweet, but so short, which is the whole of existence, that beautiful month so full for others of roses, perfumes, sunshine—by what right has it been changed for them alone into a dark and gloomy month, full of ice and frost? And you, O my God, have made them this

existence! But why then have you made them butterflies if you do not wish them to seek the roses? Why have you given them thirst if you have forbidden them the clear water of the fountains? Is it, then, absolutely necessary that they should be either unhappy or guilty? And yet these are your ministers; these you have chosen to open and close the doors of your heaven. By what caprice, then, have you placed upon your faithful servants a heavier burden of miseries than upon us who are in continued rebellion against your precepts?

"And again, as if their torment were not already cruel enough, they must be the confidants of those wild young girls who have nothing but sins of love to confess! Do you not understand, then, that the priest feels upon his lips all the kisses that they have given? Those words of love which they have whispered, and which reveal to him a paradise in which he is forbidden to set foot, flutter about him like glowing wings; they disturb, like an echo from hell, the prayers which he addresses to God, and at night they change into white young girls who come to torment his dreams. In those delicious sins which you expect him to indignantly denounce he would give anything in the world to have been a participant. The position in which you place them is that of a hungry man whom you force to serve a good meal; they resemble—pardon my trivialities, Cornelius, as I pardon yours—a dog to whose neck a leg of roast mutton has been fastened by his master.

"And yet these men who are submitted to such severe and difficult trials are not promised a paradise better than that of others if they resist, or a hell less fiery if they succumb. There is a bridge over which the crowd pass conveniently and without danger; the priests, on the contrary, are obliged to cross the river on a tight-rope, with a fragile hemp-stalk for a balancing-pole. Nineteen out of twenty are drowned, and he who reaches the other shore safe and sound has, after all, the same bank, the same sky, the same verdure that the crowd enjoy. Is that just, Cornelius?

"I hope that you will not begrudge me this discussion. You know very well that I cannot always be throwing grain to my white doves, as the poets say, or making cream cheeses, as Belle-Plante says. Unable to babble with my tongue, which has no sister here, I babble with the point of my pen; who could hold it for a crime?

"Adieu, Cornelius, that is to say, *vale*. For what should I do with the Latin that you taught me if I did not expend it upon you? *Vale*, then, Cornelius, *vale et me ama*, as Cicero said."

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE Belle-Plante pursued his project of marriage with the tenacity which misers show in everything. He was gallant with Louise. He said to her: "I have bought at the Dornecy fair a pair of oxen, on which I shall certainly make three hundred francs;" or else: "My oats this year will bring me at least a thousand francs;" or else again: "Nothing is wasted in my house; the prodigal steps upon a grain of wheat; the orderly man picks it up; every day he puts others beside it, and at the end of the year he has a bushel." And he was astonished that Louise should resist such a powerful means of seduction. He did not court her openly, but through Father Desallemagnes.

He resolved to address himself to him.

But, first of all, Belle-Plante had to get some new clothes; for there can be no marriage without a new coat; and I very much doubt if the omission of this formality, if the case were handled by a good lawyer, would not nullify the matrimonial contract. So Belle-Plante submitted to this necessity, but not

without a long and comprehensive calculation of the means of rendering the burden as light as possible.

One morning he called upon Couture, the local tailor.

"Couture," said he, "you must make me a coat."

This word coat on the lips of Belle-Plante made such a deep impression of astonishment upon Couture that his legs uncrossed, and he found himself sitting on his bench like a natural person, without understanding how it had happened.

"Yes," said Belle-Plante, who noticed his astonishment, "a coat. Do you hear me, you scamp?"

"Very willingly, Monsieur Belle-Plante," said the tailor; "but are your father's old clothes, then, all worn out at last?"

"And why should you blame me, Couture, for wearing my father's old clothes? Am I not my father's heir, Monsieur Couture?"

"Undoubtedly you are, in your right. Your father's old vests fitted you wonderfully. Such things are precious relics, to which a son should cling as long as possible."

"If you wish to retain my custom," said Belle-Plante, "this coat must be firm among the firmest, and you must not be saving of thread."

"Monsieur Belle-Plante, I will make it as firm as

a monument. It shall be a coat that will wear out three Belle-Plantes, and I will sew it, if you like, with fishing-twine. What color shall this coat be?" As Belle-Plante was reflecting, the tailor added:

"Do you wish it to be a black coat, like the mayor's, or a coat of the color of the firmament, such as the sheriff has ordered?"

"You, Couture, you work for the sheriff? Do you expect me to believe that?"

"Why, then, Monsieur Belle-Plante, if you doubt it, here is his measure. You see for yourself, on this strip of paper: '*M. Orgenneau, Sheriff of Clamecy.*' "

"That may be," said Belle-Plante; "but, inasmuch as you work for the sheriff, I am going away. The prices of the sheriff's tailor must be too high."

"Oh! I was only joking," said Couture, seeing that he was caught in his own trap. "The fact is that I work only for the natives of the neighborhood. But what color shall your coat be?"

"Earth color," said Belle-Plante, "as well as the pantaloons and waistcoat."

"What, Monsieur Belle-Plante! You are to have pantaloons and waistcoat also? You are a fine-looking man, a very fine-looking man, one of the finest-looking men in Clamecy; but in your coat

you will look a hundred times better still. Believe me, there is nothing like the tailor's handiwork to improve a young man. I am going to send my wife to Clamecy at once to get the cloth."

"Not so fast, Monsieur Couture, if you please; I am no idler, and I will go buy my cloth myself."

"As you like, Monsieur Belle-Plante; but then if you are cheated, so much the worse for you; it will not be my fault, and I wash my hands of the matter."

"All right!" said Belle-Plante; "how many yards of cloth will it take to make me a full suit?"

"Four yards, Monsieur Belle-Plante—not an inch less; and then there will be hardly enough to cover the buttons."

"Four yards! do you wish, then, to make a dressing-gown for yourself at my expense? Noyon, of Clamecy, would require only two yards. That is what comes of patronizing one's neighbors."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur Belle-Plante; you do not know Noyon. There is no tailor in the department whose scissors are more voracious. He would ask you for six yards for a full suit, and I will return to you the pieces."

"Two yards," said Belle-Plante; "otherwise we will assume that I have said nothing of the matter."

"So be it—two yards; but then your coat will have no tails."

"And of what use are the tails of a coat? What signifies the yard of cloth that flaps about a man's thighs, carefully gathering the mud of the streets. When he passes among thorns, does he not run a risk of losing his coat-tails? God is a much better tailor than man. See how he has dressed the animals! Have they on their bodies an inch of skin which is not of use? Let the tailors pattern after him."

"Undoubtedly, Monsieur Belle-Plante, you are right; your criticism is excellent and very ingenious, and I should like to have said what you have just said; but then, fashion is custom, and custom, as you know, reigns despotically over society."

"Well, three yards, Monsieur Couture."

"Four yards, or your coat will have only one tail."

"Well, have four yards, then, miserly cloth-eater. But," he added to himself, "once is not a custom, and if I am caught this way again——"

"And the buttons, Monsieur Belle-Plante?"

"Another absurdity of the tailors. They put buttons and button-holes on all their coats, and we never button them. Is it not as if a blind man

were to wear glasses? What perverse and corrupt creatures these tailors are!"

"I hope," said the tailor, "that there is nothing personal in your remark, and I beg you to observe, moreover, that I am not the inventor of buttons."

"It is true," said Belle-Plante; "I do you so much justice: you never invented anything. But, to dispose of this matter, there are some metal buttons on one of my father's old coats, and I will use those."

"What are you thinking about, Monsieur Belle-Plante? I undoubtedly profess a very great respect for your father's wedding-coat, as well as for the buttons with which it is trimmed; but my impartiality obliges me to tell you that they look more like pot-lids than buttons. You cannot attach such old iron to a new coat; you would look like a dealer in cymbals, and you would suffer in the public esteem. I am not even sure that the police would not forbid you to wear such buttons on grounds of public safety. Suppose that you were standing at your window, and one of your buttons should fall off, and——"

"And I tell you that they must be used."

"Then you will put them on yourself; to do it you will need bolts and nuts. However, I wash my hands of the matter; but I do not wish the chil-

dren to say when they see you pass, 'It was Couture who put those buttons on Monsieur Belle-Plante's coat.' Do you understand my scruples, Monsieur Belle-Plante?"

"Do, then, as you like, detestable hunchback! But I await your bill."

Sunday morning Belle-Plante went to Couture's. His coat was ready and hung on a hook in the shop. Belle-Plante tried it on; but, to have an excuse for beating the tailor down, he pronounced it a very bad fit. The tailor, on his side, in order to be paid more willingly and more dearly, maintained that the coat fitted him divinely. Thus in every question each affirms or denies, according to his own interest. The fact is that the coat was neither a good nor a bad fit.

"Well," said Belle-Plante, "how much do you want for your work?"

"For my work and my materials, if you please."

"How! what materials? Did I not furnish the cloth?"

"Is there nothing but cloth in a coat? See, here is your bill; that will tell you what I have furnished."

"I will examine it," said Belle-Plante, putting it into his pocket.

"You will examine it later as much as you like; but it is receipted, and I need the money."

"What, knave! Do you distrust me, then?"

And the tailor, who had no further reason to be cautious with Belle-Plante, because he knew that this was the only coat that he would ever make for him, said:

"Monsieur Belle-Plante, your father called me Monsieur Couture."

"Monsieur Couture! A fine monsieur you are! A beggar without a sou, monsieur! The word must have been invented for you."

"If you go on in that way," said the tailor, "I will add your insults to the bill."

"Well, then, animal—read me your bill! Do you expect me to take the trouble to decipher your scribbling?"

"'For cutting a yellow coat, and pantaloons and waistcoat of the same color, six francs twelve *sous*.'"

"Too much by half," said Belle-Plante.

"Do you know," answered the tailor, "how much time I have spent on this work; how much thread and wax I have used, and how many needles I have broken?"

"Not at all," said Belle-Plante.

"Then why do you say that it is too much?"

"Because it is too much."

"That's the way they all talk," said Couture; "the doctor, who takes one franc a visit; the lawyer who charges six francs for three dozen words; the office-holder, who receives a thousand francs a month for a hundred signatures—all say to the working-man who asks two francs for a day's work that it is too much! You, Monsieur Belle-Plante, are not one of those people by education and capacity; but you talk as they do."

"Well, here are your six francs sixty centimes," said Belle-Plante. "Now give me a receipt."

"Wait a bit; we are not yet at the end. 'For lining, three francs——'"

"Lining, lining! And who told you to line my coat? I will not pay for this lining."

"We shall see," said Couture; and he continued: "'For buttons, three francs.'"

"What! three francs for buttons! You are joking, Monsieur Couture. Take back your buttons directly. I can get as handsome ones for one franc."

"I," answered Couture, "am a tailor who sews, not a tailor who unsews. 'Received the sum of twelve francs twelve *sous*. (Signed) Couture.'"

"Knock four francs off that, and I will pay you."

"I will not knock off a *sou*."

"Will you take ten francs?" said Belle-Plante; "yes or no?"

"No," said the tailor.

"Well, then, you can sue me."

"It is you who will sue me to get your coat, for I shall keep it as security for what you owe me."

"Couture," said Belle-Plante, "you have played me a dirty trick, and you will lose my custom."

"Fine custom, yours!" said Couture. "Much water will flow under the bridge before you order another coat."

Belle-Plante was generally too good a manager to pay a total without getting a reduction, but this time he had to pay to the last *sou*, the tailor persisting in keeping the coat if he were not paid. So he took two six-franc pieces from his pocket with a sigh and handed them to Couture.

"Twelve *sous* more," said Couture.

"I have only twelve francs; perhaps you will oblige me to change a three-franc piece for twelve *sous!*"

But Couture was inflexible, and Belle-Plante, to his great regret, was forced to yield.

An hour later Belle-Plante was clad in the complete epidermis which Couture's scissors had cut for him. He had had a shirt plaited, whose starched

collar rose around his cheeks like a brick set edgewise; and, to cap the climax of his seductive costume, he had borrowed of his servant, although it was then dog-days, a pair of Angora gloves. Really Belle-Plante was not altogether ugly in his new coat; but he was as stiff, awkward, and embarrassed in this unusual costume as a wolf would be in the skin of a deer.

In this magnificent costume he went to the house of M. Desallemagnes. Father and daughter were then in the kitchen.

"Goodness! Monsieur Belle-Plante," said Father Desallemagnes, "how fine you look!"

"Cloth at fifteen francs a yard, Monsieur Desallemagnes, nothing less."

Louise understood at once what Belle-Plante's full suit meant. Her disposition suddenly soured. She did not pout, because when she pouted she did not look well; but she gently thrust forth, from the velvet of her pretty paw, five little claws as hard and sharp as needles, and made ready to scratch the nose of the hideous bulldog who dared to ask her hand in marriage.

"One could not too highly compliment Monsieur Belle-Plante on the color that he has chosen," said Louise; "he looks like a hare in a shirt-collar."

"Always facetious, Mademoiselle Louise," said Belle-Plante, calmly.

"And your gloves," said Louise, "produce a magnificent effect at the end of your long, yellow arms. Are you afraid of getting chilblains?"

Belle-Plante was beginning to get angry, especially as the money which he had spent upon his dress had failed in its effect.

"And why should I not wear gloves?" said he; "have I not the means? There are people in your commune who wear them and who have not a *sou*."

"Well, at any rate they do not borrow them of their servant."

"The only difference, mademoiselle, is that they borrow them of their merchant."

Louise, wounded in the person of Cornelius, started like a lioness about to throw herself upon the imprudent assailer of her young.

"Perhaps," said she, "that is due to the fact that the persons of whom you speak have some relative, some good brother perhaps, who has stripped them of a part of their inheritance."

"Well," said Father Desallemagnes, who understood nothing of this conversation, "perhaps you will tell us for what purpose you have gone to the expense of a coat?"

"In truth, that concerns you," said Belle-Plante, "and if you will send for a bottle of wine, I will tell you why while we break a crust."

"Since you talk of breaking a crust, I may as well invite you to breakfast."

"As you like, but I have already eaten at the house, and I accept simply not to disoblige you."

"I was far from expecting such politeness."

"It is undoubtedly your yellow coat that inspires you to breakfast twice," said Louise.

"I know many who would not do as much to please a young lady."

"Louise," said M. Desallemagnes, "I do not know what is the matter with you to-day; get us something to eat, since Monsieur Belle-Plante is willing to accept our breakfast. Prepare some ham, kill a chicken, make an omelet; we must do honor to Monsieur Belle-Plante's new suit."

"Oh, Monsieur Desallemagnes, not so much ceremony over my suit, I beg of you!"

But the fact was that internally he voted for the murder of the chicken. He calculated that he could dispense with eating at home for the balance of the day, and he looked upon this saving as in some sort a deduction from Couture's bill.

VIII.

WHILE Louise was getting breakfast, Belle-Plante walked up and down the kitchen with the farmer, conversing on various very instructive matters, such as oats, hay, and the price of cows at the last Clamecy fair. The editor of an agricultural journal could have made an excellent article from their conversation. Suddenly Belle-Plante left his companion and approached Louise.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "will you allow me an observation?"

"Two, if you like," answered Louise.

"Well, it seems to me that you are putting far too much butter in that omelet."

"Really!" said Louise; "you will soon prove to me that butter is a slow poison, too."

Just then a beggar appeared at the door.

"Monsieur Belle-Plante," said Louise, delighted to play a trick and at the same time perform an act of charity, "you see that I am busy; will you give this poor man a *sou* for me?"

"Why, with much pleasure, mademoiselle. Mis-

fortune has always been honorable in my eyes. A glass of water given to a poor man is to God the most agreeable act that one can perform; and if you thought that a glass of water could take the place of a piece of money, I would willingly give him a jugful. . . ."

"Are you determined, then, to make me leave my work, Monsieur Belle-Plante? Then you must hold the handle of the frying-pan."

"I should like that almost as well," said Belle-Plante, "and, if you are determined to bestow your alms yourself——"

"No, no," said Louise, "you would spot your new coat. Cloth at fifteen francs, Monsieur Belle-Plante!"

Belle-Plante, seeing that it was necessary to comply, took from his pocket a big bag, and drew from the bottom of it four bad *liards*, and let them fall as ostentatiously as possible into the poor man's hat. The beggar, in honor of such magnificent charity, began to mumble one of his finest prayers.

Belle-Plante, looking sidewise into the kitchen and noticing that Louise's back was turned, said to the beggar: "You have swindled me out of a *sou*, you wretch! But if ever you appear at my door, I will set my dogs on you."

The breakfast was soon ready. Belle-Plante ate like a soldier just out of the hospital and drank in proportion, but he did not breathe a word of the affair that had brought him to the house. M. Desallemagnes made it a point of conscience to let him take his time. There must be an end to everything, however, and when the last bit of omelet was on his plate he said to him:

"Well, my boy, have you had enough breakfast?"

"I was waiting," answered Belle-Plante, turning his eyes in the direction of Louise, "until we should be alone."

"Oh, don't be embarrassed," said Louise; "I know in advance what you are going to say: you wish to ask my hand in marriage, do you not? Well, my reply shall be soon given. Here it is: I will not have you!"

"Was that what you came to ask?" said Father Desallemagnes.

"You know how facetious Mademoiselle Louise is, Monsieur Desallemagnes; but, even though she were speaking seriously, is it not for you to direct her? Should the cow guide the cow-herd? You are a father or you are not; if you are not, why do you permit people to call you Father Desallemagnes?"

"Now that I am church-warden they call me Monsieur Desallemagnes."

"Well, so be it! You are and always will be Monsieur Desallemagnes to me; but you know very well that women know nothing of business. Everything that is done at the notary's is outside their comprehension. Talk to them of the most important negotiations, and if a violin is heard they will run to the window. To try to get a serious idea into a woman's head is like trying to plant an oak in an egg-shell."

"I understand your reasoning; but, if Louise does not love you——"

"Are you one of those who think that love is necessary to a marriage? What are a man and woman who marry? Two beings of different sex who associate to work together and propagate their kind. When the wife gets a good supper for her husband and mends his shirts well, when the husband brings his wife his wages and goes to the wine-shop only on Sunday, do not the two beings love each other sufficiently? They are obliged to live under the same roof, before the same fireside, in the same alcove; in short, then, is it indispensable that they should love each other in order to live together? Does the soldier love his

bedfellow? To make a pair of chickens, is it necessary to take two fowls that love each other? Do the beans love each other? Nevertheless, does that prevent them from vegetating in perfect union under the same bean-pod? And you, who have inscribed upon the tomb of Madame Desallemagnes that she was a model wife, did you love her when you married her? I tell you, Father Desallemagnes, in our society it is not persons but fortunes that marry. A female field marries a male field, when there is not too great a difference between them in point of fertility and area; but if a golden *louis* should marry a copper *sou* I should call it immorality, social disturbance, incest! And besides, Father Desallemagnes, how long does love last among those who marry, supposing that it existed before marriage? Love, you see, Father Desallemagnes, cannot be better compared than to thirst. As long as you do not drink you are thirsty; as soon as you have drunk the thirst disappears, and then certainly you are more comfortable. The newly married, Father Desallemagnes, do with their love what prodigals do with their money; they expend so much of it every day that at the end of a month it is exhausted. Look around you and see how all the love marriages turn out. The first day

the husband kisses his wife, the second he turns his back on her, and the third he beats her. In truth, young people entertain singular illusions regarding marriage. The fool marries a rose, and the next day finds only a few rose-leaves on his pillow. But do you know what the wise man marries, Father Desallemagnes? He marries an oak. I say girls should not be allowed to marry until they are sixty."

"There is some truth in what you say; but not only does my daughter not love you, she loves another, it seems. There is in the world a certain Cornelius."

"What! he! Cornelius! a prodigal, a savant, a philosopher, a mathematician, a chemist, an inventor! Oh! Father Desallemagnes, you would be the most absurd of fathers if you were to give your daughter to Cornelius! But you will not do it, I know; you would sooner confront thirty legal summons."

"I will do all that I can to make Louise listen to reason; for, after all, you are a lad with good lands; but then, if my daughter were to be unhappy with you?"

"What are you talking about, Monsieur Desallemagnes? A woman unhappy with an income of from five to six thousand francs! With me your

daughter would be the happiest wife in the department. For her sake I would depart from my economical principles; I would not send her to the fields; I would permit her to make cake, and I would allow her to work all day, if she chose, at little tasks of pleasure, such for instance as making cream cheeses. But Cornelius, what would he do with her, the wretched savant? He would set her to copying his memoirs."

"It is in vain for you to talk; I cannot give you an answer without speaking first with Louise."

"Well, shall you be at Clamecy to-morrow at the wood auction?"

"I shall be there. And you, shall you be there?"

"I shall take a turn in that direction; but wood is too dear by half; I shall make no bid."

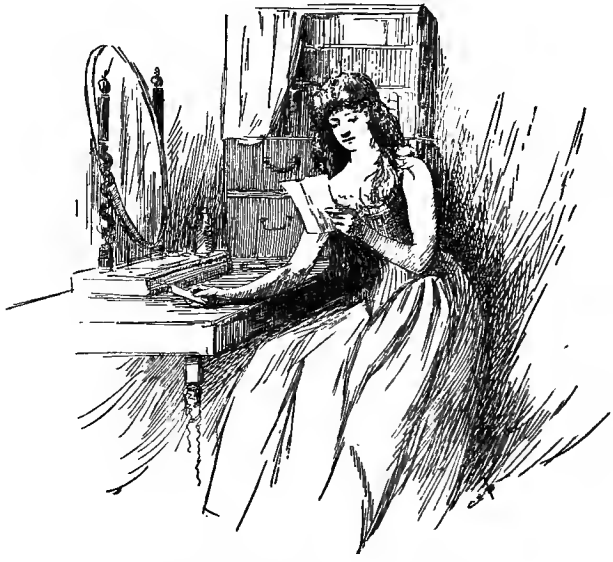
"Well, I will give you my answer."

IX.

MEANWHILE Louise was getting ready to go to mass. She was reading, half-dressed—or half-undressed, if that please you better — a letter which Jeanne, her faithful servant, had just brought her from Clamecy. It was from our friend Cornelius, and it reads as follows:

"*Non semper hispidos manent!* Pardon my absent-mindedness, Louise; that means that fortune is at last about to turn in our favor. I have in my portfolio a magnificent discovery, a discovery that promises us glory and wealth; glory for both and wealth for you alone, my Louise! I say glory for both, because the glory of a famous man is a halo that shines upon the woman who bears his name; and I say wealth for you alone, because what do I need? Beefsteaks, Bordeaux, coffee, punch, and now and then three or four savants around my table. After that I care as little for money as a surfeited dog cares for a carcass. But you, Louise, shall have every day satin dresses that make a harmonious *frou-frou*, and I will enwrap you in a network of laces.

"I like to believe that you know what a balloon is. Nevertheless, in case you should not, I will explain to you this ingenious machine. The balloon, called in the first place *montgolfière*, after its inventor, is a huge bag made of taffeta or simply



LOUISE READING CORNELIUS' LETTER.

gummed cloth, and containing hydrogen, a gas which, being about fourteen times lighter than the atmospheric air, lifts its envelope with it. So far this admirable discovery has borne no fruit, or at least none other than the gathering of curiosity-

seekers in the public squares and the killing of a large number of cats, as well as of a few celebrated men; so far the aeronaut—that is, the aerial navigator—has been obliged to abandon himself to the atmospheric currents, and to go like a feather fallen from an eagle's wing, whither it pleased the wind to carry him. But I, Cornelius Belle-Plante, have found a way of steering the balloon. It will be as docile under my hands as a boat under the oar of a fisherman, and I will guide it through vast fields of air like a horse led by the bridle. If Belle-Plante should dare to say again in your presence that I am good for nothing, you would answer him: 'Nature has given man but four members, feeble and bare; the first person who placed a boat upon the waves gave him fins; your brother has given him wings.'

"You must understand, Louise, the full significance of my discovery. Henceforth all transportation, all travel, will be done by balloon; fast vehicles and stage-coaches will disappear; we shall keep our balloon as we keep our carriage, and, instead of highways, there will be nothing but little paths for pedestrians. The fields which now serve to feed the horses will be given over to the cultivation of grain, and, not to waste the horses themselves, they will be taken to the butcher and made into beefsteaks. Perhaps that will be prejudicial to Belle-Plante, whose estates consist almost entirely of meadows and who has many horses; but we shall easily find

a way to compensate him from the product of my discovery.

"On the other hand, between nations there will be no more of those deep ditches which we call rivers; no more of those high and long walls which the good God has capped with snow and ice as the mason caps the wall of an enclosure with pieces of glass. All countries will be explored. We shall penetrate the interior of Africa more easily than the house of a member of the Academy of Sciences; we shall make the tour of the earth as you make the tour of your round table, and we shall be able to measure its circumference almost to an inch! And to me, Cornelius, will the world be indebted for this discovery! Oh, Louise! if I could embrace myself, with what transports I would embrace myself!

"You see, Louise, when my balloon is finished, we shall take a little journey together to the islands of the Pacific Ocean; we shall traverse the air like two birds carrying their nest; we shall feel the wings of the angels who watch over the earth brush against us as we go along. The sky will have become as black as a grave-cloth; you will breathe with difficulty; you will shiver under your wadded cloak, and the fire in the foot-warmer will go out; blood will sweat through the pores of your skin; I will speak to you, and you will see only the moving of my lips. I understand that that is not pleasant; but, on your return, what delight you will take in describing it all to your companions!

"We shall approach unknown shores; we shall spread among new people the benefits of European civilization; we shall overwhelm them with nails, little bits of glass, images of saints, and I shall teach them geometry. They will worship us as messengers from the gods, and perhaps they will sacrifice to us men fattened expressly for us—these good savages!

"To come back to my balloon. You will object, perhaps, that my aerial navigators will be stopped by the tempests and the violent currents of air, and that then it will be necessary to establish in the air taverns built on piles of hydrogen and fastened to stakes with ropes, where travellers may await the return of calm weather. I do not conceal the gravity of your objection, and it shows your good sense, my dear Louise; but I must find above the regions of the atmosphere a perfectly calm air, which I shall navigate as if it were a lake. I might send you the plan of my balloon, and you would see that my apparatus is strong enough to overcome ordinary atmospheric currents; but I prefer to bring it to you myself.

"Next Monday I shall be at Clamecy; I wish to make my balloon at Armes. Belle-Plante has a large yard, which will be very useful to me in coating my cloth. Despite his avarice, I hope that it will give him pleasure to receive me and give me shelter for a few months. Besides, I am obliged to make his house my headquarters; with the money

that you have sent me I have bought four hundred yards of cloth and two casks of drying-oil; when my seat in the stage-coach is paid for, I shall not have a *sou* left.

"I do not answer you in relation to what you tell me of Belle-Plante and the priest: my letter would be of unheard-of dimensious. We will talk of it at leisure when I reach Armes.

"Your friend,

"CORNELIUS."

"P. S.—If there is any term in my letter which you do not understand, you will ask Monsieur Guillerand to explain it to you."

"Of course," said Louise, and she thrust Cornelius' letter into her bosom — a charming hiding-place, where she kept each of Cornelius' missives until another came—and started for church.

The mass was finished and Louise had just reached home again, when the priest's servant came to tell her that her master desired to speak to her.

"And what does your master want of me, Jeanneton? He knows very well that I never go to the parsonage."

"I believe," said Jeanneton, "that he wishes to hand you a paper which you lost in the church."

Louise quickly felt for her letter, and, perceiving

that it was gone, she followed Jeanneton without a word.

"Here," said the priest, "is a letter addressed to you, which the sexton found in your pew at church."

"Ah!" said Louise, blushing to her temples, "I thank you, Monsieur le Curé, and I will send a pair of chickens to Monsieur Panuche to thank him for his discretion."

As she was about to leave the priest detained her.

"It appears, mademoiselle," he said, "that you love a certain Cornelius?"

"A *certain*," said Louise, drawing herself up to her full height; "what means this word *certain?* You are called Monsieur le Curé; do you think, then, that Cornelius is not as good as you are? And who told you that I love Cornelius? It seems to me, that you have permitted yourself the liberty of reading my letter. To read a letter that is addressed to another is a very evil thing in any one; it is to steal another's secrets; but in a priest it is much worse."

The priest remained unmoved under this reproach.

"Mademoiselle," he answered, "if you were capable of reflection, you would perceive without diffi-

culty that what you consider so evil in a priest is his duty. The priest performs police functions over the souls in his parish, as the commissioner performs them over the inhabitants of the city. Must he not know what is going on among those whose salvation is confided to his care? How could he apply the remedy if he did not know the location of the wound? But I myself have occasion to reproach you, since at your last confession you concealed from me your love for *this* Cornelius."

"And is it, then, a sin to love *this* Cornelius? Well, if it is a sin, I confess it. Yes, I love Cornelius! Cornelius, my savant, my madman, my babbler! How handsome he is all the same, my Cornelius, with his big, absent eyes that seem to see the angels in heaven, and his broad forehead, beneath which one seems to hear the hum of machinery! But he is so good; he has a heart so noble and so generous that, were he blind, crippled, and one-armed, I should love him still!"

"And yet you are aware that Cornelius is an impious wretch; perhaps you yourself by indiscreet confidences have provoked in him the anti-religious words which he has written."

"I will confess to you, Monsieur le Curé, that I have concealed nothing from Cornelius; he sends

me the plans of his machines; it would be ingratitude on my part were I to conceal from him the little incidents of my young girl's life."

"But this Cornelius—that is, Monsieur Cornelius—is on the way to hell. This man's love will ruin you. Should a woman fasten herself by the neck to a man who is about to plunge into an abyss?"

"And Panuche's love would take me straight into paradise, I suppose?"

"I do not tell you to love Panuche; but surely you would do very well to marry him! Panuche is a man of exemplary morals, of solid devotion, who would set you only good examples."

"Yes, but he would make me get up at five o'clock in the morning to ring the Angelus!"

"You entertain an illusion regarding the character of Panuche. Panuche would be the meekest of husbands, as he is the most regular of sextons. Very far from tyrannizing over you, he would submit, on the contrary, to your least wishes without objection. You would be queen and mistress in your own household."

"I understand! Panuche is a good man; he is ugly, he is stupid; besides, he is your sexton; it would not displease you were he to marry a pretty woman, eh?"

"What do you mean, unhappy girl?" cried the priest, furious that Louise had seen through him.

"I simply mean," answered Louise, "that I will not marry Monsieur Panuche."

"And I tell you that you shall not marry your Cornelius."

"Who will prevent me?" said Louise, measuring the priest with her black eye.

"I!"

"You?"

"Yes, I! I will refuse you the sacrament of marriage, as two impious persons."

"Oh, don't depend upon that. Cornelius does not attach much importance to the sacrament of marriage; at least, I presume so. We will marry as Adam and Eve did."

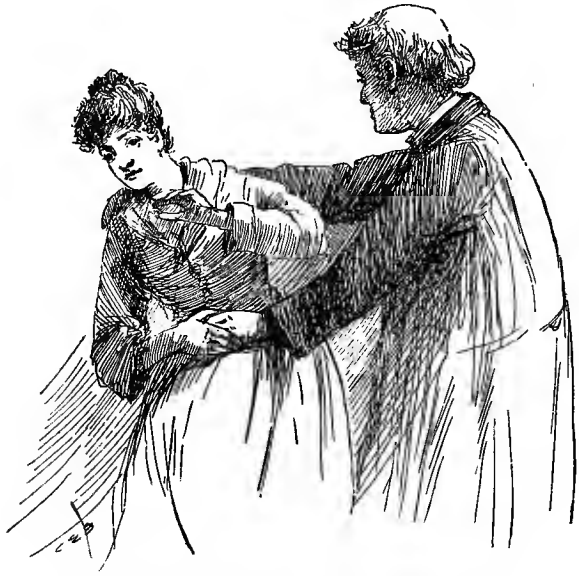
"And you would dare to commit such a sacrilege?"

"Why not? Who is guilty of sacrilege—the Church which refuses its blessing to a young couple, or the young couple who, unable to obtain it, dispense with it? Oh, Monsieur le Curé, we often eat mutton without jelly."

"Louise," said the priest, whose eyes were like two glowing coals, "if you would——"

"If I would what?"

"Nothing," said the priest; "but you know the influence that I have over your father, who is church-warden of the parish. I will induce him to



THE PRIEST PUT HIS ARM AROUND HER WAIST.

refuse you his consent, if you persist in marrying Cornelius."

"And I will inform him of certain proposals which you have made to me at confession."

"Louise, Louise!" exclaimed the priest; "do you not understand me then?"

And he placed his arm about her waist.

"Yes," said Louise, "here is the proof that I understand you."

And she gave him a blow which caused his glasses to fall off.

The priest stood dazed for a moment, and then ran for the key, which was in the door. Having put it in his pocket, he said:

"Mademoiselle, you must pay me for the insult which you have offered me."

Louise had noticed Panuche in the garden. She opened the window.

"Monsieur Panuche!" she cried, "Monsieur le Curé wants you!"

The priest, hearing Panuche's steps in the corridor, opened the door, and, leaning over toward Louise's ear, he said to her:

"War without truce, if you reveal a word of what has just happened!"

"We shall see," said Louise, "if you deserve my indulgence."

And she withdrew as rapidly as a cat who has just scratched.

The next day Belle-Plante and Father Desallemagnes met at the auction. Thanks to the depreciating rumors which Belle-Plante had spread abroad,

the bids were timid and moderate; Belle-Plante's bid exceeded those of the others by a few francs, and he was proclaimed the purchaser, to the great astonishment of Father Desallemagnes, but without any indignation on his part; for among merchants mutual deceit is allowable; theft then takes all sorts of little mincing names, so that the police in passing salute it, and sometimes the sentinel presents arms. On leaving the auction-room, Father Desallemagnes tapped Belle-Plante on the shoulder.

"Well, my boy," said he, "you have done a good day's work."

"Not so bad, Father Desallemagnes; Monsieur Martin offered me ten thousand francs' profit on the spot."

"You told me yesterday that you should not bid."

"I was not obliged to tell you that I should bid."

"True; for a new recruit, you have managed the matter very well. You will go far, Belle-Plante; it is I who tell you so."

"To be sure, Monsieur Desallemagnes; and by the way, your answer?"

"Nonsuited, my lad. Louise will not hear a word of it."

"And you, Father Desallemagnes?"

"Well, I hardly know what to say. You have

exhibited yourself to-day in a very fine light; but then, how can you expect me to force Louise to marry you?"

"See here, Father Desallemagnes, I never go by two roads; give me your word that I shall marry Louise, and I will give you a half-interest in my bargain."

"Done!" said Father Desallemagnes; "it is agreed."

"There, now you are a real father! But suppose we put it in writing? Documents, you know, are males, and words are only females."

"All right! we will soon call upon Monsieur Arthus to get him to put his stamp upon our contract; but just now we must think about our breakfast."

"I have no money with me, Monsieur Desallemagnes."

"That's right! Always say that, and you will get rich; but with me you have no cause to spend money."

"All right," said Belle-Plante, "for times are so hard, and it is so difficult to make money!"

"Yet it seems to me that you did not have much difficulty in making twenty thousand francs this morning?"

"Do you think so, Monsieur Desallemagnes? Well, I have not kept my feet in my slippers. You do not know all the trouble that I have taken to circulate among the commercial bigwigs false letters announcing that the price of wood had fallen one-third in Paris!"

Father Desallemagnes took his future son-in-law to the Hôtel de la Réunion, and ordered a bountiful breakfast; for he knew that Belle-Plante had a good appetite when he ate with others. In the same room some peasants and a gentleman in a worn hat and a turned frock-coat were breakfasting.

"Do you know that individual?" said M. Desallemagnes.

"Do I know him! That is Monsieur Matronazy, who lives beyond the bridge of Bethléem."

"Well, I will bet that it is not he who treats."

"And I that the two peasants have just borrowed money of him."

"If that be so, we shall soon see Madame Matronazy come in."

In fact, the final "y" was hardly out of his mouth when Mme. Matronazy entered.

"Come, Matronazy," she exclaimed, "dinner has been waiting an hour for you; you know very well that I cannot dine without you!"

"But, my dear, you see that I cannot leave these gentlemen."

"Oh, Monsieur Matronazy!" said one of the peasants, "if your wife will honor us with her company, she will not make our party one too many."

"Why, it is true!" exclaimed Matronazy. "Father Desanières is right; why should you not eat a bit with us?"

"Oh! I thank you, Monsieur Desanières. I have never eaten in a tavern, and I should not like to begin to-day."

"How queer you are!" said Matronazy. "Are you not with friends here? Are you afraid that these worthy people will eat you? This good Papa Desanières, he will think that you refuse out of pride. Madame Bourbon, a plate, if you please!"

Mme. Matronazy, after waiting to be further urged for the sake of form, sat down at the table.

"Now for another!" said Father Desallemagnes. "The procession is not yet finished."

And to be sure, five minutes later another Matronazy arrived—Matronazy the younger—who came in search of his mother that she might get him some dinner, and who was grumbling because he was hungry.

"Nothing is so annoying as this brat," said

Matronazy; "he is always hungry. It is necessary to keep bread in his pockets. If the dessert were here, we could get rid of him with some fruit and a piece of bread."

Father Desanières, who was not hard of hearing, ordered the dessert.

"There is a usurer who knows his trade," said Father Desallemagnes.

"I ask your pardon, Monsieur Desallemagnes," answered Belle-Plante; "he would have done much better to eat his soup at home, and to include in the interest the money which these people have spent at the tavern."

On leaving the table, Belle-Plante and Father Desallemagnes went to the office of M. Arthus; but, as the latter was at Corvol, where he had been invited to dinner by my uncle Benjamin, they were obliged to postpone their business to another day.

X.

CORNELIUS arrived that evening. Belle-Plante's cuckoo had just struck eight when he triumphantly entered his yard, followed by his cloth balloon and his two casks of drying-oil. Belle-Plante was at supper; but the truth is that you would not have taken him for a man at supper. He was sitting at a corner of the kitchen table; before him were some shallots, a little hillock of salt, and a hunch of black bread. Cornelius, perceiving him, threw himself upon his neck, pressed him in his arms, kissed him tenderly, and in short did all that is usual under such circumstances. This formality over, he said:

"You are going to serve me some supper, are you not? I have eaten nothing since I left Auxerre, and I am literally dying of hunger."

"Really!" said Belle-Plante; "you ought to have notified me in advance that you were literally dying of hunger. Here are some shallots at your service."

"You must be joking," said Cornelius. "I admit shallots in a *sauce piquant*, provided the dish be not abused; but I have never heard that a man made

in the image of God could make a supper off shallots. Go prepare me a chicken, my good Belle-Plante."

"Impossible, my good Cornelius; that would spoil the pair!"

"Well, then, kill the pair; I have appetite enough to eat two chickens this evening, provided you will help me."

"Do you not know, then, you, who are a savant, that a pair of chickens sell for thirty *sous* at Clamecy?"

"I understand, then," said Cornelius, "you think such a supper too expensive; well, then, fry some eggs."

"But, my dear fellow, eggs have their place as well as chickens. To-morrow the servant is to take them to Clamecy."

"The devil! Is everything here, then, going to Clamecy? If I had foreseen this, I would have supped at Clamecy with the red gentleman who made us laugh so much on the way, and who fairly persecuted me to make me accept his invitation."

"You couldn't have done so well. But why the devil do you come here; you have no business here, now that you have eaten up your inheritance."

"Why do I come here? In the first place, I come to see you, to embrace you; then I come to dream on the banks of my dear Yonne; I come to drink water from my fountain; I come to climb the heights of the Plateau de la Chèvre, where I have so often watched our cow!"

"The devil!" said Belle-Plante. "I see that you have much business here."

"That is not all; I come here to make a balloon. I hope that you will have the kindness to give me shelter for a few months, myself, my cloth, and my drying-oil."

"Your cloth and your drying-oil, those are well enough; but as for yourself, that's another matter."

"What! you have no place here for me? A little room with a window looking out upon the country will be sufficient."

"Really, you are not exacting; but do you think that I keep little rooms looking out upon the country especially to receive the first-comer who may like to occupy them?"

"But really, you can find for me some little corner of your farm."

"And I tell you that there is no little corner of my farm. To be frank, I am in no humor to tire

myself out to feed an idler who has never known how to do anything with his ten fingers."

"That is a prejudice common to you peasants—that he who does not work with his arms does nothing. You rise early in the morning, Belle-Plante; but sometimes I do not go to bed. Do you know that I have discovered the means of steering balloons?"

"You would have done better," said Belle-Plante, "to have found the means of making potatoes grow as big as pumpkins."

Just then the teamster who had transported Cornelius' scientific baggage from Clamecy to Armes, tired of waiting in the yard, came in to claim his pay. The good Cornelius had exaggerated but little when he wrote Louise that he should reach Armes without a *sou:* he had in his pocket only a twelve-*sou* piece, and even that was badly worn.

"Belle-Plante," said he to his brother, "lend me three francs that I may pay this man, for I have no change."

"Nor I either," said Belle-Plante.

"Well, give him a six-franc piece: he will keep the rest for his *pour-boire.*"

"Why not give him a yard of your cloth?"

"Are you mad?" said Cornelius, whose elevated

but simple and innocent soul had not yet comprehended the extent of his brother's niggardliness.

"It is you who are mad to expect that I am going to keep you for three months, toasting your shins at my fire, and pay the costs of your journey besides."

"Wretch!" cried Cornelius, in indignation. "I see who you are. Away with you! we are no longer brothers!"

Just then the door of the room half opened.

"Monsieur Cornelius!" said a gentle voice.

And little light steps, steps of little flying shoes, were heard in the yard.

Cornelius went out, and certainly you would have gone out for less, for it was Louise who had called him and who awaited him in the street. Cornelius took her in his arms without ceremony and covered her with kisses.

"Oh! Monsieur Cornelius," said Louise, when she had been superabundantly embraced, "I did not come here to be embraced!"

Just then one of Belle-Plante's dogs began to bark. The savant gave him a kick in the ribs, and said:

"There, take that to your master; it will teach you to be more polite to ladies."

"You are angry, Monsieur Cornelius," said Louise.

"No longer; it is over. In fact, it is not his fault that he is thus organized. I ought to have remembered that it is as impossible for a miser to perform an act of generosity as for a cripple to walk erect."

"Of whom are you speaking?" said Louise, smiling to herself.

"Pardon me, Louise, I am speaking of Belle-Plante. Just imagine, he refuses to receive me!"

"I knew that in advance, Cornelius, and I have so arranged things that you will not have to sleep under the beautiful stars."

"Dear Louise," said Cornelius, taking her hand, "I will demonstrate to whoever will listen to me that you are the best of women."

"That is an axiom, my friend; the woman whom one loves is always the best of all."

"I believe that you are mistaken, Louise."

Perhaps Cornelius would have begun a dissertation upon love if he had not been interrupted by the sound of a wagon. It was that of the teamster who had brought his possessions. The poor man had divined the poverty of Cornelius; he had taken pity on him, and had fully determined to ask him nothing for his journey.

"By the way, Louise," said Cornelius, "have you three francs?"

"Ah! the teamster!" said Louise; "it is true, I had forgotten him. My good man, here are six francs."

"But," said the teamster, "I have no change to give you."

"Keep it all, my good man; Monsieur Cornelius gives you three francs for a *pour-boire*. I know that such is his intention."

"You are good young people," said the teamster. "I see that you love each other, and I will tell my wife to pray God to let you marry."

"Thank you, my friend," said Cornelius.

"Thanks also for me," said Louise.

XI.

THE two lovers sought in the fields a hollow, surrounded by high hedges. It was then the end of June; the sky was as blue as if its azure had just been washed; the moon was shining in the heavens; the leaves were stirring in the wind as if caressed, and wandering clouds, emanating from the grass, were floating over the surrounding country.

"Jeanne! are you here?" said Louise.

Then the servant came out from behind a tree, carrying on her arm a basket covered with a white napkin.

"You have not supped, Monsieur Cornelius?" said Louise.

"I confess it," answered the savant.

"And you have an appetité to eat two chickens?"

"I do not deny it; but are you, then, a fairy, Louise? You know as much as I *de ipso*—that is, about myself. Tell me, have you not forgotten the little Latin that I taught you?"

"I have kept it carefully as a souvenir of you."

"Say to me in Latin, 'I love Cornelius.'"

"*Amo Cornelius*," said Louise, who always accommodated herself to the little weaknesses of the savant with charming grace.

"Very good, Louise, I thank you. But, by the way, what has Jeanne in this white basket?"

"But did you not tell me that you have not supped?"

"How did you divine it?"

"It is very difficult indeed to divine that Belle-Plante would give you no supper!"

"Well, I love you as well as you love me, but I should not have divined that. Louise, I must teach you mathematics; with your sagacity you would make surprising progress."

The two lovers stopped under a big elm, at the spot where the stream emptied into the Yonne. Jeanne spread a napkin on the grass, and placed her provisions upon it.

"What, Louise!" said Cornelius, noticing that the servant had brought two glasses and two plates, "are you going to sup with me?"

"Why not?" said Louise; "do you think that I am so ill-bred as to allow those whom I invite to my table to eat alone?"

"Heavens, Louise, how good you are! You divine everything, you foresee everything, you pro-

vide for everything; you are an inexhaustible source of intelligence and goodness. To the man you love you are a guardian angel upon earth. But what did your father think when he saw that you ate no supper?"

"Nothing," said Louise; "I said that I was not hungry, that I was indisposed, and that I was going to bed. He thinks that I am sleeping profoundly. My only fears are for this poor Jeanne, who has very willingly become my accomplice, and whom he may call if he does not find his nightcap in the right place."

"Excellent girl!" said Cornelius. "If you like, Louise, we will take her with us in our balloon."

"Yes, my friend, to the islands of the Pacific sea."

"Wicked creature! By the way, did you ask Monsieur Guillerand what the poles are?"

"Yes, I asked him; but he does not know what you mean."

"The old donkey! Well, I will explain it to you. Pass a knitting-needle through your ball of yarn."

"Cornelius, mercy; no scientific discussion tonight!"

Cornelius, stopped by the prayer of Louise like a

galloping horse seized by the bridle who still makes a few leaps more, kept silence and poured out a glass of wine. After taking a swallow, he seemed utterly amazed.

"God forgive me!" he cried, "it is Bordeaux!"

"But did you not tell me that you like Bordeaux?"

"And how did you get it? Your father has none in his cellar."

"I sent to the city for it to celebrate your advent, my friend."

Cornelius threw his napkin into the stream, overturned the bottle, broke the pie, crushed the chicken, and threw himself upon Louise's neck.

"What! in Jeanne's presence!" said Louise, in a low voice; "are you mad, Cornelius?"

"Yes, I am mad," he shouted. "*Amen*, as the ancients said; and at the present moment I could embrace you before a whole council!"

"Think rather of your condition, Monsieur Cornelius; it seems that as usual you have no money, my friend."

"Pardon me, Louise; I have twelve *sous* in my pocket."

Louise and Jeanne could not help laughing at the simplicity of the good Cornelius.

"That," said Jeanne, "is a fine fortune on which

to live three months at the tavern! Our canary spends more than twelve *sous* in a week."

"And to think," said Louise, "that I lately bought a cloak and a muff! If you had written me sooner that you were coming, I would have kept this money for you!"

"I thought, Louise, that since I knew it, you must know it also."

"Well, well," answered Louise, "that's another of your adorable simplicities. Do you take me for the good God?"

"Oh, Louise, the world would be too happy if you were the good God!"

"No impiety, my friend! In our position, we need the protection of heaven. You will lodge at the tavern of Mother Simone, my old nurse; she will give you, not all that you will ask her for, for you are no more capable than a child of six months of asking for what you need, but all that shall be necessary. She has a large meadow behind her house, where you can spread your cloth; she places it at your disposition. She will give you a pretty little room whose window opens, not only upon the country, but also upon your field. From your bed you can watch your cloth, and Dragon, Mother Simone's dog, will aid you. My nurse has been no-

tified that you are coming to-night, and she expects you."

"When my balloon is finished, I will settle with Mother Simone. I will give her three thousand francs for her daughter's dowry."

"Mother Simone lives alone; her only society is Blanchette, her cow."

"Well, I will give her three thousand francs for her cow."

"Now, Cornelius, if you are through with your supper, we will return to the village."

"To crush a pie is not to eat it," said Cornelius. "One moment more, Louise, I beg of you."

"Not more than five minutes," said Louise. "Mother Simone is old; she goes to bed early, and we must not keep her waiting."

Cornelius made no objection; he rose, took Louise's hand, and they were getting ready to start, when a man passed near them.

"That's Panuche," said Jeanne. "I know him by his sexton's air."

"Surely he does not come here to take the fresh air," said Louise, intentionally raising her voice. "And what do we care for M. Panuche?"

"He will tell the priest what he has seen, and the latter is a man to rail at us from the pulpit."

"Pending the arrival of an opportunity to cut off the priest's ears, you will permit me, Louise, to send M. Panuche to take the fresh air in the Yonne."

"You would be damned, Monsieur Cornelius," said Jeanne, "if you were to cause a sexton to take cold."

"Besides," said Louise, "you are too generous to deprive your native country of Panuche's *Veni Creators.*"

Some distance from there they found Belle-Plante, sitting on a piece of wood.

"Another spy!" said Jeanne; "to-morrow there will be a fine scandal in the village."

"Louise," said Cornelius, "would it disturb you if I should dust Monsieur Belle-Plante's jacket a little?"

"What's the use?" said Louise; "the harm is done, and I see but one remedy—that you come to-morrow to ask my father for my hand in marriage. He has sold me to Belle-Plante for I know not how many cords of wood; but the contract is not yet signed. I know that they are to go to Clamecy to-morrow for the purpose of signing a forfeiture deed at the notary's. So you will have to be at the house at eleven o'clock."

And, having shown him Mother Simone's house, she went away.

XII.

MOTHER SIMONE escorted Cornelius to his room. The savant threw a glance around him, and saw that Louise's eye had done its work there. His room was a proposition in mathematics; nothing superfluous, but nothing lacking. A good bed covered with green serge, a table covered with one of Louise's shawls, a marble top commode, and a blackboard—what more could a savant want? He opened the window and looked at the view before him. The birds had gone to rest, the insects were asleep in the grass. To the sounds of living nature had succeeded those of inanimate nature. The wind rustled through the poplars; the Yonne gravely flowed between the bluffs of its banks; the roar of the continually falling waters reached his ears from the pass of Armes like the distant sound of an orchestra. The trees were black and white; the river shone like a plate of polished steel; and the rough, dark, sombre surface of the Chevroches woods looked in the moonlight like a sea covered with foam.

"It's a pity," said Cornelius, "that Louise is not here; I would ask her this question: Which is the better lodged, he who lives in a mansion in a street of a great city, or he who has a hut whose window opens upon the country? In the first place, the owner of the mansion can only live in one room at a time; let us see, then, whether this room will be as agreeable as the hut.

"Let A be the room in the mansion. In the room A there will be first a carpet; but the owner of the room A cannot tread at one time upon a surface greater than his feet; now, let the dweller in the hut attach a bit of carpet to the soles of his shoes, has he not a carpet? In the room A there are mirrors; but in the room of the hut there is a little looking-glass. Now, does not one see himself in a little looking-glass as well as in a large mirror? In the room A there is a clock with a gilded knight or a chocolate-colored horse on top of it; but in the hut there is a cuckoo, and with a cuckoo does not one know the time as well as with a bronze clock? In the room A there is a chandelier, but there is a ham, and even several hams, hanging from the ceiling of the hut; now prove to me that a chandelier is handsomer than a ham, and I will admit that the hut has lost its case. In the

room A there are tapestries and pictures; but the trees within the frames do not blossom in the month of May, they are not covered with verdure in the month of June, they do not turn yellow in September, and are not laden with snow in January. This landscape is always inhabited by the same cows, the same sheep, the same shepherd, and the same flute. The river, prudent and well-bred, never overflows into its fields; the sky has always the same clouds, and is never illuminated by flashes of lightning; there is never an extra blade of grass upon the rocks. In the hut, to be sure, there are never any other pictures than those of the *Death of Credit* or of *The Wandering Jew*, but the dweller in the hut opens his window, or contents himself with pulling aside his curtain, and the real country spreads out before him. Each day gives it a new aspect; to-day there is a bull running through the fields; to-morrow there is a donkey rolling in the grass. In the morning a stage-coach ascends the white road which climbs the mountain between the sombre forests, and in the evening a wagoner's team descends. Each season gives it new colors; the woods which were pink and white last month are now brilliant with verdure, and soon they will become as red and yellow as if a fire had passed that way.

The dweller in the hut breathes the perfumes of his fields; he listens to their birds; if this dweller be a young girl, she gathers their flowers; if a philosopher, he takes long walks, with cane in hand; if a hunter, he goes out shooting the rabbits and the hares. But the dweller in the room A has only the pleasure of dusting his fields and protecting them from the outrages of the flies. The one has a living bird, the other a stuffed bird.

"From all this I infer that one is better lodged in a hut than in the room A."

After this conclusion, Cornelius went to bed and to sleep.

The next day Cornelius awoke with a feeling of happiness. To be sure, he had in his pocket only a well-worn twelve-*sou* piece; but he had an abundant table, a blackboard, fortune, and glory in prospect, and a woman who loved him. Here was enough to make two men happy. For my part, if this happiness had been divided into two shares, on the one side Louise, and on the other all the rest, I know very well which I would have chosen.

As soon as he had risen, he paced Mother Simone's meadow to measure it, and perceived with satisfaction that there would be plenty of room for his cloth. This first duty performed, he went to pay a

visit to his drying-oil. Belle-Plante saw him from the back of his barn, where he was threshing. He came up to him, and took him by the hand.

"You see," said he, "I bear you no ill will because of the ridiculous scene which you made yesterday. You have caused me to pass a sleepless night; but none the less I have watched over your oil as if it were my own."

Cornelius chanced to look at Belle-Plante's shoes, which were as greasy as if it were his intention to eat them in a salad, and he smiled within himself. He touched one of them with the end of a switch which he had in his hand and lifted it to his lips.

"As if it were your own is well said," he exclaimed, "for your shoes are saturated with my oil."

As Belle-Plante swore to the contrary, he continued:

"It is useless to deny it; chemistry is a sorcerer which cannot be deceived. I recognize my oil by its alkaline and slightly empyreumatic flavor."

"Well, since you know it, I will not deny it; but I have acted in your interest. I wanted to try your oil, for that is like you savants; you take everything on trust without previous examination. You write on every page of your books that men are de-

ceivers, and you always act as if they were incapable of deceiving."

"I desire," said Cornelius. "To profit by your advice. I might tell you that my oil is a corrosive injurious to shoe-leather; but you would try it in a salad, you would try it in a frying-pan, you would try it in your lamps, and, by dint of trying it to see if I had not been deceived, you would not leave me a drop. I prefer to have it carried to Mother Simone's together with my cloth."

"What!" said Belle-Plante, "you distrust your brother?"

"Yes," said Cornelius. "To be frank, when a brother is capable of closing his door against his brother, he is capable of robbing him."

"But," said Belle-Plante, "you are a hundred times more selfish than I, you who offer me this insult on account of a drop of oil. Well, I will pay you for your oil."

"No," said Cornelius, "I do not reproach you; but, you see, I have only just enough, and when this is gone, I shall have no means of buying more."

Belle-Plante was silent for a time, and then said:

"Cornelius, will you breakfast with me?"

The savant stood struck with astonishment; then

he surveyed Belle-Plante with his scrutinizing look, examining him as if he had been a geometrical figure.

"Belle-Plante," said he, "you have need of me!"

"I admit it," said Belle-Plante. "I have need of you, but it is not for that reason that I invite you to breakfast."

"Well, speak; what can I do for you?"

"We will talk of that at breakfast."

"But," said Cornelius, "I do not wish to breakfast with you."

"Well," answered Belle-Plante, frightened at the consequences of his invitation, "perhaps you are right. You Paris gentlemen are not accustomed to the peasant's way of living, and perhaps I could not offer you a breakfast worthy of you."

"Probably; but explain yourself."

"Well, it appears that you are paying attention to Mademoiselle Louise."

"And it appears that you are spying her footsteps. Listen, Belle-Plante; I love you as well as one ought to love a brother of your character; but mark this: if, when I am with Louise, I find you in my path, I shall not ask myself whether your name is Belle-Plante or Germanicus, and, though I have a cane in my hand that cost three hundred

francs, I shall break it on your backbone, unless your backbone breaks first."

"But," said Belle-Plante, "you doubtless do not know that Mademoiselle Louise belongs to me; I am under contract to marry her, and we are going to Clamecy to-day, her father and I, on this business."

"And you doubtless do not know that Louise detests you and loves me."

"Yes, but I am loved by Father Desallemagnes, and you are detested by him."

"Then it is Father Desallemagnes who is to be married?"

"What you say is entirely out of place; science has spoiled you, Cornelius. Formerly you were better than that."

"Yes, when you, by beating me, forced me to do whatever you wanted me to do."

"At any rate, I consider you a bad brother, if you persist in paying attention to my *fiancée*."

"And you undoubtedly are a good brother, when you close the door of your house against me as if I were a beggar."

"Oh! that is a very different thing," said Belle-Plante, "and I will show you why. It would have cost me much money to lodge you, warm you, light

you, and feed you. But what will it cost you to renounce Mademoiselle Desallemagnes? Not a *sou.*"

"And if I were to fall sick from sorrow, perhaps it would cost me more than a *sou.*"

"Oh! I undertake in that case to pay your doctor and your apothecary, and, if you die, to bury you at my expense."

"Many thanks; but I will not renounce Louise."

"Well, you will have to renounce her, whether you want to or not. Father Desallemagnes will soon be bound with me before a notary. Why waste in cajoling Louise time that is precious to humanity, and that you might employ so well in useful discoveries like those which you have already made?"

"Bah!" said Cornelius; "one must get some pleasure out of life; and it is my opinion that the time which is best employed is that which is wasted."

"Well, then, go to the devil, egoist, cold-heart, bad brother!"

"Adieu, Belle-Plante; in calling you by your name I give you a worse epithet than any of those."

XIII.

CORNELIUS quietly resumed his way to his tavern; he put his hand in his watch-pocket to see how much time remained before the rendezvous; but he found his watch-pocket empty. He asked himself what he had done with his watch, and he finally remembered that he had pawned it. To give himself courage, he resolved to employ the leisure time that still remained in eating a good breakfast; for Cornelius was not one of those thin and bony savants after the style of Pascal, the great man whose cook made him eat on Friday a cutlet for a herring. Cornelius placed a high value on the enjoyments of the brain; but the stomach, too, seemed to him a very respectable organ. He laughed at those philosophers who look upon the pleasures of the belly as something base. God, he said, has put in man's palate nervous tissues with which to enjoy this great feast which the sun cooks for him. If the master of a house had taken every pains to prepare delicate dishes for you, you would wound his

pride if you touched them only with the tips of your lips. Now, you offend God's pride when you disdain the excellent things that he has made for you. Such was Cornelius' philosophy—a philosophy of infinitely greater value, surely, than his theories about machines.

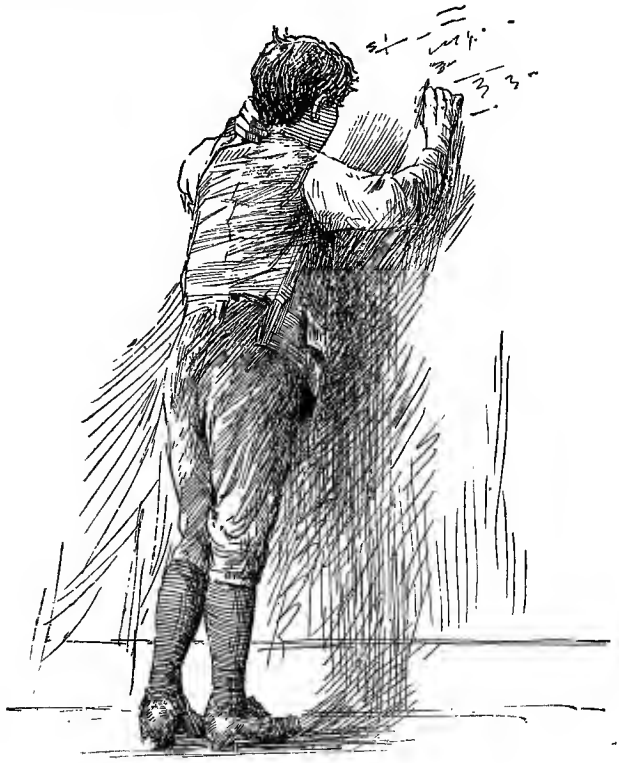
Cornelius, then, while chewing over a problem in mathematics, ate a six-egg omelet and three slices of excellent domestic ham, and drank a pint of Dornecy wine.

M. Desallemagnes' house was opposite Mother Simone's inn. Louise could see from her window all that went on in the dining-room. It was half-past ten, and she was watching Cornelius impatiently. At last the savant, having emptied his last glass of wine, rose; but in dreaming of Louise he had forgotten Father Desallemagnes; he drew a big pencil from his pocket and began to scribble equations and cabalistic algebraic signs on the white wall of the dining-room. Louise stamped with anger. Her father had already called for his white shirt, and the loiterer's pencil was still going its pace. She sent him a cherry-stone, which, launched with a sure hand, like the dart of Hippolytus, hit the savant squarely on the nose.

"That is singular," said Cornelius, scratching his

nose; "if I were outside, I should think that an aerolite had fallen on me."

And he resumed his equations.



HE RESUMED HIS EQUATIONS.

Father Desallemagnes had already put on his white cravat and his knee-breeches. Louise, un-

able to restrain herself longer, rushed into the street, and, passing before Mother Simone, who was spinning in her doorway, she said to her:

"Nurse, do me the favor to say to Monsieur Cornelius on my behalf that he is an imbecile."

"And why say that to this good young man? This morning he gave me twelve *sous* for having gone to the grocer's to buy him a pencil."

"Yes, and a fine use he is making of your pencil, my poor nurse! Go into your dining-room, and you will see."

And she disappeared.

So Mother Simone went into her dining-room, for the least wishes of Louise were to her sovereign orders; but, at sight of the horrible scrawls with which Cornelius had soiled the virgin robe of her dining-room, she forgot her message.

"What, Monsieur Cornelius, you, a man of twenty-four years, make faces on the walls like a child!"

"Faces! Be careful of your terms, Mother Simone; those are not faces; those are equations of the third degree."

And he continued to cipher.

"Monsieur Cornelius, must I tear this bit of stained wood out of your hands?"

"Permit me, Mother Simone; I am finishing a little calculation."

"Yes, a little calculation," said Mother Simone, pitifully; "you have spoiled twelve yards of plaster already! At the rate at which you are going there will not be a white spot left in the house a week from now."

"'Tis true," said Cornelius, "I am wrong; I should have reflected that I was soiling your wall. You will ask Louise to have a blackboard placed here, with some chalk."

"By the way," said Mother Simone, striking her forehead, "Mademoiselle Louise told me to tell you that you are an imbecile."

"Who, I? Oh! it is true, I am an imbecile! Louise is right. Quick, Mother Simone, my coat!" Cornelius put on his coat, placed his napkin in his pocket thinking that it was his handkerchief, and fled, pursued by Mother Simone, who brushed his back as he ran.

"Oh! Monsieur Cornelius, your frill is falling off! Your shoe-buckle is unfastened!" cried Mother Simone.

But the savant did not hear a word, and was already in Father Desallemagnes' yard, where he found Louise, who tried to sulk.

"Indeed, Monsieur Cornelius," said she, "you are very amusing with your figures."

"'Tis true, Louise," said Cornelius, "I am tiresome with my figures; but, just as there are plants each drop of whose sap is brilliancy and perfume, so there are others which bear only stiff and rugous leaves. God, who made you to charm, made me to calculate. Now, is it my fault that I calculate? Can a nightingale that sings reproach the raven that croaks? And can the butterfly that feeds upon the pollen of the flowers call it a crime in the worm to eat the damp earth of the plain? I have two passions, one great and one small: calculation and Louise. You, Louise, reign as a sovereign over my soul; you love everything that feels and palpitates within me; then at least leave some place in my life for my poor figures. Does the master who reigns in a beautiful palace envy the spider the corner of the attic where it spins its web? With you I could still calculate, for the bird which has its nest in the oasis sometimes stops in the desert; but without you, Louise, I could calculate no longer; all within me that is intelligent would be crushed, and thereafter I could only weep. Oh! I love you! I love you!"

"Cornelius," cried Louise, "when the raven is

awaited by its mate it does not amuse itself in croaking stupidly upon a tree. I have succeeded in preventing my father from going to Clamecy; but another time, probably, I should be less fortunate."

"And how did you manage, Louise, my treasure of love and tact, to prevent your father from going to Clamecy?"

Just then Belle-Plante entered, out of breath, his forehead covered with sweat.

"Goodness! Monsieur Belle-Plante," said Louise, "how hot you are! Will you take some refreshment?"

"Many thanks, mademoiselle. Is your father not at home?"

"No, indeed, Monsieur Belle-Plante; he waited a long time for you, but, as you did not come, he went to his Chevroches fields to visit his mowers."

"That cursed Panuche is to blame for this. Let the scamp come at Easter to get his *rouloires!* He came to tell me this morning that one of my teams was sinking in the mud in the valley of Armes, and that one of my oxen had broken a horn. I hurried to the spot, thinking to return in time; and, when I got there, there was no more sign of a team stuck in the mud, or of an ox with a broken horn, than there is in your room."

"Why, that is very bad," said Cornelius, seriously, "on the part of a churchman. You should complain of him to his priest."

"Possibly Panuche thought," said Louise, "that to-day was the first of April."

"I will walk a little way in the direction of Chevroches," said Belle-Plante; "if I meet your father, we shall still have time to go to Clamecy to settle our business."

"Undoubtedly," said Louise; "but make haste, for it is his intention to go from Chevroches to his vineyard to see his wine-growers."

When Belle-Plante was gone, Cornelius fell into a deep meditation.

"What is the matter with you, Monsieur Cornelius?" said Louise.

"I am trying to explain to myself in what interest Panuche, who is not a joker, could have told this lie to Belle-Plante."

"And you do not guess?"

"Not the least in the world, Louise."

"Well, it was I who determined Panuche to play this trick on Belle-Plante."

"And how did you manage it, Louise?"

"Why, I gave him the finest turkey in our flock: a turkey as fat and stupid as Panuche himself."

"And suppose your father should notice its absence?"

"Jeanne will say that the fox ate it."

"Not a bad scheme!" said Cornelius.

"Well," said Louise, "good-by until to-morrow, and I will caution Mother Simone to watch you in respect to the equations as soon as you are up. But, for greater safety, I must disarm you. Give me your pencil, Monsieur Cornelius."

Cornelius gave up his pencil with docility, and went to dream in the fields; for M. Desallemagnes might return any minute.

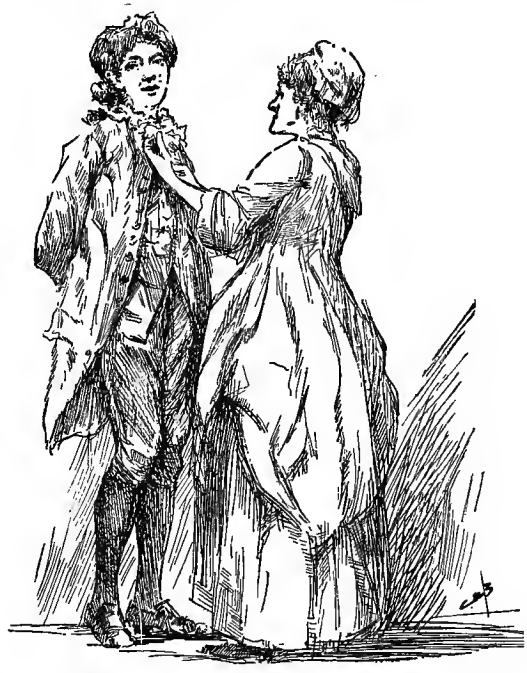
XIV.

THE next day, at eight o'clock, Cornelius left his inn; but this time he was thoroughly brushed and his shoes were irreproachable, for Mother Simone had put him through an inspection as if he were a soldier, in obedience to the orders of Louise, who did not wish him to appear in public with an incorrect exterior. Father Desallemagnes was drawing water from his well, like a patriarch, to water his mares. Now this well worked with a wheel. The unlucky wheel made the mistake—quite involuntarily, doubtless—of shocking our learned friend. He approached M. Desallemagnes, hat in hand, and thus began his exordium:

"Monsieur Desallemagnes, before interviewing you on more important subjects, I must tell you that you use for your well a very defective method of lifting. The windlass dates back to the infancy of mechanics. It was with a windlass that Jacob watered his Uncle Laban's asses, and that Rebecca drew water to cook her vegetables."

Father Desallemagnes looked at Cornelius in amazement, and took him for a madman.

"The method of the pulley is infinitely superior



MME. SIMONE HAD PUT HIM THROUGH AN INSPECTION.

to that of the windlass," continued Cornelius; "it offers this advantage——"

Louise entered the yard under pretext of throwing grain to her pigeons, and, seeing that Cornelius

was about to engage in a discussion the end of which could not be foreseen, she thought fit to intervene.

"My father," she interrupted, "Monsieur Cornelius comes to ask my hand in marriage."

"Ah!" said Father Desallemagnes, "so this is Cornelius, brother of Belle-Plante, *à propos* of whom they gossip about in the village?"

"The same, Monsieur Desallemagnes," said Cornelius.

"Well, Monsieur Cornelius, my daughter is too young; I do not wish her to marry now."

"No, my father," said Louise, "I am not too young to marry, and I even think that it is high time for me to marry."

"But Louise is rich, Monsieur Cornelius, and you have nothing left."

"What is it to me that Louise is rich? Is that a reason for preventing me from marrying her? When a watch keeps good time, should one throw it into the street because it is gold?"

Father Desallemagnes opened his eyes wide with stupefaction.

"Well," said he to Louise, "your Cornelius does not seem to shine in intelligence."

"Oh! my father," answered Louise, "saving the

respect that I owe you, he has much more wit than the entire vestry, yourself excepted and the priest included. Come now, Monsieur Cornelius, show a little wit."

"You did not clearly understand what I said, my lad," continued Father Desallemagnes; "it is Louise who does not wish to marry you, because she is rich and you are poor. Now do you understand?"

"Who told you so, my father?" answered Louise; "on the contrary I wish to marry Monsieur Cornelius. He does not understand why a miserable difference in wealth should form an obstacle to a young man and a young girl who love each other, because he has a noble heart. If Cornelius had the globe in his hand, like Charlemagne, he would give it to me; I have only two or three farms. How can you think that I would not give them to him?"

"That's it," said Cornelius. "In your turn, do you understand now, Monsieur Desallemagnes?"

"I am too old for that; but the fact is that your way of looking at things is not mine. I will not give my daughter to a man who has nothing."

"Well, let us come to an understanding," said Cornelius. "It seems that you desire a son-in-law who is rich. Well, in three months I shall be not only the richest man in France, but in all Europe.

I shall have millions at my disposition. I shall be able, if I like, to equip fleets, to pay an army, and I will put a silver pulley in your well. You look at me as if you took me for a madman. Understand, Monsieur Desallemagnes, that I have completed Montgolfier's discovery. He made only a manikin; I have taken the manikin and given it life. See! here is the plan of my balloon. Examine it and answer me."

"You do not know, Monsieur Cornelius, that my father knows no plan save that of his lands."

"So much the better!" said Cornelius, "that will procure me the pleasure of explaining my balloon to him. See, Monsieur Desallemagnes, large A is my reservoir of hydrogen, small A is my rudder; large B and small B are my wheels. I could demonstrate to you that this motor has a thirty-horse power; but that would lead us into calculations which would be out of place in a suit for marriage. You understand that with such force one can reasonably hope to overcome the most impetuous currents of air; and besides, as I have written to Louise, I hope to find in the upper regions of the atmosphere a perfectly calm air."

"Do you understand anything of that, Louise?"

"No, my father."

"Then you do not believe in his balloon?"

"I believe in it as I believe in God—without understanding it."

"The devil! that would be better than Belle-Plante's ploughs, all the same! But you see I am under contract with him; he has let me have half an interest in his bargain."

"Well, my father, abandon your contract. Is it not time for you to rest?"

"But, you see, there has already been a beginning of the execution. And that is not all; the priest has threatened to take away my office of church-warden if I allow you to marry Monsieur Cornelius."

"Is that all?" said Cornelius. "I will have you appointed church-warden at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, or in any other parish of the capital that you may choose. When my balloon is made, I shall be as powerful in France as the prime minister."

"That is very good, but I do not wish to leave Armes to be church-warden in Paris."

"Well, you shall be honorary church-warden," said Louise. "My father can live in Armes and be church-warden at Paris; can he not, Cornelius?"

"Undoubtedly," said Cornelius.

"Well, when Monsieur Cornelius has finished his

balloon, we will see; until then, I can promise nothing."

"At least, you will dismiss Monsieur Belle-Plante?"

"Oh! dismiss him yourself; I am going off."

Just then Belle-Plante came in, all covered with mud.

"Well, Monsieur Desallemagnes, are you ready?"

"My father charges me," said Louise, "to inform you that he does not wish to sign the forfeiture deed."

"Why so?" said Belle-Plante.

"Because I do not wish to marry you."

"I am not in negotiation with you, mademoiselle; this does not concern you. Your father has taken an obligation toward me; he is too honest a man to break his word."

"His engagement is null," said Cornelius; "he had not the right to stipulate for his daughter."

"Monsieur Desallemagnes needs no prompting from you, learned Cornelius; I wish him to explain himself upon this point."

"Well, no," said M. Desallemagnes, "I will not sign the forfeiture needed."

And off he went.

"All right, old knave!" said Belle-Plante; "I

have witnesses to our bargain; you shall hear from me to-morrow."

"That's right!" said Cornelius; "summon Monsieur Desallemagnes to deliver his daughter to you. Send her love-letters by a sheriff's officer, and get the courts to award you a wife; that is a method belonging only to you."

XV.

THE next day Cornelius again began work upon his balloon with heroic ardor. He led the life of a day-laborer, a life without leisure and full of sweat. The birds were not awake in the willows before he was occupied in coating his cloth with his hands dipped in oil, and when the sun had gone down he was still at work. He had accepted with resignation the role of a grease-brush, pending the time when he should be a great man.

At first, when any of the village idlers surprised him in this not very exalted occupation, he felt a sort of shame. But soon he became resigned. "All that shines," he said, "all that is radiant, all that is great here on earth, has an humble origin. It seems that God intended brilliancy to be purchased by obscurity, beauty by ugliness, strength by weakness. Rome was once only a hovel; the lightning rose to the skies from the mud of the earth; the tulip was once but an ugly bulb rotting in a bed of muck, not good even to make soup of. Why should it be otherwise with an inventor? Undoubtedly the

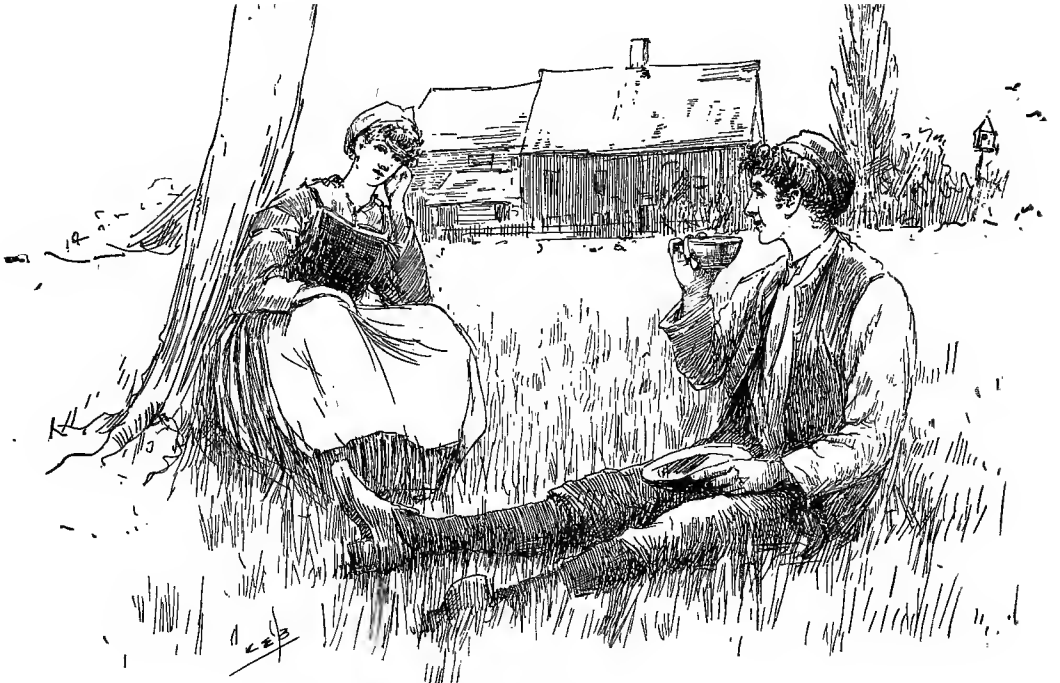
powdered savants of our academies would laugh at me if they saw me in this situation. They would say: 'Cornelius is devoting himself to a ridiculous task!' But where, then, would be the ridicule if a great captain should forge his own sword? Why are there certain tasks that belong to the people and others that belong to the rich? This handsome young man who holds a dog in leash would rather be killed than lead a donkey by the bridle; another who goes to his bookseller to get books would die of hunger rather than go to the butcher's to get meat; another who would not cross the street with his trunk upon his shoulders, very willingly carries a flower-pot under his arms; a monsieur who is not afraid to be seen shaving himself would blush to his temples if he were seen blacking his boots. What, then, is the origin of these differences between acts that are identical, and why should a sensible man comply with these ridiculous distinctions?"

And thereupon Cornelius began to brush his cloth with new ardor.

XVI.

WHEREVER there is a young girl in an attic there is also a cage placed in the rays of the sun, in which a bird, who represents spring, sings and hops about while its mistress plies her needle. But Cornelius had a bird of a very different character to amuse him in the lonely hours of his labor, and I who speak to you would like to work from morning till night on the sole condition of being entertained like Cornelius.

Mother Simone's meadow was a pretty meadow, in which one continually heard the tinkling of the bell fastened to the neck of Blanchette, Mother Simone's cow. At first this served to entertain Cornelius. But the meadow was behind the inn, serving as its garden, and was surrounded by a row of willows impenetrable by the most indiscreet eye. So, as soon as Louise had a moment to herself, she flew to Cornelius; she came to play with him, to babble with the birds in the willows, and to run over his half-dried cloth. Often she brought her work. Cornelius made a shelter for her with a piece of



IN THE MEADOW.

cloth stretched from one willow to another, and a seat with a sheaf of grass, over which he spread his coat. Louise worked by his side, now talking, laughing, teasing him in a thousand charming ways, or discussing physics with him when this tormented him too much; now spending entire quarter-hours looking at him. Sometimes Mother Simone served Cornelius' breakfast under the willows, and the two lovers ate together. This meant a half day lost for the balloon; for after breakfast they had to take a walk on the banks of the Yonne; when Cornelius complained that she disturbed him, she answered that there would always be time enough to be a great man, and the philosopher internally shared this opinion.

At night Cornelius went to get Louise at her father's, when supper was over, and they went to walk in the moonlight in the suburbs of the village. No one had anything to say against this; for it is allowable in a village for a young girl to go wherever she likes with a young man who is openly courting her.

So one day Cornelius and Louise were walking on the banks of the Yonne; they met a peasant who was carrying a large pike hanging by the gills to a stick.

"Let us buy this pike," said Louise to Cornelius; "we will tell my father that we caught it."

"A good idea!" said Cornelius; "we will say that we caught it at the fountain; that will be more extraordinary still."

"My good man," said Louise, "what will you take for your pike?"

"Alas! mademoiselle," said the fisherman, "my pike is not for sale; it is to be given away; I am carrying it to Monsieur Belle-Plante."

"To give to a person who is richer than one's self is the most absurd of absurdities."

"It is no absurdity on my part," said the fisherman. "Monsieur Belle-Plante lent me eighty francs, and he stipulated that he should have a pike in addition to the interest."

"I will bet," said Louise, "that he exacts from you at least twenty francs interest for the eighty francs that he lent you."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, Monsieur Belle-Plante is a worthy man; he takes from me only fifteen francs."

"The Jew!" shouted Cornelius; "fifteen francs and a pike for interest on eighty francs! Louise, give this man six francs; we buy his pike."

"You could not have it for twelve francs, my

dear monsieur! A bargain is a bargain, and, if I had not caught this pike, I would have bought one at the fish market."

"Well, I tell you," said Cornelius, taking his pike from his hands, "that I will buy your fish."

"But once more I say, monsieur, that cannot be!"

"And I tell you that it can be, and that furthermore it is! Louise, give this man six francs."

"But, my good friend," said Louise.

"There are no buts, dear Louise; I will not permit the son of my father to be guilty of such baseness!. Of what use is it for me to toil to make our name famous, if he toils on his side to cover it with mud?"

"But," said the fisherman, "you will cause your brother to make me pay for this."

"I take the responsibility," said Cornelius. "Go find Belle-Plante, and tell him that I took your pike, and that he can come and claim it of me at Mother Simone's. Give yourself no anxiety about the matter."

"Well, since you absolutely wish it," said the fisherman; "but I must return you three francs."

"No," said Cornelius, "your pike is worth six francs, and we will not buy it for a *sou* less. Isn't that so, Louise?"

"Yes, my friend," answered Louise.

And they returned to the village with the fisherman.

The next day, sure enough, Belle-Plante came to find Cornelius.

"Well," said the latter, as he saw him, "it seems that the peasant did my errand. Let us see what the rascal is going to say."

"So," said Belle-Plante, "it seems, savant, that yesterday you seized by main force a pike belonging to me."

"Belonging to you?" said Cornelius, knitting his dark brow, like Jupiter when he wishes to make the heavens tremble.

"Yes, belonging to me; you understand, savant; and you are going to restore it to me directly, or else I am going to complain to the sheriff."

"And I, too, skinflint, might complain to the sheriff. Do you not know, then, that usury is a crime in the eyes of the law?"

"Do you think so?" said Belle-Plante.

"Yes, I think so; and, if I were a judge, I would have no more mercy upon usurers than upon highway robbers. Usury in my eyes is the most infamous and cowardly of all robberies. When a man demands of you at the edge of a forest your money

or your life, you can answer him by the thrust of a dagger or escape by flight; when a robber forces open your desk, you can secure your money from his attempts by a stronger lock; when a rascal of another sort sends you into bankruptcy, you know that you might have secured yourself against his dishonesty and placed your credit beyond the reach of accident. But how are you to defend yourself against the usurer? He strangles you with his iron purse-strings."

"That's all very fine," said Belle-Plante; "but tell me, savant, what is interest but rent? Now, if I buy a house for three hundred francs and rent it for six hundred francs, no one will have anything to say against it; on the contrary, I shall be counted a clever man. Why, then, should I be condemned for renting a sum of eighty francs for fifteen francs and a pike? And the merchant who makes a profit of fifty per cent. on his merchandise, does he not do worse than I? If it is wrong in him to make a profit on his money, why does not the law poke its nose behind his counter? What I do everybody does without its appearance in society. I have a cancer which will kill me, and of which only a certain doctor can cure me; if I wish to save my life, I must apply to him; nevertheless he charges me

three thousand francs for five or six strokes of his lancet. This great lawyer, this king of phrase, this model of honesty to whom I entrust the defence of my fortune and my honor because in him alone I have confidence, will take three or four thousand francs from me for talking an hour or two. This priest of whom I ask the sacrament of marriage will make me pay seven hundred francs for a Papal dispensation, the whole of which can be written upon a half-sheet of paper."

"But this pike, wretch! this pike which you exact in addition to an exorbitant interest, can you justify this extortion also?"

"Why, that is the banker's discount! A great fool I should be if I were to abstain from what they all do. So I beg you to believe that I never fail in it. When I lend to a hunter, he owes me three or four hares, according to the sum; if to a cobbler, I make him give me a pair of shoes, and good ones too; if I were to lend to an old woman who had nothing but a hen on its perch, I would exact a dozen eggs."

"Wretch!" cried Cornelius, "and you are my brother! Here, I will give you an idea of the situation of an unfortunate man who under the pressure of necessity applies to the usurer."

He had in his hand his brush filled with drying-oil, and he passed it two or three times over Belle-Plante's face.

"Oh, the rascal!" shouted Belle-Plante, scarcely able to unglue his lips; "help, Mother Simone! help, monsieur the mayor! he has poisoned me, stifled me, covered me with grease; he has shortened my life by more than ten years! Mercy! I believe some of it went down my shirt-collar!"

Louise was then at Mother Simone's. On hearing Belle-Plante's cries, she came running out, thinking that the two brothers were killing one another. But at sight of Belle-Plante, who looked as if he had just come out of a frying-pan, she burst into a mad fit of laughter. This hilarity added to Belle-Plante's rage.

"All right!" he shouted, "rest easy, Cornelius; to-morrow, sorcerer, you shall hear from me. The sheriff will deal with you, scoundrel! We shall see whether you have a right to whitewash a man as if he were a barn-door, and also to spoil his shirt!"

"Sit down," said Cornelius, "and listen. To remove this oil a chemical preparation is necessary which no one knows in Armes or in Clamecy. I alone can rid you of this coating, and I will leave it on your face until you have restored to the man

with the pike everything that you have taken from him over and above legal interest. Now, do as you choose; I am in the position of the usurer, and you in that of the borrower. I beg you to observe, moreover, that you are not obliged to accept the conditions which I impose upon you."

"All right, all right, Cornelius! If you get out of this with six months in prison, you will be very lucky. I must make you rot in prison for this, if it costs me a farm!"

"But, Monsieur Belle-Plante," said Louise, between two shouts of laughter, "you are too ugly to remain thus; you look like an almond-cake! If you persist in not accepting the offer, you have but one course to take—to have yourself tinned."

"It is very becoming in you to make sport of me, *perronnelle!*"

"What did he say?" asked Cornelius.

"He said mademoiselle," answered Louise.

"No," shouted Belle-Plante, in exasperation, "I said *perronnelle;* yes, *perronnelle,* do you hear, Cornelius? And I will tell the whole village that she is your mistress."

This was said in Mother Simone's kitchen. Cornelius, furious, looked everywhere for some blunt instrument with which to show Belle-Plante his

indignation. He perceived the pike of the night before on the kitchen table; seizing it with both hands by the gills, he brought it down so furiously upon Belle-Plante 's shoulders that it sent him ten steps out into the street.

"There!" said he, "carry that to your cook! it is the pike."

XVII.

On reaching home Belle-Plante tried to rid himself of his coating; but Cornelius had told the truth: the drying-oil was fastened upon his face like a new skin. The clear water which he used in floods served only to render his countenance more shiny and copper-colored. All his servants had fled, one to the right, another to the left, that they might laugh unobserved. Old Gothon, whose age and wrinkles made it necessary for her to be serious, alone remained beside him, lavishing upon him her cares. At first she tried soap, but soap had no effect upon the diabolical coating.

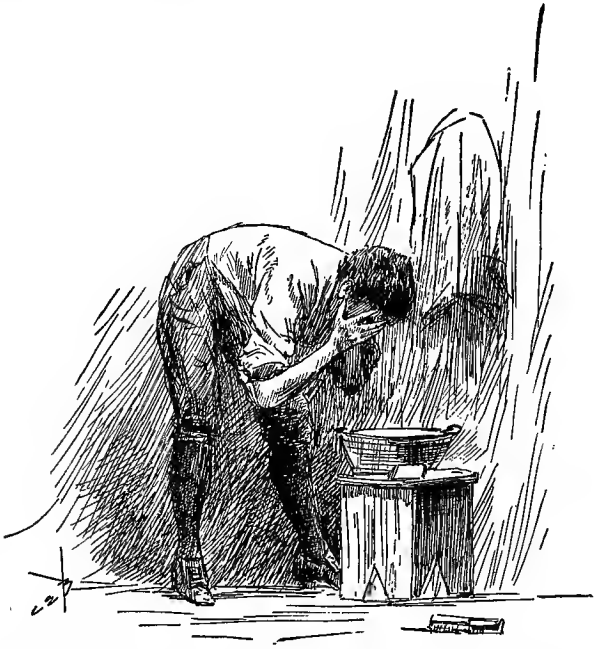
"God forgive me!" said she, "I believe, master, that we shall have to put you in lye; soap has no more effect upon you than if I were to rub a pumpkin to whiten it."

"Then," said Belle-Plante, "it is useless to waste any more of it."

"Suppose, then, I wash you with holy water, master?"

"Crazy old woman, when your kettles are rusty,

do you wash them with holy water? When your frying-pan is oxidized, I have noticed that you use



ON REACHING HOME BELLE-PLANTE TRIED TO RID HIMSELF OF HIS COATING.

ashes; do the same with me, and don't be afraid to rub."

"But, master, I shall take your skin off."

"Go ahead, nevertheless, Gothon; that is better than paying the money back."

And Mother Gothon went to work.

But Cornelius and Louise had slipped into the yard to enjoy Belle-Plante's pitiful appearance. Cornelius could not resist the desire to correct the chemical error which the servant was committing; so he entered the kitchen.

"I beg you to observe, Madame Gothon," said he, "that the action of soap is due only to the potash which it contains; now, potash is derived from ashes, and it is to the potash alone that the ashes owe their detersive power. So it is just the same as if you were to still rub with soap."

"My gun!" shouted Belle-Plante; "bring me my gun, that I may kill him!"

"You would be very imprudent to do that," said Cornelius, coldly; "if I were dead, you would have to remain all your life the color of a warming-pan. Kill me, if you like."

"Well, at least rid me of your diabolical oil, and I will say nothing to the sheriff."

"Restore," said Cornelius; "otherwise, not."

And he went away tranquilly, his hands in his pockets, to rejoin Louise.

"I am going to stew Belle-Plante's pike," said Cornelius to Louise, "and, if you like, we will dine under the willows."

"Very willingly," said Louise; "my father is at Clamecy, and my entire day is at our disposal. I am going to tell Jeanne to make a cake for us."

"Oh!" said Cornelius, rubbing his hands, "a pike, a cake, and Louise at breakfast! A great lord might well say of me that I am a lucky fellow! As if happiness were made only for gentlemen!"

"God rewards you," said Louise, "for the good deed that you have done."

"Thank you," said Cornelius; "but you did more than half of this good deed."

While they were under the willows, Mother Simone presented herself, followed by an old man, whose face wore the stamp of honesty.

"Here, Monsieur Cornelius," said she; "Father Navette would like to speak to you."

"Well, let him speak," said Cornelius; "come, my good man, what have you to say to us? And first of all drink a glass of this wine. Mother Simone, a glass for Monsieur Navette."

Mother Simone, delighted with the success of her *protégé*, ran to get a glass.

"Monsieur Sorcerer," said Father Navette.

"What do you mean, Father Navette?" said Louise, "with your Monsieur Sorcerer?"

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, perhaps I have ill

spoken; but, as monsieur bewitched Monsieur Belle-Plante on account of his usury, I would like him to do me the same service that he has done to the fisherman Jacob."

"H'm!" said Cornelius, assuming the gravity of a king giving audience; "I listen."

"The case is this, Monsieur Savant. I am Monsieur Belle-Plante's weaver, and he owes me one hundred and ninety francs for weaving cloth."

"What!" said Cornelius, "Belle-Plante owes you one hundred and ninety francs for weaving cloth? That is impossible. I know from good authority that he changes his clothes only every four months."

"You must know," said Louise, "that Belle-Plante manufactures every year linen, serge, and striped cotton. He supplies all his servants with garments, and keeps back the price thereof out of their wages. He finds that his hemp and his wool bring him more in this way than if he were to sell them at the fair."

"Belle-Plante," said Cornelius, "is no ordinary miser: he will advance the science; really there is imagination in his avarice. But go on, Father Navette; I say this, not for you, but for myself."

"For two years," said Father Navette, "he has owed me this sum. It was labor lost to ask him for

the money: he had always just made a payment; he put me off from St. Anthony's to St. John's, from St. John's to St. Martin's, from St. Martin's to Christmas; in short, he dragged me from one end of the calendar to the other. As luck would have it, we lately lost our cow, and, not having the money to buy another, I went to Monsieur Belle-Plante, and I said to him:

"'This time, Monsieur Belle-Plante, I must absolutely have my money.'

"'My dear Father Navette,' he answered, 'though you were to hang me as high as St. Martin's tower to make me find a *sou*, I could not find it.'

"'I won't hang you as high as St. Martin's tower,' I answered, 'especially as the bell-ringer would refuse me the keys; but I am going to bring suit against you.'

"'If you like, Father Navette,' he answered, 'I will give you a six months note, and you can get it discounted.'

"A bit of paper instead of money was scarcely what I wanted; but hunger drives the wolf outside the woods; I was obliged to take his paper. As I was in the yard, he called me back.

"'By the way, Father Navette,' said he, 'an idea occurs to me; since it is your intention to get your

note discounted, you may as well do it here as anywhere; that will save you a trip to the city.'

"'But,' I said to him, 'you told me just now that one might hang you as high as St. Martin's tower to make you find a *sou*.'

"'It is money that is not mine,' he answered; 'but, as you are a worthy man, to oblige you I will take it upon myself to dispose of it.'

"'Indeed, it is because I am a worthy man that you wish to rob me!'

"'Not at all!" said he; 'will you take, in exchange for your note, one hundred and sixty francs in beautiful new coin?'

"I struggled like a devil in a holy-water basin, but in the end had to comply with his wishes."

"Belle-Plante is a wretch," said Louise; "but what can Monsieur Cornelius do about it?"

"Pardon me, Louise, pardon me," said Cornelius; "I can do something about it, and even a great deal. If Belle-Plante does not restore to Father Navette the thirty francs he has cheated him out of, I undertake to return them to him."

"When your balloon is finished, Monsieur Cornelius?"

"Certainly," said Cornelius, "that goes without saying, Louise. Now, Monsieur Navette, do not

leave the premises; and, when I want you, I will send for you."

As he said this, Mother Simone came to ask if she should show M. Belle-Plante in.

"Of course, Mother Simone; bid him enter, and bring him in if he will not walk. You cannot serve us a better dessert. This happens most opportunely for you, Father Navette; go hide behind that willow yonder, and, when I call you, come out."

"So here you are!" said Cornelius.

"Yes," said Belle-Plante. "Have you at last decided to remove this frightful mask?"

"That would be a pity," said Cornelius. "It protects you from the bites of insects and from the harmful effects of dampness."

"Take it off, Cornelius, and I will restore three francs to the fisherman."

"No."

"Will you for six?"

"No."

"For ten?"

"'Tis useless to haggle," said Cornelius; "fifteen francs, take it or leave it. You know that I represent the usurer and you the borrower. Now, try to relieve yourself from my conditions."

"Well, I will restore the fifteen francs; but put me back in my original condition."

"First the fifteen francs. You know that one should not let go of the cow before the cowherd has blown his horn. That is a lesson which cost me three *sous*, and I remember it."

Belle-Plante handed the fifteen francs to Cornelius with a sigh.

"Now," said he, "I hope that you are going to take your oil off my face. What are you waiting for?"

"One moment," said Cornelius. "The devil! what a hurry you are in! We still have a little account to settle. Father Navette, come here."

Father Navette came out from his hiding-place and stood opposite Cornelius.

"Do you know this man?" said Cornelius to Belle-Plante.

"Undoubtedly I know him; he is the king of men and the emperor of weavers. But what has that to do with my face?"

"You shall know. Speak, Father Navette. Have you nothing to claim of the accused?"

"Yes, Monsieur Savant; if it is Monsieur Belle-Plante whom you call the accused, I have to claim thirty francs of him, which he cut off my bill yesterday."

"That was for discount, you stupid old man! How is it that at your age you do not understand discount? Cornelius understands it well; he knows very well that without discount no business could be done. Sometimes an individual might have a hundred thousand francs as security in his portfolio, and yet in the absence of discount could not get money enough to buy a loaf of bread."

"So," said Cornelius, "under pretext of discount you have unjustly held back from this man thirty francs on a bill that you had owed him for two years?"

"Well," said Belle-Plante, "he consented! Father Navette is not a child, Cornelius."

"Well, I am going to teach you the value of the word *consent*. You, in your turn, shall consent to restore him his thirty francs. Otherwise you shall remain under your coating forever."

"Oh, Cornelius, you are joking! It is not possible that you demand this of me?"

"Remember that I am the usurer and you the borrower. You are free, as was Father Navette, not to consent."

"Oh, this is the way you keep your word! I did not think that you had fallen as low as that, Cornelius. Well, then, since you will not wash my

face, return to me the fifteen francs which you have just extorted for your fisherman."

"No," said Cornelius, "that is money which you restored. It does not belong to me, it belongs to the fisherman."

"And you think that it is very delicate, very loyal, that it is the act of an honest man, and especially of a brother, to abuse the position in which I find myself in order to ruin me."

"What do you expect? I am the usurer, and you the borrower."

"Say, rather, that you are the robber and I the robbed."

"Oh, they are both the same thing."

"No epigrams, Cornelius! Yes or no, will you wash my face?"

"No."

"Well, I am going straight to the sheriff's."

"Go on, Belle-Plante. Perhaps the sheriff's soap is better than Mother Gothon's."

Belle-Plante went out with a firm and decided step, as if expecting to reach Clamecy in five minutes; but some time afterward he returned.

"You do not see, Cornelius," said he, "that you do more harm than good to Father Navette. Here is the proposition which I make. If you like, I will

give fifteen francs to Navette, and he shall work for me all the year long."

"Thirty francs," said Cornelius: "I am the usurer, and you the borrower."

"Mercy!" cried Belle-Plante. "Mademoiselle Louise, intercede for me."

"I am the usurer, I tell you; I listen to nothing."

"Well, then, here are your thirty francs; but God will never forgive you for this."

"He will forgive me for it, you may be sure. Since God refuses to interfere to secure justice for the oppressed, he cannot condemn another for doing his work."

"Are you going at last to wash my face, Cornelius?"

"You are very much afraid that I may impose upon you still other restitutions; but rest easy. I have sufficiently shown you, I believe, the situation of the usurer in relation to the borrower. Now I abdicate."

Then he took a phial from his pocket, emptied a drop of a certain acid upon the corner of a napkin, and restored to Belle-Plante his natural carnation.

XVIII.

CORNELIUS worked at his balloon with so much ardor that toward the end of July half of his cloth was coated. But his first cask of oil was exhausted; when he wished to use the second, he found that a treacherous hand had adulterated it and that it was no longer of any use to him. This act of disloyal malice could have been committed only during the few days that his baggage was left at Belle-Plante's. We cannot say that it was Belle-Plante who did it; in the first place, we know nothing about it, and, in the second place, Belle-Plante's heirs might drag us before the civil courts for damage done to the reputation of their uncle, and the civil courts are not disposed to listen to reason. In vain will you claim that the reputation which you thought it your duty to attack was already damaged; just as when you break a square of cracked glass, you must replace it with a new one, willy-nilly. At any rate the cask of oil which was lacking at the very moment when it was needed was irreparably lost to Cornelius. His last resources being

exhausted, it would have been impossible for him to get another cask, even though the price had been but thirty *sous*.

Our friend Cornelius was in dismay, and you will admit that he might have been for less. For the want of a few pints of his oil, it was necessary for him to leave half-finished the finest and most fruitful undertaking ever conceived by the human mind. The glory of which he had dreamed so long he saw escaping him like a bird at the moment when one is about to place his hand upon it. His drying oil cost him eighty-five francs a cask. Yet for a cask of this oil he would have given without regret ten of the finest years of his life, as under certain circumstances a woman would give a diamond for a needleful of thread.

Cornelius did not tear his hair like a classic hero; he did not cry damnation and malediction, with fist raised toward heaven, like a romantic hero; for Cornelius was neither classic nor romantic, I beg you to believe; but he gave his cask a terrible kick, which smashed it in.

When Louise came, she found him like Marius amid the ruins of Minturnes, sitting on a roll of cloth, his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands, looking fixedly at a puddle of black water

spreading at his feet. She was frightened at his dismay.

"What is the matter with you, Cornelius?" she cried.

Cornelius kept silence.

"Answer me quickly, Cornelius; what is the matter with you?"

"Well," said Cornelius, "I have no more oil. This mixture of water and lampblack is all that Belle-Plante has left me!"

"What! Belle-Plante, your brother? Indeed this man is capable of anything. He should be handed over to justice."

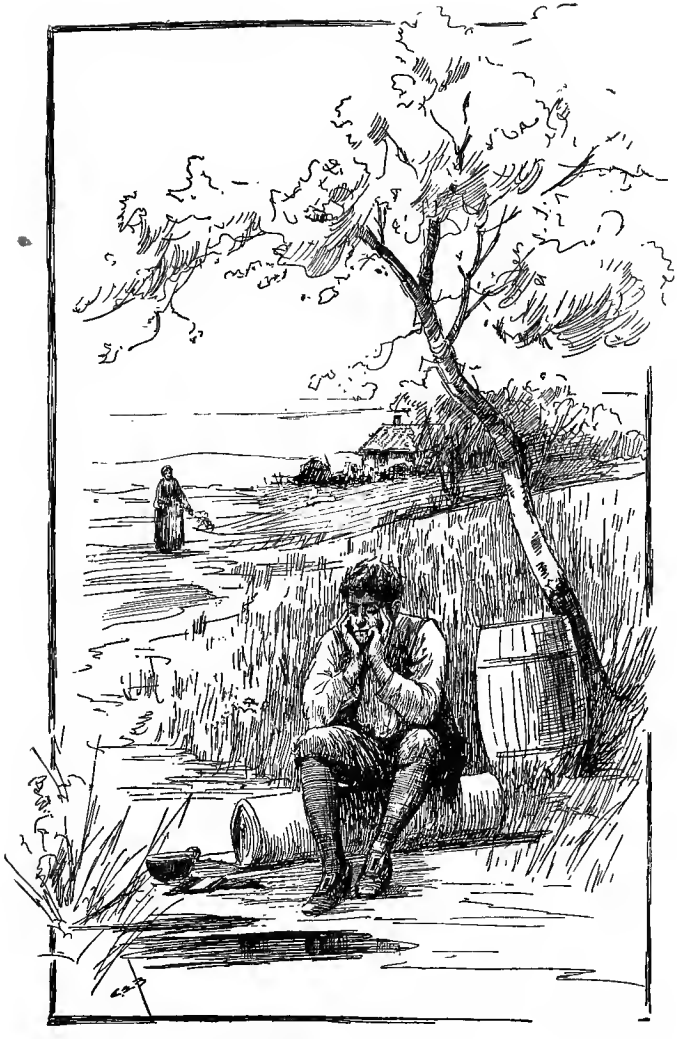
"What are you thinking of, Louise? I make a criminal court resound with my father's name! Oh, no, Louise, a hundred times no! Better remain wretched and unknown all my life!"

"You have a noble heart, Cornelius. But it is always such people whom fortune attacks, as if it sought a worthy adversary. But perhaps this misfortune is not irreparable."

"It is, Louise, for cloth cannot be made waterproof except with drying oil."

"I mean, my friend, that perhaps it is not impossible to get you another cask of oil."

"And how, Louise?" said Cornelius, pricking up



SHE FOUND HIM LOOKING FIXEDLY AT A PUDDLE OF BLACK WATER AT HIS FEET.

his ears like a war-horse at the sound of the trumpet.

"A little patience," said Louise; "I am thinking; I do not yet know."

And indeed the poor girl was at the end of her resources; she had sold all her jewels, one after another, to pay Cornelius' board, he not knowing it.

"Come, my friend," she added, "give me your arm, and let us take a walk in our field; the exercise will give us ideas."

"True," said Cornelius; "there are writers who can work only while walking; it was while walking that Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote his 'Nouvelle Héloïse.'"

Cornelius rose mechanically, like a statue set upon its feet by means of a capstan. He took Louise's arm, and both walked silently along beside the willows, with eyes fixed upon the ground, as if they had lost something in the grass. Louise's pensive gaze fell upon Blanchette, Mother Simone's cow, who was innocently browsing in the corner of the field.

"I have your oil, Cornelius," she shouted, clapping her hands.

"My oil! where is it?" asked Cornelius, who had

begun in spite of himself to dream of a geometrical solution.

"See," said Louise, "there! Blanchette, my old nurse's cow!"

"You are crazy, Louise. Do you think that one can coat balloon-cloth with butter and cheese?"

"Go after Mother Simone, and don't trouble yourself about the rest."

Cornelius soon returned with his venerable hostess.

"Nurse," said Louise, "how much do you love me?"

"As much as the daughter whom I lost," said Mother Simone.

"Then you love me more than Blanchette?"

"How can you ask such a question, mademoiselle?"

"Well, if I found myself in a position of great embarrassment, if all my hopes of happiness were at stake, would you sell Blanchette to relieve me of my difficulty?"

"If it were absolutely necessary," said Mother Simone.

"Oh, it is absolutely necessary, nurse," said Louise, taking her hands and covering them with kisses. "If it were not absolutely necessary, you

may know that I would not be so cruel as to deprive you of your beloved cow."

"Dear girl, you pay me for my cow ten times more than she is worth. To-morrow I will take her to the fair."

"And you will give me the money, nurse?"

"I will give it to you, dear girl. But at least permit me to kiss you. Since you have become a young lady, I no longer dare give myself that pleasure."

Louise threw herself upon Mother Simone's neck, who pressed her lovingly against her red handkerchief. Meanwhile Cornelius wept upon his frill like a booby.

Mother Simone wished to return to her stove.

"No, stay, Mother Simone," said Cornelius; "I have something to say to you. The deed which you have just done is beautiful, undoubtedly; but permit me to view only one aspect of it. It proves irrefutably that paternal love is not a consequence of paternity—that is, that one does not love a child simply because one has given it life. You did not give life, Mother Simone, to Mademoiselle Desallemagnes; you gave her only your milk at the rate of fifteen francs a month, which is almost ten *sous* a pint; you have been to her only what the deer of

Geneviève de Brabant was to her poor child. Nevertheless you love Mademoiselle Desallemagnes more than her father loves her, I am sure. Why so, Mother Simone? Because you are accustomed to see her, because she has grown and developed under your eyes, and also because she is pretty. You love her, in short, as a florist loves the flower which he waters every day and whose development he watches. Well, it is in that way, and not otherwise, that a father loves his child. His child is to him a little creature to which he is bound by ties of friendship. If the child is given to squalling, if it is ugly, if it has pimples on its face, if it has the diarrhœa, he feels nothing but repugnance for it; and this repugnance continues if the child is ill-organized, if it has a disagreeable nature, if, in short, it has any of those faults that repel affection. If a woman were to bring a hare into the world, do you think, Mother Simone, that her husband would be very fond of it? I am persuaded, for my part, if it were to be made into a stew, he would eat it very willingly. When a child comes into the world deformed, its parents would much rather give it a grave than a cradle. Nevertheless, why do they not love it, if to love a child it is necessary only to have created it? You will tell me that they become

attached to it; but that arises from the friendship necessarily established between beings who have continual relations with each other. Almost all the acts of a father toward his child are acts of egoism. Thus, instead of buying the child a three-franc doll, which would make the child very happy, he buys him a fine coat because the coat will do honor to the father of the child. If he is a notary and his son is a poet, he will make a notary of him; if he is a noble and his daughter loves a plebeian, he will marry her to a noble; and so in everything. A father who is very indifferent regarding his son is seized with regret as soon as he has lost him. Do you know why, Mother Simone? Because this father had rested hopes of some sort on his son's head; because his pride dreamed of a fine social position for him, the brilliancy of which would be reflected upon the family; because he thought that in some way he would do honor to him. The proof of this is that we never regret our children more than when they die at an age when the future has not yet had time to shatter the dreams that we have entertained concerning them. If a little girl dies, her mother regrets her as a great lady; if a little boy, the father weeps over him as a great poet, a great financier, a great lawyer, and perhaps as

a great cabinet minister whom the family have lost."

Cornelius held Mother Simone by her apron, so afraid was he that she might escape him.

"Ah!" said she, "will you soon be finished, Monsieur Cornelius? I must go and see if your dinner is not burning."

"Well," said Cornelius, "Louise will give me the pleasure of listening to the end of my discourse."

"Not at all," interrupted Louise; "I paid no attention to the beginning."

"Then I will finish it when Mother Simone comes back."

"Yes," said she, "yes, wait for me under the elm."

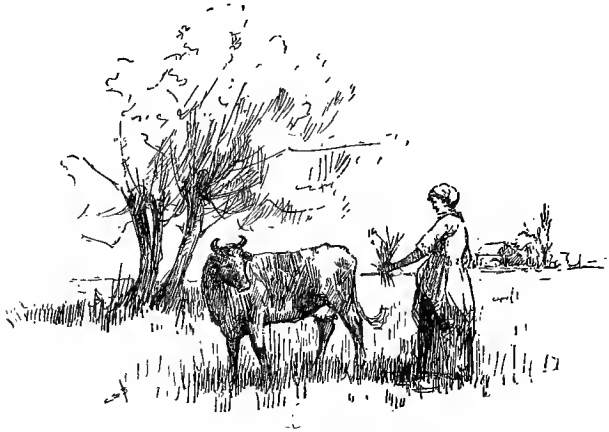
As she passed by her cow, Mother Simone gave her a handful of grass, which Blanchette ate from her hand like a well-bred beast, and she kissed her on the nose.

"Poor Blanchette!" said she, "I hoped that we should never part; but to relieve Louise from embarrassment we must be resigned to this separation. How you will suffer away from me, my Blanchette!"

As Mother Simone moved away, Blanchette, as if she had understood what her mistress had just

said, gave a cry of lament, like that of a cow whose calf has just been taken from her.

"They will break my heart between them," said Louise; "I must try to persuade my father to buy her cow, and later we will return it to her."



AS SHE PASSED HER COW MME. SIMONE GAVE HER A HANDFUL OF GRASS.

"Louise," said Cornelius, "I fear now that I may not succeed. If I should not succeed, who would repay you and this poor woman, who is so devoted to us?"

"You will succeed, my friend," answered Louise; "those whom one loves thus upon earth, God loves also in heaven."

At all events, the next morning poor Blanchette went to the Corvol fair, and in the afternoon she was sold, for Father Desallemagnes would not listen to the plan.

Cornelius hastened to write to Paris, ordering a third cask of oil, and pending the execution of the order he went back to his equations. Now, this is what happened to him.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and he was very tranquilly engaged in eating a leg of mutton at Mother Simone's table. A carriage drawn by four horses stopped before the tavern door. The cracking of the whips had attracted a considerable number of curiosity-seekers about the carriage. Three men got out; one of high stature, with an embroidered coat and a long cue hanging over his shoulders; the two others also dressed very richly, but in costumes which seemed a little worn. With them was a very fine poodle. This aristocratic quadruped had unceremoniously thrown himself upon Mother Simone's chickens as upon a taxable tribe.

"So, ho! Fontenoy!" cried one of the three personages, and the dog came and placed himself beside him.

Cornelius was going out to see what it all meant, when the three travellers entered the dining-room.

"Monsieur," said the man in the embroidered coat, addressing him, "are you not the savant Cornelius?"

"The savant Cornelius? No. But the fact is that I am Cornelius."

"Then it is you, monsieur, whom we wish to see. But do not let us interfere with your supper, Monsieur Cornelius; in fact, if you will permit it, we will add our fare to yours."

A servant brought from the carriage some cold meats and a considerable number of bottles of wine; and the newcomers sat down to table with our savant.

"I do not know," said Cornelius to my Uncle Benjamin—for it was he—"whether I have seen you or dreamed of you, but your face is not unfamiliar to me."

"You may have seen me at the king's," said my uncle, "if you go there."

"It was not at the king's, where I do not go, but it must have been in the stage-coach going from Auxerre to Clamecy; you had a red coat, and you made us laugh all the way."

"Then, monsieur, you have been abused by a deceitful resemblance; for I am the king's prime minister, Monsieur de Choiseuil; this general officer

at your left is the Marshal de Saxe, and this other the Chancellor of France."

Now, the Chancellor of France was Machecourt.

"I thought," said Cornelius, "that Maurice de Saxe had been dead a long time."

"I know that public sheets in the pay of England have spread this report with a view to discouraging the army; but God, who protects France, as you must have seen on the six-franc pieces, will long preserve to the king this worthy and faithful servant."

"I hope so, monsieur," said Cornelius, "and I am delighted to see that Monsieur the Marshal eats and drinks like a man who has no desire to die soon."

"What you have just said, Monsieur Cornelius, proves that the benefits with which the king, my master, honors you could not be better placed, and I will make them known to you."

"Permit me, Your Excellency, to what benefits do you refer? I have never received from the king anything but warnings to pay my taxes."

"If you will listen to me to the end, Monsieur Cornelius, you will see that you owe the king more gratitude than you think. His Majesty knows that you are building a balloon, and that you have found a way to steer it through the atmospheric currents."

"And how did His Majesty find that out? I have told only Louise and Father Desallemagnes."

"It makes little difference to you, monsieur, how His Majesty found it out. Do you wish perchance to penetrate state secrets?"

"Not at all, Your Excellency, but I have a right to be astonished at what you tell me."

"Be as astonished as you please, monsieur; the king will find no fault with that; but listen to me without interruption. The king, then, has charged me to hand you twelve hundred francs as evidence of the esteem he bears you, and he invites you to continue your useful discoveries."

Cornelius could not believe his ears; but M. de Choiseuil having made a sign to the lackey who was waiting on the table, the latter went out and soon returned with a bag of money.

"Here, monsieur, is the sum His Majesty has charged me to give to you; you can count it to see if there are really twelve hundred francs."

"I do not distrust His Majesty," said Cornelius, "and I beg you to convey to him the assurance of my gratitude and my devotion. Your Excellency, might I offer you a glass of currant ratafia? Mother Simone makes very good ratafia."

"We accept very willingly, the Marshal de Saxe

and I, and I shall be sure to report to the king regarding the welcome you have given us."

"And Monsieur the Chancellor, will he not take a glass of ratafia?"

"I forbid it," said Benjamin; "a man of the law! That would not be proper."

"And I tell you, Benjamin, that I will take a glass! It is not against the law."

"If you take it, I will have you put in the Bastile."

"And I, if you prevent me, will blow upon your ministry and reduce it to dust."

"Well," said Cornelius, "the Chancellor seems to be on very familiar terms with Your Excellency."

"What can you expect? These lawyers put on airs. I will present a report to His Majesty recommending that they be made to sit upon a stool."

Meanwhile Mother Simone had brought the decanter, and the glasses were as soon emptied as filled. Cornelius thought that the king's ministers were good drinkers, but he did as they did, persuaded that one could not go wrong in following the example of the prime minister.

"It seems to me," said Cornelius, in a very low voice, to M. de Choiseuil, "that the Chancellor is a little bit tipsy."

"He is blind drunk," said the sergeant.

"Marshal," said Machecourt, "if you had not won the battle of Fontenoy——"

"Pay no attention to that, Chancellor; you know that military people talk as rudely as street porters."

Meanwhile the decanter had been emptied.

"Mother Simone," said Cornelius, "another decanter, if you please; I will pay for it."

"But I have no more," said Mother Simone.

"Well, is this the only decanter in the village?" said Choiseuil.

"Monsieur Belle-Plante has ratafia, which he sells at two *sous* a glass."

"Well, go for his decanter; you will tell him it is for the prime minister."

Mother Simone came back, and said that Belle-Plante would not let them have his decanter for less than twelve francs.

"Offer him fifteen, and tell him to bring it himself."

XIX.

In fact, a few moments later Belle-Plante, wearing his cotton nightcap, came carrying the decanter in his arms, like a nurse carrying a baby.

"You rascal!" said Cornelius, whose reason was returning, "why don't you salute the minister?"

And he snatched off his nightcap and threw it to the end of the room.

"Why!" said Belle-Plante, "you see that I cannot salute, since I am holding the decanter in both hands."

"Don't mind him, Monsieur Belle-Plante," said the prime minister; "these savants are extremely free in their manners."

"It is twelve francs," said Belle-Plante, placing the decanter on the table. "To whom must I apply for the pay?"

"Here are eighteen," said Choiseuil, "but you must do us the honor to drink with us."

"He, Belle-Plante, drink with you?" said Cornelius; "why, he is a peasant, three times a peasant; he doesn't even know how to read."

"What difference does that make?" said the prime minister. "He is a good farmer, and His Majesty, whom I represent, honors all people of merit."

"Eh! Cornelius, do you hear that, balloon-maker?"

"And you, do you see this, carrot-planter?" said Cornelius, showing him his bag.

"His Majesty," said the minister, "has charged me to drink with Monsieur Belle-Plante. So sit down, Monsieur Belle-Plante, and drink with us."

Cornelius having approached his glass to Belle-Plante's, the latter drew his back.

"What!" said the minister, "you will not drink with your brother, Monsieur Belle-Plante?"

"How does Your Excellency know that he is my brother?" said Cornelius.

"Again I tell you, monsieur, that does not concern you; it is a state secret."

The Chancellor had risen from the table, and, taking a double handful of currant seeds from the bottom of the emptied decanter, he poured it down the poodle's throat. The Marshal de Saxe sang "*Aussitôt que la Lumière,*" beating time with his glass; and Belle-Plante ate the rest of the mutton,

calculating with satisfaction that he would not need to breakfast the next day.

Meanwhile the song of the Marshal, the laughter of the Chancellor, and the barking of the poodle, who would swallow no more currant seeds, attracted the constable, who was making his rounds. He knocked at Mother Simone's door, triumphant at finding the drinkers violating the law. Mother Simone, made bold by the presence of His Majesty's prime minister, would not open.

"In the name of the king, open!" replied the constable.

"If I open, your nose will be flattened, my poor Baudruche."

"Well, open at any rate," said the constable.

M. de Choiseuil gave the order to open the door.

"Gentlemen," said the constable, "I declare you under arrest."

"What! His Majesty's prime minister under arrest? Impertinent fellow, take care lest I strip you of your office."

"But you are not all cabinet ministers here," said the constable. "Here is Belle-Plante; he is not a cabinet minister."

"True," said M. de Choiseuil; "since you must declare some one under arrest, let it be Monsieur Belle-Plante."

"But, Baudruche——"

"There is no Baudruche about it; I declare you under arrest, Monsieur Belle-Plante."

"Very good, constable, you shall be promoted."

"But, Your Excellency," said Belle-Plante, "you know very well that it was you who forced me to remain."

"Well, what do you expect? You are violating the law. I can do nothing about it. The law must take its course."

"And Cornelius! he is violating it as much as I am."

"Cornelius has the king's permission to remain in the tavern as long as he likes."

"Come, Choiseuil," said the Chancellor, "have pity on this poor man."

"What, Chancellor, is this the way that you would carry out the regulations? This man is pointed out to me as a miser, a usurer, almost a robber; moreover, it is proved by the fact that he charged us fifteen francs for a decanter not worth thirty *sous*. Besides, he is violating another regulation in selling liquor without a license."

"The case is serious, truly," said the Chancellor; "what does the Marshal think about it?"

"I think that, if he will give the constable the

fifteen francs which he has just received, he should be allowed to go free. And you, constable, do you consent?"

"If monsieur is willing."

"And you, Belle-Plante?"

"Since it is necessary," said he, with a sigh.

"The case is settled," said the prime minister, giving a huge and sonorous yawn. "But it is time to start, gentlemen; remember that we are summoned to the king on pressing business. Adieu, Monsieur Cornelius!"

But Cornelius was sleeping blissfully on the table.

XX.

THE next morning Cornelius found himself in his bed, without knowing how he had got there.

He thought he had dreamed of the Duke de Choiseuil and of the Marshal de Saxe; but the bag containing twelve hundred francs lying on his table recalled him to reality, and all that he understood of the scene that had taken place was that he had twelve hundred francs. He rose hastily, pocketed the money, and went out without attracting Mother Simone's notice. Louise learned from Mother Simone in the morning what had happened the night before, and she, too, believed in the reality of the prime minister. She awaited Cornelius; then, growing impatient at his tardiness, she went to seek him in the village suburbs. All that any one could tell her of him was that he had been seen to pass that morning over the *pertuis* of Armes. Finally, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Cornelius arrived, driving before him, with a roll of wove paper, Mother Simone's cow. Blanchette went straight to her stable, and Cornelius to the house of M.

Desallemagnes. At sight of him Louise felt a desire to throw herself into his arms, but she concealed her joy under a displeased air.

"So it is you at last, Monsieur Cornelius! It is very nice of you to start off without telling any one! And where have you been, you abominable child?"

"Louise," said Cornelius, when Mademoiselle Desallemagnes was seated, "why have you no more rings?"

"Because I no longer have any," said Louise, taken unawares by this question.

"Well, I wish you to have rings."

And he took from his pocket ten rings, which he threw upon Louise's apron.

"You are mad, Cornelius! What do you expect me to do with ten rings?"

"No, Louise, I am not mad. Have you not ten fingers?"

"Yes, but two are thumbs."

"True," said Cornelius; "I have made an error in calculation, which the jeweller ought to have rectified; but it is an error that is easily repaired. I will buy six other rings, that you may have two for each finger. You must make up for lost time. Why, Louise, have you no longer any necklaces?"

"Because it is too hot, and they embarrass me."

"Well, I wish you to have necklaces."

And he took from his pocket four necklaces of different colors and placed them in Louise's apron.

"But what do you expect me to do with these, Cornelius?"

"What one usually does with a necklace, Louise. Louise, why—Louise,—but where the devil is the pocket that has the ear-rings?" said he, passing his hand over his waistcoat. "Ah! here they are, Louise. Why have you no longer any ear-rings? Why have you no longer any rings? Why have you no longer any necklace?"

"You bore me with all your whys."

"Well, I am going to tell you. You have no longer any rings, no longer any necklace, no longer any ear-rings, because you have sold them all to feed poor Cornelius. Cornelius' family has abandoned him. You have said: 'This man has no one but me upon earth; I must take care of him,' and you have taken care of him as a mother would her child. Cornelius was rich, and he has made haste to profit by his wealth to show you his gratitude. See, Louise, here are some ear-rings."

And he laid upon Louise's apron four pairs of ear-rings, which would have made a countess smile with joy.

"Heavens! Cornelius, what need have I of all these jewels? You would have done better to buy back Mother Simone's cow."

"True," said Cornelius, "that poor Blanchette, a quadruped so full of feeling! But who told you, Louise, that I did not buy her back?"

"What! you thought of that, Cornelius?"

"Yes, I thought of that, savant though I am. We came back from Clamecy, Blanchette and I, and she is now enjoying Mother Simone's embraces."

"Poor nurse, how happy she must be!"

"I thought of Mother Simone as well as of her cow. Here, Louise, is a gold chain, which I beg you to give to her."

"Are you joking? Does Mother Simone wear necklaces?"

"What is that to me? She can give it to her cow, if she likes. Here is a silver snuff-box besides, which you will ask her to accept in my name."

"But, my friend, Mother Simone does not take snuff."

"Must Cornelius, then, be a monster of ingratitude?"

Louise took the chain and the snuff-box, but with the intention of converting these two brilliant but

useless articles into something better suited to her nurse's wants.

"Now, Cornelius, will you explain to me how your pockets have suddenly become storehouses of jewelry? I know that the king's prime minister came yesterday to see you——"

"And the Marshal de Saxe, Louise, and the High Chancellor! The king holds me in esteem. He is interested in my balloon, and he has sent me twelve hundred francs by his prime minister."

"So this, then, is the explanation of all your liberality! And I will bet that now you have no money left."

"I have still nine francs and six *sous*. That will do for my small expenses until my balloon is finished."

"Nine francs and six *sous*, out of twelve hundred francs! What a spendthrift you are, Cornelius! I see clearly that when we are married I shall have to hold the purse. But did you buy anything for yourself?"

"Yes, Louise, a roll of wove paper and a parallelogram of India ink."

"But you ought to have thought of yourself, Cornelius. You have only one coat."

"Well, have I two bodies?"

"You have only half a dozen frills."

"There are thousands of men in France who have none."

"You are lacking in necessities."

"What does one lack when one is happy?"

"But suppose you should be unfortunate enough to break a square of glass in the village?"

"Well, I would come to you for a twelve-*sous* piece to pay for it."

XXI.

MEANWHILE the days were getting shorter. Cornelius knew very well how to employ his evenings; but Belle-Plante, who had no Louise and did not know how to read, what could he do with those two mortal hours which stretch between supper-time and bed-time? Belle-Plante, in order to avoid lighting up, went to bed as soon as he was through his supper. But lost time is an expense; Belle-Plante was too great a master in the art of avarice to allow this consideration to escape him, and he deplored and mourned these useless hours which he spent in tossing and turning in his bed. What should he do, then, to pass his evenings? You, reader, would have gone to the café; but to Belle-Plante the café was a forbidden Eden, in which he had never set foot. What, then, did Belle-Plante do with his money? you will ask. He put the six-franc pieces in one drawer, the smaller coins in another, and the louis in his belt. That is how he enjoyed his wealth. A sad pleasure, you will think.

In fact, I am of your opinion, and I am persuaded that it gives a miser more pain to lose a *sou* than pleasure to make one. Oh! avarice is a heavy ball to drag after one. If God should say to me, I will give you an income of forty millions on condition that you become a miser, I would say to him: "My God, keep your capital and leave me my carelessness; if I have only a *sou*, I enjoy it; if I had your millions, I should not enjoy them at all."

Belle-Plante, however, thought in the first place of learning to knit; but he reflected that at this trade he would not make enough to pay for his candles. Then it occurred to him that he spent much money for the manufacture of his cloth, and that the trade of a weaver was easy to learn. He decided to become a weaver.

Father Navettte had an old loom which he had consigned to the attic. Belle-Plante bought it of him, but on condition that he, Navette, should come every evening to give him a lesson in weaving at the rate of five *sous* a lesson. The loom was set up in his cellar, the air-hole in which he enlarged and closed with a sash covered with oiled paper, and he began to ply the shuttle.

When it was known in the village that Belle-Plante had become a weaver, he was assailed with

jokes from every side, and he could not go out without making himself a target for some witticism. Moreover, the *gamins*, who have no mercy for anything that is ridiculous—these flies that bite the strong man without his being able to defend himself—gathered every evening at his cellar-door, and, opening it every minute, shouted at him: "Monsieur Belle-Plante, ploughman, grazier, and weaver!" Belle-Plante, as soon as this unfortunate phrase reached his ears, seized his whip, which was always within reach, and ascended the stairs four steps at a time; but when he was in the street, the *gamins* scattered, shouting: "Monsieur Belle-Plante, ploughman!" like a flock of screaming birds, only to return again as soon as he was once more seated at his loom.

One day Pierrot, Father Desallemagne's shepherd, thought of an improvement which had so far escaped his young comrades. He thrust his head through the oiled paper and began to shout at Belle-Plante, at an elevation of six feet above him: "Monsieur Belle-Plante, ploughman!" At sight of this head so impudently violating his domicile, Belle-Plante promptly threw down his shuttle and rushed for his whip. Pierrot tried to withdraw his head, but his head, whether because it liked being in a fine frame

of oiled paper or for some other reason, persisted in remaining. Now, as Pierrot could not go away without his head, however pressing a motive he might have for departure, he made a violent effort to release himself. But his ears would not yield; the sash was wiser, and yielded, and Pierrot carried it away like a collar over his shoulders. Belle-Plante started in pursuit of his sash; but, seeing that he could not overtake the thief, he shouted: "At least, give me back my sash, you young rascal, and I will do you no harm." But the scamp, frightened by the movement of the sash beating upon his shoulders, ran only the faster, like a dog with a frying-pan tied to his tail. Pardon me, reader, I make a stupid comparison. The words *tail* and *frying-pan* are not admissible in fashionable drawing-rooms, and if a dog were to enter one, he would have to leave his tail at the door. The frightened child rushed into Monsieur Desallemagnes' kitchen, where Belle-Plante arrived a few seconds later, panting and wheezing like an old pair of bellows with a hole in them.

Louise and Cornelius quickly understood the situation, and shouted with laughter.

"Will you permit me, Mademoiselle Desallemagnes, to thrash this little wretch?"

"And why, Monsieur Belle-Plante, do you wish to strike this child?"

"Because he has stolen my sash."

"I take him under my protection," said Cornelius, "and, if you touch this child, you will have to deal with me."

"At least, then, savant, make him return me my sash."

The child had succeeded in extricating himself from the sash.

"Here," said he, throwing it into the middle of the room, "there is your sash."

Belle-Plante went to pick it up; but Cornelius was before him. He took the sash and threw it into the fire.

"So," said Belle-Plante, folding his arms, "you wish to ruin me, Cornelius?"

"I wish to correct you," said Cornelius; "for a miser of your stamp is worse than a ruined man; he enjoys nothing. I will not suffer my father's son to make himself the butt of everybody with gayety of heart; I will not endure that wherever a group of peasants gather your ridiculous and base conduct shall be the subject of their conversation; you will find me always in your path, and, if you denounce me to the sheriff, who is no better

than you, I will remind the courts of what took place at the time of my father's death. Now begone, for I am disgusted, and so is Louise, I am sure, to see a man who has ten farms tiring himself out in running after a five-*sous* sash."

Belle-Plante left without saying a word.

Meanwhile the oil for which Cornelius was waiting had arrived; he went to work at his balloon again with fresh ardor, and soon it was in readiness for a trial. This trial took place in the presence of the whole village. The balloon rose majestically until it attained a height where it seemed no more than a gray spot upon the blue of the sky. Only Cornelius abstained from following it into the heavens, making Mother Simone's cat his substitute. The balloon and the cat came back safe and sound, after a sojourn of an hour in the atmosphere, and Cornelius was very well satisfied with the success of his work. Nothing remained to be done but to attach the steering apparatus to his balloon; but he was not yet at the end of his difficulties. One day, when he was at work in his fields, the priest came to find him.

"Monsieur," said the priest, "you are engaged in an impious work."

"How so, Monsieur le Curé?"

"Because, with all your mechanical feats, you cause people to doubt the existence of God."

"On the contrary, Monsieur le Curé, the greater the intelligence, the more necessary it is to suppose an author thereof."

"If God had intended to give man domain over the air, he would have caused him to be born with wings."

"If God had intended that priests should wear a bit of waxed leather on their heads, he would have caused them to be born with a skull-cap."

"That is a jest, not an argument, monsieur."

"Well, I will give you an argument. If God had forbidden man the air, he would have made the atmosphere so that it could not sustain a balloon."

"Unenlightened men will say that it was in a balloon that Elias rose to heaven."

"Well, I would not swear that it was not."

"Then you are an impious man!"

"I do not deny it, Monsieur le Curé."

"I will close the doors of the church against you."

"What do I care? I do not go there."

"I will refuse you the sacraments."

"I do not use them."

"I will not bury you in my parish."

"That will be twelve francs saved for my heirs."

"I will have your balloon burned on the public square."

"And I, Monsieur le Curé, if you make the slightest attack upon my balloon of whatever nature, will set fire to your parsonage."

"You shall hear from me, monsieur."

"Very good; but, if you write me by mail, put a stamp on your letter."

"The miscreant!" said the priest, as he went away.

"The sycophant!" said Cornelius, working at his wheels.

XXII.

A FEW days later a very natural storm, charged with electricity, like all the others, burst over the village and did some damage to the crops and vines. This catastrophe occurred on Saturday. On Sunday the priest ascended his pulpit and said that the wrath of God had burst upon the village because of the diabolical inventions of Cornelius; that our friend Cornelius was a sorcerer, and that, as long as his balloon should remain in existence, the village would be a prey to all sorts of scourges, which he specified, so sure was he of the fact. In support of his assertions, he cited numerous texts from the Holy Scriptures, for the Holy Scriptures are to hypocrites what the Code is to lawyers without a conscience: they find in them a justification for every iniquity. This sermon, accompanied with gestures a yard wide and with big white eyes rolled toward heaven, had a prodigious effect upon the faithful of Armes.

Louise, who heard them whispering about her, foresaw what was going to happen. She left the

church, and, after warning Cornelius, she started for Clamecy on the run with the design of calling for armed force.

On coming from mass, the peasants gathered under the church porch and excited each other to march against Cornelius' balloon.

"Yes," shouted Panuche, "not an ear of corn will grow in the village as long as this diabolical machine exists. This Cornelius is a sorcerer, as is proved by the way in which he painted Monsieur Belle-Plante, an honest man who never did harm to any one. Imagine, my brothers, a coating on which even holy water had no effect!"

"It is true," said Belle-Plante, "and it burned my cheeks like a drug from hell. I did everything that a man possibly could do to get rid of it, but without success, and he, with a drop of water, made it disappear."

"He rides wolves," said an old peasant; "I once met him astride one of those animals. As he approached me, I made the sign of the cross, and he changed into smoke."

"Then," said Navette, "if that be the case, Bazout should be sent to make the sign of the cross on his balloon."

"I do not believe," said the fisherman, "that he

is a sorcerer; but at any rate he is a good sorcerer, for he got me back the nineteen francs which Monsieur Belle-Plante overcharged me."

"What does nineteen francs amount to?" said Panuche, "compared with the injury that he does to us other proprietors? Every year our crops will be crushed by the hail, and you will soon see some pest break out in the village. That is the opinion of Monsieur le Curé."

"Yes, yes," cried all the peasants, "some pest will break out in the village."

"Come on; let all who love Monsieur le Curé follow me," shouted Panuche.

And they tumultuously started for Mother Simone's field.

But Cornelius had been warned in time. He had put himself on a war footing. The good Cornelius had armed himself with Mother Simone's spit. He had thrust his largest compasses into his belt, to say nothing of many smaller ones that he had in his pocket, and he had taken as an auxiliary the brave Dragon, Mother Simone's dog, to whom he had become strongly attached.

Cornelius awaited his assailants at the threshold of the shed in which his balloon was stored. He was too weak to defend the approaches to the place.

So he allowed them to pass the hedge without opposition; but, when they were within reach of his spit, he traced a circle around him with its point, and declared in a loud and intelligible voice that he would impale upon it the first to cross this line of demarcation. This measure irritated the most ardent.

Cornelius, who, on the whole, was as agreeable to an arrangement as to an assault, profited by this moment of indecision to begin a negotiation.

"Let us see, gentlemen," said he to his assailants, "what do you want of me? Before fighting let us have an explanation. If your demand is reasonable, I shall be pleased to accede to it."

"We wish to destroy your balloon," said Panuche.

"I should be delighted, Monsieur Panuche, to be agreeable to you, but really I cannot go as far as that."

"Fire the balloon! Fire the balloon!" shouted the peasants.

"Then, gentlemen, you will explain to me what grievances you have against my balloon."

"It is a work of Satan," said Panuche. "You are the cause of the hail that has fallen upon our village. God has struck us because of you."

"Really!" said Cornelius; "let us reason a little,

if you please. I hope that you will not condemn my balloon without a hearing. If you admit a God, you admit of course that he is just, do you not? And that he knows what he is about? Now, how can you think that God could punish pious men like you for the sins of an impious man like me, supposing me to be a sinner? Or, take Monsieur Panuche, for instance. If I had administered a kick to Monsieur Panuche, would Monsieur Panuche go off and pull the choir boys' ears? Now, do you think that God has less wit than Monsieur Panuche, and that he does what an Angelus-ringer would not do?"

"Gentlemen," said Panuche, "I call you to witness that he insults me."

"What! I insult Monsieur Panuche, because I say that God is not more stupid than he? Must I say, then, that God has less wit than the sexton of our parish? Is it possible that Panuche would like to become a Pope?"

The peasants burst out laughing.

"My brothers——," exclaimed Panuche.

"Seek him!" said Cornelius to his friend, pointing at Panuche with his finger.

Friend Dragon, whose teeth were itching, rushed into the middle of the crowd.

"Help, my brothers!" shouted Panuche.

He fled, but Dragon caught him by his coat, one tail of which remained between his teeth; and, shaking this glorious trophy, he brought it to Cornelius.

Cornelius placed Panuche's coat tail on the end of his spit, and, lifting it in the air so that all could see it, he shouted: "Do you see, my friends? Heaven declares for me and my balloon. Monsieur Panuche has excited you to riot against my balloon; he wished to destroy it. My friend Dragon, on the contrary—for one may well give the title friend to a dog so faithful—my friend Dragon, I say, has been the faithful companion of my labors; he has guarded my balloon at night; he has barked at the children who threw stones upon my cloth, and one day he strangled a rooster who was pecking at it. Now, God has declared in favor of Dragon to the prejudice of his Church, and here is Panuche, stripped of one of his coat tails. Now, let them say that my balloon is disagreeable to God."

"True!" shouted the peasants, "true! true! true!"

Cornelius' cause seemed won; but the priest, who had watched the whole affair from his window, seeing his troops weakening, ran out upon the battle-field.

"Cowardly Christians!" he shouted, "is this the

way you serve the cause of the Most High? Come on, follow me, those who love me! Heaven for those who shall go forward, hell for those who shall stand back!" And he started foremost.

Cornelius made a half turn, crossed his spit, and aimed a thrust at the priest, which would have pierced him as a needle pierces thin cloth. The priest dodged the thrust, but he could not prevent the spit from penetrating his gown in the neighborhood of his loins and nailing him to a poplar. Cornelius tried to withdraw his spit from the tree; but, seeing that he could not do it, he abandoned it, seized the compasses that he had in his belt, drew back three steps, and with lifted arm, sparkling eyes, and a high head, defied his assailants to take another step, while friend Dragon at his side showed them his white fangs, that looked like pieces of daggers.

Just then Mother Simone arrived, carrying in one hand a kettle and in the other a big brush.

"Monsieur Cornelius," said she, "here is your hot frying oil."

Cornelius dipped his brush in the oil, and, advancing upon his assailants, he shouted: "Whoever wishes to share the fate of Belle-Plante, let him approach me!"

At sight of the terrible brush, the frightened crowd drew back ten steps.

"Christians," shouted Panuche, "before you retire, at least demand that your priest shall be restored to you."

"True! The priest! The priest! The priest!" screamed the crowd.

"Your priest, gentlemen, is a prisoner of war, and I cannot restore him to you until peace is declared. The best of it is that there is no need to make him give his word of honor that he will not escape. I will treat him with all the respect due to his character and his unpleasant position. You see, moreover, that he is not utterly deprived of his liberty; he can move from the point of the spit to its hilt."

"At least, Monsieur Cornelius," cried Panuche, "give me back my coat tail."

"That does not depend upon me; it belongs to the brave Dragon. I cannot oblige him to give up his booty."

"What, cowards!" shouted Panuche, making a last attempt; "you will suffer your pastor, and your sexton's coat tail which this cursed dog tears between his teeth, to be treated thus!"

XXIII.

At the same moment a man dressed in red, and mounted on a horse as black as jet, arrived with a naked sword in his hand.

"It is the devil!" shouted a voice.

At this sinister cry the assailants fled in all directions. The infernal horseman started for Panuche, who ran for the parsonage at full speed. Overtaking him, he lifted him up as if he had been a child, placed him across his horse, took the road for Chevroches, crossed the Yonne at the ford, and soon disappeared in the neighboring woods.

Who was this horseman? That is the question. As I cannot make you believe, you who are so fortunate as to live in an enlightened century, that it was the devil, I will tell you very frankly that it was my uncle Benjamin. Now you will wish to know how my uncle happened to intervene in Cornelius' affairs and had by his unaided effort won this great battle. As I do not wish to be mysterious with you, I will tell you all about it.

Benjamin was on his way to Dornecy to see a patient. Toward the Maladrerie he saw a horse lying on the ground and a carriage upset. He raised up the horse, but the animal could no longer continue on his way. A young girl was sitting by the roadside crying. It was Louise.

"Console yourself," Benjamin said to her, "your horse will not be lame and your carriage is not broken."

"Alas, monsieur, it is not for the horse and carriage that I weep!"

And she told him what was happening at Armes.

"You do not need to go for the marshal," said Benjamin; "your Cornelius is one of my friends, and I will undertake to settle his affair. In return, I ask you only for a kiss when next we meet."

Thereupon he remounted his horse and started off at a gallop.

We know the result of his intervention. Panuche, carried off through the woods and across the fields and meadows that seemed to flee behind him, was convinced that he was going to hell, and recited many a Paternoster. My uncle had him carried into a very dark cellar, and the next day had him brought forth again.

My uncle had caused a throne to be erected in his

large hall. Arthus occupied it, representing the Eternal Father. At his feet was the sergeant's poodle, who represented the archangels, except that he had no lyre. Benjamin, sitting at a sort of black desk, in the same costume as the day before, performed the functions of the devil. Page, with his wig, represented Saint Joseph. The Jesus Christ was Parlanta, and Manette had very willingly undertaken the rôle of the Holy Virgin. As for Rapin, Guillerand, and Machecourt, they were sundry saints.

My uncle had been much pleased at the idea of affording his friends the spectacle of a Last Judgment, and had notified them to be present at Corvol in the morning, a rendezvous at which no one failed, as we have seen.

A servant dressed in black went to get Panuche in his cell, and bandaged his eyes, because, he said, he could not endure the brilliancy of the Lord, which seemed to Panuche plausible enough. They made him kneel before the Eternal Father.

"What is your name?" said the Father, in a grave voice.

"Jean Panuche, my Eternal Father," said the sexton.

"How old are you?"

"Why," said Panuche, "it seems to me that you must know that."

"What profession?"

"Sexton. Besides, it is impossible that I should be unknown to you; I have chanted *oremuses* enough in your honor."

"It is precisely that with which I reproach you. What need have I of all your church music? You have a passion for singing my praises, and your voice is as false as a broken violin. I notify you that after the eighteen hundred years that you have been carrying this on, I am beginning to get tired of it. If I wanted music, I would go to the opera, not to church. You will cause me to stop going to mass."

"Eternal Father," said the Guardian Angel, "I beg you to observe that it is not my client's fault if his voice is false; you gave it to him."

"It is true," said the Eternal Father; "let us pass to something else. Satan, with what do you reproach him?"

"I reproach him because in winter he rang the Angelus at six o'clock instead of ringing it at five, and because often he did not ring it at all, which deprived Madame the Virgin of a number of angelic salutations."

"Why!" said Panuche, leaning over toward his Guardian Angel, "I have heard that voice somewhere."

"Hush!" said the angel; and he continued: "Eternal Father, I beg you to observe again that this is not his fault; he was asleep. Now, was it in his power to sleep or not to sleep? Is it not your ordinance that sleep should enchain the faculties of man for a certain time?"

"It is true," said God. "This is to give him an idea of the nothingness from which I have drawn him. Let us pass to something else."

"I accuse Panuche," said Satan, "of having scooped out the loaf of blessed bread, and of having sold portions of it in the village for his own profit."

"I make answer to Satan," said the Angel, "that, if Panuche has stolen blessed bread, it was because the opportunity presented itself with all its temptations. As the Eternal Father knows, it is the occasion which makes the thief."

The Eternal Father lowered his head in token of assent.

"A man has remained honest," continued the Guardian Angel, "because the opportunity to steal has never offered itself to him, and you usher him into Paradise! Another has had a chance to steal

ten times, and he has stolen only once; I say that he is a more honest man than the first. Yet you send him to hell! If Panuche has stolen blessed bread, it is because he was sexton. If he had had an income of fifty thousand francs, probably he never would have taken a crumb. I claim, then, that the complaint should be dismissed."

"Well spoken, my Guardian Angel!" said Panuche.

"What the Angel says is the truth," said the Eternal Father. "Let us pass to something else."

"I accuse Jean Panuche," said Satan, "of having sinned against the fifth commandment of the church."

"The devil!" said the Eternal Father, "this is serious. What does the Angel say to that?

"The Angel answers that you have organized each man in a certain fashion, and that he must necessarily act according to this organization, just as the duck necessarily goes to the water and the cat necessarily leaps upon the mouse. Man is inclined to evil, and the best is only the least bad. Now, I compare men, with their different propensities, to stones on a mountain slope. The flat stone will remain in its place; the square stone will stop at the smallest obstacle; but the round stone will

roll to the foot. I do not say that it is altogether impossible for man to resist the instincts of his organization; but it is extremely rare, and you will not find one in ten who has the strength."

"It is very true," said the Eternal Father, "the Angel is right. It is the same general law that makes the earth turn around the sun and the sun around the earth. Let us pass to something else."

"Panuche," said Satan, "has incited the village to riot against Monsieur Cornelius. He has made the peasants of Armes believe that his balloon was offensive to you."

"Who told you that, Monsieur Panuche?" answered the Eternal Father; "have I communicated to you my impressions, perchance?"

"And," continued Satan, "that because of this you have made it hail in the village of Armes."

"What, Monsieur Panuche! you said that?"

"I believed it, Eternal Father."

"You lie, Panuche, you knew exactly the contrary. You wanted to serve your priest's hatred for Monsieur Cornelius. Now, I do not wish the priests to mix up my name with their private quarrels. Much honor it does me, indeed, to pass in the parish of Armes for having made it hail upon the village, because in this village a savant was quietly

making a balloon! You will tell your priest that I do not intend that this shall happen again. What has the Angel to say regarding this count of the indictment?"

"I will confine myself to imploring divine mercy for my client, and I rely upon the wisdom of the Father."

"I will beg the Father to observe," said the Holy Virgin, "that the guiltiest party in all this is the priest."

"That is true," said the Father. "And, as Panuche is neither virtuous enough to enter Paradise nor guilty enough to be cast into hell, he shall be sent back to earth to be tried once more in his functions as sexton. We condemn Satan to carry him back to the place whence he took him.

"The court is adjourned!"

They made Panuche drink a glass of rum containing opium, and at night a servant carried him back to the public square in Armes.

XXIV.

A FEW days later Cornelius' balloon, victorious over all its enemies, was ready to rise into the air. Cornelius, to give more solemnity to his ascension, had postponed it to September twenty-ninth, the day of the local patron saint. The night before this solemn day Cornelius supped at Father Desallemagnes'. The savant was radiant, but Louise was sad; she heard a voice within her that foretold some misfortune. After supper, although it was very late, she wished to accompany Cornelius to his tavern.

"Dear friend," she said to him, "you must grant me a favor."

"What is it?" asked Cornelius.

"To take me with you to-morrow in your balloon."

"That cannot be, Louise; my balloon is not yet trained; and besides, I have not hydrogen enough to take both of us up."

"You are deceiving me, Cornelius; you foresee some danger to which you do not wish to expose

me. Yet you know well that my life and yours are but one."

"Let us not give way to emotion, Louise," said Cornelius; "I must have courage."

"I need it more than you," said Louise; "but, since you wish it, we will say no more about it."

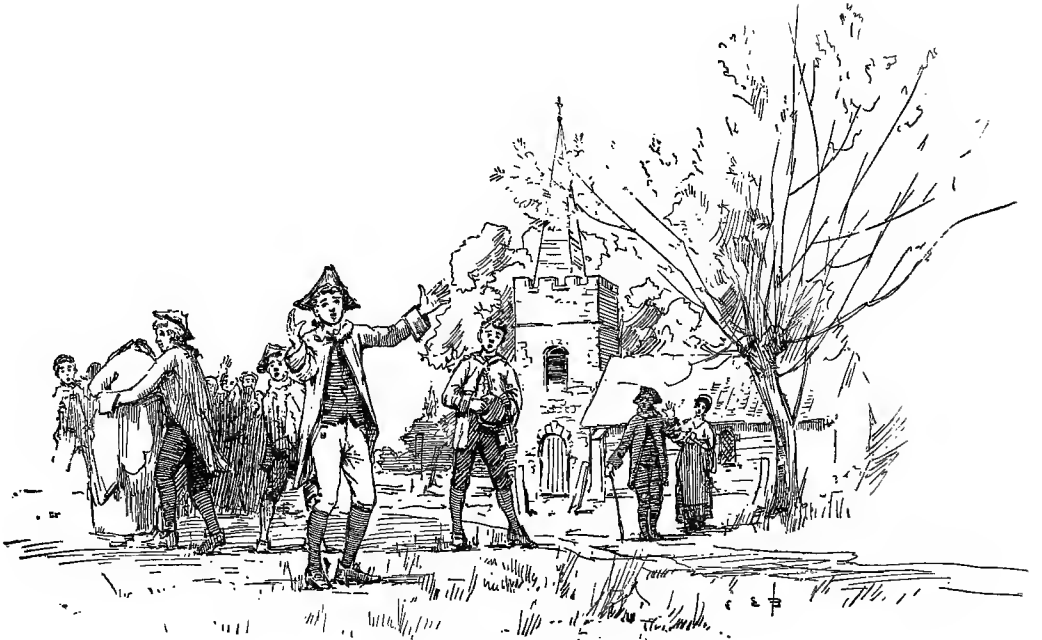
As they passed the parsonage, they saw a light in the priest's room. He was engaged in examining a gun.

"What!" said Cornelius, "is it possible that he is going hunting?"

And they continued on their way.

Louise accompanied Cornelius to Mother Simone's door. There he bade her good-by, for he did not wish to see her again the next day; and, as he kissed her, he felt upon her cheeks something that seemed like tears. He hastily entered the house and shut himself up in his room.

The next day, on rising, Cornelius examined the sky. The weather was stormy; it had rained all night, and thick clouds were flying rapidly through the atmosphere. Nevertheless Cornelius was unwilling to put off his ascension, and he spent all the morning in getting his balloon ready. At two o'clock Mother Simone's field was surrounded by an immense crowd of curiosity-seekers of all condi-



AND THE BALLOON SOON DISAPPEARED.

tions; for the news of the experiment which Cornelius was to try had attracted to Armes an unusual crowd.

Soon Cornelius appeared in the middle of the field; he was pale, for he had not slept during the night, but his eye was radiant, and his bearing was full of a noble pride. Nothing lifts a man in his own eyes like the consciousness that a multitude is looking at him.

Cornelius' last thought was of Louise. He called Mother Simone and handed her a little silver pencil-case, the only thing that he possessed suitable to offer a woman.

"If anything happens to me," he said to her, "you will give this to Louise; if I come down safe and sound, you will say nothing to her about it."

Then he mounted into his car.

As the balloon began to rise, friend Dragon, who had remained beside it as if desirous of guarding it to the last moment, leaped after the car, with the intention, doubtless, of holding Cornelius back. This act of attachment on the part of the dog was looked upon by the crowd as a bad omen.

Nevertheless the balloon, after swaying for some time, rose majestically into the air, amid the cheers of the crowd, and its wheels, turning as rapidly as

those of a steamboat, impelled it, against the atmospheric current, in the direction of Clamecy.

Just then a bright light flashed from the plateau overlooking the village. A gun-shot was heard, and immediately pieces of one of the balloon's wheels were seen flying through the air and falling to the ground. At the same time there came a gust of wind, and the balloon, borne away by it, soon disappeared from the eyes of the crowd behind the mountains of Chevroches. All day long they waited for Cornelius; all the next day, all the week; but he did not return, and no one could give any information concerning his balloon. In vain did Louise insert in all the newspapers a note relating to his disappearance; no one knew anything of him, and poor Louise had to resign herself to mourn him as one dead.

She had the remnants of the wheel that had fallen from the air buried in her father's garden, and every day she went to the spot to dream of her Cornelius.

THE END.