

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy: L'Abbe Constantin

Ludovic Halevy

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PREFACE

Ludovic Halevy was born in Paris, January 1, 1834. His father was Leon Halevy, the celebrated author; his grandfather, Fromenthal, the eminent composer. Ludovic was destined for the civil service, and, after finishing his studies, entered successively the Department of State (1852); the Algerian Department (1858), and later on became editorial secretary of the Corps Legislatif (1860). When his patron, the Duc de Morny, died in 1865, Halevy resigned, giving up a lucrative position for the uncertain profession of a playwright: At this period he devoted himself exclusively to the theatre.

He had already written plays as early as 1856, and had also tried his hand at fiction, but did not meet with very great success. Toward 1860, however, he became acquainted with Henri Meilhac, and with him formed a kind of literary union, lasting for almost twenty years, when Halevy rather abruptly abandoned the theatre and became a writer of fiction.

We have seen such kinds of co-partnerships, for instance, in Beaumont and Fletcher; more recently in the beautiful French tales of Erckmann– Chatrian, and still later in the English novels of Besant and Rice.

Some say it was a fortunate event for Meilhac; others assert that Halevy reaped a great profit by the union. Be this as it may, a great number of plays—drama, comedy, farce, opera, operetta and ballet were jointly produced, as is shown by the title—pages of two score or more of their pieces. When Ludovic Halevy was a candidate for L'Academie he entered that glorious body in 1884 the question was ventilated by Pailleron: "What was the author's literary relation in his union with Meilhac?" It was answered by M. Sarcy, who criticised the character and quality of the work achieved. Public opinion has a long time since brought in quite another verdict in the case.

Halevy's cooperation endowed the plays of Meilhac with a fuller ethical richness tempered them, so to speak, and made them real, for it can not be denied that Meilhac was inclined to extravagance.

Halevy's novels are remarkable for the elegance of literary style, tenderness of spirit and keenness of observation. He excels in ironical sketches. He has often been compared to Eugene Sue, but his touch is lighter than Sue's, and

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his humor less unctuous. Most of his little sketches, originally written for *La Vie Parisienne*, were collected in his 'Monsieur et Madame Cardinal' (1873); and 'Les Petites Cardinal', (1880). They are not intended 'virginibus puerisque', and the author's attitude is that of a half-pitying, half-contemptuous moralist, yet the virility of his criticism has brought him immortality.

Personal recollections of the great war are to be found in 'L'Invasion' (1872); and 'Notes et Souvenirs', 1871–1872 (1889). Most extraordinary, however, was the success of 'L'Abbe Constantin' (1882), crowned by the Academy, which has gone through no less than one hundred and fifty editions up to 1904, and ranks as one of the greatest successes of contemporaneous literature. It is, indeed, his 'chef-d'oeuvre', very delicate, earnest, and at the same time ironical, a most entrancing family story. It was then that the doors of the French Academy opened wide before Halevy. 'L'Abbe Constantin' was adapted for the stage by Cremieux and Decourcelle (Le Gymnase, 1882). Further notable novels are: 'Criquette, Deux Mariages, Un Grand Mariage, Un Mariage d'Amour', all in 1883; 'Princesse, Les Trois Coups de Foudre, Mon Camarade Moussard', all in 1884; and the romances, 'Karikari' (1892), and 'Marianne' (1893). Since that time, I think, Halevy has not published anything of importance.

E. LEGOUVE

de l'Academie Francaise.

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I. THE SALE OF LONGUEVAL

With a step still valiant and firm, an old priest walked along the dusty road in the full rays of a brilliant sun. For more than thirty years the Abbe Constantin had been Cure of the little village which slept there in the plain, on the banks of a slender stream called La Lizotte. The Abbe Constantin was walking by the wall which surrounded the park of the castle of Longueval; at last he reached the entrance-gate, which rested high and massive on two ancient pillars of stone, embrowned and gnawed by time. The Cure stopped, and mournfully regarded two immense blue posters fixed on the pillars.

The posters announced that on Wednesday, May 18, 1881, at one o'clock P.M., would take place, before the Civil Tribunal of Souvigny, the sale of the domain of Longueval, divided into four lots:

1. The castle of Longueval, its dependencies, fine pieces of water, extensive offices, park of 150 hectares in extent, completely surrounded by a wall, and traversed by the little river Lizotte. Valued at 600,000 francs.
2. The farm of Blanche-Couronne, 300 hectares, valued at 500,000 francs.
3. The farm of La Rozeriaie, 250 hectares, valued at 400,000 francs.
4. The woods and forests of La Mionne, containing 450 hectares, valued at 550,000 francs.

And these four amounts, added together at the foot of the bill, gave the respectable sum of 2,050,000 francs.

Then they were really going to dismember this magnificent domain, which, escaping all mutilation, had for more than two centuries always been transmitted intact from father to son in the family of Longueval. The placards also announced that after the temporary division into four lots, it would be possible to unite them again, and offer for

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sale the entire domain; but it was a very large morsel, and, to all appearance, no purchaser would present himself.

The Marquise de Longueval had died six months before; in 1873 she had lost her only son, Robert de Longueval; the three heirs were the grandchildren of the Marquise: Pierre, Helene, and Camille. It had been found necessary to offer the domain for sale, as Helene and Camille were minors. Pierre, a young man of three-and-twenty, had lived rather fast, was already half-ruined, and could not hope to redeem Longueval.

It was mid-day. In an hour it would have a new master, this old castle of Longueval; and this master, who would he be? What woman would take the place of the old Marquise in the chimney-corner of the grand salon, all adorned with ancient tapestry? the old Marquise, the friend of the old priest. It was she who had restored the church; it was she who had established and furnished a complete dispensary at the vicarage under the care of Pauline, the Cure's servant; it was she who, twice a week, in her great barouche, all crowded with little children's clothes and thick woolen petticoats, came to fetch the Abbe Constantin to make with him what she called 'la chasse aux pauvres'.

The old priest continued his walk, musing over all this; then he thought, too the greatest saints have their little weaknesses he thought, too, of the beloved habits of thirty years thus rudely interrupted. Every Thursday and every Sunday he had dined at the castle. How he had been petted, coaxed, indulged! Little Camille she was eight years old would come and sit on his knee and say to him:

"You know, Monsieur le Cure, it is in your church that I mean to be married, and grandmamma will send such heaps of flowers to fill, quite fill the church more than for the month of Mary. It will be like a large garden all white, all white, all white!"

The month of Mary! It was then the month of Mary. Formerly, at this season, the altar disappeared under the flowers brought from the conservatories of Longueval. None this year were on the altar, except a few bouquets of lily-of-the-valley and white lilac in gilded china vases. Formerly, every Sunday at high mass, and every evening during the month of Mary, Mademoiselle Hebert, the reader to Madame de Longueval, played the little harmonium given by the Marquise. Now the poor harmonium, reduced to silence, no longer accompanied the voices of the choir or the children's hymns. Mademoiselle Marbeau, the postmistress, would, with all her heart, have taken the place of Mademoiselle Hebert, but she dared not, though she was a little musical! She was afraid of being remarked as of the clerical party, and denounced by the Mayor, who was a Freethinker. That might have been injurious to her interests, and prevented her promotion.

He had nearly reached the end of the wall of the park that park of which every corner was known to the old priest. The road now followed the banks of the Lizotte, and on the other side of the little stream stretched the fields belonging to the two farms; then, still farther off, rose the dark woods of La Mionne.

Divided! The domain was going to be divided! The heart of the poor priest was rent by this bitter thought. All that for thirty years had been inseparable, indivisible to him. It was a little his own, his very own, his estate, this great property. He felt at home on the lands of Longueval. It had happened more than once that he had stopped complacently before an immense cornfield, plucked an ear, removed the husk, and said to himself:

"Come! the grain is fine, firm, and sound. This year we shall have a good harvest!"

And with a joyous heart he would continue his way through his fields, his meadows, his pastures; in short, by every chord of his heart, by every tie of his life, by all his habits, his memories, he clung to this domain whose last hour had come.

The Abbe perceived in the distance the farm of Blanche-Couronne; its red-tiled roofs showed distinctly against the verdure of the forest. There, again, the Cure was at home. Bernard, the farmer of the Marquise, was his friend;

and when the old priest was delayed in his visits to the poor and sick, when the sun was sinking below the horizon, and the Abbe began to feel a little fatigued in his limbs, and a sensation of exhaustion in his stomach, he stopped and supped with Bernard, regaled himself with a savory stew and potatoes, and emptied his pitcher of cider; then, after supper, the farmer harnessed his old black mare to his cart, and took the vicar back to Longueval. The whole distance they chatted and quarrelled. The Abbe reproached the farmer with not going to mass, and the latter replied:

"The wife and the girls go for me. You know very well, Monsieur le Cure, that is how it is with us. The women have enough religion for the men. They will open the gates of paradise for us."

And he added maliciously, while giving a touch of the whip to his old black mare:

"If there is one!"

The Cure sprang from his seat.

"What! if there is one! Of a certainty there is one."

"Then you will be there, Monsieur le Cure. You say that is not certain, and I say it is. You will be there, you will be there, at the gate, on the watch for your parishioners, and still busy with their little affairs; and you will say to St. Peter for it is St. Peter, isn't it, who keeps the keys of paradise?"

"Yes, it is St. Peter."

"Well, you will say to him, to St. Peter, if he wants to shut the door in my face under the pretense that I did not go to mass you will say to him: 'Bah! let him in all the same. It is Bernard, one of the farmers of Madame la Marquise, an honest man. He was common councilman, and he voted for the maintenance of the sisters when they were going to be expelled from the village school.' That will touch St. Peter, who will answer: 'Well, well, you may pass, Bernard, but it is only to please Monsieur le Cure.' For you will be Monsieur le Cure up there, and Cure of Longueval, too, for paradise itself would be dull for you if you must give up being Cure of Longueval."

Cure of Longueval! Yes, all his life he had been nothing but Cure of Longueval, had never dreamed of anything else, had never wished to be anything else. Three or four times excellent livings, with one or two curates, had been offered to him, but he had always refused them. He loved his little church, his little village, his little vicarage. There he had it all to himself, saw to everything himself; calm, tranquil, he went and came, summer and winter, in sunshine or storm, in wind or rain. His frame became hardened by fatigue and exposure, but his soul remained gentle, tender, and pure.

He lived in his vicarage, which was only a larger laborer's cottage, separated from the church by the churchyard. When the Cure mounted the ladder to train his pear and peach trees, over the top of the wall he perceived the graves over which he had said the last prayer, and cast the first spadeful of earth. Then, while continuing his work, he said in his heart a little prayer for the repose of those among his dead whose fate disturbed him, and who might be still detained in purgatory. He had a tranquil and childlike faith.

But among these graves there was one which, oftener than all the others, received his visits and his prayers. It was the tomb of his old friend Dr. Reynaud, who had died in his arms in 1871, and under what circumstances! The doctor had been like Bernard; he never went to mass or to confession; but he was so good, so charitable, so compassionate to the suffering. This was the cause of the Cure's great anxiety, of his great solicitude. His friend Reynaud, where was he? Where was he? Then he called to mind the noble life of the country doctor, all made up of courage and self-denial; he recalled his death, above all his death, and said to himself:

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"In paradise; he can be nowhere but in paradise. The good God may have sent him to purgatory just for form's sake but he must have delivered him after five minutes."

All this passed through the mind of the old man, as he continued his walk toward Souvigny. He was going to the town, to the solicitor of the Marquise, to inquire the result of the sale; to learn who were to be the new masters of the castle of Longueval. The Abbe had still about a mile to walk before reaching the first houses of Souvigny, and was passing the park of Lavardens when he heard, above his head, voices calling to him:

"Monsieur le Cure, Monsieur le Cure."

At this spot adjoining the wall, a long alley of limetrees bordered the terrace, and the Abbe, raising his head, perceived Madame de Lavardens, and her son Paul.

"Where are you going, Monsieur le Cure?" asked the Countess.

"To Souvigny, to the Tribunal, to learn "

"Stay here Monsieur de Larnac is coming after the sale to tell me the result."

The Abbe Constantin joined them on the terrace.

Gertrude de Lannilis, Countess de Lavardens, had been very unfortunate. At eighteen she had been guilty of a folly, the only one of her life, but that one irreparable. She had married for love, in a burst of enthusiasm and exaltation, M. de Lavardens, one of the most fascinating and brilliant men of his time. He did not love her, and only married her from necessity; he had devoured his patrimonial fortune to the very last farthing, and for two or three years had supported himself by various expedients. Mademoiselle de Lannilis knew all that, and had no illusions on these points, but she said to herself:

"I will love him so much, that he will end by loving me."

Hence all her misfortunes. Her existence might have been tolerable, if she had not loved her husband so much; but she loved him too much. She had only succeeded in wearying him by her importunities and tenderness. He returned to his former life, which had been most irregular. Fifteen years had passed thus, in a long martyrdom, supported by Madame de Lavardens with all the appearance of passive resignation. Nothing ever could distract her from, or cure her of, the love which was destroying her.

M. de Lavardens died in 1869; he left a son fourteen years of age, in whom were already visible all the defects and all the good qualities of his father. Without being seriously affected, the fortune of Madame de Lavardens was slightly compromised, slightly diminished. Madame de Lavardens sold her mansion in Paris, retired to the country, where she lived with strict economy, and devoted herself to the education of her son.

But here again grief and disappointment awaited her. Paul de Lavardens was intelligent, amiable, and affectionate, but thoroughly rebellious against any constraint, and any species of work. He drove to despair three or four tutors who vainly endeavored to force something serious into his head, went up to the military college of Saint-Cyr, failed at the examination, and began to devour in Paris, with all the haste and folly possible, 200,000 or 300,000 francs.

That done, he enlisted in the first regiment of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, had in the very beginning of his military career the good fortune to make one of an expeditionary column sent into the Sahara, distinguished himself, soon became quartermaster, and at the end of three years was about to be appointed sub-lieutenant, when he was captivated by a young person who played the 'Fille de Madame Angot', at the theatre in Algiers.

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Paul had finished his time, he quitted the service, and went to Paris with his charmer . . . then it was a dancer . . . then it was an actress . . . then a circus-rider. He tried life in every form. He led the brilliant and miserable existence of the unoccupied.

But it was only three or four months that he passed in Paris each year. His mother made him an allowance Of 30,000 francs, and had declared to him that never, while she lived, should he have another penny before his marriage. He knew his mother, he knew he must consider her words as serious. Thus, wishing to make a good figure in Paris, and lead a merry life, he spent his 30,000 francs in three months, and then docilely returned to Lavardens, where he was "out at grass." He spent his time hunting, fishing, and riding with the officers of the artillery regiment quartered at Souvigny. The little provincial milliners and grisettes replaced, without rendering him obvious of, the little singers and actresses of Paris. By searching for them, one may still find grisettes in country towns, and Paul de Lavardens sought assiduously.

As soon as the Cure had reached Madame de Lavardens, she said: "Without waiting for Monsieur de Larnac, I can tell you the names of the purchasers of the domain of Longueval. I am quite easy on the subject, and have no doubt of the success of our plan. In order to avoid any foolish disputes, we have agreed among ourselves, that is, among our neighbors, Monsieur de Larnac, Monsieur Gallard, a great Parisian banker, and myself. Monsieur de Larnac will have La Mionne, Monsieur Gallard the castle and Blanche-Couronne, and La Rozeriaie. I know you, Monsieur le Cure, you will be anxious about your poor, but comfort yourself. These Gallards are rich and will give you plenty of money."

At this moment a cloud of dust appeared on the road, from it emerged a carriage.

"Here comes Monsieur de Larnac!" cried Paul, "I know his ponies!"

All three hurriedly descended from the terrace and returned to the castle. They arrived there just as M. de Larnac's carriage drove up to the entrance.

"Well?" asked Madame de Lavardens.

"Well!" replied M. de Larnac, "we have nothing."

"What? Nothing?" cried Madame de Lavardens, very pale and agitated.

"Nothing, nothing; absolutely nothing the one or the other of us."

And M. de Larnac springing from his carriage, related what had taken place at the sale before the Tribunal of Souvigny.

"At first," he said, "everything went upon wheels. The castle went to Monsieur Gallard for 650,000 francs. No competitor a raise of fifty francs had been sufficient. On the other hand, there was a little battle for Blanche-Couronne. The bids rose from 500,000 francs to 520,000 francs, and again Monsieur Gallard was victorious. Another and more animated battle for La Rozeriaie; at last it was knocked down to you, Madame, for 455,000 francs . . . I got the forest of La Mionne without opposition at a rise of 100 francs. All seemed over, those present had risen, our solicitors were surrounded with persons asking the names of the purchasers.

"Monsieur Brazier, the judge intrusted with the sale, desired silence, and the bailiff of the court offered the four lots together for 2,150,000 or 2,160,000 francs, I don't remember which. A murmur passed through the assembly. 'No one will bid' was heard on all sides. But little Gibert, the solicitor, who was seated in the first row, and till then had given no sign of life, rose and said calmly, 'I have a purchaser for the four lots together at 2,200,000 francs.' This was like a thunderbolt. A tremendous clamor arose, followed by a dead silence. The hall was filled

with farmers and laborers from the neighborhood. Two million francs! So much money for the land threw them into a sort of respectful stupor. However, Monsieur Gallard, bending toward Sandrier, the solicitor who had bid for him, whispered something in his ear. The struggle began between Gibert and Sandrier. The bids rose to 2,500,000 francs. Monsieur Gallard hesitated for a moment decided continued up to 3,000,000. Then he stopped and the whole went to Gibert. Every one rushed on him, they surrounded they crushed him: 'The name, the name of the purchaser?' 'It is an American,' replied Gibert, 'Mrs. Scott.'"

"Mrs. Scott!" cried Paul de Lavardens.

"You know her?" asked Madame de Lavardens.

"Do I know her? do I not at all. But I was at a ball at her house six weeks ago."

"At a ball at her house! and you don't know her! What sort of woman is she, then?"

"Charming, delightful, ideal, a miracle!"

"And is there a Mr. Scott?"

"Certainly, a tall, fair man. He was at his ball. They pointed him out to me. He bowed at random right and left. He was not much amused, I will answer for it. He looked at us as if he were thinking, 'Who are all these people? What are they doing at my house?' We went to see Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival, her sister. And certainly it was well worth the trouble."

"These Scotts," said Madame de Lavardens, addressing M. de Larnac, "do you know who they are?"

"Yes, Madame, I know. Mr. Scott is an American, possessing a colossal fortune, who settled himself in Paris last year. As soon as their name was mentioned, I understood that the victory had never been doubtful. Gallard was beaten beforehand. The Scotts began by buying a house in Paris for 2,000,000 francs, it is near the Parc Monceau."

"Yes, Rue Murillo," said Paul; "I tell you I went to a ball there. It was "

"Let Monsieur de Larnac speak. You can tell us presently about the ball at Mrs. Scott's."

"Well, now, imagine my Americans established in Paris," continued M. de Larnac, "and the showers of gold begun. In the orthodox parvenu style they amuse themselves with throwing handfuls of gold out of window. Their great wealth is quite recent, they say; ten years ago Mrs. Scott begged in the streets of New York."

"Begged!"

"They say so. Then she married this Scott, the son of a New York banker, and all at once a successful lawsuit put into their hands not millions, but tens of millions. Somewhere in America they have a silver mine, but a genuine mine, a real mine a mine with silver in it. Ah! we shall see what luxury will reign at Longueval! We shall all look like paupers beside them! It is said that they have 100,000 francs a day to spend."

"Such are our neighbors!" cried Madame de Lavardens. "An adventuress! and that is the least of it a heretic, Monsieur l'Abbe, a Protestant!"

A heretic! a Protestant! Poor Cure; it was indeed that of which he had immediately thought on hearing the words, "An American, Mrs. Scott." The new chatelaine of Longueval would not go to mass. What did it matter to him

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that she had been a beggar? What did it matter to him if she possessed tens and tens of millions? She was not a Catholic. He would never again baptize children born at Longueval, and the chapel in the castle, where he had so often said mass, would be transformed into a Protestant oratory, which would echo only the frigid utterances of a Calvinistic or Lutheran pastor.

Every one was distressed, disappointed, overwhelmed; but in the midst of the general depression Paul stood radiant.

"A charming heretic at all events," said he, "or rather two charming heretics. You should see the two sisters on horseback in the Bois, with two little grooms behind them not higher than that."

"Come, Paul, tell us all you know. Describe the ball of which you speak. How did you happen to go to a ball at these Americans?"

"By the greatest chance. My Aunt Valentine was at home that night; I looked in about ten o'clock. Well, Aunt Valentine's Wednesdays are not exactly scenes of wild enjoyment, I give you my word! I had been there about twenty minutes when I caught sight of Roger de Puymartin escaping furtively. I caught him in the hall and said:

"We will go home together.'

"Oh! I am not going home.'

"Where are you going?'

"To the ball.'

"Where?'

"At Mrs. Scott's. Will you come?'

"But I have not been invited.'

"Neither have I'

"What! not invited?'

"No. I am going with one of my friends.'

"And does your friend know them?'

"Scarcely; but enough to introduce us. Come along; you will see Mrs. Scott.'

"Oh! I have seen her on horseback in the Bois.'

"But she does not wear a low gown on horseback; you have not seen her shoulders, and they are shoulders which ought to be seen. There is nothing better in Paris at this moment.'

"And I went to the ball, and I saw Mrs. Scott's red hair, and I saw Mrs. Scott's white shoulders, and I hope to see them again when there are balls at Longueval."

"Paul!" said Madame de Lavardens, pointing to the Abbe.

"Oh! Monsieur l'Abbe, I beg a thousand pardons. Have I said anything? It seems to me "

The poor old priest had heard nothing; his thoughts were elsewhere. Already he saw, in the village streets, the Protestant pastor from the castle stopping before each house, and slipping under the doors little evangelical pamphlets.

Continuing his account, Paul launched into an enthusiastic description of the mansion, which was a marvel

"Of bad taste and ostentation," interrupted Madame de Lavardens.

"Not at all, mother, not at all; nothing startling, nothing loud. It is admirably furnished, everything done with elegance and originality. An incomparable conservatory, flooded with electric light; the buffet was placed in the conservatory under a vine laden with grapes, which one could gather by handfuls, and in the month of April! The accessories of the cotillon cost, it appears, more than 400,000 francs. Ornaments, 'bon-bonnières', delicious trifles, and we were begged to accept them. For my part I took nothing, but there were many who made no scruple. That evening Puymartin told me Mrs. Scott's history, but it was not at all like Monsieur de Larnac's story. Roger said that, when quite little, Mrs. Scott had been stolen from her family by some acrobats, and that her father had found her in a travelling circus, riding on barebacked horses and jumping through paper hoops."

"A circus-rider!" cried Madame de Lavardens, "I should have preferred the beggar."

"And while Roger was telling me this Family Herald romance, I saw approaching from the end of a gallery a wonderful cloud of lace and satin; it surrounded this rider from a wandering circus, and I admired those shoulders, those dazzling shoulders, on which undulated a necklace of diamonds as big as the stopper of a decanter. They say that the Minister of Finance had sold secretly to Mrs. Scott half the crown diamonds, and that was how, the month before, he had been able to show a surplus of 1,500,000 francs in the budget. Add to all this that the lady had a remarkably good air, and that the little acrobat seemed perfectly at home in the midst of all this splendor."

Paul was going so far that his mother was obliged to stop him. Before M. de Larnac, who was excessively annoyed and disappointed, he showed too plainly his delight at the prospect of having this marvellous American for a near neighbor.

The Abbe Constantin was preparing to return to Longueval, but Paul, seeing him ready to start, said:

"No! no! Monsieur le Cure, you must not think of walking back to Longueval in the heat of the day. Allow me to drive you home. I am really grieved to see you so cast down, and will try my best to amuse you. Oh! if you were ten times a saint I would make you laugh at my stories."

And half an hour after, the two the Cure and Paul drove side by side in the direction of the village. Paul talked, talked, talked. His mother was not there to check or moderate his transports, and his joy was overflowing.

"Now, look here, Monsieur l'Abbe, you are wrong to take things in this tragic manner. Stay, look at my little mare, how well she trots! what good action she has! You have not seen her before? What do you think I paid for her? Four hundred francs. I discovered her a fortnight ago, between the shafts of a market gardener's cart. She is a treasure. I assure you she can do sixteen miles an hour, and keep one's hands full all the time. Just see how she pulls. Come, tot-tot-tot! You are not in a hurry, Monsieur l'Abbe, I hope. Let us return through the wood; the fresh air will do you good. Oh! Monsieur l'Abbe, if you only knew what a regard I have for you, and respect, too. I did not talk too much nonsense before you just now, did I? I should be so sorry "

"No, my child, I heard nothing."

"Well, we will take the longest way round."

After having turned to the left in the wood, Paul resumed his communications.

"I was saying, Monsieur l'Abbe," he went on, "that you are wrong to take things so seriously. Shall I tell you what I think? This is a very fortunate affair."

"Very fortunate?"

"Yes, very fortunate. I would rather see the Scotts at Longueval than the Gallards. Did you not hear Monsieur de Larnac reproach these Americans with spending their money foolishly. It is never foolish to spend money. The folly lies in keeping it. Your poor for I am perfectly sure that it is your poor of whom you are thinking your poor have made a good thing of it to-day. That is my opinion. The religion? Well, they will not go to mass, and that will be a grief to you, that is only natural; but they will send you money, plenty of money, and you will take it, and you will be quite right in doing so. You will see that you will not say no. There will be gold raining over the whole place; a movement, a bustle, carriages with four horses, postilions, powdered footmen, paper chases, hunting parties, balls, fireworks, and here in this very spot I shall perhaps find Paris again before long. I shall see once more the two riders, and the two little grooms of whom I was speaking just now. If you only knew how well those two sisters look on horseback! One morning I went right round the Bois de Boulogne behind them; I fancy I can see them still. They had high hats, and little black veils drawn very tightly over their faces, and long riding-habits made in the princess form, with a single seam right down the back; and a woman must be awfully well made to wear a riding-habit like that, because you see, Monsieur l'Abbe, with a habit of that cut no deception is possible."

For some moments the Cure had not been listening to Paul's discourse. They had entered a long, perfectly straight avenue, and at the end of this avenue the Cure saw a horseman galloping along.

"Look," said the Cure to Paul, "your eyes are better than mine. Is not that Jean?"

"Yes, it is Jean. I know his gray mare."

Paul loved horses, and before looking at the rider looked at the horse. It was indeed Jean, who, when he saw in the distance the Cure and Paul de Lavardens, waved in the air his kepi adorned with two golden stripes. Jean was lieutenant in the regiment of artillery quartered at Souvigny.

Some moments after he stopped by the little carriage, and, addressing the Cure, said:

"I have just been to your house, 'mon parrain'. Pauline told me that you had gone to Souvigny about the sale. Well, who has bought the castle?"

"An American, Mrs. Scott."

"And Blanche-Couronne?"

"The same, Mrs. Scott."

"And La Rozeria?"

"Mrs. Scott again."

"And the forest? Mrs. Scott again?"

"You have said it," replied Paul, "and I know Mrs. Scott, and I can promise you that there will be something going on at Longueval. I will introduce you. Only it is distressing to Monsieur l'Abbe because she is an American a Protestant."

"Ah! that is true," said Jean, sympathizingly. "However, we will talk about it to-morrow. I am going to dine with you, godfather; I have warned Pauline of my visit; no time to stop to-day. I am on duty, and must be in quarters at three o'clock."

"Stables?" asked Paul.

"Yes. Good-by, Paul. To-morrow, godfather."

The lieutenant galloped away. Paul de Lavardens gave his little horse her head.

"What a capital fellow Jean is!" said Paul.

"Oh, yes, indeed!"

"There is no one on earth better than Jean."

"No, no one."

The Cure turned round to take another look at Jean, who was almost lost in the depths of the forest.

"Oh, yes, there is you, Monsieur le Cure."

"No, not me! not me!"

"Well, Monsieur l'Abbe, shall I tell you what I think? I think there is no one better than you two you and Jean. That is the truth, if I must tell you. Oh! what a splendid place for a trot! I shall let Niniche go; I call her Niniche."

With the point of his whip Paul caressed the flank of Niniche, who started off at full speed, and Paul, delighted, cried:

"Just look at her action, Monsieur l'Abbe! just look at her action! So regular just like clockwork. Lean over and look."

To please Paul de Lavardens the Abbe Constantin did lean over and look at Niniche's action, but the old priest's thoughts were far away.

CHAPTER II. THE NEW CHATELAINE

This sub-lieutenant of artillery was called Jean Reynaud. He was the son of a country doctor who slept in the churchyard of Longueval.

In 1846, when the Abbe' Constantin took possession of his little living, the grandfather of Jean was residing in a pleasant cottage on the road to Souvigny, between the picturesque old castles of Longueval and Lavardens.

Marcel, the son of that Dr. Reynaud, was finishing his medical studies in Paris. He possessed great industry, and an elevation of sentiment and mind extremely rare. He passed his examinations with great distinction, and had

decided to fix his abode in Paris and tempt fortune there, and everything seemed to promise him the most prosperous and brilliant career, when, in 1852, he received the news of his father's death he had been struck down by a fit of apoplexy. Marcel hurried to Longueval, overwhelmed with grief, for he adored his father. He spent a month with his mother, and then spoke of the necessity of returning to Paris.

"That is true," said his mother; "you must go."

"What! I must go! We must go, you mean. Do you think that I would leave you here alone? I shall take you with me."

"To live in Paris; to leave the place where I was born, where your father lived, where he died? I could never do it, my child, never! Go alone; your life, your future, are there. I know you; I know that you will never forget me, that you will come and see me often, very often."

"No, mother," he answered; "I shall stay here."

And he stayed.

His hopes, his ambitions, all in one moment vanished. He saw only one thing duty the duty of not abandoning his aged mother. In duty, simply accepted and simply discharged, he found happiness. After all, it is only thus that one does find happiness.

Marcel bowed with courage and good grace to his new existence. He continued his father's life, entering the groove at the very spot where he had left it. He devoted himself without regret to the obscure career of a country doctor. His father had left him a little land and a little money; he lived in the most simple manner possible, and one half of his life belonged to the poor, from whom he would never receive a penny.

This was his only luxury.

He found in his way a young girl, charming, penniless, and alone in the world. He married her. This was in 1855, and the following year brought to Dr. Reynaud a great sorrow and a great joy the death of his old mother and the birth of his son Jean.

At an interval of six weeks, the Abby Constantin recited the prayers for the dead over the grave of the grandmother, and was present in the position of godfather at the baptism of the grandson.

In consequence of constantly meeting at the bedside of the suffering and dying, the priest and the doctor had been strongly attracted to each other. They instinctively felt that they belonged to the same family, the same race the race of the tender, the just, and the benevolent.

Year followed year calm, peaceful, fully occupied in labor and duty. Jean was no longer an infant. His father gave him his first lessons in reading and writing, the priest his first lessons in Latin. Jean was intelligent and industrious. He made so much progress that the two professors particularly the Cure found themselves at the end of a few years rather cast into the shade by their pupil. It was at this moment that the Countess, after the death of her husband, came to settle at Lavardens. She brought with her a tutor for her son Paul, a very nice, but very lazy little fellow. The two children were of the same age; they had known each other from their earliest years.

Madame de Lavardens had a great regard for Dr. Reynaud, and one day she made him the following proposal:

"Send Jean to me every morning," said she, "I will send him home in the evening. Paul's tutor is a very accomplished man; he will make the children work together. It will be rendering me a real service. Jean will set

Paul a good example."

Things were thus arranged, and the little bourgeois set the little nobleman a most excellent example of industry and application, but this excellent example was not followed.

The war broke out. On November 14th, at seven o'clock in the morning, the mobiles of Souvigny assembled in the great square of the town; their chaplain was the Abbe Constantin, their surgeon-major, Dr. Reynaud. The same idea had come at the same moment to both; the priest was sixty-two, the doctor fifty.

When they started, the battalion followed the road which led through Longueval, and which passed before the doctor's house. Madame Reynaud and Jean were waiting by the roadside. The child threw himself into his father's arms.

"Take me, too, papa! take me, too!"

Madame Reynaud wept. The doctor held them both in a long embrace, then he continued his way.

A hundred steps farther the road made a sharp curve. The doctor turned, cast one long look at his wife and child—the last; he was never to see them again.

On January 8, 1871, the mobiles of Souvigny attacked the village of Villersexel, occupied by the Prussians, who had barricaded themselves. The firing began. A mobile who marched in the front rank received a ball in the chest and fell. There was a short moment of trouble and hesitation.

"Forward! forward!" shouted the officers.

The men passed over the body of their comrade, and under a hail of bullets entered the town.

Dr. Reynaud and the Abbe Constantin marched with the troops; they stopped by the wounded man; the blood was rushing in floods from his mouth.

"There is nothing to be done," said the doctor. "He is dying; he belongs to you."

The priest knelt down by the dying man, and the doctor rose to go toward the village. He had not taken ten steps when he stopped, beat the air with both hands, and fell all at once to the ground. The priest ran to him; he was dead—killed on the spot by a bullet through the temples. That evening the village was ours, and the next day they placed in the cemetery of Villersexel the body of Dr. Reynaud.

Two months later the Abbe Constantin took back to Longueval the coffin of his friend, and behind the coffin, when it was carried from the church, walked an orphan. Jean had also lost his mother. At the news of her husband's death, Madame Reynaud had remained for twenty-four hours petrified, crushed, without a word or a tear; then fever had seized her, then delirium, and after a fortnight, death.

Jean was alone in the world; he was fourteen years old. Of that family, where for more than a century all had been good and honest, there remained only a child kneeling beside a grave; but he, too, promised to be what his father and grandfather before him had been good, and honest, and true.

There are families like that in France, and many of them, more than one ventures to say. Our poor country is in many respects calumniated by certain novelists, who draw exaggerated and distorted pictures of it. It is true the history of good people is often monotonous or painful. This story is a proof of it.

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The grief of Jean was the grief of a man. He remained long sad and silent. The evening of his father's funeral the Abbe Constantin took him home to the vicarage. The day had been rainy and cold. Jean was sitting by the fireside; the priest was reading his breviary opposite him. Old Pauline came and went, arranging her affairs.

An hour passed without a word, when Jean, raising his head, said:

"Godfather, did my father leave me any money?"

This question was so extraordinary that the old priest, stupefied, could scarcely believe that he heard aright.

"You ask if your father "

"I asked if my father left me some money?"

"Yes; he must have left you some."

"A good deal, don't you think? I have often heard people say that my father was rich. Tell me about how much he has left me!"

"But I don't know. You ask "

The poor old man felt his heart rent in twain. Such a question at such a moment! Yet he thought he knew the boy's heart, and in that heart there should not be room for such thoughts.

"Pray, dear godfather, tell me," continued Jean, gently. "I will explain to you afterward why I ask that."

"Well, they say your father had 200,000 or 300,000 francs."

"And is that much?"

"Yes, it is a great deal."

"And it is all mine?"

"Yes, it is all yours."

"Oh! I am glad, because, you know, the day that my father was killed in the war, the Prussians killed, at the same time, the son of a poor woman in Longueval old Clemence, you know; and they killed, too, the brother of Rosalie, with whom I used to play when I was quite little. Well, since I am rich and they are poor, I will divide with Clemence and Rosalie the money my father has left me."

On hearing these words the Cure rose, took Jean by both hands, and drew him into his arms. The white head rested on the fair one. Two large tears escaped from the eyes of the old priest, rolled slowly down his cheeks, and were lost in the furrows of his face.

However, the Cure was obliged to explain to Jean that, though he was his father's heir, he had not the right of disposing of his heritage as he would. There would be a family council, and a guardian would be appointed.

"You, no doubt, godfather?"

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"No, not I, my child; a priest has not the right of exercising the functions of a guardian. They will, I think, choose Monsieur Lenient, the lawyer in Souvigny, who was one of your father's best friends. You can speak to him and tell him what you wish."

M. Lenient was eventually appointed guardian, and Jean urged his wishes so eagerly and touchingly that the lawyer consented to deduct from the income a sum of 2,400 francs, which, every year till Jean came of age, was divided between old Clemence and little Rosalie.

Under these circumstances, Madame de Lavardens was perfect. She went to the Abbe and said:

"Give Jean to me, give him to me entirely till he has finished his studies. I will bring him back to you every year during the holidays. It is not I who am rendering you a service; it is a service which I ask of you. I cannot imagine any greater good fortune for my son than to have Jean for a companion. I must resign myself to leaving Lavardens for a time. Paul is bent upon being a soldier and going up to Saint-Cyr. It is only in Paris that I can obtain the necessary masters. I will take the two children there; they will study together under my own eyes like brothers, and I will make no difference between them; of that you may be sure."

It was difficult to refuse such an offer. The old Cure would have dearly liked to keep Jean with him, and his heart was torn at the thought of this separation, but what was for the child's real interest? That was the only question to be considered; the rest was nothing. They summoned Jean.

"My child," said Madame de Lavardens to him, "will you come and live with Paul and me for some years? I will take you both to Paris."

"You are very kind, Madame, but I should have liked so much to stay here."

He looked at the Cure, who turned away his eyes.

"Why must we go?" he continued. "Why must you take Paul and me away?"

"Because it is only in Paris that you can have all the advantages necessary to complete your studies. Paul will prepare for his examination at Saint-Cyr. You know he wishes to be a soldier."

"So do I, Madame. I wish to be one, too."

"You a soldier!" exclaimed the Cure; "but you know that was not at all your father's idea. In my presence, he has often spoken of your future, your career. You were to be a doctor, and, like him, doctor at Longueval, and, like him, devote yourself to the sick and poor. Jean, my child, do you remember?"

"I remember, I remember."

"Well, then, Jean, you must do as your father wished; it is your duty, Jean; it is your duty. You must go to Paris. You would like to stay here, I understand that well, and I should like it, too; but it can not be. You must go to Paris, and work, work hard. Not that I am anxious about that; you are your father's true son. You will be an honest and laborious man. One can not well be the one without the other. And some day, in your father's house, in the place where he has done so much good, the poor people of the country round will find another Doctor Reynaud, to whom they may look for help. And I if by chance I am still in this world when that day comes, I shall be so happy! But I am wrong to speak of myself; I ought not, I do not count. It is of your father that you must think. I repeat it, Jean, it was his dearest wish. You can not have forgotten it."

"No, I have not forgotten; but if my father sees me, and hears me, I am certain that he understands and forgives me, for it is on his account."

"On his account?"

"Yes. When I heard that he was dead, and when I heard how he died, all at once, without any need of reflection, I said to myself that I would be a soldier, and I will be a soldier! Godfather, and you, Madame, I beg you not to prevent me."

The child burst into tears a perfect flood of passionate tears. The Countess and the Abbe soothed him with gentle words.

"Yes yes it is settled," they said; "anything that you wish, all that you wish."

Both had the same thought leave it to time; Jean is only a child; he will change his mind.

In this, both were mistaken; Jean did not change his mind. In the month of September, 1876, Paul de Lavardens was rejected at Saint-Cyr, and Jean Reynaud passed eleventh at the Ecole Polytechnique. The day when the list of the candidates who had passed was published, he wrote to the Abbe Constantin:

"I have passed, and passed too well, for I wish to go into the army, and not the civil service; however, if I keep my place in the school, that will be the business of one of my comrades; he will have my chance."

It happened so in the end. Jean Reynaud did better than keep his place; the pass-list showed his name seventh, but instead of entering 'l'Ecole des Ponts et Chaussees', he entered the military college at Fontainebleau in 1878.

He was then just twenty-one; he was of age, master of his fortune, and the first act of the new administration was a great, a very great piece of extravagance.

He bought for old Clemence and little Rosalie two shares in Government stock of 1,500 francs each. That cost him 70,000 francs, almost the sum that Paul de Lavardens, in his first year of liberty in Paris, spent for Mademoiselle Lise Bruyere, of the Palais Royal Theatre.

Two years later Jean passed first at the examination, and left Fontainebleau with the right of choosing among the vacant places. There was one in the regiment quartered at Souvigny, and Souvigny was three miles from Longueval. Jean asked for this, and obtained it.

Thus Jean Reynaud, lieutenant in the ninth regiment of artillery, came in the month of October, 1880, to take possession of the house that had been his father's; thus he found himself once more in the place where his childhood had passed, and where every one had kept green the memory of the life and death of his father; thus the Abbe Constantin was not denied the happiness of once again having near him the son of his old friend, and, if the truth must be told, he no longer wished that Jean had become a doctor.

When the old Cure left his church after saying mass, when he saw coming along the road a great cloud of dust, when he felt the earth tremble under the rumbling cannon, he would stop, and, like a child, amuse himself with seeing the regiment pass, but to him the regiment was Jean. It was this robust and manly cavalier, in whose face, as in an open book, one read uprightness, courage, and goodness.

The moment Jean perceived the Cure, he would put his horse to a gallop, and go to have a little chat with his godfather. The horse would turn his head toward the Cure, for he knew very well there was always a piece of sugar for him in the pocket of that old black soutane rusty and worn— the morning soutane. The Abbe

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Constantin had a beautiful new one, of which he took great care, to wear in society when he went into society.

The trumpets of the regiment sounded as they passed through the village, and all eyes sought Jean "little Jean"—for to the old people of Longueval he was still little Jean. Certain wrinkled, broken-down, old peasants had never been able to break themselves of the habit of saluting him when he passed with, "Bonjour, gamin, ca va bien?"

He was six feet high, this gamin, and Jean never crossed the village without perceiving at one window the old furrowed parchment skin of Clemence, and at another the smiling countenance of Rosalie. The latter had married during the previous year; Jean had given her away, and joyously on the wedding-night had he danced with the girls of Longueval.

Such was the lieutenant of artillery, who, on Saturday, May 28, 1881, at half-past four in the afternoon, sprang from his horse before the door of the vicarage of Longueval. He entered the gate, the horse obediently followed, and went by himself into a little shed in the yard. Pauline was at the kitchen window; Jean approached and kissed her heartily on both cheeks.

"Good-evening, Pauline. Is all well?"

"Very well. I am busy preparing your dinner; would you like to know what you are going to have? potato soup, a leg of mutton, and a custard."

"That is excellent; I shall enjoy everything, for I am dying of hunger."

"And a salad; I had forgotten it; you can help me cut it directly. Dinner will be at half-past six exactly, for at half-past seven Monsieur le Cure has his service for the month of Mary."

"Where is my godfather?"

"You will find him in the garden. He is very sad on account of this sale of yesterday."

"Yes, I know, I know."

"It will cheer him a little to see you; he is always so happy when you are here. Take care; Loulou is going to eat the climbing roses. How hot he is!"

"I came the long way by the wood, and rode very fast."

Jean captured Loulou, who was directing his steps toward the climbing roses. He unsaddled him, fastened him in the little shed, rubbed him down with a great handful of straw, after which he entered the house, relieved himself of his sword and kepi, replaced the latter by an old straw hat, value sixpence, and then went to look for his godfather in the garden.

The poor Abbe was indeed sad; he had scarcely closed an eye all night he who generally slept so easily, so quietly, the sound sleep of a child. His soul was wrung. Longueval in the hands of a foreigner, of a heretic, of an adventuress!

Jean repeated what Paul had said the evening before.

"You will have money, plenty of money, for your poor."

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"Money! money! Yes, my poor will not lose, perhaps they will even gain by it; but I must go and ask for this money, and in the salon, instead of my old and dear friend, I shall find this red-haired American. It seems that she has red hair! I will certainly go for the sake of my poor I will go and she will give me the money, but she will give me nothing but money; the Marquise gave me something else her life and her heart. Every week we went together to visit the sick and the poor; she knew all the sufferings and the miseries of the country round, and when the gout nailed me to my easy-chair she made the rounds alone, and as well, or better than I."

Pauline interrupted this conversation. She carried an immense earthenware salad-dish, on which bloomed, violent and startling, enormous red flowers.

"Here I am," said Pauline, "I am going to cut the salad. Jean, would you like lettuce or endive?"

"Endive," said Jean, gayly. "It is a long time since I have had any endive."

"Well, you shall have some to-night. Stay, take the dish."

Pauline began to cut the endive, and Jean bent down to receive the leaves in the great salad dish. The Cure looked on.

At this moment a sound of little bells was heard. A carriage was approaching; one heard the jangling and creaking of its wheels. The Cure's little garden was only separated from the road by a low hedge, in the middle of which was a little trellised gate.

All three looked out, and saw driving down the road a hired carriage of most primitive construction, drawn by two great white horses, and driven by an old coachman in a blouse. Beside this old coachman was seated a tall footman in livery, of the most severe and correct demeanor. In the carriage were two young women, dressed both alike in very elegant, but very simple, travelling costumes.

When the carriage was opposite the gate the coachman stopped his horses, and addressing the Abbe:

"Monsieur le Cure," said he, "these ladies wish to speak to you."

Then, turning toward the ladies:

"This is Monsieur le Cure of Longueval."

The Abbe Constantin approached and opened the little gate. The travellers alighted. Their looks rested, not without astonishment, on the young officer, who stood there, a little embarrassed, with his straw hat in one hand, and his salad dish, all overflowing with endive, in the other.

The visitors entered the garden, and the elder she seemed about twenty-five addressing the Abbe Constantin, said to him, with a little foreign accent, very original and very peculiar:

"I am obliged to introduce myself -Mrs. Scott; I am Mrs. Scott! It was I who bought the castle and farms and all the rest here at the sale yesterday. I hope that I do not disturb you, and that you can spare me five minutes." Then, pointing to her travelling companion, "Miss Bettina Percival, my sister; you guessed it, I am sure. We are very much alike, are we not? Ah! Bettina, we have left our bags in the carriage, and we shall want them directly."

"I will get them."

And as Miss Percival prepared to go for the two little bags, Jean said to her:

"Pray allow me."

"I am really very sorry to give you so much trouble. The servant will give them to you; they are on the front seat."

She had the same accent as her sister, the same large eyes black, laughing, and gay—and the same hair, not red, but fair, with golden shades, where daintily danced the light of the sun. She bowed to Jean with a pretty little smile, and he, having returned to Pauline the salad dish full of endive, went to look for the two little bags. Meanwhile—much agitated, sorely disturbed the Abbe Constantin introduced into his vicarage the new Chatelaine of Longueval.

CHAPTER III. DELIGHTFUL SURPRISES

This vicarage of Longueval was far from being a palace. The same apartment on the ground floor served for dining and drawing-room, communicating directly with the kitchen by a door, which stood always wide open. This room was furnished in the most scanty manner; two old arm chairs, six straw chairs, a sideboard, a round table. Pauline had already laid the cloth for the dinner of the Abbe and Jean.

Mrs. Scott and Miss Percival went and came, examining the domestic arrangements of the Cure with a sort of childish wonder.

"But the garden, the house, everything is charming," said Mrs. Scott.

They both boldly penetrated into the kitchen; the Abbe Constantin followed them, scared, bewildered, stupefied at the suddenness and resolution of this American invasion.

Old Pauline, with an anxious and gloomy air, examined the two foreigners.

"There they are, then," she said to herself, "these Protestants, these accursed heretics!"

"I must compliment you," said Bettina; "it is so beautifully kept. Look, Susie, is not the vicarage altogether exactly what you wished?"

"And so is the Cure," rejoined Mrs. Scott. "Yes, Monsieur le Cure, if you will permit me to say so, you do not know how happy it makes me to find you just what you are. In the railway carriage what did I say to you, Bettina? And again just now, when we were driving here?"

"My sister said to me, Monsieur le Cure, that what she desired above everything was a priest, not young, or melancholy, or severe; but one with white hair and a kind and gentle manner. And that is exactly what you are, Monsieur le Cure, exactly. No, we could not have been more fortunate. Excuse me for speaking to you in this manner; the Parisians know how to make pretty phrases, but I do not, and in speaking French I should often be quite at a loss if I did not say everything in a simple and childish way, as it comes into my head. In a word, I am satisfied, quite satisfied, and I hope that you, too, Monsieur le Cure, will be as satisfied with your new parishioners."

"My parishioners!" exclaimed the Cure, all at once recovering speech, movement, life, everything which for some moments had completely abandoned him. "My parishioners! Pardon me, Madame, Mademoiselle, I am so agitated. You will be you are Catholics?"

"Certainly we are Catholics."

"Catholics! Catholics!" repeated the Cure.

"Catholics! Catholics!" echoed old Pauline.

Mrs. Scott looked from the Cure to Pauline, from Pauline to the Cure, much surprised that a single word should produce such an effect, and, to complete the tableau, Jean appeared carrying the two little travelling bags.

The Cure and Pauline saluted him with the same words:

"Catholics! Catholics!"

"Ah! I begin to understand," said Mrs. Scott, laughing. "It is our name, our country; you must have thought that we were Protestants. Not at all. Our mother was a Canadian, French and Catholic by descent; that is why my sister and I both speak French, with an accent, it is true, and with certain American idioms, but yet in such a manner as to be able to express nearly all we want to say. My husband is a Protestant, but he allows me complete liberty, and my two children are Catholics. That is why, Monsieur l'Abbe, we wished to come and see you the very first day."

"That is one reason," continued Bettina, "but there is also another; but for that reason we shall want our little bags."

"Here they are," said Jean.

While the two little bags passed from the hands of the officer to those of Mrs. Scott and Bettina, the Cure introduced Jean to the two Americans, but his agitation was so great that the introduction was not made strictly according to rule. The Cure only forgot one thing, it is true, but that was a thing tolerably essential in an introduction the family name of Jean.

"It is Jean," said he, "my godson, lieutenant of artillery, now quartered at Souvigny. He is one of the family."

Jean made two deep bows, the Americans two little ones, after which they foraged in their bags, from which each drew a 'rouleau' of 1,000 francs, daintily inclosed in green sheaths of serpent-skin, clasped with gold.

"I have brought you this for your poor," said Mrs. Scott.

"And I have brought this," said Bettina.

"And besides that, Monsieur le Cure, I am going to give you five hundred francs a month," said Mrs. Scott.

"And I will do like my sister."

Delicately they slipped their offerings into the right and left hands of the Cure, who, looking at each hand alternately, said:

"What are these little things? They are very heavy; there must be money in them. Yes, but how much, how much?"

The Abbe Constantin was seventy-two, and much money had passed through his hands, but this money had come to him in small sums, and the idea of such an offering as this had never entered his head. Two thousand francs! Never had he had so much in his possession no, not even one thousand. He stammered:

"I am very grateful to you, Madame; you are very good, Mademoiselle "

But after all he could not thank them enough, and Jean thought it necessary to come to his assistance.

"They have given you two thousand francs!"

And then, full of warmest gratitude; the Cure cried:

"Two thousand francs! Two thousand francs for my poor!"

Pauline suddenly reappeared.

"Here, Pauline," said the Cure, "put away this money, and take care "

Old Pauline filled many positions in this simple household: cook, maid— of—all—work, treasurer, dispenser. Her hands received with a respectful tremble these two little 'rouleaux' which represented so much misery alleviated, so much suffering relieved.

"One thousand francs a month! But there will be no poor left in the country."

"That is just what I wish. I am rich, very rich, and so is my sister; she is even richer than I am, because a young girl has not so many expenses, while I Ah! well, I spend all that I can all that I can. When one has a great deal of money, too much, more than one feels to be just, tell me, Monsieur le Cure, is there any other way of obtaining pardon than to keep one's hands open, and give, give, give, all one can, and as usefully as one can? Besides, you can give me something in return;" and, turning to Pauline, "Will you be so kind as to give me a glass of water? No, nothing else; a glass of cold water; I am dying of thirst."

"And I," said Bettina, laughing, while Pauline ran to fetch the water, "I am dying of something else—of hunger, to tell the truth. Monsieur le Cure I know that I am going to be dreadfully intrusive; I see your cloth is laid could you not invite us to dinner?"

"Bettina!" said Mrs. Scott.

"Let me alone, Susie, let me alone. Won't you, Monsieur le Cure? I am sure you will."

But he could find no reply. The old Cure hardly knew where he was. They had taken his vicarage by storm; they were Catholics; they had promised him one thousand francs a month, and now they wanted to dine with him. Ah! that was the last stroke. Terror seized him at the thought of having to do the honors of his leg of mutton and his custard to these two absurdly rich Americans. He murmured:

"Dine!—you would like to dine here?"

Jean thought he must interpose again. "It would be a great pleasure to my godfather," said he, "if you would kindly stay. But I know what disturbs him. We were going to dine together, just the two of us, and you must not expect a feast. You will be very indulgent?"

"Yes, yes, very indulgent," replied Bettina; then, addressing her sister, "Come, Susie, you must not be cross, because I have been a little you know it is my way to be a little Let us stay, will you? It will do us good to pass a quiet hour here, after such a day as we have had! On the railway, in the carriage, in the heat, in the dust; we had such a horrid luncheon, in such a horrid hotel. We were to have returned to the same hotel at seven o'clock to dine, and then take the train back to Paris, but dinner here will be really much nicer. You won't say no? Ah! how good you are, Susie! "

She embraced her sister fondly; then turning toward the Cure:

"If you only knew, Monsieur le Cure, how good she is!"

"Bettina! Bettina!"

"Come," said Jean, "quick, Pauline, two more plates; I will help you."

"And so will I," said Bettina, "I will help, too. Oh! do let me; it will be so amusing. Monsieur le Cure, you will let me do a little as if I were at home?"

In a moment she had taken off her mantle, and Jean could admire, in all its exquisite perfection, a figure marvellous for suppleness and grace. Miss Percival then removed her hat, but with a little too much haste, for this was the signal for a charming catastrophe. A whole avalanche descended in torrents, in long cascades, over Bettina's shoulders. She was standing before a window flooded by the rays of the sun, and this golden light, falling full on this golden hair, formed a delicious frame for the sparkling beauty of the young girl. Confused and blushing, Bettina was obliged to call her sister to her aid, and Mrs. Scott had much trouble in introducing order into this disorder.

When this disaster was at length repaired, nothing could prevent Bettina from rushing on plates, knives, and forks.

"Oh, indeed," said she to Jean, "I know very well how to lay the cloth. Ask my sister. Tell him, Susie, when I was a little girl in New York, I used to lay the cloth very well, didn't I?"

"Very well, indeed," said Mrs. Scott.

And then, while begging the Cure to excuse Bettina's want of thought, she, too, took off her hat and mantle, so that Jean had again the very agreeable spectacle of a charming figure and beautiful hair; but, to Jean's great regret, the catastrophe had not a second representation.

In a few minutes Mrs. Scott, Miss Percival, the Cure, and Jean were seated round the little vicarage table; then, thanks partly to the impromptu and original nature of the entertainment, partly to the good-humor and perhaps slightly audacious gayety of Bettina, the conversation took a turn of the frankest and most cordial familiarity.

"Now, Monsieur le Cure," said Bettina, "you shall see if I did not speak the truth when I said I was dying of hunger. I never was so glad to sit down to dinner. This is such a delightful finish to our day. Both my sister and I are perfectly happy now we have this castle, and these farms, and the forest."

"And then," said Mrs. Scott, "to have all that in such an extraordinary and unexpected manner. We were so taken by surprise."

"You may indeed say so, Susie. You must know, Monsieur l'Abbe, that yesterday was my sister's birthday. But first, pardon me, Monsieur Jean, is it not?"

"Yes, Miss Percival, Monsieur Jean."

"Well, Monsieur Jean, a little more of that excellent soup, if you please."

The Abbe was beginning to recover a little, but he was still too agitated to perform the duties of a host. It was Jean who had undertaken the management of his godfather's little dinner. He filled the plate of the charming American, who fixed upon him the glance of two large eyes, in which sparkled frankness, daring, and gayety. The eyes of

Jean, meanwhile, repaid Miss Percival in the same coin. It was scarcely three quarters of an hour since the young American and the young officer had made acquaintance in the Cure's garden, yet both felt already perfectly at ease with each other, full of confidence, almost like old friends.

"I told you, Monsieur l'Abbe," continued Bettina, "that yesterday was my sister's birthday. A week ago my brother-in-law was obliged to return to America, but at starting he said to my sister, 'I shall not be with you on your birthday, but you will hear from me.' So, yesterday, presents and bouquets arrived from all quarters, but from my brother-in-law, up to five o'clock, nothing nothing. We were just starting for a ride in the Bois, and 'a propos' of riding" she stopped, and looking curiously at Jean's great dusty boots " Monsieur Jean, you have spurs on."

"Yes, Miss Percival."

"Then you are in the cavalry?"

"I am in the artillery, and that, you know, is cavalry."

"And your regiment is quartered?" –

"Quite near here."

"Then you will be able to ride with us?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"That is settled. Let me see; where was I?"

"You do not know at all where you are, Bettina, and you are telling these gentlemen things which can not interest them."

"Oh! I beg your pardon," said the Cure. "The sale of this estate is the only subject of conversation in the neighborhood just now, and Miss Percival's account interests me very much."

"You see, Susie, my account interests Monsieur le Cure very much; then I shall continue. We went for our ride, we returned at seven o'clock nothing. We dined, and just when we were leaving the table a telegram from America arrived. It contained only a few lines:

"I have ordered the purchase to-day, for you and in your name, of the castle and lands of Longueval, near Souvigny, on the Northern Railway line.'

"Then we both burst into a fit of wild laughter at the thought."

"No, no, Bettina; you calumniate us both. Our first thought was one of very sincere gratitude, for both my sister and I are very fond of the country. My husband knows that we had longed to have an estate in France. For six months he had been looking out, and found nothing. At last he discovered this one, and, without telling us, ordered it to be bought for my birthday. It was a delicate attention."

"Yes, Susie, you are right, but after the little fit of gratitude, we had a great one of gayety."

"Yes, I confess it. When we realized that we had suddenly become possessed of a castle, without knowing in the least where it was, what it was like, or how much it had cost, it seemed so like a fairy-tale. Well, for five good

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minutes we laughed with all our hearts, then we seized the map of France, and succeeded in discovering Souvigny. When he had finished with the map it was the turn of the railway guide, and this morning, by the ten o'clock express, we arrived at Souvigny.

"We have passed the whole day in visiting the castle, the farms, the woods, the stables. We are delighted with what we have seen. Only, Monsieur le Cure, there is one thing about which I feel curious. I know that the place was sold yesterday; but I have not dared to ask either agent or farmer who accompanied me in my walk for my ignorance would have seemed too absurd I have not dared to ask how much it cost. In the telegram my husband does not mention the sum. Since I am so delighted with the place, the price is only a detail, but still I should like to know it. Tell me, Monsieur le Cure, do you know what it cost?"

"An enormous price," replied the Cure, "for many hopes and many ambitions were excited about Longueval."

"An enormous price! You frighten me. How much exactly?"

"Three millions!"

"Is that all? Is that all?" cried Mrs. Scott. "The castle, the farms, the forest, all for three millions?"

"But that is nothing," said Bettina. "That delicious little stream which wanders through the park is alone worth three millions."

"And you said just now, Monsieur le Cure, that there were several persons who disputed the purchase with us?"

"Yes, Mrs. Scott."

"And, after the sale, was my name mentioned among these persons?"

"Certainly it was."

"And when my name was mentioned was there no one there who spoke of me? Yes, yes, your silence is a sufficient answer; they did speak of me. Well, Monsieur le Cure, I am now serious, very serious. I beg you as a favor to tell me what was said."

"But," replied the poor Cure, who felt himself upon burning coals, "they spoke of your large fortune."

"Yes, of course, they would be obliged to speak of that, and no doubt they said that I was very rich, but had not been rich long that I was a parvenu. Very well, but that is not all; they must have said something else."

"No, indeed; I have heard nothing else."

"Oh, Monsieur le Cure, that is what you may call a white lie, and it is making you very unhappy, because naturally you are the soul of truth; but if I torment you thus it is because I have the greatest interest in knowing what was said."

"You are right," interrupted Jean, "you are right. They said you were one of the most elegant, the most brilliant, and the "

"And one of the prettiest women in Paris. With a little indulgence they might say that; but that is not all yet there is something else."

"Oh! I assure you "

"Yes, there is something else, and I should like to hear it this very moment, and I should like the information to be very frank and very exact. It seems to me that I am in a lucky vein to-day, and I feel as if you were both a little inclined to be my friends, and that you will be so entirely some day. Well, tell me if I am right in supposing that should false and absurd stories be told about me you will help me to contradict them."

"Yes!" replied Jean, "you are right in believing that."

"Well, then, it is to you that I address myself. You are a soldier, and courage is part of your profession. Promise me to be brave. Will you promise me?"

"What do you understand by being brave?"

"Promise, promise without explanations, without conditions."

"Well, I promise."

"You will then reply frankly, 'Yes' or 'No,' to questions?"

"I will."

"Did they say that I had begged in the streets of New York?"

"Yes, they said so."

"Did they say I had been a rider in a travelling circus?"

"Yes; they said that, too."

"Very well; that is plain speaking. Now remark first that in all this there is nothing that one might not acknowledge if it were true; but it is not true, and have I not the right of denying it? My history I will tell it you in a few words. I am going to pass a part of my life in this place, and I desire that all should know who I am and whence I come. To begin, then. Poor! Yes, I have been, and very poor. Eight years ago my father died, and was soon followed by my mother. I was then eighteen, and Bettina nine. We were alone in the world, encumbered with heavy debts and a great lawsuit. My father's last words had been, 'Susie, never, never compromise. Millions, my children, you will have millions.' He embraced us both; soon delirium seized him, and he died repeating, 'Millions; millions!' The next morning a lawyer appeared, who offered to pay all our debts, and to give us besides ten thousand dollars, if we would give up all our claims. I refused. It was then that for several months we were very poor."

"And it was then," said Bettina, "that I used to lay the cloth."

"I spent my life among the solicitors of New York, but no one would take up my case; everywhere I received the same reply: 'Your cause is very doubtful; you have rich and formidable adversaries; you need money, large sums of money, to bring such a case to a conclusion, and you have nothing. They offer to pay your debts, and to give you ten thousand dollars besides. Accept it, and sell your case.' But my father's last words rang in my ears, and I would not. Poverty, however, might soon have forced me to, when one day I made another attempt on one of my father's old friends, a banker in New York, Mr. William Scott. He was not alone; a young man was sitting in his office.

"You may speak freely," said Mr. Scott; "it is my son Richard."

"I looked at the young man, he looked at me, and we recognized each other.

"Susie!"

"Richard!"

"Formerly, as children, we had often played together and were great friends. Seven or eight years before this meeting he had been sent to Europe to finish his education. We shook hands; his father made me sit down, and asked what had brought me. He listened to my tale; and replied:

"You would require twenty or thirty thousand dollars. No one would lend you such a sum upon the uncertain chances of a very complicated lawsuit. If you are in difficulties; if you need assistance "

"It is not that, father. That is not what Miss Percival asks."

"I know that very well, but what she asks is impossible."

"He rose to let me out. Then the sense of my helplessness overpowered me for the first time since my father's death. I burst into a violent flood of tears. An hour later Richard Scott was with me.

"Susie," he said, "promise to accept what I am going to offer."

"I promised him.

"Well," said he, "on the single condition that my father shall know nothing about it, I place at your disposal the necessary sum."

"But then you ought to know what the lawsuit is what it is worth."

"I do not know a single word about it, and I do not wish to. Besides, you have promised to accept it; you can not withdraw now."

"I accepted. Three months after the case was ours. All this vast property became beyond dispute the property of Bettina and me. The other side offered to buy it of us for five million dollars. I consulted Richard.

"Refuse it and wait," said he; "if they offer you such a sum it is because the property is worth double."

"However, I must return you your money; I owe you a great deal."

"Oh! as for that there is no hurry; I am very easy about it; my money is quite safe now."

"But I should like to pay you at once. I have a horror of debt! Perhaps there is another way without selling the property. Richard, will you be my husband?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Cure, yes," said Mrs. Scott, laughing, "it is thus that I threw myself at my husband's head. It is I who asked his hand. But really I was obliged to act thus. Never, never, would he have spoken; I had become too rich, and as it was me he loved, and not my money, he was becoming terribly afraid of me. That is the history of my marriage. As to the history of my fortune, it can be told in a few words. There were indeed millions in those wide lands of Colorado; they discovered there abundant mines of silver, and from those mines we draw every year

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an income which is beyond reason, but we have agreed my husband, my sister, and myself to give a very large share of this income to the poor. You see, Monsieur le Cure, it is because we have known very hard times that you will always find us ready to help those who are, as we have been ourselves, involved in the difficulties and sorrows of life. And now, Monsieur Jean, will you forgive me this long discourse, and offer me a little of that cream, which looks so very good?"

This cream was Pauline's custard, and while Jean was serving Mrs. Scott:

"I have not yet finished," she continued. "You ought to know what gave rise to these extravagant stories. A year ago, when we settled in Paris, we considered it our duty on our arrival to give a certain sum to the poor. Who was it spoke of that? None of us, certainly, but the thing was told in a newspaper, with the amount. Immediately two young reporters hastened to subject Mr. Scott to a little examination on his past history; they wished to give a sketch of our career in the what do you call them? society papers. Mr. Scott is sometimes a little hasty; he was so on this occasion, and dismissed these gentlemen rather brusquely, without telling them anything. So, as they did not know our real history, they invented one, and certainly displayed a very lively imagination. First they related how I had begged in the snow in New York; the next day appeared a still more sensational article, which made me a rider in a circus in Philadelphia. You have some very funny papers in France; so have we in America, for the matter of that."

During the last five minutes, Pauline had been making desperate signs to the Cure, who persisted in not understanding them, till at last the poor woman, calling up all her courage, said:

"Monsieur le Cure, it is a quarter past seven."

"A quarter past seven! Ladies, I must beg you to excuse me. This evening I have the special service for the month of Mary."

"The month of Mary? And will the service begin directly?"

"Yes, directly."

"And when does our train start for Paris?"

"At half past nine," replied Jean.

"Susie, can we not go to church first?"

"Yes, we will go," replied Mrs. Scott; "but before we separate, Monsieur le Cure, I have one favor to ask you. I should like very much, the first time I dine at Longueval, that you would dine with me, and you, too, Monsieur Jean, just us four alone like to-day. Oh! do not refuse my invitation; it is given with all my heart."

"And accepted as heartily," replied Jean.

"I will write and tell you the day, and it shall be as soon as possible. You call that having a housewarming, don't you? Well, we shall have the house-warming all to ourselves."

Meanwhile, Pauline had drawn Miss Percival into a corner of the room, and was talking to her with great animation. The conversation ended with these words:

"You will be there?" said Bettina, "and you will tell me the exact moment?"

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"I will tell you, but take care. Here is Monsieur le Cure; he must not suspect anything."

The two sisters, the Cure, and Jean left the house. To go to the church they were obliged to cross the churchyard. The evening was delicious. Slowly, silently, under the rays of the setting sun, the four walked down a long avenue.

On their way was the monument to Dr. Reynaud, very simple, but which, by its fine proportions, showed distinctly among the other tombs.

Mrs. Scott and Bettina stopped, struck with this inscription carved on the stone:

"Here lies Dr. Marcel Reynaud, Surgeon–Major of the Souvigny Mobiles; killed January 8, 1871, at the Battle of Villersexel. Pray for him."

When they had read it, the Cure, pointing to Jean, said:

"It was his father!"

The two sisters drew near the tomb, and with bent heads remained there for some minutes, pensive, touched, contemplative. Then both turned, and at the same moment, by the same impulse, offered their hands to Jean; then continued their walk to the church. Their first prayer at Longueval had been for the father of Jean.

The Cure went to put on his surplice and stole. Jean conducted Mrs. Scott to the seat which belonged to the masters of Longueval.

Pauline had gone on before. She was waiting for Miss Percival in the shadow behind one of the pillars. By a steep and narrow staircase, she led Bettina to the gallery, and placed her before the harmonium.

Preceded by two little chorister boys, the old Cure left the vestry, and at the moment when he knelt on the steps of the altar:

"Now! Mademoiselle," said Pauline, whose heart beat with impatience. "Poor, dear man, how pleased he will be."

When he heard the sound of the music rise, soft as a murmur, and spread through the little church, the Abbe Constantin was filled with such emotion, such joy, that the tears came to his eyes. He could not remember having wept since the day when Jean had said that he wished to share all that he possessed with the mother and sister of those who had fallen by his father's side under the Prussian bullets.

To bring tears to the eyes of the old priest, a little American had been brought across the seas to play a reverie of Chopin in the little church of Longueval.