

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

BOUVARD AND
PÉCUCHE,
PART 2

Gustave Flaubert

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Gustave Flaubert

Bouvard and Pécuchet, part 2 / A Tragicomic Novel of Bougeois Life, vol. X

BOUVARD AND PÉCUCHET (*CONTINUED.*)

CHAPTER IX

Sons of the Church

MARCEL reappeared next day at three o'clock, his face green, his eyes bloodshot, a lump on his forehead, his breeches torn, his breath tainted with a strong smell of brandy, and his person covered with dirt.

He had been, according to an annual custom of his, six leagues away at Iqueville to enjoy a midnight repast with a friend; and, stuttering more than ever, crying, wishing to beat himself, he begged of them for pardon, as if he had committed a crime. His masters granted it to him. A singular feeling of serenity rendered them indulgent.

The snow had suddenly melted, and they walked about the garden, inhaling the genial air, delighted merely with living.

Was it only chance that had kept them from death? Bouvard felt deeply affected. Pécuchet recalled his first commission, and, full of gratitude to the Force, the Cause, on which they depended, the idea took possession of them to read pious works.

The Gospel dilated their souls, dazzled them like a sun. They perceived Jesus standing on a mountain, with one arm raised, while below the multitude listened to Him; or else on the margin of a lake in the midst of the apostles, while they drew in their nets; next on the ass, in the clamour of the "alleluias," His hair fanned by the quivering palms; finally, lifted high upon the Cross, bending down His head, from which eternally falls a dew of blood upon the world. What won them, what ravished them, was His tenderness for the humble, His defence of the poor, His exaltation of the oppressed; and they found in that Book, wherein Heaven unfolds itself, nothing theological in the midst of so many precepts, no dogma, no requirement, save purity of heart.

As for the miracles, their reason was not astonished by them. They had been acquainted with them from their childhood. The loftiness of St. John enchanted Pécuchet, and better disposed him to appreciate the *Imitation*.

Here were no more parables, flowers, birds, but lamentations – a compression of the soul into itself.

Bouvard grew sad as he turned over these pages, which seemed to have been written in foggy weather, in the depths of a cloister, between a belfry and a tomb. Our mortal life appeared there so wretched that one must needs forget it and return to God. And the two poor men, after all their disappointments, experienced that need of simple natures – to love something, to find rest for their souls.

They studied *Ecclesiastes*, *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*.

But the Bible dismayed them with its lion-voiced prophets, the crashing of thunder in the skies, all the sobbings of Gehenna, and its God scattering empires as the wind scatters clouds.

They read it on Sunday at the hour of vespers, while the bell was ringing.

One day they went to mass, and then came back. It was a kind of recreation at the end of the week. The Count and Countess de Faverges bowed to them from the distance, a circumstance which was remarked. The justice of the peace said to them with blinking eyes:

“Excellent! You have my approval.”

All the village dames now sent them consecrated bread. The Abbé Jeufroy paid them a visit; they returned it; friendly intercourse followed; and the priest avoided talking about religion.

They were astonished at this reserve, so much so that Pécuchet, with an assumption of indifference, asked him what was the way to set about obtaining faith.

“Practise first of all.”

They began to practise, the one with hope, the other with defiance, Bouvard being convinced that he would never be a devotee. For a month he regularly followed all the services; but, unlike Pécuchet, he did not wish to subject himself to Lenten fare.

Was this a hygienic measure? We know what hygiene is worth. A matter of the proprieties? Down with the proprieties! A mark of submission towards the Church? He laughed at it just as much; in short, he declared the rule absurd, pharisaical, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

On Good Friday in other years they used to eat whatever Germaine served up to them. But on this occasion Bouvard ordered a beefsteak. He sat down and cut up the meat, and Marcel, scandalised, kept staring at him, while Pécuchet gravely took the skin off his slice of codfish.

Bouvard remained with his fork in one hand, his knife in the other. At length, making up his mind, he raised a mouthful to his lips. All at once his hands began to tremble, his heavy countenance grew pale, his head fell back.

“Are you ill?”

“No. But – ” And he made an avowal. In consequence of his education (it was stronger than himself), he could not eat meat on this day for fear of dying.

Pécuchet, without misusing his victory, took advantage of it to live in his own fashion. One evening he returned home with a look of sober joy imprinted on his face, and, letting the word escape, said that he had just been at confession.

Thereupon they argued about the importance of confession.

Bouvard acknowledged that of the early Christians, which was made publicly: the modern is too easy. However, he did not deny that this examination concerning ourselves might be an element of progress, a leaven of morality.

Pécuchet, desirous of perfection, searched for his vices: for some time past the puffings of pride were gone. His taste for work freed him from idleness; as for gluttony, nobody was more moderate. Sometimes he was carried away by anger.

He made a vow that he would be so no more.

In the next place, it would be necessary to acquire the virtues: first of all, humility, that is to say, to believe yourself incapable of any merit, unworthy of the least recompense, to immolate your spirit, and to place yourself so low that people may trample you under their feet like the mud of the roads. He was far as yet from these dispositions.

Another virtue was wanting in him – chastity. For inwardly he regretted Mélie, and the pastel of the lady in the Louis XV. dress disturbed him by her ample display of bosom. He shut it up in a cupboard, and redoubled his modesty, so much so that he feared to cast glances at his own person.

In order to mortify himself, Pécuchet gave up his little glass after meals, confined himself to four pinches of snuff in the day, and even in the coldest weather he did not any longer put on his cap.

One day, Bouvard, who was fastening up the vine, placed a ladder against the wall of the terrace near the house, and, without intending it, found himself landed in Pécuchet’s room.

His friend, naked up to the middle, first gently smacked his shoulders with the cat-o’-nine-tails without quite undressing; then, getting animated, pulled off his shirt, lashed his back, and sank breathless on a chair.

Bouvard was troubled, as if at the unveiling of a mystery on which he should not have gazed.

For some time he had noticed a greater cleanliness about the floor, fewer holes in the napkins, and an improvement in the diet – changes which were due to the intervention of Reine, the curé's housekeeper. Mixing up the affairs of the Church with those of her kitchen, strong as a ploughman, and devoted though disrespectful, she gained admittance into households, gave advice, and became mistress in them. Pécuchet placed implicit confidence in her experience.

On one occasion she brought to him a corpulent man with narrow eyes like a Chinaman, and a nose like a vulture's beak. This was M. Gouttman, a dealer in pious articles. He unpacked some of them shut up in boxes under the cart-shed: a cross, medals, and beads of all sizes; candelabra for oratories, portable altars, tinsel bouquets, and sacred hearts of blue pasteboard, St. Josephs with red beards, and porcelain crucifixes. The price alone stood in his way.

Gouttman did not ask for money. He preferred barterings; and, having gone up to the museum, he offered a number of his wares for their collection of old iron and lead.

They appeared hideous to Bouvard. But Pécuchet's glance, the persistency of Reine, and the bluster of the dealer were effectual in making him yield.

Gouttman, seeing him so accommodating, wanted the halberd in addition; Bouvard, tired of having exhibited its working, surrendered it. The entire valuation was made. "These gentlemen still owed a hundred francs." It was settled by three bills payable at three months; and they congratulated themselves on a good bargain.

Their acquisitions were distributed through the various rooms. A crib filled with hay and a cork cathedral decorated the museum.

On Pécuchet's chimney-piece there was a St. John the Baptist in wax; along the corridor were ranged the portraits of episcopal dignitaries; and at the bottom of the staircase, under a chained lamp, stood a Blessed Virgin in an azure mantle and a crown of stars. Marcel cleaned up those splendours, unable to imagine anything more beautiful in Paradise.

What a pity that the St. Peter was broken, and how nicely it would have done in the vestibule!

Pécuchet stopped sometimes before the old pit for composts, where he discovered the tiara, one sandal, and the tip of an ear; allowed sighs to escape him, then went on gardening, for now he combined manual labour with religious exercises, and dug the soil attired in the monk's habit, comparing himself to Bruno. This disguise might be a sacrilege. He gave it up.

But he assumed the ecclesiastical style, no doubt owing to his intimacy with the curé. He had the same smile, the same tone of voice, and, like the priest too, he slipped both hands with a chilly air into his sleeves up to the wrists. A day came when he was pestered by the crowing of the cock and disgusted with the roses; he no longer went out, or only cast sullen glances over the fields.

Bouvard suffered himself to be led to the May devotions. The children singing hymns, the gorgeous display of lilacs, the festoons of verdure, had imparted to him, so to speak, a feeling of imperishable youth. God manifested Himself to his heart through the fashioning of nests, the transparency of fountains, the bounty of the sun; and his friend's devotion appeared to him extravagant, fastidious.

"Why do you groan during mealtime?"

"We ought to eat with groans," returned Pécuchet, "for it was in that way that man lost his innocence" – a phrase which he had read in the *Seminarist's Manual*, two duodecimo volumes he had borrowed from M. Jeufroy: and he drank some of the water of La Salette, gave himself up with closed doors to ejaculatory prayers, and aspired to join the confraternity of St. Francis.

In order to obtain the gift of perseverance, he resolved to make a pilgrimage in honour of the Blessed Virgin. He was perplexed as to the choice of a locality. Should it be Nôtre Dame de Fourviers, de Chartres, d'Embrun, de Marseille, or d'Auray? Nôtre Dame de la Délivrande was nearer, and it suited just as well.

"You will accompany me?"

“I should look like a greenhorn,” said Bouvard.

After all, he might come back a believer; he did not object to being one; and so he yielded through complaisance.

Pilgrimages ought to be made on foot. But forty-three kilometers would be trying; and the public conveyances not being adapted for meditation, they hired an old cabriolet, which, after a twelve hours' journey, set them down before the inn.

They got an apartment with two beds and two chests of drawers, supporting two water-jugs in little oval basins; and “mine host” informed them that this was “the chamber of the Capuchins” under the Terror. There La Dame de la Délivrande had been concealed with so much precaution that the good fathers said mass there clandestinely.

This gave Pécuchet pleasure, and he read aloud a sketch of the history of the chapel, which had been taken downstairs into the kitchen.

It had been founded in the beginning of the second century by St. Régnobert, first bishop of Lisieux, or by St. Ragnebert, who lived in the seventh, or by Robert the Magnificent in the middle of the eleventh.

The Danes, the Normans, and, above all, the Protestants, had burnt and ravaged it at various epochs. About 1112, the original statue was discovered by a sheep, which indicated the place where it was by tapping with its foot in a field of grass; and on this spot Count Baudouin erected a sanctuary.

“ ‘Her miracles are innumerable. A merchant of Bayeux, taken captive by the Saracens, invoked her: his fetters fell off, and he escaped. A miser found a nest of rats in his corn loft, appealed to her aid, and the rats went away. The touch of a medal, which had been rubbed over her effigy, caused an old materialist from Versailles to repent on his death-bed. She gave back speech to Sieur Adeline, who lost it for having blasphemed; and by her protection, M. and Madame de Becqueville had sufficient strength to live chastely in the married state.

“ ‘Amongst those whom she cured of irremediable diseases are mentioned Mademoiselle de Palfresne, Anne Lirieux, Marie Duchemin, François Dufai, and Madame de Jumillac née d’Osseville.

“ ‘Persons of high rank have visited her: Louis XI., Louis XIII., two daughters of Gaston of Orléans, Cardinal Wiseman, Samirri, patriarch of Antioch, Monseigneur Véroles, vicar apostolic of Manchuria; and the Archbishop of Quelen came to return thanks to her for the conversion of Prince Talleyrand.’ ”

“She might,” said Pécuchet, “convert you also!”

Bouvard, already in bed, gave vent to a species of grunt, and presently was fast asleep.

Next morning at six o’clock they entered the chapel.

Another was in course of construction. Canvas and boards blocked up the nave; and the monument, in a rococo style, displeased Bouvard, above all, the altar of red marble with its Corinthian pilasters.

The miraculous statue, in a niche at the left of the choir, was enveloped in a spangled robe. The beadle came up with a wax taper for each of them. He fixed it in a kind of candlestick overlooking the balustrade, asked for three francs, made a bow, and disappeared.

Then they surveyed the votive offerings. Inscriptions on slabs bore testimony to the gratitude of the faithful. They admired two swords in the form of a cross presented by a pupil of the Polytechnic School, brides' bouquets, military medals, silver hearts, and in the corner, along the floor, a forest of crutches.

A priest passed out of the sacristy carrying the holy pyx.

When he had remained for a few minutes at the bottom of the altar, he ascended the three steps, said the *Oremus*, the *Introit*, and the *Kyrie*, which the boy who served mass recited all in one breath on bended knees.

The number present was small – a dozen or fifteen old women. The rattling of their beads could be heard accompanying the noise of a hammer driving in stones. Pécuchet bent over his prie-dieu

and responded to the “Amen.” During the elevation, he implored Our Lady to send him a constant and indestructible faith. Bouvard, in a chair beside him, took up his Euchology, and stopped at the litany of the Blessed Virgin.

“Most pure, most chaste, most venerable, most amiable, most powerful – Tower of ivory – House of gold – Gate of the morning.”

These words of adoration, these hyperboles drew him towards the being who has been the object of so much reverence. He dreamed of her as she is represented in church paintings, above a mass of clouds, cherubims at her feet, the Infant Jesus on her breast – Mother of tendernesses, upon whom all the sorrows of the earth have a claim – ideal of woman carried up to heaven; for man exalts that love arising out of the depths of the soul, and his highest aspiration is to rest upon her heart.

The mass was finished. They passed along by the dealers’ sheds which lined the walls in front of the church. They saw there images, holy-water basins, urns with fillets of gold, Jesus Christs made of cocoanuts, and ivory chaplets; and the sun brought into prominence the rudeness of the paintings, the hideousness of the drawings. Bouvard, who had some abominable specimens at his own residence, was indulgent towards these. He bought a little Virgin of blue paste. Pécuchet contented himself with a rosary as a memento.

The dealers called out: “Come on! come on! For five francs, for three francs, for sixty centimes, for two sous, don’t refuse Our Lady!”

The two pilgrims sauntered about without making any selections from the proffered wares. Uncomplimentary remarks were made about them.

“What is it they want, these creatures?”

“Perhaps they are Turks.”

“Protestants, rather.”

A big girl dragged Pécuchet by the frock-coat; an old man in spectacles placed a hand on his shoulder; all were bawling at the same time; and a number of them left their sheds, and, surrounding the pair, redoubled their solicitations and effronteries.

Bouvard could not stand this any longer.

“Let us alone, for God’s sake!”

The crowd dispersed. But one fat woman followed them for some distance, and exclaimed that they would repent of it.

When they got back to the inn they found Gouttman in the café. His business called him to these quarters, and he was talking to a man who was examining accounts at a table.

This person had a leather cap, a very wide pair of trousers, a red complexion, and a good figure in spite of his white hair: he had the appearance at the same time of a retired officer and an old strolling player.

From time to time he rapped out an oath; then, when Gouttman replied in a mild tone, he calmed down at once and passed to another part of the accounts.

Bouvard who had been closely watching him, at the end of a quarter of an hour came up to his side.

“Barberou, I believe?”

“Bouvard!” exclaimed the man in the cap, and they embraced each other.

Barberou had in the course of twenty years experienced many changes of fortune. He had been editor of a newspaper, an insurance agent, and manager of an oyster-bed.

“I will tell you all about it,” he said.

At last, having returned to his original calling, he was travelling for a Bordeaux house, and Gouttman, who took care of the diocese, disposed of wines for him to the ecclesiastics. “But,” he hurriedly added, “you must pardon me one minute; then I shall be at your service.”

He was proceeding with the examination of the accounts, and all of a sudden he jumped up excitedly.

“What! two thousand?”

“Certainly.”

“Ha! it’s wrong, that’s what it is!”

“What do you say?”

“I say that I’ve seen Hérambert myself,” replied Barberou in a passion. “The invoice makes it four thousand. No humbug!”

The dealer was not put out of countenance.

“Well, it discharges you – what next?”

Barberou, as he stood there with his face at first pale and then purple, impressed Bouvard and Pécuchet with the apprehension that he was about to strangle Gouttman.

He sat down, folded his arms, and said:

“You are a vile rascal, you must admit.”

“No insults, Monsieur Barberou. There are witnesses. Be careful!”

“I’ll bring an action against you!”

“Ta! ta! ta!” Then having fastened together his books, Gouttman lifted the brim of his hat: “I wish you luck on’t!” With these words he went off.

Barberou explained the facts: For a credit of a thousand francs doubled by a succession of renewals with interest, he had delivered to Gouttman three thousand francs’ worth of wines. This would pay his debt with a profit of a thousand francs; but, on the contrary, he owed three thousand on the transaction! His employers might dismiss him; they might even prosecute him!

“Blackguard! robber! dirty Jew! And this fellow dines at priests’ houses! Besides, everything that touches the clerical headpiece – ”

And he went on railing against the priests, and he struck the table with such violence that the little statue was near falling.

“Gently!” said Bouvard.

“Hold on! What’s this here?” And Barberou having removed the covering of the little Virgin: “A pilgrimage bauble! Yours?”

“ ’Tis mine,” said Pécuchet.

“You grieve me,” returned Barberou; “but I’ll give you a wrinkle on that point. Don’t be afraid.” And as one must be a philosopher, and as there is no use in fretting, he invited them to come and lunch with him.

The three sat down together at table.

Barberou was agreeable, recalled old times, took hold of the maid-servant’s waist, and wished to measure the breadth of Bouvard’s stomach. He would soon see them again, and would bring them a droll book.

The idea of his visit was rather pleasant to them. They chatted about it in the omnibus for an hour, while the horse was trotting. Then Pécuchet shut his eyes. Bouvard also relapsed into silence. Internally he felt an inclination towards religion.

“M. Marescot had the day before called to make an important communication” – Marcel knew no more about it.

They did not see the notary till three days after; and at once he explained the matter.

Madame Bordin offered to buy the farm from M. Bouvard, and to pay him seven thousand five hundred francs a year.

She had been casting sheep’s eyes on it since her youth, knew the boundaries and lands all around it, its defects and its advantages; and this desire consumed her like a cancer.

For the good lady, like a true Norman, cherished above everything landed estate, less for the security of the capital than for the happiness of treading on soil that belonged to herself. In that hope she had devoted herself to inquiries and inspections from day to day, and had practised prolonged economies; and she waited with impatience for Bouvard’s answer.

He was perplexed, not desiring that Pécuchet one day should be fortuneless; but it was necessary to seize the opportunity – which was the result of the pilgrimage, for the second time Providence had shown itself favourable to them. They proposed the following conditions: An annual payment, not of seven thousand five hundred francs, but of six thousand francs, provided it should pass to the survivor.

Marescot made the point that one of them was in delicate health. The constitution of the other gave him an apoplectic tendency. Madame Bordin, carried away by her ruling passion, signed the contract.

Bouvard got into a melancholy frame of mind about it. Somebody might desire his death; and this reflection inspired him with serious thoughts, ideas about God and eternity.

Three days after, M. Jeufroy invited them to the annual dinner which it was his custom to give to his colleagues. The dinner began at two o'clock in the afternoon, and was to finish at eleven at night.

Perry was used at it as a beverage, and puns were circulated. The Abbé Pruneau, before they broke up, composed an acrostic; M. Bougon performed card-tricks; and Cerpet, a young curate, sang a little ballad which bordered on gallantry.

The curé frequently came to see them. He presented religion under graceful colours. And, after all, what risk would they run? So Bouvard expressed his willingness to approach the holy table shortly, and Pécuchet was to participate in the sacrament on the same occasion.

The great day arrived. The church, on account of the first communions, was thronged with worshippers. The village shopkeepers and their womenfolk were crowded close together in their seats, and the common people either remained standing up behind or occupied the gallery over the church door.

What was about to take place was inexplicable – so Bouvard reflected; but reason does not suffice for the comprehension of certain things. Great men have admitted that. Let him do as much as they had done; and so, in a kind of torpor, he contemplated the altar, the censer, the tapers, with his head a little light, for he had eaten nothing, and experienced a singular weakness.

Pécuchet, by meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ, excited himself to outbursts of love. He would have liked to offer his soul up to Him as well as the souls of others – and the ecstasies, the transports, the illumination of the saints, all beings, the entire universe. Though he prayed with fervour, the different parts of the mass seemed to him a little long.

At length the little boys knelt down on the first step of the altar, forming with their coats a black band, above which rose light or dark heads of hair at unequal elevations. Then the little girls took their places, with their veils falling from beneath their wreaths. From a distance they resembled a row of white clouds at the end of the choir.

Then it was the turn of the great personages.

The first on the gospel-side was Pécuchet; but, too much moved, no doubt, he kept swaying his head right and left. The curé found difficulty in putting the host into his mouth, and as he received it he turned up the whites of his eyes.

Bouvard, on the contrary, opened his jaws so widely, that his tongue hung over his lip like a streamer. On rising he jostled against Madame Bordin. Their eyes met. She smiled; without knowing the reason why, he reddened.

After Madame Bordin, Mademoiselle de Faverges, the countess, their lady companion, and a gentleman who was not known at Chavignolles approached the altar in a body.

The last two were Plaquevent and Petit, the schoolmaster, and then, all of a sudden, Gorju made his appearance. He had got rid of the tuft on his chin; and, as he went back to his place, he had his arms crossed over his breast in a very edifying fashion.

The curé harangued the little boys. Let them take care later on in life not to act like Judas, who betrayed his God, but to preserve always their robe of innocence.

Pécuchet was regretting his when there was a sudden moving of the seats: the mothers were impatient to embrace their children.

The parishioners, on their way out, exchanged felicitations. Some shed tears. Madame de Faverges, while waiting for her carriage, turned round towards Bouvard and Pécuchet, and presented her future son-in-law: "Baron de Mahurot, engineer." The count was sorry not to have the pleasure of their company. He would return the following week. "Pray bear it in mind."

The carriage having now come up, the ladies of the château departed, and the throng dispersed.

They found a parcel inside their own grounds in the middle of the grass. The postman, as the house had been shut up, had thrown it over the wall. It was the work which Barberou had promised to send, *Examination of Christianity*, by Louis Hervieu, a former pupil of the Normal School. Pécuchet would have nothing to say to it, and Bouvard had no desire to make himself acquainted with it.

He had been repeatedly told that the sacrament would transform him. For several days he awaited its blossomings in his conscience. He remained the same as ever, and a painful astonishment took possession of him.

What! The Flesh of God mingles with our flesh, and it produces no effect there! The Thought which governs the world does not illuminate our spirits! The Supreme Power abandons us to impotence!

M. Jeufroy, while reassuring him, prescribed for him the catechism of the Abbé Gaume.

On the other hand, Pécuchet's devotion had become developed. He would have liked to communicate under two species, kept singing psalms as he walked along the corridor, and stopped the people of Chavignolles to argue with, and to convert them. Vaucorbeil laughed in his face; Girbal shrugged his shoulders; and the captain called him "Tartuffe."

It was now thought that they were going too far.

It is an excellent custom to consider things as so many symbols. If the thunder rumbles, imagine to yourself the Last Judgment; at sight of a cloudless sky, think of the abode of the blessed; say to yourself in your walks that every step brings you nearer to death. Pécuchet observed this method. When he took hold of his clothes, he thought of the carnal envelope in which the Second Person of the Trinity was clad; the ticking of the clock recalled to him the beatings of His heart, and the prick of a pin the nails of the Cross. But in vain did he remain on his knees for hours and multiply his fasts and strain his imagination. He did not succeed in getting detached from self; it was impossible to attain to perfect contemplation.

He had recourse to mystic authors: St. Theresa, John of the Cross, Louis of Granada, Simpoli, and, of the more modern, Monseigneur Chaillot. Instead of the sublimities which he expected, he encountered only platitudes, a very disjointed style, frigid imagery, and many comparisons drawn from lapidaries' shops.

He learned, however, that there is an active purgation and a passive purgation, an internal vision and an external vision, four kinds of prayers, nine excellencies in love, six degrees in humility, and that the wounding of the soul is not very different from spiritual theft.

Some points embarrassed him.

"Since the flesh is accursed, how is it that we are bound to thank God for the boon of existence?" "What proportion must be observed between the fear indispensable to the salvation and the hope which is no less so?" "Where is the sign of grace?" etc.

M. Jeufroy's answers were simple.

"Don't worry yourself. By desiring to sift everything we rush along a perilous slope."

The *Catechism of Perseverance*, by Gaume, had disgusted Pécuchet so much that he took up Louis Hervieu's book. It was a summary of modern exegesis, prohibited by the government. Barberou, as a republican, had bought the book.

It awakened doubts in Bouvard's mind, and, first of all, on original sin. "If God had created man peccable, He ought not to punish him; and evil is anterior to the Fall, since there were already volcanoes and wild beasts. In short, this dogma upsets my notions of justice."

“What would you have?” said the curé. “It is one of those truths about which everybody is agreed, without being able to furnish proofs of it; and we ourselves make the crimes of their fathers rebound on the children. Thus morality and law justify this decree of Providence, since we find it in nature.”

Bouvard shook his head. He had also doubts about hell.

“For every punishment should look to the amelioration of the guilty person, which is impossible where the penalty is eternal; and how many are enduring it? Just think! All the ancients, the Jews, the Mussulmans, the idolaters, the heretics, and the children who have died without baptism – those children created by God, and for what end? – for the purpose of being punished for a sin which they did not commit!”

“Such is St. Augustine’s opinion,” added the curé; “and St. Fulgentius involves even the unborn child in damnation. The Church, it is true, has come to no decision on this matter. One remark, however. It is not God, but the sinner who damns himself; and the offence being infinite, since God is infinite, the punishment must be infinite. Is that all, sir?”

“Explain the Trinity to me,” said Bouvard.

“With pleasure. Let us take a comparison: the three sides of a triangle, or rather our soul, which contains being, knowing, and willing; what we call faculty in the case of man is person in God. There is the mystery.”

“But the three sides of the triangle are not each the triangle; these three faculties of the soul do not make three souls, and your persons of the Trinity are three Gods.”

“Blasphemy!”

“So then there is only one person, one God, one substance affected in three ways!”

“Let us adore without understanding,” said the curé.

“Be it so,” said Bouvard. He was afraid of being taken for an atheist, and getting into bad odour at the château.

They now visited there three times a week, about five o’clock in winter, and the cup of tea warmed them. The count’s manners recalled the ease of the ancient court; the countess, placid and plump, exhibited much discernment about everything. Mademoiselle Yolande, their daughter, was the type of the young person, the angel of “keepsakes”; and Madame de Noares, their lady companion, resembled Pécuchet in having a pointed nose like him.

The first time they entered the drawing-room she was defending somebody.

“I assure you he is changed. His gift is a proof of it.”

This somebody was Gorju. He had made the betrothed couple an offer of a Gothic prie-dieu. It was brought. The arms of the two houses appeared on it in coloured relief. M. de Mahurot seemed satisfied with it, and Madame de Noares said to him:

“You will remember my *protégés*?”

Then she brought in two children, a boy of a dozen years and his sister, who was perhaps ten. Through the holes in their rags could be seen their limbs, reddened with cold. The one was shod in old slippers, the other wore only one wooden shoe. Their foreheads disappeared under their hair, and they stared around them with burning eyeballs like famished wolves.

Madame de Noares told how she had met them that morning on the high-road. Placquevent could not give any information about them.

They were asked their names.

“Victor – Victorine.”

“Where was their father?”

“In jail.”

“And what was he doing before that?”

“Nothing.”

“Their country?”

“St. Pierre.”

“But which St. Pierre?”

The two little ones for sole response, said, snivelling:

“Don’t know – don’t know.”

Their mother was dead, and they were begging.

Madame de Noares explained how dangerous it would be to abandon them; she moved the countess, piqued the count’s sense of honour, was backed up by mademoiselle, pressed the matter – succeeded.

The gamekeeper’s wife would take charge of them. Later, work would be found for them, and, as they did not know how to read or write, Madame de Noares gave them lessons herself, with a view to preparing them for catechism.

When M. Jeufroy used to come to the château, the two youngsters would be sent for; he would question them, and then deliver a lecture, into which he would import a certain amount of display on account of his audience.

On one occasion, when the abbé had discoursed about the patriarchs, Bouvard, on the way home with him and Pécuchet, disparaged them very much.

“Jacob is notorious for his thieveries, David for his murders, Solomon for his debaucheries.”

The abbé replied that we should look further into the matter. Abraham’s sacrifice is a prefigurement of the Passion; Jacob is another type of the Messiah, just like Joseph, like the Brazen Serpent, like Moses.

“Do you believe,” said Bouvard, “that he composed the ‘Pentateuch’?”

“Yes, no doubt.”

“And yet his death is recorded in it; the same observation applies to Joshua; and, as for the Judges, the author informs us that, at the period whose history he was writing, Israel had not yet kings. The work was, therefore, written under the Kings. The Prophets, too, astonish me.”

“He’s going to deny the Prophets now!”

“Not at all! but their overheated imagination saw Jehovah under different forms – that of a fire, of a bush, of an old man, of a dove; and they were not certain of revelation since they are always asking for a sign.”

“Ha! and where have you found out these nice things?”

“In Spinoza.”

At this word, the curé jumped.

“Have you read him?”

“God forbid!”

“Nevertheless, sir, science – ”

“Sir, no one can be a scholar without being a Christian.”

Science furnished a subject for sarcasms on his part:

“Will it make an ear of corn sprout, this science of yours? What do we know?” he said.

But he did know that the world was created for us; he did know that archangels are above the angels; he did know that the human body will rise again such as it was about the age of thirty.

His ecclesiastical self-complacency provoked Bouvard, who, through want of confidence in Louis Hervieu, had written to Varlot; and Pécuchet, better informed, asked M. Jeufroy for explanations of Scripture.

The six days of Genesis mean six great epochs. The pillage of the precious vessels made by the Jews from the Egyptians must be interpreted to mean intellectual riches, the arts of which they had stolen the secret. Isaiah did not strip himself completely, *nudus* in Latin signifying “up to the hips”: thus Virgil advises people to go naked in order to plough, and that writer would not have given a precept opposed to decency. Ezekiel devouring a book has nothing extraordinary in it; do we not speak of devouring a pamphlet, a newspaper?

“But if we see metaphors everywhere, what will become of the facts?”

The abbé maintained, nevertheless, that they were realities.

This way of understanding them appeared disloyal to Pécuchet. He pushed his investigations further, and brought a note on the contradictions of the Bible.

“Exodus teaches us that for forty years they offered up sacrifices in the desert; according to Amos and Jeremiah they offered up none. Paralipomenon and the book of Esdras are not in agreement as to the enumeration of the people. In Deuteronomy, Moses saw the Lord face to face; according to Exodus, he could not see Him. Where, then, is the inspiration?”

“An additional ground for admitting it,” replied M. Jeufroy smiling. “Impostors have need of connivance; the sincere take no such precautions. In perplexity, have recourse to the Church. She is always infallible.”

“On whom does her infallibility depend?”

“The Councils of Basle and of Constance attribute it to the councils. But often the councils are at variance – witness that which decided in favour of Athanasius and of Arius; those of Florence and Lateran award it to the Pope.”

“But Adrian VI. declares that the Pope may be mistaken, like any other person.”

“Quibbles! All that does not affect the permanence of dogma.”

“Louis Hervieu’s work points out the variations: baptism was formerly reserved for adults, extreme unction was not a sacrament till the ninth century, the Real Presence was decreed in the eighth, purgatory recognised in the fifteenth, the Immaculate Conception is a thing of yesterday.”

And so it came to pass that Pécuchet did not know what to think of Jesus. Three Evangelists make him out to be a man. In one passage of St. John he appears to be equal to God; in another, all the same, to acknowledge himself His inferior.

The abbé rejoined by citing the letter of King Abgar, the acts of Pilate, and the testimony of the sibyls, “the foundation of which is genuine.” He found the Virgin again amongst the Gauls, the announcement of a Redeemer in China, the Trinity everywhere, the Cross on the cap of the Grand Lama, and in Egypt in the closed hands of the gods; and he even exhibited an engraving representing a nilometer, which, according to Pécuchet, was a phallus.

M. Jeufroy secretly consulted his friend Pruneau, who searched for proofs for him in the authors. A conflict of erudition was waged, and, lashed by conceit, Pécuchet became abstruse, mythological. He compared the Virgin to Isis, the Eucharist to the Homa of the Persians, Bacchus to Moses, Noah’s ark to the ship of Xithurus. These analogies demonstrated to his satisfaction the identity of religions.

But there cannot be several religions, since there is only one God. And when he was at the end of his arguments, the man in the cassock exclaimed: “It is a mystery!”

“What is the meaning of that word? Want of knowledge: very good. But if it denotes a thing the mere statement of which involves contradiction, it is a piece of stupidity.”

And now Pécuchet would never let M. Jeufroy alone. He would surprise him in the garden, wait for him in the confessional, and take up the argument again in the sacristy.

The priest had to invent plans in order to escape from him.

One day, after he had started for Sassetot on a sick call, Pécuchet proceeded along the road in front of him in such a way as to render conversation inevitable.

It was an evening about the end of August. The red sky began to darken, and a large cloud lowered above them, regular at the base and forming volutes at the top.

Pécuchet at first talked about indifferent subjects, then, having slipped out the word “martyr”:

“How many do you think there were of them?”

“A score of millions at least.”

“Their number is not so great, according to Origen.”

“Origen, you know, is open to suspicion.”

A big gust of wind swept past, violently shaking the grass beside the ditches and the two rows of young elm trees that stretched towards the end of the horizon.

Pécuchet went on:

“Amongst the martyrs we include many Gaulish bishops killed while resisting the barbarians, which is no longer the question at issue.”

“Do you wish to defend the emperors?”

According to Pécuchet, they had been calumniated.

“The history of the Theban legion is a fable. I also question Symphorosa and her seven sons, Felicitas and her seven daughters, and the seven virgins of Ancyra condemned to violation, though septuagenarians, and the eleven thousand virgins of St. Ursula, of whom one companion was called *Undecemilla*, a name taken for a figure; still more, the ten martyrs of Alexandria!”

“And yet – and yet they are found in authors worthy of credit.”

Raindrops fell, and the curé unrolled his umbrella; and Pécuchet, when he was under it, went so far as to maintain that the Catholics had made more martyrs than the Jews, the Mussulmans, the Protestants, and the Freethinkers – than all those of Rome in former days.

The priest exclaimed:

“But we find ten persecutions from the reign of Nero to that of Cæsar Galba!”

“Well! and the massacres of the Albigenses? and St. Bartholomew? and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes?”

“Deplorable excesses, no doubt; but you do not mean to compare these people to St. Étienne, St. Lawrence, Cyprian, Polycarp, a crowd of missionaries?”

“Excuse me! I will remind you of Hypatia, Jerome of Prague, John Huss, Bruno, Vanini, Anne Dubourg!”

The rain increased, and its drops dashed down with such force that they rebounded from the ground like little white rockets.

Pécuchet and M. Jeufroy walked on slowly, pressed close to one another, and the curé said:

“After abominable tortures they were flung into vessels of boiling water.”

“The Inquisition made use of the same kind of torture, and it burned very well for you.”

“Illustrious ladies were exhibited to the public gaze in the *lupanars*.”

“Do you believe Louis XIV.’s dragoons regarded decency?”

“And mark well that the Christians had done nothing against the State.”

“No more had the Huguenots.”

The wind swept the rain into the air. It clattered on the leaves, trickled at the side of the road; and the mud-coloured sky intermingled with the fields, which lay bare after the close of harvest. Not a root was to be seen. Only, in the distance, a shepherd’s hut.

Pécuchet’s thin overcoat had no longer a dry thread in it. The water ran along his spine, got into his boots, into his ears, into his eyes, in spite of the Amoros headpiece. The curé, while lifting up with one hand the tail of his cassock, uncovered his legs; and the points of his three-cornered hat sputtered the water over his shoulders, like the gargoyles of a cathedral.

They had to stop, and, turning their backs to the storm, they remained face to face, belly to belly, holding with their four hands the swaying umbrella.

M. Jeufroy had not interrupted his vindication of the Catholics.

“Did they crucify your Protestants, as was done to St. Simeon; or get a man devoured by two tigers, as happened to St. Ignatius?”

“But make some allowance for the number of women separated from their husbands, children snatched from their mothers, and the exile of the poor across the snow, in the midst of precipices. They huddled them together in prisons; just when they were at the point of death they were dragged along on the hurdle.”

The abbé sneered. “You will allow me not to believe a word of it. And our martyrs are less doubtful. St. Blandina was delivered over naked in a net to a furious cow. St. Julia was beaten to death. St. Taracus, St. Probus, and St. Andronicus had their teeth broken with a hammer, their sides torn with iron combs, their hands pierced with reddened nails, and their scalps carried off.”

“You are exaggerating,” said Pécuchet. “The death of the martyrs was at that time an amplification of rhetoric.”

“What! of rhetoric?”

“Why, yes; whilst what I relate to you, sir, is history. The Catholics in Ireland disembowelled pregnant women in order to take their children – ”

“Never!”

“ – and give them to the pigs.”

“Come now!”

“In Belgium they buried women alive.”

“What nonsense!”

“We have their names.”

“And even so,” objected the priest, angrily shaking his umbrella, “they cannot be called martyrs. There are no martyrs outside the Church.”

“One word. If the value of a martyr depends on the doctrine, how could he serve to demonstrate its existence?”

The rain ceased; they did not speak again till they reached the village. But, on the threshold of the presbytery, the curé said:

“I pity you! really, I pity you!”

Pécuchet immediately told Bouvard about the wrangle. It had filled him with an antipathy to religion, and, an hour later, seated before a brushwood fire, they both read the *Curé Meslier*. These dull negations disgusted Pécuchet; then, reproaching himself for perhaps having misunderstood heroes, he ran through the history of the most illustrious martyrs in the Biography.

What a clamour from the populace when they entered the arena! and, if the lions and the jaguars were too quiet, the people urged them to come forward by their gestures and their cries. The victims could be seen covered with gore, smiling where they stood, with their gaze towards heaven. St. Perpetua bound up her hair in order that she might not look dejected.

Pécuchet began to reflect. The window was open, the night tranquil; many stars were shining. There must have passed through these martyrs’ souls things of which we have no idea – a joy, a divine spasm! And Pécuchet, by dwelling on the subject, believed that he understood this emotion, and that he would have done the same himself.

“You?”

“Certainly.”

“No fudge! Do you believe – yes or no?”

“I don’t know.”

He lighted a candle; then, his eyes falling on the crucifix in the alcove:

“How many wretches have sought help from that!”

And, after a brief silence:

“They have denaturalised Him. It is the fault of Rome – the policy of the Vatican.”

But Bouvard admired the Church for her magnificence, and would have brought back the Middle Ages provided he might be a cardinal.

“You must admit I should have looked well in the purple.”

Pécuchet’s headpiece, placed in front of the fire, was not yet dry. While stretching it out he felt something in the lining, and out tumbled a medal of St. Joseph.

Madame de Noares wished to ascertain from Pécuchet whether he had not experienced some kind of change, bringing him happiness, and betrayed herself by her questions. On one occasion, whilst he was playing billiards, she had sewn the medal in his cap.

Evidently she was in love with him: they might marry; she was a widow, and he had had no suspicion of this attachment, which might have brought about his life's happiness.

Though he exhibited a more religious tendency than M. Bouvard, she had dedicated him to St. Joseph, whose succour is favourable to conversions.

No one knew so well as she all the beads and the indulgences which they procure, the effect of relics, the privileges of blessed waters. Her watch was attached to a chain that had touched the bonds of St. Peter. Amongst her trinkets glittered a pearl of gold, in imitation of the one in the church of Allouagne containing a tear of Our Lord; a ring on her little finger enclosed some of the hair of the curé of Ars, and, as she was in the habit of collecting simples for the sick, her apartment was like a sacristy combined with an apothecary's laboratory.

Her time was passed in writing letters, in visiting the poor, in dissolving irregular connections, and in distributing photographs of the Sacred Heart. A gentleman had promised to send her some "martyr's paste," a mixture of paschal wax and human dust taken from the Catacombs, and used in desperate cases in the shape of fly-blisters and pills. She promised some of it to Pécuchet.

He appeared shocked at such materialism.

In the evening a footman from the château brought him a basketful of little books relating pious phrases of the great Napoleon, witticisms of clergymen at inns, frightful deaths that had happened to atheists. All those things Madame de Noares knew by heart, along with an infinite number of miracles. She related several stupid ones – miracles without an object, as if God had performed them to excite the wonder of the world. Her own grandmother had locked up in a cupboard some prunes covered with a piece of linen, and when the cupboard was opened a year later they saw thirteen of them on the cloth forming a cross.

"Explain this to me."

This was the phrase she used after her marvellous tales, which she declared to be true, with the obstinacy of a mule. Apart from this she was a harmless woman of lively disposition.

On one occasion, however, she deviated from her character.

Bouvard was disputing with her about the miracle of Pezilla: this was a fruit-dish in which wafers had been hidden during the Revolution and which had become gilded of itself.

"Perhaps there was at the bottom a little yellow colour caused by humidity?"

"Not at all! I repeat it, there was not! The cause of the gilding was the contact with the Eucharist."

By way of proof she relied on the attestations of bishops.

"It is, they say, like a buckler, a – a palladium over the diocese of Perpignan. Ask Monsieur Jeufroy, then!"

Bouvard could not stand this kind of talk any longer; and, after he had looked over his Louis Hervieu, he took Pécuchet off with them.

The clergyman was finishing his dinner. Reine offered them chairs, and, at a gesture from her master, she went to fetch two little glasses, which she filled with Rosolio.

After this Bouvard explained what had brought him there.

The abbé did not reply candidly.

"Everything is possible to God, and the miracles are a proof of religion."

"However, there are laws of nature –"

"That makes no difference to Him. He sets them aside in order to instruct, to correct."

"How do you know whether He sets them aside?" returned Bouvard. "So long as Nature follows her routine we never bestow a thought on it, but in an extraordinary phenomenon we believe we see the hand of God."

"It may be there," replied the ecclesiastic; "and when an occurrence has been certified by witnesses –"

"The witnesses swallow everything, for there are spurious miracles."

The priest grew red.

"Undoubtedly; sometimes."

"How can we distinguish them from the genuine ones? If the genuine ones, given as proofs, have themselves need of proofs, why perform them?"

Reine interposed, and, preaching like her master, said it was necessary to obey.

"Life is a passage, but death is eternal."

"In short," suggested Bouvard, guzzling the Rosolio, "the miracles of former times are not better demonstrated than the miracles of to-day; analogous reasonings uphold those of Christians and Pagans."

The curé flung down his fork on the table.

"Again I tell you those miracles were spurious! There are no miracles outside of the Church."

"Stop!" said Pécuchet, "that is the same argument you used regarding the martyrs: the doctrine rests on the facts and the facts on the doctrine."

M. Jeufroy, having swallowed a glass of water, replied:

"Even while denying them you believe in them. The world which twelve fishermen converted – look at that! it seems to me a fine miracle."

"Not at all!"

Pécuchet gave a different account of the matter: "Monotheism comes from the Hebrews; the Trinity from the Indians; the Logos belongs to Plato, and the Virgin Mother to Asia."

No matter! M. Jeufroy clung to the supernatural and did not desire that Christianity should have humanly the least reason for its existence, though he saw amongst all peoples foreshadowings or deformations of it. The scoffing impiety of the eighteenth century he would have tolerated, but modern criticism, with its politeness, exasperated him.

"I prefer the atheist who blasphemes to the sceptic who cavils."

Then he looked at them with an air of bravado, as if to dismiss them.

Pécuchet returned home in a melancholy frame of mind. He had hoped for a reconciliation between faith and reason.

Bouvard made him read this passage from Louis Hervieu:

"In order to know the abyss which separates them, oppose their axioms.

"Reason says to you: 'The whole comprehends the part,' and faith replies to you: 'By substantiation, Jesus, while communicating with the apostles, had His body in His hand and His head in His mouth.'

"Reason says to you: 'No one is responsible for the crime of another,' and faith replies to you: 'By original sin.'

"Reason says to you: 'Three make three,' and faith declares that 'Three make one.' "

They no longer associated with the abbé.

It was the period of the war with Italy. The respectable people were trembling for the Pope. They were thundering against Victor Emmanuel. Madame de Noares went so far as to wish for his death. Bouvard and Pécuchet alone protested timidly.

When the door of the drawing-room flew open in front of them and they looked at themselves in the lofty mirrors, as they passed, whilst through the windows they caught a glimpse of the walks where glared above the grass the red waistcoat of a man-servant, they felt a sensation of delight; and the luxuriousness of their surroundings rendered them indulgent to the words that were uttered there.

The count lent them all the works of M. de Maistre. He expounded the principles contained in them before a circle of intimate friends – Hurel, the curé, the justice of the peace, the notary,

and the baron, his future son-in-law, who used to come from time to time for twenty-four hours to the château.

“What is abominable,” said the count, “is the spirit of ’eighty-nine. First of all they question the existence of God; then they dispute about government; then comes liberty – liberty for insults, for revolt, for enjoyments, or rather for plunder, so that religion and authority ought to proscribe the independents, the heretics. No doubt they will protest against what they call persecution, as if the executioners persecuted the criminals. Let me resume: No State without God! the law being unable to command respect unless it comes from on high, and, in fact, it is not a question of the Italians, but of determining which shall have the best of it, the Revolution or the Pope, Satan or Jesus Christ.”

M. Jeufroy expressed his approval by monosyllables, Hurel by means of a smile, and the justice of the peace by nodding his head. Bouvard and Pécuchet kept their eyes fixed on the ceiling; Madame de Noares, the countess, and Yolande were making clothes for the poor, and M. de Mahurot, beside his betrothed, was turning over the leaves of a book.

Then came intervals of silence, during which everyone seemed to be absorbed in the investigation of a problem. Napoleon III. was no longer a saviour, and he had even given a deplorable example by allowing the masons at the Tuileries to work on Sunday.

“It ought not to be permitted,” was the ordinary phrase of the count.

Social economy, fine arts, literature, history, scientific doctrines – on all he decided in his quality of Christian and father of a family; and would to God that the government, in this respect, exercised the same severity that he exhibited in his household! Authority alone is the judge of the dangers of science: spread too extensively, it inspires fatal ambitions in the breasts of the people. They were happier, these poor people, when the nobles and the bishops tempered the absolutism of the king. The manufacturers now make use of them. They are on the point of sinking into slavery.

And all looked back with regret to the old *régime*, Hurel through meanness, Coulon through ignorance, Marescot as a man of artistic tastes.

Bouvard, when he found himself at home once more, fortified his mind with a course of Lamettrie, Holbach, and others; whilst Pécuchet forsook a religion which had become a medium of government.

M. de Mahurot had communicated in order the better to charm the ladies, and, if he adopted it as a practice, it was in the interests of the servants.

A mathematician and *dilettante*, who played waltzes on the piano and admired Topffer, he was distinguished by a tasteful scepticism. What was said about feudal abuses, the Inquisition, and the Jesuits, was the result of prejudice. He extolled progress, though he despised everyone who was not a gentleman, or who had not come from the Polytechnic School!

M. Jeufroy likewise displeased the two friends. He believed in sorcery, made jokes about idolatry, declared that all idioms are derived from the Hebrew. His rhetoric lacked the element of novelty: it was invariably the stag at bay, honey and absinthe, gold and lead, perfumes, urns, and the comparison of the Christian soul to the soldier who ought to say in the face of sin: “Thou shalt not pass!”

In order to avoid his discourses they used to come to the château at as late an hour as possible.

One day, however, they encountered him there. He had been an hour awaiting his two pupils. Suddenly Madame de Noares entered.

“The little girl has disappeared. I am bringing Victor in. Ah! the wretch!”

She had found in his pocket a silver thimble which she had lost three days ago. Then, stifled with sobs:

“That is not all! While I was giving him a scolding, he turned his back on me!”

And, ere the count and countess could have said a word:

“However, it is my own fault: pardon me!”

She had concealed from them the fact that the two orphans were the children of Touache, who was now in prison.

What was to be done?

If the count sent them away they would be lost, and his act of charity would be taken for a caprice.

M. Jeufroy was not surprised. Since man is corrupt, our natural duty is to punish him in order to improve him.

Bouvard protested. Leniency was better. But the count once more expatiated on the iron hand indispensable for children as well as for the people. These two children were full of vices – the little girl was untruthful, the boy brutish. This theft, after all, might have been excused, the impertinence never. Education should be the school of respect.

Therefore Sorel, the gamekeeper, would immediately administer to the youngster a good flogging.

M. de Mahurot, who had something to say to him, undertook the commission. He went to the anteroom for a gun, and called Victor, who had remained in the centre of the courtyard with downcast head.

“Follow me,” said the baron. As the way to the gamekeeper’s lodge turned off a little from Chavignolles, M. Jeufroy, Bouvard, and Pécuchet accompanied him.

At a hundred paces from the château, he begged them not to speak any more while he was walking along the wood.

The ground sloped down to the river’s edge, where rose great blocks of stone. At sunset they looked like slabs of gold. On the opposite side the green hillocks were wrapped in shadow. A keen wind was blowing. Rabbits came out of their burrows, and began browsing on the grass.

A shot went off; a second; a third: and the rabbits jumped up, then rolled over. Victor flung himself on them to seize hold of them, and panted, soaking with perspiration.

“You have your clothes in nice condition!” said the baron.

There was blood on his ragged blouse.

Bouvard shrank from the sight of blood. He would not admit that it ever should be shed.

M. Jeufroy returned:

“Circumstances sometimes make it necessary. If the guilty person does not give his own, there is need of another’s – a truth which the Redemption teaches us.”

According to Bouvard, it had been of hardly any use, since nearly all mankind would be damned, in spite of the sacrifice of Our Lord.

“But every day He renews it in the Eucharist.”

“And whatever be the unworthiness of the priest,” said Pécuchet, “the miracle takes place at the words.”

“There is the mystery, sir.”

Meanwhile Victor had riveted his eyes on the gun, and he even tried to touch it.

“Down with your paws!” And M. de Mahurot took a long path through the wood.

The clergyman had placed Pécuchet on one side of him and Bouvard at the other, and said to the latter:

“Attention, you know. *Debetur pueris.*”

Bouvard assured him that he humbled himself in the presence of the Creator, but was indignant at their having made Him a man. We fear His vengeance; we work for His glory. He has every virtue: an arm, an eye, a policy, a habitation.

“‘Our Father, who art in heaven,’ what does that mean?”

And Pécuchet added: “The universe has become enlarged; the earth is no longer its central point. It revolves amongst an infinite multitude of other worlds. Many of them surpass it in grandeur, and this belittlement of our globe shows a more sublime ideal of God.

“So, then, religion must change. Paradise is something infantile, with its blessed always in a state of contemplation, always chanting hymns, and looking from on high at the tortures of the damned. When one reflects that Christianity had for its basis an apple!”

The curé was annoyed. “Deny revelation; that would be simpler.”

“How do you make out that God spoke?” said Bouvard.

“Prove that he did not speak!” said M. Jeufroy.

“Once again, who affirms it?”

“The Church.”

“Nice testimony!”

This discussion bored M. de Mahurot, and, as he walked along: “Pray listen to the curé. He knows more than you.”

Bouvard and Pécuchet made signs to indicate that they were taking another road; then, at Croix-Verte:

“A very good evening.”

“Your servant,” said the baron.

All this would be told to M. de Faverges, and perhaps a rupture would result. So much the worse. They felt that they were despised by those people of rank. They were never asked to dinner, and they were tired of Madame de Noares, with her continual remonstrances.

They could not, however, keep the De Maistre; and a fortnight after they returned to the château, not expecting to be welcomed, but they were. All the family were in the boudoir, and amongst those present were Hurel and, strangely enough, Foureau.

Correction had failed to correct Victor. He refused to learn his catechism; and Victorine gave utterance to vulgar words. In short, the boy should go to a reformatory, and the girl to a nunnery. Foureau was charged with carrying out the measure, and he was about to go when the countess called him back.

They were waiting for M. Jeufroy to fix the date of the marriage, which was to take place at the mayor’s office before being celebrated in the church, in order to show that they looked on civil marriage with contempt.

Foureau tried to defend it. The count and Hurel attacked it. What was a municipal function beside a priesthood? – and the baron would not have believed himself to be really wedded if he had been married only in the presence of a tri-coloured scarf.

“Bravo!” said M. Jeufroy, who had just come in. “Marriage having been established by Jesus Christ – ”

Pécuchet stopped him: “In which Gospel? In the Apostolic times they respected it so little that Tertullian compares it to adultery.”

“Oh! upon my word!”

“Yes, certainly! and it is not a sacrament. A sign is necessary for a sacrament. Show me the sign in marriage.”

In vain did the curé reply that it represented the union of God with the Church.

“You do not understand Christianity either! And the law – ”

“The law preserves the stamp of Christianity,” said M. de Faverges. “Without that, it would permit polygamy.”

A voice rejoined: “Where would be the harm?”

It was Bouvard, half hidden by a curtain.

“You might have many wives, like the Patriarchs, the Mormons, the Mussulmans, and nevertheless be an honest man.”

“Never!” exclaimed the priest; “honesty consists in rendering what is due. We owe homage to God. So he who is not a Christian is not honest.”

“Just as much as others,” said Bouvard.

The count, believing that he saw in this rejoinder an attack on religion, extolled it. It had set free the slaves.

Bouvard referred to authorities to prove the contrary:

“St. Paul recommends them to obey their masters as they would obey Jesus. St. Ambrose calls servitude a gift of God. Leviticus, Exodus, and the Councils have sanctioned it. Bossuet treats it as a part of the law of nations. And Monseigneur Bouvier approves of it.”

The count objected that, none the less, Christianity had developed civilisation.

“Ay, and idleness, by making a virtue of poverty.”

“However, sir, the morality of the Gospel?”

“Ha! ha! not so moral! Those who labour only during the last hour are paid as much as those who labour from the first hour. To him who hath is given, and from him who hath not is taken away. As for the precept of receiving blows without returning them and of letting yourself be robbed, it encourages the audacious, the cowardly, and the dissolute.”

They were doubly scandalised when Pécuchet declared that he liked Buddhism as well.

The priest burst out laughing.

“Ha! ha! ha! Buddhism!”

Madame de Noares lifted up her hands: “Buddhism!”

“What! Buddhism!” repeated the count.

“Do you understand it?” said Pécuchet to M. Jeufroy, who had become confused. “Well, then, learn something about it. Better than Christianity, and before it, it has recognised the nothingness of earthly things. Its practices are austere, its faithful more numerous than the entire body of Christians; and, as for incarnation, Vishnu had not merely one, but nine of them. So judge.”

“Travellers’ lies!” said Madame de Noares.

“Backed up by the Freemasons!” added the curé.

And all talking at the same time:

“Come, then, go on!”

“Very pretty!”

“For my part, I think it funny!”

“Not possible!”

Finally, Pécuchet, exasperated, declared that he would become a Buddhist!

“You are insulting Christian ladies,” said the baron.

Madame de Noares sank into an armchair. The countess and Yolande remained silent. The count kept rolling his eyes; Hurel was waiting for his orders. The abbé, to contain himself, read his breviary.

This sight calmed M. de Faverges; and, looking at the two worthies:

“Before you find fault with the Gospel, and that when there may be stains on your own lives, there is some reparation – ”

“Reparation?”

“For stains?”

“Enough! gentlemen. You don’t understand me.” Then, addressing Foureau: “Sorel is informed about it. Go to him.”

Bouvard and Pécuchet withdrew without bowing.

At the end of the avenue they all three gave vent to their indignation.

“They treated me as if I were a servant,” grumbled Foureau; and, as his companions agreed with him, in spite of their recollection of the affair of the hemorrhoids, he exhibited towards them a kind of sympathy.

Road-menders were working in the neighbourhood. The man who was over them drew near: it was Gorju. They began to chat.

He was overseeing the macadamisation of the road, voted in 1848, and he owed this post to M. de Mahurot, the engineer. "The one that's going to marry Mademoiselle de Faverges. I suppose 'tis from the house below you were just coming?"

"For the last time," said Pécuchet gruffly.

Gorju assumed an innocent air. "A quarrel! Come, come!"

And if they could have seen his countenance when they had turned on their heels, they might have observed that he had scented the cause of it.

A little further on, they stopped before a trellised enclosure, inside which there were kennels, and also a red-tiled cottage.

Victorine was on the threshold. They heard dogs barking. The gamekeeper's wife came out. Knowing the object of the mayor's visit, she called to Victor. Everything was ready beforehand, and their outfit was contained in two pocket-handkerchiefs fastened together with pins.

"A pleasant journey," said the woman to the children, too glad to have no more to do with such vermin.

Was it their fault if they owed their birth to a convict father? On the contrary, they seemed very quiet, and did not even betray any alarm as to the place to which they were being conveyed.

Bouvard and Pécuchet watched them as they walked in front of them.

Victorine muttered some unintelligible words, with her little bundle over her arm, like a milliner carrying a bandbox.

Every now and then she would turn round, and Pécuchet, at the sight of her fair curls and her pretty figure, regretted that he had not such a child. Brought up under different conditions, she would be charming later. What happiness only to see her growing tall, to hear day after day her bird-like warbling, to kiss her when the fancy seized him! – and a feeling of tenderness, rising from his heart to his lips, made his eyes grow moist and somewhat oppressed his spirit.

Victor, like a soldier, had slung his baggage over his shoulder. He whistled, threw stones at the crows in the furrows, and went to cut switches off the trees.

Foureau called him back; and Bouvard, holding him by the hand, was delighted at feeling within his own those fingers of a robust and vigorous lad. The poor little wretch asked for nothing but to grow freely, like a flower in the open air! and he would rot between closed walls with tasks, punishment, a heap of tomfooleries! Bouvard was seized with pity, springing from a sense of revolt, a feeling of indignation against Fate, one of those fits of rage in which one longs to destroy government altogether.

"Jump about!" he said, "amuse yourself! Have a bit of fun as long as you can!"

The youngster scampered off.

His sister and he were to sleep at the inn, and at daybreak the messenger from Falaise would take Victor and set him down at the reformatory of Beaubourg; while a nun belonging to the orphanage of Grand-Camp would come to fetch Victorine.

Foureau having gone into these details, was once more lost in his own thoughts. But Bouvard wished to know how much the maintenance of the youngsters would cost.

"Bah! a matter perhaps of three hundred francs. The count has given me twenty-five for the first disbursements. What a stingy fellow!"

And, stung to the heart by the contempt shown towards his scarf, Foureau quickened his pace in silence.

Bouvard murmured: "They make me feel sad. I will take the charge of them."

"And so will I," said Pécuchet, the same idea having occurred to both of them.

No doubt there were impediments?

"None," returned Foureau. Besides, he had the right as mayor to entrust deserted children to whomsoever he thought fit. And, after a prolonged hesitation:

"Well, yes; take them! That will annoy *him*."

Bouvard and Pécuchet carried them off.

When they returned to their abode they found at the end of the staircase, under the Madonna, Marcel upon his knees praying with fervour. With his head thrown back, his eyes half closed, and his hare-lip gaping, he had the appearance of a fakir in ecstasy.

“What a brute!” said Bouvard.

“Why? He is perhaps attending to things that would make you envy him if you could only see them. Are there not two worlds entirely distinct? The aim of a process of reasoning is of less consequence than the manner of reasoning. What does the form of belief matter? The great thing is to believe.”

Such were the objections of Pécuchet to Bouvard’s observation.

CHAPTER X

Lessons in Art and Science

THEY procured a number of works relating to education, and resolved to adopt a system of their own. It was necessary to banish every metaphysical idea, and, in accordance with the experimental method, to follow in the lines of natural development. There was no haste, for the two pupils might forget what they had learned.

Though they had strong constitutions, Pécuchet wished, like a Spartan, to make them more hardy, to accustom them to hunger, thirst, and severe weather, and even insisted on having their feet badly shod in order that they might be prepared for colds. Bouvard was opposed to this.

The dark closet at the end of the corridor was used as their sleeping apartment. Its furniture consisted of two folding beds, two couches, and a jug. Above their heads the top window was open, and spiders crawled along the plaster. Often the children recalled to mind the interior of a cabin where they used to wrangle. One night their father came home with blood on his hands. Some time afterwards the gendarmes arrived. After that they lived in a wood. Men who made wooden shoes used to kiss their mother. She died, and was carried off in a cart. They used to get severe beatings; they got lost. Then they could see once more Madame de Noares and Sorel; and, without asking themselves the reason why they were in this house, they felt happy there. But they were disagreeably surprised when at the end of eight months the lessons began again. Bouvard took charge of the little girl, and Pécuchet of the boy.

Victor was able to distinguish letters, but did not succeed in forming syllables. He stammered over them, then stopped suddenly, and looked like an idiot. Victorine put questions. How was it that “ch” in “orchestra” had the sound of a “q,” and that of a “k” in “archæology.” We must sometimes join two vowels and at other times separate them. All this did not seem to her right. She grew indignant at it.

The teachers gave instruction at the same hour in their respective apartments, and, as the partition was thin, these four voices, one soft, one deep, and two sharp, made a hideous concert. To finish the business and to stimulate the youngsters by means of emulation, they conceived the idea of making them work together in the museum; and they proceeded to teach them writing. The two pupils, one at each end of the table, copied written words that were set for them; but the position of their bodies was awkward. It was necessary to straighten them; their copybooks fell down; their pens broke, and their ink bottles were turned upside down.

Victorine, on certain days, went on capitally for about three minutes, then she would begin to scrawl, and, seized with discouragement, she would sit with her eyes fixed on the ceiling. Victor was not long before he fell asleep, lying over his desk.

Perhaps they were distressed by it? Too great a strain was bad for young heads.

“Let us stop,” said Bouvard.

There is nothing so stupid as to make children learn by heart; yet, if the memory is not exercised, it will go to waste, and so they taught the youngsters to recite like parrots the first fables of La Fontaine. The children expressed their approval of the ant that heaped up treasure, of the wolf that devoured the lamb, and of the lion that took everyone’s share.

When they had become more audacious, they spoiled the garden. But what amusement could be provided for them?

Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* advises the teacher to get the pupil to make his own playthings. Bouvard could not contrive to make a hoop or Pécuchet to sew up a ball. They passed on to toys that were instructive, such as cut-paper work. Pécuchet showed them his microscope. When the candle was lighted, Bouvard would sketch with the shadow of his finger on the wall the profile of a hare or a pig. But the pupils grew tired of it.

Writers have gone into raptures about the delightfulness of an open-air luncheon or a boating excursion. Was it possible for them really to have such recreations? Fénelon recommends from time to time “an innocent conversation.” They could not invent one. So they had to come back to the lessons – the multiplying bowls, the erasures of their scrawlings, and the process of teaching them how to read by copying printed characters. All had proved failures, when suddenly a bright idea struck them.

As Victor was prone to gluttony, they showed him the name of a dish: he soon ran through *Le Cuisinier Français* with ease. Victorine, being a coquette, was promised a new dress if she wrote to the dressmaker for it: in less than three weeks she accomplished this feat. This was playing on their vices – a pernicious method, no doubt; but it had succeeded.

Now that they had learned to read and write, what should they be taught? Another puzzle.

Girls have no need of learning, as in the case of boys. All the same, they are usually brought up like mere animals, their sole intellectual baggage being confined to mystical follies.

Is it expedient to teach them languages? “Spanish and Italian,” the Swan of Cambray lays down, “scarcely serve any purpose save to enable people to read dangerous books.”

Such a motive appeared silly to them. However, Victorine would have to do only with these languages; whereas English is more widely used. Pécuchet proceeded to study the rules of the language. He seriously demonstrated the mode of expressing the “th” – “like this, now, *the, the, the.*”

But before instructing a child we must be acquainted with its aptitudes. They may be divined by phrenology. They plunged into it, then sought to verify its assertions by experiments on their own persons. Bouvard exhibited the bumps of benevolence, imagination, veneration, and amorous energy —*vulgo*, eroticism. On Pécuchet’s temples were found philosophy and enthusiasm allied with a crafty disposition. Such, in fact, were their characters. What surprised them more was to recognise in the one as well as in the other a propensity towards friendship, and, charmed with the discovery, they embraced each other with emotion.

They next made an examination of Marcel. His greatest fault, of which they were not ignorant, was an excessive appetite. Nevertheless Bouvard and Pécuchet were dismayed to find above the top of the ear, on a level with the eye, the organ of alimentivity. With advancing years their servant would perhaps become like the woman in the Salpêtrière, who every day ate eight pounds of bread, swallowed at one time fourteen different soups, and at another sixty bowls of coffee. They might not have enough to keep him.

The heads of their pupils presented no curious characteristics. No doubt they had gone the wrong way to work with them. A very simple expedient enabled them to develop their experience.

On market days they insinuated themselves among groups of country people on the green, amid the sacks of oats, the baskets of cheese, the calves and the horses, indifferent to the jostlings; and whenever they found a young fellow with his father, they asked leave to feel his skull for a scientific purpose. The majority vouchsafed no reply; others, fancying it was pomatum for ringworm of the scalp, refused testily. A few, through indifference, allowed themselves to be led towards the porch of the church, where they would be undisturbed.

One morning, just as Bouvard and Pécuchet were beginning operations, the curé suddenly presented himself, and seeing what they were about, denounced phrenology as leading to materialism and to fatalism. The thief, the assassin, the adulterer, have henceforth only to cast the blame of their crimes on their bumps.

Bouvard retorted that the organ predisposes towards the act without forcing one to do it. From the fact that a man has in him the germ of a vice, there is nothing to show that he will be vicious.

“However, I wonder at the orthodox, for, while upholding innate ideas, they reject propensities. What a contradiction!”

But phrenology, according to M. Jeufroy, denied Divine Omnipotence, and it was unseemly to practise under the shadow of the holy place, in the very face of the altar.

“Take yourselves off! No! – take yourselves off!”

They established themselves in the shop of Ganot, the hairdresser. Bouvard and Pécuchet went so far as to treat their subjects' relations to a shave or a clip. One afternoon the doctor came to get his hair cut. While seating himself in the armchair he saw in the glass the reflection of the two phrenologists passing their fingers over a child's pate.

"So you are at these fooleries?" he said.

"Why foolery?"

Vaucorbeil smiled contemptuously, then declared that there were not several organs in the brain. Thus one man can digest food which another cannot digest. Are we to assume that there are as many stomachs in the stomach as there are varieties of taste?

They pointed out that one kind of work is a relaxation after another; an intellectual effort does not strain all the faculties at the same time; each has its distinct seat.

"The anatomists have not discovered it," said Vaucorbeil.

"That's because they have dissected badly," replied Pécuchet.

"What?"

"Oh, yes! they cut off slices without regard to the connection of the parts" – a phrase out of a book which recurred to his mind.

"What a piece of nonsense!" exclaimed the physician. "The cranium is not moulded over the brain, the exterior over the interior. Gall is mistaken, and I defy you to justify his doctrine by taking at random three persons in the shop."

The first was a country woman, with big blue eyes.

Pécuchet, looking at her, said:

"She has a good memory."

Her husband attested the fact, and offered himself for examination.

"Oh! you, my worthy fellow, it is hard to lead you."

According to the others, there was not in the world such a headstrong fellow.

The third experiment was made on a boy who was accompanied by his grandmother.

Pécuchet observed that he must be fond of music.

"I assure you it is so," said the good woman. "Show these gentlemen, that they may see for themselves."

He drew a Jew's-harp from under his blouse and began blowing into it.

There was a crashing sound – it was the violent slamming of the door by the doctor as he went out.

They were no longer in doubt about themselves, and summoning their two pupils, they resumed the analysis of their skull-bones.

That of Victorine was even all around, a sign of ponderation; but her brother had an unfortunate cranium – a very large protuberance in the mastoid angle of the parietal bones indicated the organ of destructiveness, of murder; and a swelling farther down was the sign of covetousness, of theft. Bouvard and Pécuchet remained dejected for eight days.

But it was necessary to comprehend the exact sense of words: what we call combativeness implies contempt for death. If it causes homicides, it may, likewise bring about the saving of lives. Acquisitiveness includes the tact of pickpockets and the ardour of merchants. Irreverence has its parallel in the spirit of criticism, craft in circumspection. An instinct always resolves itself into two parts, a bad one and a good one. The one may be destroyed by cultivating the other, and by this system a daring child, far from being a vagabond, may become a general. The sluggish man will have only prudence; the penurious, economy; the extravagant, generosity.

A magnificent dream filled their minds. If they carried to a successful end the education of their pupils, they would later found an establishment having for its object to correct the intellect, to subdue tempers, and to ennoble the heart. Already they talked about subscriptions and about the building.

Their triumph in Ganot's shop had made them famous, and people came to consult them in order that they might tell them their chances of good luck.

All sorts of skulls were examined for this purpose – bowl-shaped, pear-shaped, those rising like sugar loaves, square heads, high heads, contracted skulls and flat skulls, with bulls' jaws, birds' faces, and eyes like pigs'; but such a crowd of people disturbed the hairdresser in his work. Their elbows rubbed against the glass cupboard that contained the perfumery, they put the combs out of order, the wash-hand stand was broken; so he turned out all the idlers, begging of Bouvard and Pécuchet to follow them, an ultimatum which they uncomplainingly accepted, being a little worn out with craniology.

Next day, as they were passing before the little garden of the captain, they saw, chatting with him, Girbal, Coulon, the keeper, and his younger son, Zephyrin, dressed as an altar-boy. His robe was quite new, and he was walking below before returning to the sacristy, and they were complimenting him.

Curious to know what they thought of him, Placquevent asked "these gentlemen" to feel his young man's head.

The skin of his forehead looked tightly drawn; his nose, thin and very gristly at the tip, drooped slantwise over his pinched lips; his chin was pointed, his expression evasive, and his right shoulder was too high.

"Take off your cap," said his father to him.

Bouvard slipped his hands through his straw-coloured hair; then it was Pécuchet's turn, and they communicated to each other their observations in low tones:

"Evident *love of books!* Ha! ha! *approbation!* *Conscientiousness* wanting! No *amativeness!*"

"Well?" said the keeper.

Pécuchet opened his snuff-box, and took a pinch.

"Faith!" replied Bouvard, "this is scarcely a genius."

Placquevent reddened with humiliation.

"All the same, he will do my bidding."

"Oho! Oho!"

"But I am his father, by God! and I have certainly the right – "

"Within certain limits," observed Pécuchet.

Girbal interposed. "The paternal authority is indispensable."

"But if the father is an idiot?"

"No matter," said the captain; "his power is none the less absolute."

"In the interests of the children," added Coulon.

According to Bouvard and Pécuchet, they owed nothing to the authors of their being; and the parents, on the other hand, owed them food, education, forethought – in fact, everything.

Their good neighbours protested against this opinion as immoral. Placquevent was hurt by it as if it were an insult.

"For all that, they are a nice lot that you collect on the high-roads. They will go far. Take care!"

"Care of what?" said Pécuchet sourly.

"Oh! I am not afraid of you."

"Nor I of you either."

Coulon here used his influence to restrain the keeper and induce him to go away quietly.

For some minutes there was silence. Then there was some talk about the dahlias of the captain, who would not let his friends depart till he had exhibited every one of them.

Bouvard and Pécuchet were returning homeward when, a hundred paces in front of them, they noticed Placquevent; and close beside him Zephyrin was lifting up his elbow, like a shield, to save his ear from being boxed.

What they had just heard expressed, in another form, were the opinions of the count; but the example of their pupils proved how much liberty had the advantage over coercion. However, a little discipline was desirable.

Pécuchet nailed up a blackboard in the museum for the purpose of demonstrations. They each resolved to keep a journal wherein the things done by the pupil, noted down every evening, could be read next morning, and, to regulate the work by ringing the bell when it should be finished. Like Dupont de Nemours, they would, at first, make use of the paternal injunction, then of the military injunction, and familiarity in addressing them would be forbidden.

Bouvard tried to teach Victorine ciphering. Sometimes he would make mistakes, and both of them would laugh. Then she would kiss him on the part of his neck which was smoothest and ask leave to go, and he would give his permission.

Pécuchet at the hour for lessons in vain rang the bell and shouted out the military injunction through the window. The brat did not come. His socks were always hanging over his ankles; even at table he thrust his fingers into his nostrils, and did not even keep in his wind. Broussais objects to reprimands on this point on the ground that "it is necessary to obey the promptings of a conservative instinct."

Victorine and he made use of frightful language, saying, *mé itou* instead of *moi aussi*, *bère* instead of *boire*, *al* instead of *elle*, and *deventiau* with the *iau*; but, as grammar cannot be understood by children, and as they would learn the use of language by hearing others speak correctly, the two worthy men watched their own words till they found it quite distressing.

They held different views about the way to teach geography. Bouvard thought it more logical to begin with the commune, Pécuchet with the entire world.

With a watering-pot and some sand he sought to demonstrate what was meant by a river, an island, a gulf, and even sacrificed three flower-beds to explain three continents; but the cardinal points could not be got into Victor's head.

On a night in January Pécuchet carried him off in the open country. While they walked along he held forth on astronomy: mariners find it useful on their voyages; without it Christopher Columbus would not have made his discovery. We owe a debt of gratitude to Copernicus, to Galileo, and to Newton.

It was freezing hard, and in the dark blue sky countless stars were scintillating. Pécuchet raised his eyes.

"What! No Ursa Major!"

The last time he had seen it, it was turned to the other side. At length he recognised it, then pointed out the polar star, which is always turned towards the north, and by means of which travellers can find out their exact situation.

Next day he placed an armchair in the middle of the room and began to waltz round it.

"Imagine that this armchair is the sun and that I am the earth; it moves like this."

Victor stared at him, filled with astonishment.

After this he took an orange, passed through it a piece of stick to indicate the poles, then drew a circle across it with charcoal to mark the equator. He next moved the orange round a wax candle, drawing attention to the fact that the various points on the surface were not illuminated at the same time – which causes the difference of climates; and for that of the seasons he sloped the orange, inasmuch as the earth does not stand up straight – which brings about the equinoxes and the solstices.

Victor did not understand a bit of it. He believed that the earth turns around in a long needle, and that the equator is a ring pressing its circumference.

By means of an atlas Pécuchet exhibited Europe to him; but, dazzled by so many lines and colours, he could no longer distinguish the names of different places. The bays and the mountains did not harmonise with the respective nations; the political order confused the physical order. All this, perhaps, might be cleared up by studying history.

It would have been more practical to begin with the village, and go on next to the arrondissement, the department, and the province; but, as Chavignolles had no annals, it was absolutely necessary to stick to universal history. It was rendered embarrassing by such a variety of details that one ought only to select its beautiful features. For Greek history there are: “We shall fight in the shade,” the banishment of Aristides by the envious, and the confidence of Alexander in his physician. For Roman, the geese of the Capitol, the tripod of Scævola, the barrel of Regulus. The bed of roses of Guatimozin is noteworthy for America. As for France, it supplies the vase of Soissons, the oak of St. Louis, the death of Joan of Arc, the boiled hen of Bearnais – you have only too extensive a field to select from, not to speak of *À moi d’Auvergne!* and the shipwreck of the *Vengeur*.

Victor confused the men, the centuries, and the countries. Pécuchet, however, was not going to plunge him into subtle considerations, and the mass of facts is a veritable labyrinth. He confined himself to the names of the kings of France. Victor forgot them through not knowing the dates. But, if Dumouchel’s system of mnemonics had been insufficient for themselves, what would it be for him! Conclusion: history can be learned only by reading a great deal. He would do this.

Drawing is useful where there are numerous details; and Pécuchet was courageous enough to try to learn it himself from Nature by working at the landscape forthwith. A bookseller at Bayeux sent him paper, india-rubber, pasteboard, pencils, and fixtures, with a view to the works, which, framed and glazed, would adorn the museum.

Out of bed at dawn, they started each with a piece of bread in his pocket, and much time was lost in finding a suitable scene. Pécuchet wished to reproduce what he found under his feet, the extreme horizon, and the clouds, all at the same time; but the backgrounds always got the better of the foregrounds; the river tumbled down from the sky; the shepherd walked over his flock; and a dog asleep looked as if he were hunting. For his part, he gave it up, remembering that he had read this definition:

“Drawing is composed of three things: line, grain, and fine graining, and, furthermore, the powerful touch. But it is only the master who can give the powerful touch.”

He rectified the line, assisted in the graining process, watched over the fine graining, and waited for the opportunity of giving the powerful touch. It never arrived, so incomprehensible was the pupil’s landscape.

Victorine, who was very lazy, used to yawn over the multiplication table. Mademoiselle Reine showed her how to stitch, and when she was marking linen she lifted her fingers so nicely that Bouvard afterwards had not the heart to torment her with his lesson in ciphering. One of these days they would resume it. No doubt arithmetic and sewing are necessary in a household; but it is cruel, Pécuchet urged, to bring up girls merely with an eye to the husbands they might marry. Not all of them are destined for wedlock; if we wish them later to do without men, we ought to teach them many things.

The sciences can be taught in connection with the commonest objects; for instance, by telling what wine is made of; and when the explanation was given, Victor and Victorine had to repeat it. It was the same with groceries, furniture, illumination; but for them light meant the lamp, and it had nothing in common with the spark of a flint, the flame of a candle, the radiance of the moon.

One day Victorine asked, “How is it that wood burns?” Her masters looked at each other in confusion. The theory of combustion was beyond them.

Another time Bouvard, from the soup to the cheese, kept talking of nutritious elements, and dazed the two youngsters with fibrine, caseine, fat and gluten.

After this, Pécuchet desired to explain to them how the blood is renewed, and he became puzzled over the explanation of circulation.

The dilemma is not an easy one; if you start with facts, the simplest require proofs that are too involved, and by laying down principles first, you begin with the absolute – faith.

How is it to be solved? By combining the two methods of teaching, the rational and the empirical; but a double means towards a single end is the reverse of method. Ah! so much the worse, then.

To initiate them in natural history, they tried some scientific excursions.

"You see," said they, pointing towards an ass, a horse, an ox, "beasts with four feet – they are called quadrupeds. As a rule, birds have feathers, reptiles scales, and butterflies belong to the insect class."

They had a net to catch them with, and Pécuchet, holding the insect up daintily, made them take notice of the four wings, the six claws, the two feelers, and of its bony proboscis, which drinks in the nectar of flowers.

He gathered herbs behind the ditches, mentioned their names, and, when he did not know them, invented them, in order to keep up his prestige. Besides, nomenclature is the least important thing in botany.

He wrote this axiom on the blackboard: "Every plant has leaves, a calyx, and a corolla enclosing an ovary or pericarp, which contains the seed." Then he ordered his pupils to go looking for plants through the fields, and to collect the first that came to hand.

Victor brought him buttercups; Victorine a bunch of strawberries. He searched vainly for the pericarp.

Bouvard, who distrusted his own knowledge, rummaged in the library, and discovered in *Le Redouté des Dames* a sketch of an iris in which the ovaries were not situated in the corolla, but beneath the petals in the stem. In their garden were some scratchweeds and lilies-of-the-valley in flower. These rubiaceæ had no calyx; therefore the principle laid down on the blackboard was false.

"It is an exception," said Pécuchet.

But chance led to the discovery of a field-madder in the grass, and it had a calyx.

"Goodness gracious! If the exceptions themselves are not true, what are we to put any reliance on?"

One day, in one of these excursions, they heard the cries of peacocks, glanced over the wall, and at first did not recognise their own farm. The barn had a slate roof; the railings were new; the pathways had been metalled.

Père Gouy made his appearance.

"'Tisn't possible! Is it you?"

How many sad stories he had to tell of the past three years, amongst others the death of his wife! As for himself, he had always been as strong as an oak.

"Come in a minute."

It was early in April, and in the three fruit-gardens rows of apple trees in full blossom showed their white and red clusters; the sky, which was like blue satin, was perfectly cloudless. Table-cloths, sheets, and napkins hung down, vertically attached to tightly-drawn ropes by wooden pins. Père Gouy lifted them as they passed; and suddenly they came face to face with Madame Bordin, bareheaded, in a dressing-gown, and Marianne offering her armfuls of linen.

"Your servant, gentlemen. Make yourselves at home. As for me, I shall sit down; I am worn out."

The farmer offered to get some refreshment for the entire party.

"Not now," said she; "I am too hot."

Pécuchet consented, and disappeared into the cellar with Père Gouy, Marianne and Victor.

Bouvard sat down on the grass beside Madame Bordin.

He received the annual payment punctually; he had nothing to complain of; and he wished for nothing more.

The bright sunshine lighted up her profile. One of her black head-bands had come loose, and the little curls behind her neck clung to her brown skin, moistened with perspiration. With each breath

her bosom heaved. The smell of the grass mingled with the odour of her solid flesh, and Bouvard felt a revival of his attachment, which filled him with joy. Then he complimented her about her property.

She was greatly charmed with it; and she told him about her plans. In order to enlarge the farmyard, she intended to take down the upper bank.

Victorine was at that moment climbing up the slopes, and gathering primroses, hyacinths, and violets, without being afraid of an old horse that was browsing on the grass at her feet.

“Isn’t she pretty?” said Bouvard.

“Yes, she is pretty, for a little girl.”

And the widow heaved a sigh, which seemed charged with life-long regret.

“You might have had one yourself.”

She hung down her head.

“That depended on you.”

“How?”

He gave her such a look that she grew purple, as if at the sensation of a rough caress; but, immediately fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief:

“You have let the opportunity slip, my dear.”

“I don’t quite understand.” And without rising he drew closer to her.

She remained looking down at him for some time; then smiling, with moist eyes:

“It is your fault.”

The sheets, hanging around them, hemmed them in, like the curtains of a bed.

He leaned forward on his elbow, so that his face touched her knees.

“Why? – eh? – why?”

And as she remained silent, while he was in a condition in which words cost nothing, he tried to justify himself; accused himself of folly, of pride.

“Forgive me! Let everything be as it was before. Do you wish it?” And he caught her hand, which she allowed to remain in his.

A sudden gust of wind blew up the sheets, and they saw two peacocks, a male and a female. The female stood motionless, with her tail in the air. The male marched around her, erected his tail into a fan and bridled up, making a clucking noise.

Bouvard was clasping the hand of Madame Bordin. She very quickly loosed herself. Before them, open-mouthed and, as it were, petrified, was young Victor staring at them; a short distance away Victorine, stretched on her back, in the full light of day, was inhaling all the flowers which she had gathered.

The old horse, frightened by the peacocks, broke one of the lines with a kick, got his legs entangled in it, and, galloping through the farmyard, dragged the washed linen after him.

At Madame Bordin’s wild screams Marianne rushed up. Père Gouy abused his horse: “Fool of a beast! Old bag of bones! Infernal thief of a horse!” – kicked him in the belly, and lashed his ears with the handle of a whip.

Bouvard was shocked at seeing the animal maltreated.

The countryman, in answer to his protest, said:

“I’ve a right to do it; he’s my own.”

This was no justification. And Pécuchet, coming on the scene, added that animals too have their rights, for they have souls like ourselves – if indeed ours have any existence.

“You are an impious man!” exclaimed Madame Bordin.

Three things excited her anger: the necessity for beginning the washing over again, the outrage on her faith, and the fear of having been seen just now in a compromising attitude.

“I thought you were more liberal,” said Bouvard.

She replied, in a magisterial manner, “I don’t like scamps.”

And Gouy laid the blame on them for having injured his horse, whose nostrils were bleeding. He growled in a smothered voice:

“Damned unlucky people! I was going to put him away when they turned up.”

The two worthies took themselves off, shrugging their shoulders.

Victor asked them why they had been vexed with Gouy.

“He abuses his strength, which is wrong.”

“Why is it wrong?”

Could it be that the children had no idea of justice? Perhaps so.

And the same evening, Pécuchet, with Bouvard sitting at his right, and facing the two pupils with some notes in his hand, began a course of lectures on morality.

“This science teaches us to exercise control over our actions.

“They have two motives – pleasure and interest, and a third, more imperious – duty.

“Duties are divided into two classes: first, duties towards ourselves, which consist in taking care of our bodies, protecting ourselves against all injury.” (They understood this perfectly.) “Secondly, duties towards others; that is to say, to be always loyal, good-natured, and even fraternal, the human race being only one single family. A thing often pleases us which is injurious to our fellows; interest is a different thing from good, for good is in itself irreducible.” (The children did not comprehend.) He put off the sanction of duties until the next occasion.

In the entire lecture, according to Bouvard, he had not defined “good.”

“Why do you wish to define it? We feel it.”

So, then, the lessons of morality would suit only moral people – and Pécuchet’s course did not go further.

They made their pupils read little tales tending to inspire them with the love of virtue. They plagued Victor to death.

In order to strike his imagination, Pécuchet suspended from the walls of his apartment representations of the lives of the good person and the bad person respectively. The first, Adolphe, embraced his mother, studied German, assisted a blind man, and was admitted into the Polytechnic School. The bad person, Eugène, began by disobeying his father, had a quarrel in a café, beat his wife, fell down dead drunk, smashed a cupboard – and a final picture represented him in jail, where a gentleman, accompanied by a young lad, pointed him out, saying, “You see, my son, the dangers of misconduct.”

But for the children, the future had no existence. In vain were their minds saturated with the maxim that “work is honourable,” and that “the rich are sometimes unhappy.” They had known workmen in no way honoured, and had recollections of the château, where life seemed good. The pangs of remorse were depicted for them with so much exaggeration that they smelled humbug, and after that became distrustful. Attempts were then made to govern their conduct by a sense of honour, the idea of public opinion, and the sentiment of glory, by holding up to their admiration great men; above all, men who made themselves useful, like Belzunce, Franklin, and Jacquard. Victor displayed no longing to resemble them.

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