GERMINAL

EMILE ZOLA

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Ottawa

http://www.archive.org/details/germinalz00zola

ETIENNE SHARING CATHERINE'S LUNCH.

GERMINAL.

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "L'ASSOMOIR," "NANA," "HELENE," "MAGDALEN FERAT," "POT BOUILLE," ETC., ETC.

TRANSLATED BY CARLYNNE.

CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:
BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.
1885.

COPYRIGHT,
1885.
BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.

DONOHUE & HENNEBERRY, Printers and Binders, Chicago.

INDEX.

Chapter.	Page.	Chapter	Page.
I	7	XXI	200
II	16	XXII	210
III	26	XXIII	221
IV	39	XXIV	232
V	49	XXV	242
VI	59	XXVI	252
VII	67	XXVII	261
VIII	76	XXVIII	271
IX	85	XXIX	284
X	96	XXX	297
XI	103	XXXI	309
XII	110	XXXII	320
XIII	120	XXXIII	330
XIV	131	XXXIV	341
XV	139	XXXV	353
XVI	148	XXXVI	366
XVII	157	XXXVII	376
XVIII	170	XXXVIII	391
XIX	178	XXXIX	406
XX	186	XL	424

GERMINAL.

CHAPTER I.

On an open plain, under a starless sky black and thick as ink, a solitary man was following the main road from Marchiennes to Montson, a paved way of ten kilometres, cutting straight through fields of beets. He could not even see the dark ground before him, and he was insensible to the immense plain around him, except from blasts of March wind, great gusts as on the sea, biting cold, sweeping over leagues of marsh and naked field. No shade of tree specked the sky; the road unfolded itself with the regularity of a jetty amid the darkening shadows of the night.

The man had started from Marchiennes at two o'clock. He had walked with great strides, shivering beneath the thin lining of his velvet vest and pantaloons. A small bundle, tied up in a checked handkerchief, annoyed him greatly, and he rested it against his hips, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, to enable him to put both hands into the depths of his pockets at the same time, hands benumbed and deprived of blood by the cutting east wind. A single thought occupied his mind—a mechanic without work and without home—the hope that the cold would be less severe after the break of day. For an hour and a half he had proceeded in this manner, when, two kilometres from Montson, he perceived, on the left, some red fires, three brasiers of glowing coal burning as if suspended in the open air. At first, through fear, he hesitated, then he could not resist the pitiful desire to warm his hands an instant.

A steep path ran down before him. Then all was dark. On his right was a high board fence shutting in a railroad, while on the left rose a weedy slope sur-

mounted by a confusion of gables, the outlines of a village of low and irregular roofs. He took about two hundred steps. Suddenly the fires again came into view close to him, at one side of the path, without his comprehending how they burned so high in the black sky like luminous moons. But close to the ground another spectacle made him pause. It was a heavy mass, a cluster of low buildings, from which rose the outlines of the chimney of a manufactory; strange lights came from the dirty windows, outside five or six dull lanterns were hanging from a frame structure, the blackened timbers of which vaguely defined the outlines of a huge trestle-work, and from that phantom-like apparition, shrouded in smoke and darkness, a single sound was heard, the long, loud respiration of escaping steam, which was not visible.

Then the young man saw it was a mine. He again became disheartened. What good? He would get no work there. Instead of directing his steps toward the building, he finally ventured to climb the hill on which burned the three coal fires, in iron kettles, to give light and heat. The outside workmen had been obliged to work late; they were still clearing away the useless rubbish. Now he could hear the pushers shoving their cars upon the trestles, and he distinguished flitting shadows tipping them up near each fire.

"Good-evening," said he, approaching one of the kettles.

The driver was standing with his back to the fire, a little old man, dressed in a purple wool jacket, on his head was an old rabbit-skin cap; while his horse, a large fawn-colored beast, waited motionless as stone, while they emptied the six cars which he had drawn up. This work was done by an assistant, a jolly fellow, red and healthy, who hurried little, pressing upon the lever with a heavy hand. Up there the wind was still more severe, a freezing wind, whose great regular blasts swept on like the blows of a scythe.

"Good-evening," replied the old man.

Silence followed. The man who felt himself regarded with suspicion immediately made known his name.

"I call myself Etienne Lantier, I am a machinist. Is there not some work for me here?"

The flames threw a light upon him, he was about twenty-one years old, very dark, a handsome fellow, apparantly strong notwithstanding his slight limbs.

Reassured, the driver shook his head.

"Work for a machinist? No, no. . . . There were two here yesterday. There was nothing for them."

A gust of wind cut off his words. Then, Etienne demanded, pointing to the dark spot where the buildings stood at the foot of the hill, "That is a mine, is it not!"

This time the old man could not respond. A violent fit of coughing choked him. Finally he spat, and his spittle left a dark spot upon the ground.

"Yes, a mine, the Voreux. The entrance is close by."

Then, with out-stretched arm, he pointed out in the darkness, the village, the confused roofs of which the young man had already discerned. But the six cars were empty; with limbs stiff from rheumatism, he followed them without a crack of the whip, as the great fawn-colored horse had started off again, unbidden, plodding along between the rails, under a fresh squall of wind which ruffled up his coat.

The Voreux was now becoming dear to him. Etienne, who had forgotten to warm his blood-chilled hands at the fire, was intently studying and making out each part of the mine; the tarred shed for screening, the tower of the shafts, the large room for the hoisting engine and the square turret of the machine for draining. This mine, down in a hollow, with its low brick buildings, lifting its chimney like a threatening horn, to him had the horrid semblance of a ravenous beast, crouching there ready to devour the world. While he was looking, he thought over his life of the last eight days, a tramp seeking a place; again he saw himself in the railway shops, slapping the face of his chief, driven from Lille, driven from everywhere; Saturday he had arrived in Marchiennes, where they told him he could get work at Forges; but there was nothing, either at Forges or at Sonneville, he had spent Sunday concealed in a shipyard from which the superintendent ejected him at two o'clock in the morning. Nothing, not a sou, not even

a crust, had he obtained on the road; without aim, not even knowing where to shelter himself from the storms. Yes, it was undoubtedly a mine, the strange lanterns lit up the entrance to the shaft, a door opening suddenly enabled him to catch a glimpse of the furnaces of the boilers in a bright light. He now understood the escapement of steam, that great long respiration, puffing without stop, as if the breath of the monster was choked.

The assistant, rounding his back, had not even lifted his eyes to Etienne, and the latter was about to take up his little bundle, which had fallen on the ground, when a fit of coughing announced the return of the driver. They saw him coming slowly out of the darkness, followed by the fawn-colored horse, who was bringing up six new-filled cars.

"Are there any works in Montson?" asked the youth.

The old man spit black, then answered in the wind:

"Oh, it's not works that are wanted; that ought to have been seen three or four years ago. Everything was prosperous, it was impossible to find workmen, they had never earned so much. . . . And then they began to feel the pangs of hunger. Sad fact for the country; they discharged the people, the shops shut up one after the other. . . . It is not the fault of the Emperor, perhaps, but why does he go to fight in America without considering that the brutes die of cholera as well as others?"

Then, in short sentences, with breath interrupted, both continued to complain. Etienne related his useless journey of a week. Must he perish from hunger? Soon the roads would be full of beggars.

"Yes," said the old man; "that will be a bad ending, for it is not in accordance with God's purpose to throw all Christians into the streets."

"We don't have meat every day."

"Still, if one has bread!"

"True, if we only have bread!"

Their voices were lost; gusts of wind carried away the words with a plaintive moan.

"There's Montson," resumed the driver in a loud voice, turning toward the south.

And again extending his hand, he pointed toward

some objects invisible in the darkness, naming them in order. Down there in Montson the sugar-works of Fauvelle are still going, but the works of Hoton are shut down; there is nothing but the boiler-works of Dutilleuil and the rope manufactory of mine cables belonging to Bienze which are still running. Then, with a sweeping gesture extending over half the horizon, he pointed to the north, the machine shops of Sonneville had not received two-thirds of their usual orders; of the three blast furnaces of Forges and of Marchiennes, only two were lit, and even at the glass works of Gagebois a strike was threatened, for they talked of a reduction of salary.

"I know, I know," repeated the young man at each indication, "I understand."

"We others have gone on up to the present," added the driver. "The mines, however, have decreased their work, look before you at the Victoria, they have only two tiers of coke ovens which are going."

He spat and started out again behind his sleepy horse, after having hitched him to the empty cars.

Now Etienne understood the whole country. The shades of night were still deep, but the old man had so filled them with great forebodings, that the youth unconsciously felt himself, particularly at that hour, within the limitless unknown. Was not that a cry of hunger which followed the March wind through that naked country! The winds were enraged, they seemed to bear the death of work, and a famine which should destroy many people. And with his wandering eyes he endeavored to pierce the darkness, distressed by the desire and yet the fear of sight. Everything is annihilated in the unknown obscurity of night; he could only perceive, in the distance, the blast furnaces and the coke fires. These with rows of a hundred chimneys, set obliquely, traced by the ascent of ruddy flames; while two towers more to the left burned up all blue in the open air like giant torches. It had the sadness of incendiarism, no lights of stars shone forth from the threatening sky, only these nocturnal fires belonging to a country of coal and iron.

"You are perhaps from Belgium," resumed the driver, having returned behind Etienne.

This time he had only brought three cars. They could easily be emptied; an accident had happened at the hoisting cage, a screw-nut broke, stopping the work for a quarter of an hour. At the foot of the hill, a silence had fallen, the *moulineurs* were no longer shaking the trestles with their constant pushing. One only heard coming from the mine the distant sound of a hammer striking upon iron.

"No, I am from the south," responded the young man.

The assistant, after having emptied the carts, seated himself upon the ground, glad of the accident, maintaining his mute unsociability. He had simply raised his large dull eyes to the driver as if annoyed by all his talk. The latter, in fact, spoke very little usually. It was necessary that the face of a stranger pleased him, and that he should be found in one of those longings for confidence which sometimes make old people talk aloud even to themselves.

"As for me," said he, "I'm from Montson; I'm called Bonnemort."

"Is that a surname?" asked Etienne, astonished.

The old man laughed in a disagreeable manner and pointed to the Voreux.

"Yes, yes; they have taken me three times from inside—once with all my skin scorched, another time with the earth up to my throat, the third with my stomach filled with water like a frog. . . . Then when they saw that I couldn't be killed, they called me 'Bonnemort,' for fun."

His gaiety redoubled, and his disagreeable laugh brought on a terrible fit of coughing. The fire kettle now fully lit up his great head with its strange looking white hair, and his unanimated face of a livid hue, covered with bluish spots. He was short, with an enormous neck, the calves of his legs and his heels bare, with long arms and hands which reached down to his knees; as for the rest, like his horse which remained motionless upon its feet without appearing to feel the wind, he seemed of stone, he acted as though he had no suspicion of the cold or the gusts of wind whistling in his ears. When he coughed, his throat was racked in a terrible manner;

he spat at the foot of the kettle, and the ground was blackened.

Etienne looked at him, and then at the ground which he stained in that manner.

"Have you worked in the mine a long time?" said he.

Bonnemort threw up both arms.

"A long time, ah! yes! I wasn't eight years old when I went right down into the Voreux, and I'm forty-eight now. Reckon a little I've been everything in there, '*galibut*' first, then '*herchem*,' as I had the strength to succeed in each kind of work in rotation, then '*haveur*' for eighteen years. Finally, on account of my cursed limbs, they put me above ground, as outside workman, until they wanted me to go to the bottom, for the doctor said I'd go there to stay. Then, after I had five years of that, they made me a driver. Well, its all right, forty years of a mine with thirty-five spent at the bottom."

While he was speaking some pieces of burning coal, which meanwhile had fallen from the kettle, illumined his sallow face with a reddening reflection.

"They told me to rest," continued he. "Me—I couldn't do that. If they think me so foolish, I'll keep on two years longer until my sixtieth year, to get the pension of a hundred and sixty sous. If I should wish them good-day to-day, they would immediately give me a hundred and fifty. They're sly, the rogues! . . . Moreover, I'm sound apart from my legs. You see, it's the water which has entered beneath the skin, on account of being soaked in the mine. Some days I can't move a foot without crying."

A coughing spell again interrupted him.

"And that is what makes you cough so?" said Etienne.

But he shook his head violently. Then, when he could speak:

"No, no, I caught cold some months ago. I never used to cough, but now I can't get rid of it. . . . The strange thing is that I spit—it's strange. . . ."

His throat again filled up and he spat black.

"Do you spit blood?" demanded Etienne, at last daring to question him.

Slowly Bonnemort wiped off his mouth with the back of his hand.

"It's coal. . . . I have enough in my carcass to warm me the rest of my days. And I've not put my foot down below for five years. I had that on hand, sure. Bah! it keeps."

There was silence, the neighboring hammer beat its regular blows in the mine, the wind passed on with its wail like the cry of hunger and weariness coming from the depths of the night. Before the flames which looked wild, the old man continued in a lower voice, turning over in his mind the days gone by. Ah! certainly, it was not yesterday that he and his struck the vein! His family had worked for the company of the Montson mines since the start; and that dated far back, it had been then already a hundred and six years. His grand-father, Guillaume Maheu, a boy of thirteen years then, had found the rich coal at Requillart, the first mine of the company, an old abandoned mine to-day, down near the sugar-mill of Fauvelle. All the country knew him, to prove which the vein discovered was called the vein Guillaume, the first name of his grand-father. He had not known him, a large man they say, very strong, who died of old age at sixty years. Then his father, Nicolas Maheu, called le Rouge, when less than forty years of age, was burned in the Voreux, that they were sinking at that time: a cave-in completely crushed him, the rocks drank his blood and swallowed up his bones. Two of his uncles and his three brothers, later on, had also lost their lives there. He, Vincent Maheu, who of them all was left a little better preserved, except the crooked legs, passed for a rogue. What matter, however! he worked. They said that of the father and his sons, like they would have said anything else. His sons, All-saints-day Maheu had died, and his little sons, and all his people who were working in front of him, in the same gallery. One hundred and five years of digging down, the children after the old men, for the same master: well; many of the bosses could not have told so good a story.

"Still, when one can eat!" murmured Etienne again.

"That's what I say: while one has bread to eat one can live."

Bonnemort became silent, his eyes turned toward the alley, where some lights shone out one by one. Four o'clock sounded by the clock of Monston, the cold became greater.

"And is your company rich?" asked Etienne.

The old man lifted his shoulders, then let them drop, as though overwhelmed by the thought of money.

"Ah! yes; ah! yes. . . . Not as rich, perhaps as its neighbor the company of Anzin. But millions and millions all the same. They can't count them any longer. . . . Nineteen mines, of which thirteen are worked, the Voreux, Victoire, Crèvecœur, Miron, Saint-Thomas, Madeleine, Feutry-Cantel and still others, and six which are worn out, with air shafts like Réquillart. . . . Ten thousand workmen, grants which extend over sixty-seven communes, an output of five thousand tons per day, a railroad uniting all the mines, and some shops and buildings. . . . Ah! yes; ah! yes, they have money!"

A rolling of cars upon the way, made the great fawn-colored horse prick up his ears. The cage had been repaired below, and the *moulineurs* had resumed their work. While he harnessed the beast to redescend, the driver added softly, speaking to himself:

"You mustn't let yourself talk so much, deuced idleness! . . . If M. Hennebeau knew how much time had been spent."

Etienne, deep in thought, was looking out into the night. He inquired:

"Then the mine belongs to M. Hennebeau?"

"No," explained the old man, "M. Hennebeau is only the overseer. He is payed like us."

With a gesture the young man stared into the boundless depths of the night.

"Whose is it, then?"

But Bonnemort remained an instant suffocated by a new fit of coughing of such violence that he could not get his breath. At last, when he had spat and wiped the black matter from his lips, he said, in the wind which was increasing:

"What — to whom does it belong? We don't know. To somebody." And with his hand he pointed into the darkness vaguely to an unknown and remote place, in-

habited by those people for whom the Maheus had dug the vein for more than a century. His voice had taken a sort of religious fear; it was as if he had spoken of an inaccessible tabernacle, where was hidden the unknown God who gave them their portion without their knowing him.

"But if, at least, one had bread in sufficiency!" repeated Etienne for the third time without apparent change.

"Yes, indeed! if one always had bread, that would be good."

The horse had started, the driver disappeared in his turn, with the loitering step of an invalid. The assistant had not budged; drawn up in a ball, with his chin thrust between his knees, his great dull eyes were fixed upon vacancy.

When he had taken up his bundle Etienne still loitered. He felt the wind freezing his back, while in front he was burning before the huge fire. Perhaps, all the same, it would be wise for him to inquire at the works; the old man could not know; then he became resigned, he would accept any work. Where could he go, and what would become of him in that country famishing from the stoppage of work; must he lay his carcass behind a wall like a lost dog? But he hesitated through fear of the Voreux, in the midst of that level plain shrouded by a night so thick. At every blast the wind seemed stronger, as if it blew from a constantly enlarging horizon. Not one peep of day whitened that dead sky, the high chimneys alone flamed out, and the coke fires reddened the darkness without revealing the unknown. And the Voreux at the bottom of the hollow, with its settlement of wretched creatures, was still more darkly hidden, breathing a deeper and longer breath, troubled with its painful digestion of human flesh.

CHAPTER II.

Among fields of wheat and beets, the alley of the Duexcent-Quarante slept under the dark night. One could vaguely distinguish from long rows of little houses

back to back, regularly laid out, parallel, as in barracks, or a hospital, which three wide streets separated, dividing into equal plats. On the bleak plain, there was only heard the wail of the wind tearing away the trelliage of the inclosure.

At Maheu's house, number 16 on the last row, no one was moving. The darkest gloom filled the single room on the first floor, as though to overwhelm with its weight the sleep of the human beings resting there, sleeping with open mouths, overcome with fatigue. In spite of the terrible cold outside, the heavy air was quite warm, that stifling heat of badly ventilated rooms, tainted by the occupants.

Four was struck by the wooden clock on the first floor, no one moved as yet, heavy breathing was constantly heard, accompanied by two loud snores. And suddenly Catherine awoke. In her weariness she had counted as usual the four strokes of the bell, through the ceiling, without the strength to completely awake herself. Then throwing her limbs out of the bed, she groped around; at length striking a match, she lit the candle. But she remained seated on the edge of the mattress, her head so heavy that it fell backward, yielding to an invincible wish to again drop upon the pillow.

Now the candles lit up the room, square, having two windows and filled with three beds. There was a bureau, a table, two walnut chairs, while a smoky appearance hung heavily on the walls of the room, painted a light yellow. This was all; some rags hung on nails, a jug was placed on the table beside a red pan, used as a wash-basin. In the bed on the left, Zacharie, the eldest, a boy of twenty-one years, was lying with his brother Jeanlin, who had just completed his eleventh year; in the bed on the right two little children, Lenore and Henri, the first six and the other four years of age, were sleeping in each other's arms, while Catherine shared the third bed with her sister, so small, although nine years of age, that she could scarcely have felt her by her side had it not been for the hump on the little invalid which crowded her ribs inward. The glazed door was open, and you could see the stairway and a small room where the mother and father occupied a fourth bed, by

the side of which they were obliged to place the cradle of the last comer, Estelle, scarce three months old.

Meanwhile Catherine made a desperate effort. She ran both hands through the red hair which covered her forehead and neck. Thin for her sixteen years, her limbs were not exposed below the straight skirt of her chemise; only her feet appeared, bluish as if tattoed with coal, and her thin arms, white as milk, which contrasted with the sallow tint of her face, already spoiled by continual washing with soft soap. One last yawn opened her rather large mouth, filled with superb teeth in pale sickly gums; while her watery grey eyes, striving against sleep with an expression sad and weary, seemed to be filled with the fatigue of her entire person.

A growl arose from the landing, the voice of Maheu stammering out:

"Good heavens! it is time to get up. . . . Have you a light, Catherine?"

"Yes, father. . . . The clock has just struck, down stairs."

"Make haste then, drone. If you had danced less yesterday, you would have awakened us sooner. . . . There's an idle life for you."

And he continued to growl, but sleep at last overcame him, and his reproaches, which were taken no notice of, died away in another snore.

The young girl, still in her chemise, moved about the room in her bare feet; pausing before the bed of Henri and Lenore, she laid over them the covers which they had thrown off; they did not awake, lost in the sound sleep of infancy. Alzire, her eyes open, turned over and took the warm place of her large sister, without saying a word.

"Get up, Zacharie! and you, too, Jeanlin, get up!" said Catherine standing before the two brothers who remained silent, their noses in the pillow.

She seized the largest boy by the shoulder and shook him, then when he became abusive she snatched the coverings off him. That amused her, for she laughed loudly, when she saw the two boys struggling, with bare legs.

"That's silly; leave me alone!" stammered Zacharie,

in a bad humor, when he sat up. "I don't like that fun, it's enough to say it's time to get up."

He was thin, ill-formed, his face long, covered with an odd-looking beard, with the yellow hair and sallow complexion of all the family. When his shirt was thrown up he pulled it down, not from shame, but because it was cold.

"The clock has struck," said Catherine. "Get up, lazy! your father will be angry."

Jeanlin, who was circled up in a heap, opened his eyes and said: "Go 'way and stop your fooling; I'm sleepy."

She laughed again. He was so little with his puny legs and large joints, swollen with scrofula, that she took him in her arms. He kicked about, his wan, monkey-like face and curly head, with his sharp eyes and large ears, turning pale with rage, because he was feeble. He said nothing, he knew in his heart she was doing right.

"Bad child!" murmured she, repressing a sob and placing him on the floor.

Alzire, silent, the sheet drawn up to her chin, was not asleep. She followed, with the intelligent eyes of an invalid, her sister and two brothers, who were now dressing themselves. Another quarrel broke out around the wash-basin, the boys hustled the young girl out of the way, because it took her too long to wash. Their night clothes flew off, while, still filled with sleep, they dressed themselves with the tranquil freedom of a litter of young dogs growing up together. Catherine was ready first. She jumped into her miner's trousers, slipped on the linen vest, knotted the blue scarf around her head, and in this weekday garb she had the appearance of a little man; nothing remained of her sex except the slightly waddling gait.

"When the old man comes back," said Zacharie spitefully, "he'll be glad to find the bed tossed up. . . . I'll tell him 'twas you, you know."

He spoke of the grandfather, old Bonnemort, who worked at night and slept during the day. The bed never was cold, it always had some one snoring within it.

Without replying, Catherine was pulling up the coverings and tucking them in. But, at that instant a

noise was heard the other side of the wall, in the neighboring house. These brick buildings, economically constructed by the company, were so frail that the least breath traversed them. They lived elbow to elbow as it were, from one end of the row to the other, and nothing of private life remained concealed, even to the children. A heavy step shook the stairs, then there was a sound something like a light fall, followed by a sigh of relief.

"Good! . . ." said Catherine, "Levaque has gone down stairs, and here is Bouteloup, who is coming up again to see Levaque's wife."

Jeanlin sneered, the eyes of Alzire shone. Every morning they amused themselves thus, with the intimacy of these three neighbors, a *haveur* who lodged an outside workman which gave the woman two men, one for the night and the other for the day.

"Philomene is coughing," resumed Catherine, after listening.

She was speaking of the Levaque's eldest, a large girl of nineteen years, the mistress of Zacharie, to whom she had already borne two children, with such weak lungs though that she was a sifter, and never had worked inside the mine.

"Ah, yes. Philomene," replied Zacharie. "She don't mind that, she's asleep. She's a pig to sleep until six o'clock."

He was putting on his pants when he opened a window as if a thought had suddenly struck him. Outside, in the dark, the alleyway was lit up, lights shone out one after another between the cracks of the window blinds. And that was the occasion of another dispute with his sister. He leaned out trying to see if the superintendent, whom they accused of visiting Pierron's wife, was at her house across the way, when his sister told him that since the day before the husband had been doing day work at the breaker, and that Dansaert could not possibly have slept there that night. The air entered in chilling puffs, both were becoming angry maintaining the correctness of their knowledge, when cries broke out. They were from the cradle. The cold was disturbing Estelle.

Suddenly Maheu awoke, they heard him growling

angrily. What was the matter with him? he had slept like a beggar! And he swore so loud that the child beside him held its breath. Zacharie and Jeanlin slowly finished washing themselves, they were weary even now. Alzire, her great eyes open, watched them constantly. The two little ones, Lenore and Henri, with their arms around each other, had not moved, breathing regularly, in spite of the tumult.

"Catherine, give me the candle!" cried Maheu.

She finished buttoning her vest and carried the candle into the chamber, leaving her brothers to find their clothing from the little light which came through the door. Her father jumped out of bed. But she did not stop, she went down stairs in her coarse woolen stockings, and feeling her way she lit another candle in the kitchen to prepare the coffee. All the shoes of the family were under the cupboard.

"Shut up," said Maheu, exasperated by Estelle's continued crying.

He was short like old Bonnemort, and resembled him in stoutness; his head was large, his face of a livid hue, with close-cut yellow hair. The infant yelled louder, frightened by the great bare arms which were held above her.

"Let her alone; you know very well that she will not be quiet," said the mother, stretching herself out in the middle of the bed.

She also, having just awakened, began to complain. It was too bad never to get a good night's rest. Couldn't they leave quietly? Buried in the covering, she only showed her long figure and traces of a lifeless kind of beauty, already destroyed at the age of thirty-nine years by her life of misery and the seven children which she had borne. With her eyes on the ceiling, she began to speak slowly, while her husband dressed himself. The infant was still crying, neither paying any attention to it.

"Well, I've told you I haven't a sou left, and this is Monday—still six days to wait for the fifteenth. This can't go on any longer. All of you only earn nine francs a day, and how do you expect me to get along? We have ten in the family."

"Oh! nine francs," growled Maheu. "Zacharie and

I three, that makes six. . . . Catharine and the father two, that makes four; four and six, ten. . . . and Jeanlin one, that makes eleven."

"Yes, eleven; but there are the Sundays and the days you knock off. Never more than nine, do you see."

He did not reply at once, being engaged in looking on the floor for his leather belt. Then he said, raising himself up:

"You shouldn't grumble. I'm healthy, anyhow. There are very few at the age of forty-two who haven't been through some sickness."

"True, old man, but that doesn't give us bread. What am I going to do? You have nothing."

"I have two sous."

"Keep them for a drink. . . . My God! what am I going to do; six days, they will never end. We owe sixty francs to Maigrat, who turned me from his door the day before yesterday. He refused to give us a loaf of bread. That will not prevent me from going to him again to-day. But if he keeps on refusing . . ."

And the woman continued in a plaintive tone, her head motionless, closing her eyes for an instant to shut out the light of the candle. She said the cupboard was empty, the children wanted bread, even coffee was needed, for water gave them the colic; the long days must pass in trying to satisfy their hunger with boiled cabbage leaves. Little by little she had been obliged to raise her voice, for the screams of Estelle drowned her words. These cries became unbearable. Maheu seemed all at once to become conscious of them. Almost crazy, he seized the little one from the cradle and threw her upon the bed of the mother, stammering with rage:

"Take her, or I'll choke her. Great heavens, that child! She don't want anything, and yet she makes more fuss than anyone else."

Estelle had at last began to nurse. Disappearing under the covers, quieted by the warmth of the bed, she made no sound but a little smack of the lips.

"Didn't the rich folks of the Piolaine tell you to go and see them?" resumed the father, at the end of a silence.

The mother puckered up her mouth with an air of contempt.

"Yes, they met me; they'll give some clothing to the poor children. . . . At any rate I'll take Lenore and Henri to them this morning. If they would only give me a hundred sous!"

Silence was renewed. Maheu was ready. He stood still a moment, then he concluded with his harsh voice:

"What do you want; it is always so; get some soup. . . . This won't keep us from starving, it is better to be below at work."

"That's so," responded the wife. "Blow out the candle, I don't want to see the color of my thoughts."

He blew out the candle. Zacharie and Jeanlin had already gone down; he followed them, and the wooden staircase creaked under their heavy feet clothed in wool. Behind them, in the passage and chamber, it was dark again. The little ones were sleeping, even Alzire's eyelids were closed. But the mother now remained with her eyes open in the darkness, while pulling upon her weary breast, Estelle purred like a little kitten.

Down stairs, Catherine was at first busy at the stove which had an iron flue, an oven on each side and a grate in the centre, in which a coal fire was constantly burning. The company gave monthly to each family eight bushels of screenings, hard coal picked up on the tracks. It lit with difficulty, and the young girl who covered the fire every night was obliged to rake it in the morning and add some little pieces of soft coal, sorted out with care. Then she placed a kettle full of water upon the grate and knelt down before the cupboard.

It was a large enough room, taking up the whole ground floor, painted apple green, of a Flemish neatness, with its flagstones well washed and sprinkled with white sand. Beside the cupboard of varnished pine, the furniture consisted of a table and some chairs of the same wood. Hanging on the wall, gaudily colored, were the portraits of the Emperor and Empress given by the company, some soldiers and saints, a mixture of gilt, harmonizing strangely with the plain nakedness of the room, and for other ornaments, there was only a box of red paste-board upon the cupboard and a wooden clock with a glass front, whose loud tic-tac seemed to fill the emptiness of the place. Near the door of the

stairs, another door led to the cellar. In spite of the great cleanliness, an odor of cooked onions, shut in since the day before, poisoned the warm air which was already heavily charged with coal gas.

Meanwhile, before the open cupboard, Catherine was reflecting. There was left, only one loaf of bread, with cheese in sufficiency, but scarcely a particle of butter, and it was a question, how to make sandwiches for all four. At last she decided, cutting the slices as thin as possible and covering one with cheese and another with butter she laid them together, and the lunch which was carried each morning to the mine was ready. Soon the four portions were in a row on the table, dealt out with a severe justice, from the great one for the father to the little one for Jeanlin.

But the water had commenced to sing in the kettle. Catherine, who appeared to be a good housekeeper, could not, however, help musing over the things which Zacharie had told her, about the superintendent and the wife of Pierron, for she opened the street door and glanced outside with an instinctive movement, in spite of the certainty that where she stood there was nothing out of the way to be seen, that morning. The wind was still blowing, numerous lights fell upon the long projective fronts of the alley, from which went up the low hum of awakening. Doors were already opening, and dark files of workmen were moving off in the gloom. She was foolish to freeze herself there when the feeder at the breaker was still sleeping, before going to work at six o'clock! Yet she remained there watching the house before her, in the flat across the way. The door opened, her curiosity was excited. But it was only Pierron's little Lydie, who was starting for the mine.

The hissing sound of steam made Catherine start. She shut the door and ran in, the water was boiling over, putting out the fire. There was no more coffee, she must be contented with pouring the water upon the old grounds; then she sweetened it with brown sugar. Just then her father and two brothers came down.

"Plague take it!" said Zacharie, when he had put his lips to the cup, "this won't weaken our heads."

Maheu shrugged his shoulders with a resigned air.

"Bah! it's hot all the same, its good."

Jeanlin picked up the bits of bread and butter and put them in his cup. Catharine after drinking, finished by draining the coffee pot into tin pails. All four remained standing, badly lit up by the smoking candle, drinking in haste.

"Well, we're finished!" said the father. "One would think we were rich."

But a voice came from the staircase, the door of which they had left open. It was the mother, who cried:

"Take all the bread, I have a little vermicelli for the children."

"Yes, yes!" responded Catherine.

She had again covered the fire, leaving upon one corner of the grate the remaining cup of coffee, which the grandfather would find hot when he returned at six o'clock. Each took their pair of shoes from under the cupboard, placed the string of the tin pail over their shoulders, and stuffing the sandwich between the shirt and vest at their back, they went out, the men first, the girl behind, who blew out the candle and turned the key. The house again became dark.

"Hold on! we'll all go together," said a man who had shut the door of the next house.

It was Levaque, with his son Bebert, a boy of twelve years, a great friend of Jeanlin.

Catherine, surprised, was laughing behind Zacharie; What? Bouteloup does not even wait for the husband to leave!

Now, in the alley, the lights were going out. A last door shut, all slept again, the wives and the little ones returned to their naps in the middle of the less crowded beds. And from the silent village to the Voreux, under the heavy blasts, a slow file of shadows went on, it was the departure of the coal men for work, shrugging their shoulders, folding their arms across their breasts, while the sandwiches made a hump on each back. Clothed in light linen, they shivered with cold, without hurrying, marching along the road like an army.

CHAPTER III.

ETIENNE had ventured to approach the Voreux; and all the men to whom he addressed himself, asking if he could get work there, shook their heads and ended by telling him to wait for the superintendent. They left him alone, in the midst of the badly lit buildings, filled with black holes confusing with the intricacy of their rooms and floors. He had just mounted a dark flight of steps, half decayed, when he found himself upon a swinging foot-bridge, then having passed through the screening shed, he plunged into a darkness so profound that he walked with his hands before him, so as not to hurt himself. Suddenly, in front of him, two enormous yellow eyes hown out of the gloom. He was under the tower, at the superintendent's office at the mouth of the shaft.

A miner, the elder Richomme, with a large soldier-like figure and gray mustache, was walking slowly, directing his steps toward the superintendent's office.

"Do they need a workman here, no matter for what kind of work?" again inquired Etienne.

Richomme started to say no; but he checked himself and responded, like the others, with a nod of the head:

"Wait for Monsieur Danseart, the superintendent."

Four lanterns were set there, and the reflections, which were all turned toward the mouth of the shafts shone brightly upon the iron inclined plane, the handspikes and the plane upon which the two cages were slid in. As for the rest, the large room, like the nave of a church, remained in a strange light, filled with great floating shadows. Only the oil light flamed out at the end of the place, while in the superintendent's room a small lamp gleamed like a dim star. The hoisting had just been resumed; and upon the iron flagging there was a continual din, the coal cars rolling by without ceasing, the running to and fro of the *moulineurs*, whose long, bent forms were distinguishable in the midst of the confusion of all these black and noisy things, which were in constant motion.

For an instant Etienne remained motionless, deafened, blinded. He was chilled with the currents of air coming in from outside. Then he stepped forward attracted by the engine, the shining steel and copper of which he now saw. It was located twenty-five metres in front of the shaft, in a higher room, and set so firmly upon its brick foundation that it ran at full steam, with all its four hundred horse power, with no movement but that of the crank, which rose and fell with a well-oiled smoothness, shaking the floor. The engineer stood at the throttle, listening for the sound of the signal, his eyes never leaving the indicator; on which the shaft was represented, with its different galleries by a vertical grove through which some plummets ran suspended by cords and representing the cages. And at each departure, when the engine was again started, the drums, two great cylinders five metres in circumference, about the centers of which steel cables wind and unwind in opposite directions, revolving with such rapidity that they look like nothing more than dust.

"Take care!" cried two miners who were dragging a huge ladder.

Etienne had just escaped injury, his eyes becoming accustomed to the light, he watched the cable moving in the air, more than thirty metres of steel ribbon, which went up swiftly into the tower where they passed over the drums and then decended perpendicularly into the shaft to be connected to the hoisting cages. An iron framework similar to the high framework of the tower supported the drums. It was like the flight of birds, without noise, without collision, the movement swift, the continual coming and going of a cable of enormous weight, which would lift as much as twelve thousand kilogrammes at the rate of ten metres a second.

"Great Heavens, look out!" again cried the men who were dragging the ladder to the other side to examine the drum on the left.

Slowly Etienne returned to the superintendent's office. That gigantic flight above his head astounded him. And, shivering in the drafts of air, he watched the working of the cages, his ears cracked by the rolling of the cars. . . . Near the shaft the signal was

operated—a heavy hammer upon a lever that a cord pulled from below let drop upon a block. One blow to stop, two to descend, three to come up. It was without intermission, like the blows of a gavel controlling a tumult, accompanied by the clear sound of a bell, while the *moulineur* directing the movement often increased the noise by shouting orders through a speaking trumpet to the engineer. The cages in the middle of the clear space appeared and sank down again, were emptied and re-filled without Etienne's understanding anything of their complicated operations. He could only comprehend one thing: the shaft swallowed up the men in groups of twenty and thirty, and with a gulp so easy that he did not seem to notice them pass away. The descent of the workmen commenced at four o'clock. They arrived at the shed with bare feet, lamp in hand, waiting in little groups to make up the required number. Noiselessly, with the stealthy spring of a night animal, the iron cage came up out of the darkness and was secured by bolts, with its four compartments containing each two cars filled with coal. *Moulineurs*, at different landings, took out the cars and replaced them with others empty, or filled in advance with cut timber. And it was the empty cars that the workmen filled, five by five, as many as forty at a time. Whenever the compartments were full a voice cried through the speaking trumpet (meanwhile a cord was pulled four times for a signal below) shouting *A la viand*, for the purpose of giving information that the load was human flesh; then, with a slight jerk, the cage silently disappeared, dropping like a stone, leaving behind it only the trembling flight of the cable.

"Is it deep?" asked Etienne of a miner who was waiting near him, with a sleepy air.

"Five hundred and forty-four metres," responded the man. "But there are four levels below, the first at three hundred and twenty."

Both turned their eyes to the cable which was running up again. Etienne resumed:

"And what if that should break?"

"Ah! if it should!"

The miner finished the sentence with a shrug. His turn had arrived, the cage had reappeared with its easy,

tireless movement. He crouched down there with some others, it plunged down again, reappearing at the end of four minutes, only to take on a new gang of men. For a half hour the shaft swallowed them up in this manner, with a mouth more or less greedy, according to the depth of the level to which they descended. But without a pause, always hungry, with the stomach of a giant capable of digesting a family. It filled itself repeatedly, and while the shadows still remained the cage rose out of the pit in the same eager silence.

Etienne was again overtaken with the disheartened feeling which he had already experienced outside. Why trouble himself? that superintendent would dismiss him like the others. A vague fear suddenly determined him, he went away and stopped outside just before the boiler building. The door, wide open, showed seven boilers and two furnaces. In the midst of white steam and a hissing noise, a fireman was occupied in charging one of the furnaces, the scorching heat of which could be felt as far as the door sill; and the young man pleased with the thought of getting warm was approaching, when he nearly ran into another company of coal men who were arriving at the mine. It was Maheu and Levaque, when he perceived Catherine ahead with the air of a quiet boy, the wild idea seized him of risking a last inquiry.

"Say, now, comrade, they have no need of a workman here for anything, have they?"

She looked at him in surprise, a little afraid of that sudden voice which came in out of the shadow. But, behind her, Maheu had heard, and he replied, stopping a little as he spoke. No they had no need of anyone. But that poor devil of a workman dying upon the road, interested him; when he left him he said to the others:

"Well, we might be like that; we shouldn't complain, every one hasn't work to kill them."

The company entered and went straight to the waiting room. A great hall, rudely plastered, surrounded with closets which were secured with padlocks. In the center a huge furnace, a kind of stove without cover, was glowing, so stuffed with burning coal that pieces were cracking and sizzing upon the floor of beaten earth. The hall was only lit up by that fire of live

coal, the reflections of which danced along the dirty wainscoting up to the ceiling which was covered with black dust.

When the Maheus arrived, laughs broke forth in the great heat. Thirty of the workmen were standing, their backs to the flame, roasting themselves with an air of enjoyment. Before the descent they all came there to take and carry away in their skins a good bit of fire, to brave the dampness below. But that morning they were more cheerful, they joked with Morquette, a *hercheuse* of nineteen years, a jolly girl, whose large breasts and hips swelled out her vest and breeches. She lived in Requillart, with her father, old Moque, a groom, and her brother Moquet, a miner. The hours of work were the same for all, but she came alone to the mine, and among the wheat fields in summer or behind walls in winter she met her lovers of the week. She had had the whole mine, a fact mentioned by her companions without further notice. One day when a nailmaker of Marchiennes had taunted her, she nearly died of anger, crying that she respected herself so much; that she would cut off an arm if any one could say they had seen her with another than a miner.

"Isn't it the big Cheval any more?" said a miner, laughing. "And you're takin' that little fellow. He'll have to use a ladder, I've seen you behind Requillart, and to prove it he was standing on a stone." "Well?" responded Moquette, in a good humor, "what's that to you? We didn't call you to help us."

And these rude pleasantries increased the mirth of the men who were throwing forward their shoulders, scorched by the fire, while they shook with laughter. She walked among them, with an impudent air and tantalizing joke, with her projecting lumps of flesh exaggerated even to a deformity.

Meanwhile the fun ceased. Moquette was telling Maheu that Fleurance, big Fleurance, could come no more; they had found him the day before dead upon his bed, some said of a disease of the heart, and others, of a pint of gin drunk too quickly. And Maheu was in despair from the mishap, that was a loss of one of his *hercheuses*, without being able to immediately replace him. He did piecework; there were four *haveurs*

associated at his work, he, Zacharie, Levaque and Chaval. If they had only Catherine to push the cars, the work was going to suffer. Suddenly he had an idea:

"Hold on! there's that man who was looking for work."

Just then Dansaert passed before the waiting room. Maheu related the trouble to him, asking leave to hire the man; and he insisted upon the wish of the Company to gradually replace the pushers by youths like at Anzin. The superintendent smiled at first, the idea of excluding the women from inside was generally repugnant to the miners, who were not uneasy at placing their daughters there, little touched by the question of morality or health. Finally, after having hesitated, he gave permission, but with the reservation that his decision should be ratified by M. Negrel, the engineer.

"All right," declared Zacharie, "the man is not far off, if he has walked at all."

"No," said Catherine, "I saw him stop at the boilers."

"Go after him, idiot," cried Maheu.

The young girl rushed out, while a crowd of miners started down the shaft, yielding the fire to the others. Jeanlin did not wait for his father, but also went, taking his lamp, with Thebut, a great stupid boy, and Lydie, a wild girl of twelve years. Starting before them, Moquette was screaming on the dark stairway, calling them dirty brats and threatening to box their ears if they pinched her.

Étienne, in the boiler shed, was talking with the stoker who fed the fires. He shivered greatly at the thought of the cold night which he had passed. However, he had decided to set out again when he felt a hand placed on his shoulder.

"Come," said Catherine, "here's some work for you to do."

At first he did not understand. Then he experienced a feeling of joy, and vigorously pressed the hands of the young girl.

"Thanks, comrade. . . . Ah! you are indeed a good fellow."

She laughed, and looked at him in the red rays of the fire which lit them up. It amused her that he still

took her for a boy, her hair tucked up under her cap. He also laughed with pleasure, and they both remained an instant, laughing in each others faces, their cheeks glowing.

Maheu in the waiting room knelt down before his box, taking off his sabots and coarse woolen stockings. When Etienne arrived there they arranged all in a few words: thirty sous a day, it was hard work, but he would learn quickly. Maheu advised him to keep on his shoes and lent him an old cap, a leather head-dress, designed to protect the head, a precaution which the father and children disdained. The tools were taken out of the chest where they found all ready the shovel of Fleurance. Then when Maheu had shut up their sabots and also Etienne's bundle, he suddenly became impatient.

"What's the matter with that fool of a Chaval? We are a half hour late to-day."

Zacharie and Levaque shrugged their shoulders quietly. The first said at length:

"Is it Chaval we're waiting for? . . . He got here before us and went down at once."

"What! you knew that and you said nothing. . . Come on! come on! hurry up!"

Catherine, who was warming her benumbed hands, started to follow the party. Etienne let her pass, then followed. Again he found himself in a labyrinth of stairs and blind passages, where the bare feet made a soft noise like old socks. But suddenly, a small light blazed up, showing a glazed place filled with racks where a number of safety lamps were ranged in rows of a hundred, inspected and cleaned the evening before, shining out like tapers at the end of a lighted chapel. At the door each workman took his own, placed at his number and examined it, closing it up himself, while the time-keeper seated at a table inscribed upon the register the hour of the descent. Maheu was obliged to ask for a lamp for his new pusher. And there was still another precaution taken, the men walked in single file before an inspecter who satisfied himself if all the lamps were well shut up.

"The deuce! it's not warm here," murmured Catherine, shivering.

Etienne contented himself with nodding his head.

He again had that shrinking feeling before the shaft, in the midst of that vast hall, filled with currents of air. True, he thought he was brave, but there came a disagreeable sensation in his throat at the thundering of the cars, the heavy blows of the signal, the smothered bellowing of the speaking trumpet, in the sight of the continual flight of the cables which wound and unwound on their drums, with the engine at full steam. The cages rose and fell with their stealthy movement of an animal of the night, always taking down some men which the mouth of the pit seemed to swallow. It was his turn now, he was very cold, he maintained a nervous silence which made Zacharie and Levaque laugh; both had disapproved of the hiring of that unknown, Levaque especially, who was offended by not having been consulted. But Catherine was pleased at seeing her father explain things to the young man.

"See here, above the cage, here is a safety break, some iron clamps stick into the guides in case of a break. That works? Oh! not always. . . . Yes, the shaft is divided into three compartments, inclosed by planking from top to bottom. In the middle one are the cages, on the left one is a ladder.

But he stopped to growl without raising his voice.

"What's the matter? Good heavens! Is it right to freeze us in this manner?"

The boss, Richomme, who was likewise going down, his lamp fastened to a stud on his leather cap, heard the complaint.

"Take care, the walls have ears!" kindly said the old miner, true to his companions, "the work must be done. . . . Hold on! We are there, get in with your people."

The cage, composed of bars of iron and a fine wire mask, waited for them, held up by the locking bolts. Maheu, Zacharie, Levaque and Catherine crawled into a car at the bottom; and as it should hold five, Etienne entered also; but the good places were taken, and he was obliged to crouch down close to the young girl whose elbow stuck into his side. His lamp annoyed him, they advised him to fasten it to a button of his vest. He did not hear, and held it awkwardly in his hand. The loading continued above them, a mixed mass of

humanity. It seemed to him so long that he lost all patience. At last a jerk shook them up and all became dark, the objects around him disappearing while he experienced a strange sensation of falling. The only light of day came from above the two stories of the office, struggling through the network of timbers, then falling into the blackness of the pit it disappeared until no longer preceptible to the senses.

"Now we're off," said Maheu, quietly.

They were all easy. But he each moment asked himself if he was rising or falling. He was motionless while the cage went straight down without touching the guides, and with sudden bumps, finally producing a shaking of the joists which made him fear an accident. Meanwhile, he could not distinguish the walls of the shaft beyond the grating against which he had put his face; the lamps badly lit up the people at his feet. Only the open lamp of the boss in the neighboring car burned like a beacon.

"This one is four metres in diameter," continued Maheu, instructing him. "The tubing ought to be repaired, for the water filters on all sides. Hold on, we are arriving at a level, do you hear?"

Etienne suddenly asked himself what was that noise like a shower. Great drops finally sounded upon the top of the cage, at first like the beginning of a shower, and then the rain had increased, streaming down and changing into a veritable deluge. Without doubt, the roofing was broken in, for a stream of water ran down the shoulders of the young man; he trembled all over. The cold became intense, they were buried in a damp darkness. When they had rapidly gone down still lower they caught a glimpse of an opening where men were bustling about in the rays of a lamp. But in an instant they were lost to sight.

Maheu said:

"That is the first gallery. We are three hundred and twenty metres down. . . . Look how fast we go."

Raising his lamp, he lit up a joist of the guides, which ran like a rail under a train at full speed; and beyond that they could see nothing. Three other gal-

leries were passed in the twinkling of an eye. The deafening rain fell in the darkness.

"How dark it is!" murmured Etienne.

The descent seemed to have lasted for hours. He was suffering from the uneasy position which he had taken, not daring to stir, especially on Catherine's side. She did not speak a word; he only felt her against him, warming him up. When the cage stopped at last, at the bottom, at five hundred and forty metres, he was astonished to learn that the descent had lasted just one minute. But the sound of the bolts which were slipping in place and the feeling of solidity under him, suddenly cheered him up and made him so happy that he spoke familiarly to Catherine.

"What have you under your skin to be so warm? I have had your elbow in my side all the way."

Then she also made merry. He was stupid to still take her for a boy. He must be blind.

"I guess you've had it in your eyes—my elbow, I mean," responded she in the midst of a tempest of laughter which surprised the young man, who could not see the point.

The cage was emptied, the workmen passed through the main opening of that gallery, a room in the rock, arched with masonry, and where three great open lamps were burning. The loaders were actively rolling some full cars upon the iron flooring. A cave-like odor fell from the walls, a smell of nitre with warm breaths of air came from a neighboring stable. Four drifts were worked there, yawning and dark.

"Through here," said Maheu to Etienne. "You're not there yet; we've two good kilometres to go."

The workmen separated, disappearing in groups at the bottom of these dark holes. Fifteen men had just begun digging on the left, and Etienne walked behind Maheu who was preceded by Catherine, Zacharie and Levaque. It was a good wagon level cut out through a layer of coal and from a rock so solid that it had only needed to be partly walled. One after the other, they wind on and on by the little lights of the lamps. The young man hit against something at each step, catching his feet in the rails. Each instant a dull noise made him uneasy, the distant sound of a shower of rain, the

rush of which seemed to proceed from the bowels of the earth. Was that the thunder of the storm sending down upon their heads the enormous mass which separated them from the earth? A light pierced the night, he felt the rock tremble, and when he ranged himself along the wall like his comrades, he saw pass before his face a great white horse harnessed to a train of cars. Herbert was seated on the first, holding the guides and driving, while Jeanlin, his hands pressed against the back of the last car was running in his bare feet.

They resumed their march. Farther on a crossway appeared, two new drifts opened, and the party again divided, the men distributing themselves a few at a time in all parts of the mine. Now the wagon road was timbered, the wood, with its bark on, and of a palish yellow, supported the roof, making in the fallen rock an immense hole, sticking out of which one perceived sharp pieces of slate, sparkling with mica, and a heavy mass of stone, dull and rough. Trains of cars, full or empty, were continually passing, crossing each other with their loads, carried in the darkness by a dumb beast, with a phantom-like trot. Across the two rails of the road a long black serpent was sleeping, a train stopped, the horse snorted, so startled in the night that his haunches dropped like a block trembling from an arch. The rough wooden doors slowly closed up, and the farther they advanced the straighter and lower the drifts became, while the uneven ceiling forced them to bend their backs constantly.

Etienne severely bumped his head. Without the leather cap he would have cracked his skull. However, he followed with attention the least gestures of Maheu before him, whose dark shadow was produced by the rays of the lamp. Not one of the workmen knocked themselves; they were obliged to know each projection, every knot in the timber and enlargement of the rock. The young man was also distressed by the slipping ground which annoyed him more and more. Now and then he passed through some real pools which the muddiness of his feet alone revealed. But what surprised him still more was the sudden changes of temperature. At the foot of the shaft it was very fresh, and in the wagon line through which passed all the air of the

mine there blew a cold wind whose force was like a gale between the narrow walls; then as they passed into the other drifts, which received only their alloted portion of the air, the wind ceased, it grew hot, a choking heat, heavy as lead. For a quarter of an hour they had gone on and on through these narrow passages; and they were now entering into a more oven-like pit, blinding and melting.

Maheu no longer opened his mouth. He went into a drift simply saying to Etienne, without turning round:

"The vein Guillaume."

This was the vein where the lead was discovered.

From the first step Etienne struck his head and elbows. The sloping ceiling dropped so low as to be only twenty or thirty metres high in some places, making it necessary to walk doubled up. The water came up to their ankles.

His breath left him for an instant for the heat still increased. They proceeded thus two hundred metres when suddenly he saw Levaque, Zacharie and Catherine disappear, who seemed to be swallowed up in a small fissure opening before him.

"We must go up," said Maheu. "Put your lamp on a button and hold on to the wood."

He also disappeared. Etienne was compelled to follow him. This opening left in the vein was reserved for the miners and cleared the whole second floor. It extended through the layer of coal more than sixty centimetres. Happily the young man was slight, for still awkard he drew himself up with difficulty, flattening his shoulders and hips, pulling forward by the strength of his wrists, his hands clinging to the timber; at the end of fifteen metres they first came upon the second floor, but they must go on, the vein belonging to Maheu and his gang was at the sixth floor, "in Hell," as they said. The floors was ranged one above the other at distances of fifteen metres and the ascent still continued straight through that cleft which scraped the back and chest. Etienne was stifled as if the weight of the rocks rested upon him, his hands scratched, his legs bruised, his skin worn away so much that he could

feel the blood bursting out. Dimly in a path he perceived two doubled up beings, one small and one large who were pushing the cars, it was Lydic and Moquette already at work. But he must climb up to the highest part of the vein. The perspiration blinded him, he despaired of overtaking the others, whom he heard with agile limbs climbing the rock with a long glide.

"Courage, here we are," said the voice of Catherine.

But when he had really arrived, another voice cried at the end of the wall.

"Well, what's the matter? You don't think of any other folks. I have to come two kilometres from Montson, and I'm the first to get here."

It was Cheval, a tall, thin man of twenty-five years, with strong features, who was angry at being compelled to wait. When he perceived Etienne he inquired, with a contemptuous air.

"Who's this? what does this mean?"

And Maheu having told him the story, he added between his teeth—

"Then, the boys will take the bread from the girls!"

The two men exchanged a glance lit with hatred, which from intuition is felt on the instant. Etienne had felt the injury without being conscious of it. A silence reigned, then all set to work. The veins were at last filled. Little by little the leads were alive at each story, at the end of each path. The devouring shaft had swallowed its daily ration of men—almost seven hundred workmen who were laboring at that hour, in that huge swarm, boring holes in all parts of the earth; it was riddled like an old piece of wood filled with worms. And in the midst of a profound silence following the crushing of the heavy layers, with the ear held close to the rock, one could hear the steps of the human insects in walking and the flight of cable which sent the hoisting cage up and down, and even the scratching of the tools cutting the coal, at the bottom of the felling-board.

Etienne in turning around, found himself again pressed against Catherine. But this time he noticed the rising roundness of her neck and shoulders, he comprehended immediately the warmth which he had felt.

"Are you a girl?" murmured he, in astonishment.

She responded with a gay air, without blushing:

"Yes, it's true; but it's taken you a long time to find it out."

CHAPTER IV.

THE four diggers stretched themselves out one above the other, on each ledge in front of the drift. Separated by the hanging floors which kept back the coal, each man occupied four metres of the vein; and that vein was so narrow, scarcely more than fifty centimetres wide, that they seemed flattened out between the roof and wall, dragging themselves along on their knees and elbows, unable to turn without knocking their shoulders. They were obliged to mine the coal lying upon the side, the neck twisted, the arms raised in a slanting position, striking short blows with the pick.

Zacharie worked nearest the gallery; over him was Chaval, then Levaque, and above all Maheu. Each, with his pick, removed the layer of slate found in the vein; when they had finally loosened the stratum upon the bottom, they made two vertical notches and then detached the blea by driving a gad of iron in the upper part. The coal was rich, the blea broke in pieces the length of their bodies. When these pieces, kept back by the board, were all heaped up, the diggers disappeared, seeming to wall themselves up in the seam thus detached.

Maheu was the greatest sufferer. Where he toiled the temperature was higher by thirty degrees, the air did not circulate, and at length the suffocation became more intolerable than the heat. His lamp, fastened to a stud above him enabled him to see clearly, but so warmed his head as to bring the blood to fever heat. But his anguish was increased by the dampness. From a rock some centimetres above his face, came a continual and rapid dripping, in obstinate rythm, always falling in the same place. He threw his head back; the water beat against his face, streaming down, dripping over him without relaxation. In a quarter of an hour, with perspiration and water combined, he was

wet through. That morning a drop fell in his eye causing him to swear. Unwilling to leave his position, he gave such heavy blows that the violent shaking of the rocks placed him in a position similar to a moth held between two leaves of a book, threatened with complete destruction.

Not a word was exchanged. No sound was heard save the regular blows of the pick, muffled as though coming from a distance. Not an echo responded as the sounds came forth in the still air. Even the shadows were of an unknown darkness, dense with the flying coal-dust, rendered heavy by the gas which weighed upon the eye-lids. The lamp-wicks, under their cover of wire gauze, threw out only reddish gleams. Nothing was distinguishable, the drift arose like a large chimney, level, then oblique, where the soot of ten winters was heaped up, making a profound night. The dim lights fell on spectral forms, flitting to and fro, revealing rounded hips, knotty arms and heads smirched as though from a brawl. At times pieces of detached coal were suddenly lit up with a crystal-like reflection. Then darkness returned, while the heavy blows still continue, coupled with the panting of weary chests and groans of uneasiness and fatigue from the heavy air and falling water.

Zacharie, weak from a wedding party of the night before, soon slackened his work, under pretext of being lame, and forgetting himself, he whistled softly, his eyes roving on the shadows. Behind the diggers, almost three metres of the vein remained cleared, without their having taken the precaution to sustain the rock above, heedless of the danger, and stingy of their time.

"Halloo!" cried the young man to Etienne, "give me some wood."

Etienne, whom Catherine had taught to use his shovel, was obliged to carry up the wood into the drift. There was a small amount left there from the day before. A portion, ready cut, was brought down to them every morning.

"Hurry up now," cried Zacharie, seeing the newcomer awkwardly raising himself up among the coal, his arms encumbered with four pieces of oak.

With his pick, he made a notch in the ceiling, and

another in the wall; and wedged in two pieces of wood, thus propping up the rock. In the afternoon other workmen took the gobbing left at the end of the gallery by the diggers, and filled up the trench made in the vein where they saw the supports, arranging carefully through the inferior and superior roads, over which the cars were pushed.

Maheu paused, having at last detached his blea. He wiped his perspiring face upon his sleeve, uneasy at the work of Zacharie, behind him.

"Leave that alone," said he. "We'll see to it after lunch. . . . It'll be better to dig, if we want to have our number of cars."

"This is sinking," responded the young man. "Look, there's a crack. I'm afraid its giving way."

But his father shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, giving way! It wouldn't be the first time; they'd get out of it all the same." He ended by becoming angry, and sending his son back in front of the drift.

The others continued their work. Levaque, lying upon his back, was swearing; a falling stone had cut his left thumb, from which the blood was flowing. Chaval, overheated, had removed his shirt, and was now at work naked to the waist. The perspiration, added to the fine coal dust which blackened them, ran in streams down their half naked bodies. Maheu was the first to again commence striking, lower down, his head close to the rock. Now the drops falling upon his face so persistently seemed to pierce his skull.

"It ain't worth while to watch them," said Catherine to Etienne. "They'll always yell."

And the obliging girl resumed her instructions. Each loaded car arrived at the top just as it set out from the drift, marked with a special character, so that the receiver could put it on the account of that section. Thus, they were obliged to be very careful in filling it only to take the good coal or it would be rejected at the office.

The young man, whose eyes had become habituated to the obscurity, watched her, so pallid with her taint of chlorosis; and he could not have told her age, not more than twelve years to him it seemed, she looked so frail. However, from her boyish liberty, she appeared

older, with a naïve boldness which slightly embarrassed him; she did not please him, she was too much of a boy. But that which astonished him most was the strength of that child, a nervous but skillful strength. She filled her car more quickly than he, lifting her shovel with rapid regularity; then she pushed it as far as the inclined plane, with a slow thrust, without impediment, passing at her ease under the lowest rocks. His car, frequently becoming derailed, added to his perplexity.

In truth it was not an easy road. It was sixty metres from the drift to the inclined plane; and the road, which the repairers had not yet enlarged, was a mere passage way, while the uneven ceiling was filled with projections of coal. At certain places, which the filled cars passed through, the pusher was obliged to shove the car by crouching down upon his knees to keep from splitting his scull, while at other points the timber was bent and already cracked. They saw it along the walls, split in the middle, in long thin pieces like invalids crutches. Care was necessary to avoid rubbing off the skin against these projections, and owing to the heavy pressure from above, pieces as large as a man's thigh frequently flew off, causing the workmen to lie flat down, not knowing how soon they might be crushed.

"Again!" said Catherine, laughingly.

Etienne's car had just gone off the rails in the most difficult passage. He had not yet learned to push straight, upon these rails which had become twisted by the soft earth; and he swore, he flew into a passion, savagely fighting with the wheels, which in spite of the most severe efforts, he could not replace.

"Wait now," said the young girl. "If you get mad it'll never go right.

Having placed a chock under the wheels of her own car, she adroitly crept by him and with a slight lifting of her back, raised the car onto the track. It weighed seven hundred kilogrammes. He, surprised and ashamed, stammered an excuse.

She was compelled to show him how to brace himself against the timber on each side of the gallery, thus giving a solid means of support. The body should be bent, the arms stiff, in order to give the full strength to the

muscles of the shoulders and thighs in pushing. During one trip he kept behind, to observe her manner of working, with lower limbs bent and the hands low, she seemed to walk on four paws, like one of those dwarf beasts who travel in the circus. She perspired, panting for breath, cracking in all the joints, but without a murmur, with the indifference of habit, as if the common lot of all was to live thus bent up. His shoes annoyed him, he suffered from walking with head bent down. At length this position became a torture, an intolerable agony, so painful that he fell on his knees for an instant, to hold up his head and breathe.

Then at the inclined plane came a new drudgery. She taught him to load his car quickly. Above and below that plane, which was used by all the drifts from one story to the other, a boy was placed, the sender above, the receiver below. These rogues of twelve or thirteen years were always screaming, and to warn them it was necessary to shout still louder. Then when there was an empty car to go up, the receiver gave the signal, the sender loosened his brake and the car, filled by the pusher, descended by gravity, bringing the empty car up. In the gallery below, the trains which the horses drew to the foot of the shaft were formed.

"Hello, there!" cried Catherine down the plane, wooded the length of a hundred metres, which resounded like a huge speaking trumpet.

The boys must have lain down, for there was no response. At each story the wheeling was arrested. A shrill girlish voice called out:

"You can bet this is Mouquette's fault."

Mocking laughs broke out.

"Who's that?" said Etienne to Catherine.

She told him it was little Lydie, a child who knew as much and wheeled her car as well as any woman, in spite of her doll-like arms.

But suddenly the voice of the sender was heard, giving the order to start. Without doubt an overseer was passing above. The rolling was resumed at the nine floors, the only sound heard was the regular calls of the boys, and the panting of the pushers who were arriving at the plane, utterly exhausted.

And, at each trip, Etienne again noticed the closeness

at the bottom of the drift, the dull, broken thud of the picks, the great, heavy sighs of the diggers, obstinately bent on their work. These nearly nude men were completely covered with a black mud. Then he was obliged to assist Maheu, who was hauling away the plank to allow the coal to slide down upon the track. Zacharie and Levaque were in a rage at the vein, which, they said, had become dirty, rendering their work valueless. Cheval turned around to abuse Etienne, whose presence exasperated him.

"You're a fine one; you haven't the strength of a girl! . . . Ah! can you fill your cart? Well, there's nothing like being saving of one's arms. . . . Good heavens! I'm willing to lose ten sous if you make two for us."

The young man refrained from replying, only too happy at having found this galley-slave work, willing to accept the brutal treatment of both workman and overseer. But he could work no more; his feet were bleeding, his limbs racked with terrible cramps, his body as if pressed in a vice. Happily, it was ten o'clock, and the workmen decided to lunch.

Maheu had a watch which he did not even consult. At the bottom of that starless night he was never mistaken as to time; he could tell it within five minutes. All resumed their shirts and vests. Then descending from the drift they crouched down, their elbows at their sides, sitting on their heels, a position so habitual to miners that they took it even when out of the mine, without seeing the need of even a stone to sit upon. And each one having taken out a sandwich, gravely bit into the thick slice, letting slip a few words upon the work of the morning. Catherine, who had remained standing, at last joined Etienne, who, a short distance off, had stretched himself out across some rails, his back against the wood, where it was less damp.

"Why don't you eat?" she asked, with mouth full and sandwich in her hand.

Then she remembered Etienne wandering about in the darkness, without a sou or a morsel of bread.

"Won't you share with me?"

And when he refused, swearing he was not hungry,

his voice trembling with the cravings of his stomach, she said gayly:

"Ah! so you're disgusted! But, hold on! I've only bit into that side; I'll give you the other part."

She had already broken the slices in two. The young man took his half, controlling himself, so as not to devour it in one mouthful; and he placed his hands upon his hips, so that she could not see them tremble. With her tranquil air of *bon camarade* she had thrown herself down beside him, flat on her stomach, her chin in one hand, slowly eating from the other. Their lamps between them lit them up.

Catherine regarded him a moment in silence. She began to think him handsome, with his fine features and black mustache; she smiled.

"So you're a machinist, and they've sent you away from your shops. . . . Why?"

"Because I slapped my boss."

She was amazed; her inherited ideas of subordination and passive obedience were upset.

"I must own up I was drunk," continued he, "and when I drink it makes me crazy; why, I'd eat myself and everybody else. . . . I can't take two little glasses without wanting to fight. . . . And I was sick for two days."

"You musn't drink," said she, seriously.

"Ah! don't be afraid; I know myself."

And he shook his head, he had a hatred of rum, the hatred of the last child of a race of drunkards, whose nature suffered all that burning thirst produced by alcohol, knowing that the least drop was, for him, a poison.

"It's on account of my mother that I'm annoyed at having been put out in the street," said he after having swallowed a mouthful. "My mother is not well off, and every once in a while I send her a hundred sous."

"Where is your mother?"

"In Paris. . . . She's a wash-woman, in the rue de la Goutte d'Or."

He was silent. When he thought of these things his black eyes gleamed with sharp pain, as he brooded over injury received. For an instant, his looks were lost in the depths of the mine's shadows; and in that darkness,

under the weight and confinement of the earth above, he again saw his childhood, his mother, still pretty and healthy, cast off by his father and then taken back again, after having been married to another, living between the two men who ruined her, and, at last, ended with them in the gutter, in wine and filth. He recalled the street; some details came back to him, the dirty linen in the middle of the shop, some drunken men who gathered at the house and the boxing which almost broke his ears.

"Now," resumed he in a low voice, "I shall not be able to give her much out of thirty sous. . . . She will die in misery, that's certain."

He shrugged his shoulders in despair; then again bit into his sandwich.

"Won't you have a drink?" asked Catherine, who was holding her pail to her lips. "Oh! its coffee; that'll do you no harm. You'll choke without something to wash down the bread."

But he refused. It was bad enough for him to have taken half of her bread. However, she insisted in a good-natured way, saying:

"Well, I'll drink before you, if your so polite. . . . Only it would be mean to refuse any longer."

She tendered him her pail, kneeling down before him, lit up by the yellow rays of the two lamps. Why had he thought her ugly? Now that she was black, her face covered with coal dust, to him she seemed to have a singular charm. In the half gloom, the teeth in her large mouth were of a dazzling whiteness, her eyes grew larger, shining with a greenish reflection, like the eyes of a cat. A mass of auburn hair which had escaped from the pail delighted him, and he laughed quietly. She no longer appeared so young, she was at least fourteen.

"To please you," said he, drinking and returning the pail.

She again drank, then forced him to take another swallow, wishing to divide; and that pail going from one to the other amused them. Suddenly he asked himself if he ought not to seize her in his arms and kiss her upon the lips. She had full lips of a pale rose color, heightened by the coal dust, which tempted him with an increasing passion. But he dared not, he was

abashed before her. In Lille he had only had the lowest kind of girls, ignorant, such as one would expect to mate with a workman.

"You're about fourteen, are you not?" he asked, after going back to his bread.

She was surprised and somewhat angry.

"How much? Fourteen! Why, I'm sixteen! . . . It's true, I'm not very large. The girls here don't grow much."

He continued to question her; she spoke of everything without boldness or shame. Though she was not ignorant of anything pertaining to man and woman, he instinctively perceived she was of virgin purity. When he spoke of Mouquette, to embarrass her, she related some dreadful stories—her quiet voice becoming animated. Ah! that one had done some terrible things! And when he asked her if she had not a lover, she answered playfully that she did not wish to annoy her mother, but that would come some day. Her clothing, wet with perspiration, caused her to shiver slightly. She shrugged her shoulders in a resigned manner as though ready to endure anything.

"They don't lack lovers when they live all together, do they?"

"No indeed."

"Then that don't hurt any one. . . . They needn't tell the priest."

"Oh! the priest, I don't care for him! . . . But there's the black man."

"What black man?"

"The old miner who comes back in the mines and wrings the necks of the bad girls."

He looked at her, fearing she was making game of him.

"Do you believe that nonsense; don't you know anything?"

"Of course; I know how to read and write. . . . That's very useful in our house, for in my father's and mother's time they didn't learn such things."

She was certainly very nice. When she finished her slice of bread he would take her in his arms and kiss her on her large rosy lips. It was a timid resolution, a thought of violence, which made him slightly uncom-

fortable. Those boys' clothes on that girlish form made him feel uneasy. He swallowed his last mouthful, and again drinking from the tin pail, he gave it to her to empty. Now the moment to act had come. He was slyly glancing toward the miners below him, when a shadow darkened the gallery.

For some time Cheval had been watching them from a distance; then assuring himself that Maheu was not looking he came forward, and seizing Catherine by the shoulders, he turned back her head to cover her mouth with a brutal kiss, tranquilly affecting not to have seen Etienne. In that kiss there was a taking possession—a sort of jealous decision.

But the young girl was disgusted.

"Leave me alone, will you!"

He held up her head, looking straight into her eyes. His red mustache and beard partially covered his black face, while his big nose stood out like the beak of an eagle. At last he loosened her, and went off without a word.

Etienne was seized with a chill. It was stupid to have waited. He could not embrace her now, or she would believe that he wished to treat her like that other. At last in his hurt vanity he felt a real despair.

"Why have you lied?" said he in a low voice. "That's your lover."

"No, I swear to you," cried she. "There's nothing between us. Sometimes he wants to fool. . . . Besides he's only been here six months, from Pas-de-Calais."

Both had risen, about to begin work again. When she saw him so cold, she was chagrined. Without doubt, she thought him handsomer than the others; she would have preferred him. The thought of a reconciliation arose in her mind, and when the young man, still angry, was examining his lamp which was burning with a pale, blue flame, she tried to attract his attention.

"Come on, I'll show you something," murmured she good-naturedly.

When she had led him to the end of the drift, she showed him a crevice in the coal. A slight bubbling arose from it and a little noise like the whistling of a bird.

"Put your hand there, you can feel the wind. . . It's fire-damp."

He was surprised. Was that the terrible fire-damp which made everything explode? She laughed, saying there was a great deal of it that day, and that was the reason the lamps burned so blue.

"When will you fools stop your tongues?" cried the rough voice of Maheu.

Catherine and Etienne hastened to refill their cars, and push them to the inclined plane, their backs bent, crawling under the uneven ceiling of the track. From the second trip, the perspiration soaked them and their bones cracked anew.

In the drift the work of the diggers was resumed. They often cut short their lunch so as not to chill themselves, and their sandwiches, eaten thus far from the sun, with speechless voracity, filled their stomachs as if with lead. Stretched out upon their sides, they dug still harder, having only one fixed idea, that of completing a great day's work. Everything else disappeared in the struggle for gain so rudely contested. They ceased to feel the water dripping upon their limbs, the cramps from the forced attitude, always the same, the blackness of the night where they withered like plants buried in a cave. In proportion, as the day advanced, the air became more vitiated from the smoke of the lamps, the impure breaths and the gas from the fire-damp, weighing down the eyelids like cobwebs. All this combined was sufficient to destroy the effect of any pure air. Each one, buried in his molehole under the earth, with scarcely a breath in his weary body, still toiled on.

CHAPTER V.

MAHEU, without consulting the watch which was left in his vest, said:

"Almost an hour. Zacharie, is that done?"

The young man paused, but remained upon his back, his wandering eyes running over the line of arches which he had made the day before; then he awoke from his stupor and replied:

"Yes, that'll do till to-morrow."

And he went back to his work in the drift. Levaque and Cheval also seized their picks. There was a pause; then, wiping their faces upon their bare arms, they looked at the rock above them from which protruded great masses of slate. Work was the only topic of conversation.

"Another chance of being buried under the earth," murmured Cheval. "It don't make any difference to the company, though."

"Thieves!" growled Levaque. "They're always trying to get the best of us."

Zacharie was laughing. He made fun of everything, and it amused him to hear the company abused. In his quiet way, Maheu explained that for twenty metres the whole nature of the rock was changed. It was best to be just; they could foresee nothing. Then, when the two others continued to rail against their chiefs, he became uneasy, looking around him.

"Hold your tongues! You've said enough now!"

"You're right," said Levaque, lowering his voice. "It's risky to talk like that."

A fear of spies constantly haunted them, even in that darkness, as if the stock-holders' coal, still in the veins, had ears.

"I don't care," added Cheval, in a loud voice, with an air of defiance, "but if that pig Dansaert speaks to me the way he did the other day, I'll fling a stone at him. I don't hinder him from making love to the blonde."

This time, Zacharie roared. The love of the superintendent for the wife of Pierron was a continual cause for mirth in the mine. Even Catherine, at the foot of the drift, leaned upon her shovel, her sides shaking with laughter; but Maheu became angry, filled with fear he could no longer conceal.

"Are you going to shut up? Wait till you're alone if you want to speak of such things."

He was still speaking when the sound of feet was heard in the upper gallery. Almost immediately the mine engineer, the little nigger, as the workmen called him, appeared at the top of the drift, accompanied by Dansaert, the superintendent.

"What did I say," muttered Maheu. "Speak of the devil and his imps will appear."

Paul Megrel, the nephew of M. Hennebeau, was a slight, handsome man of twenty-six years, with curly hair and black mustache. His pointed nose and bright eyes reminded one of a sharp ferret; but his affable air was changed into one of authority when dealing with the workmen. In miner's dress, like them, he was covered with coal-dust; and to command their respect, he assumed courage, running the risk of breaking his back in the most difficult part of the mine, always the first at a caving in, or in an explosion from fire-damp.

"We are here, Dansaert, are we not?" said he.

The superintendent, a Belgian, with a heavy face and large sensual nose, replied with an exaggerated politeness:

"Yes, Monsieur Megrel. . . . Here is the man they engaged this morning."

Then both passed into the drift opening. The engineer, going up to Etienne, raised his lamp and looked at him, without saying a word.

"It's all right," said he at last. "But I don't like them to engage unknown people."

He would not listen to the explanations given him, the necessity of the work and the company's desire to replace the women wheelers with boys. He was looking intently at the ceiling, while the miners again took up their picks. Suddenly he cried:

"Say, now, Maheu, have you no thought for people? You are going to bury us here like dogs."

"Oh! that's solid," responded the workman, quietly.

"Solid! . . . Why the rock is already sinking, and you grudge the time spent in placing props two metres apart! Ah! you would risk cracking your skulls rather than leave your vein to attend to the timbering. I tell you to prop that up immediately. Double the supports; do you hear?"

And, at the angry looks of the miners, who thought themselves good judges of their own safety, he quickly became angry.

"Very well! When your heads are broken, do you have to bear the consequences? Not at all; it is the

company who will be obliged to give pensions either to you or to your wives. . . . They know you: to have two more cars in the evening you would give your lives."

Maheu, in spite of the anger which filled him, said composedly:

"If we were paid better, we would do more propping."

The engineer shrugged his shoulders without replying. Then going to the end of the drift he concluded:

"There is an hour left yet, get to work, every one of you, or you shall each be fined three francs."

A low growl from the miners followed this command. The governing power, upheld by military discipline, was felt by all in the mine, from the superintendent down to the smallest boy. Cheval and Levaque shook their fists, while Maheu checked them with a look and Zacharie shrugged his shoulders in disgust. But Etienne shook with anger. Each moment spent in that hell filled him with revolt. He looked at Catherine, patient, with bent back. Could it be possible that they were killing themselves by inches, toiling in these shadows, and then not getting the few sous for their daily bread?

Megrel, who had gone away with Dansaert, contented himself, whenever approving, with a nod of the head. Again their voices were heard. They had paused once more, and were examining the propping on the road, six metres of which the miners were obliged to keep in repair.

"Did I not tell you they cared for nothing?" cried the engineer. "Why don't you watch them?"

"I am weary of saying the same thing over and over," exclaimed the superintendent.

Megrel screamed loudly:

"Maheu! Maheu!"

Then still going on he continued:

"See here, is that the way that should be done. . . . You economize timber to economize time. I understand that the timbering costs us a great deal, and, if that would stand it would be all right. But it is bound to break, and then the company is forced to employ an army of repairers. . . . Just look there; why, it is terrible."

Cheval wished to speak, but he made him keep silent.

"No, I know what you are going to say. That we should pay you more. Well, I warn you that you will force us to make a change. Yes, we will pay you in part for the timbering, and we will reduce the price of the cars in proportion. We shall see if you win. . . In the meantime, prop that up at once, I will pass here to-morrow."

And with that threat he moved off. Dansaert so humble before him, remained behind a second, saying to the men:

"You've made me catch it. . . . I'll fine you more than three francs, if you don't look out.

Then, when he had gone, Maheu broke out:

"Great God! that is not just. I believe in being calm, but they would make any one violent. . . . Have you heard? the cars cut down and a percentage for the timbering! it is only another plan to pay us less."

He was looking for some one on whom to vent his anger, when he perceived Catherine and Etienne swinging their arms.

"Are you going to give me some timber? I suppose this has amused you."

Etienne went after a load, so furious at the chiefs, that he did not notice the rage of the miner.

Levaque and Cheval swore roundly, even Zacharie had savagely gone to work at the timbering. For nearly a half hour nothing was heard but the cracking of wood, wedged in with blows of a mallet. Not a word was exchanged; they were breathing heavily, exasperated at the rock, which they would have torn out and raised higher with their shoulders had they been able to lift the extra weight.

"That's enough," said Maheu at last, worn out with rage and fatigue. "One hour and a half. . . . Ah! this has been a good day; we've not made fifty sous; I'm discouraged."

There was only a half hour for work left; he dressed himself, the others doing the same. The very sight of the drift irritated them. When the wheeler went on with her work, they called her back, angry at her zeal; they were through for that day, and all six, their tools under their arms, started out, on their return to the

shaft, through the same openings which they had followed in the morning.

In the passage Catherine and Etienne paused, meeting little Lydie, who had stopped in the opening to let them pass. She told them of the disappearance of Moquette, who an hour before had been taken with a bleeding at the nose; she had gone somewhere to bathe her face, and they could not tell what had become of her. When they left her, the child, tired out, with aching back, again began pushing her car, her insect-like arms and limbs reminding one of a thin, black ant moving a burden too large for its size.

The lower gallery was deserted. In the distance red lights were disappearing on one side of the road. They were no longer cheerful; they walked with the heavy step of fatigue, she in front, he following. The lights were growing dim; he could scarcely distinguish her, enveloped as she was in a kind of smoky fog. Thinking of her, he was vexed. Why had she lied to him? That man was her lover. They were both stooping in order to avoid the projections above them. Without cause he felt angry with her. But every little while she, turning around, warned him of an obstacle, as though asking him to be amiable. They were alone; why should they not be good friends? Finally, when they came out upon the main gallery, for him it was a relief from the indecision which he suffered; while she gave one last sad look, a regret for happiness which they could never recover.

Now, around them the underground road resounded with the continual passing of the people, and the going and coming of the cars, carried along by the trotting horses. Lamps shone out like stars at night. They were obliged to shrink back against the rock, leaving the road to the seeming shadows of men and beasts, whose breath they felt in passing. Jeanlin, with bare feet, running behind his train, cried something to his sister, which they did not hear in the thundering of the wheels. They still went on. She had become silent, while he, not remembering the cross-roads, imagined she was misleading him more and more; now he suffered from the cold, a chill which came over him when he left the drift, and which made him shiver

the harder as he approached the shaft. Between the narrow walls the air blew violently. He was in despair of ever arriving, when, suddenly, they pulled themselves up by their hands into the main room of the floor.

Cheval threw on them a sidelong glance of distrust. The others were there, still perspiring in the cold draft, silent, restraining their low mutterings. They had arrived too soon, and were unable to go up for a half hour, perhaps longer, because of the arrangements for the descent of a horse. The loaders were still filling their cars, with a deafening noise, and the cages were swallowed up, disappearing in the beating shower which fell into the black hole. Below, the sump, a water sump of ten metres, filled by this falling stream, also sent towards him its thick dampness. Some men were ceaselessly moving around the shaft, pulling the signal cords, pressing hard upon the levers, amidst that stream of water by which their clothing was soaked. A reddening light, revealing great moving shadows, fell from the three open lamps, giving to that subterranean chamber the air of a villainous cavern, the home of bandits on the edge of a stream.

Mahen made a last effort; he approached Pierron who had gone to work at six o'clock.

"Say, you might just as well let us go up."

But the loader, a splendid fellow, with strong limbs and kind face, refused with an angry gesture.

"Impossible, ask the overseer . . . They'd fine me."

Fresh mutterings were stifled. Catherine whispered in the ear of Etienne.

"Come and see the stables. It's nice there."

They escaped without being seen, for it was forbidden to go there. The stable was on the left, at the end of a short gallery. Twenty-five metres in length and four in width, hewn out of the rock and arched over with bricks, holding twenty horses. It was indeed nice there, a good odor of fresh litter, properly cared for. One light burned softly as a night-lamp. Some horses turned their great child-like eyes upon them, then, satisfied, went back to their oats in peace, laborers, fat and healthy, loved by all the world.

While Catherine was reading aloud the names over

each stall, she gave a slight cry on seeing some one suddenly stand erect before her. It was Mouquette, who had fallen out of a heap of straw where she had been sleeping. Mondays, weary from the folic of Sunday, she gave her nose a violent blow with her fist, then, leaving her work under the pretext of going to find some water, she came there, to lie down with the beasts in the warm litter. Her father who had a great weakness for the rogue, tolerated it at the risk of getting in trouble.

Suddenly, old Moque entered; he was short, bald and scarred by time, but still remained fat, a rare thing among miners of fifty years. Since they had made him a groom he had chewed so much that even his gums had become discolored. When he perceived the two others he became angry.

"What's the matter with you all? I don't want you to bring any man here in my stable."

Moquette, laughing, thought that funny. But Etienne went away, angry, Catherine following him. At length, when all three had returned to the main gallery, Bebert and Jeanlin had arrived with their train of cars. They paused at the cages, and the young girl approached the horse to caress him, speaking to him as she would to a companion. It was Bataille, the oldest worker in the mine, a white horse that had been at the bottom six years. For six years he had lived in that hole, occupying the same corner of the stable, making the same shadow along the black galleries, without even having again seen the light of day. Very fat, his skin shone with an appearance of good health; he seemed here to pass a happy life, sheltered from the unhappiness above. He had become accustomed to the darkness. The track which he traversed was so familiar to him, that, with his head, he would push open the ventilating doors, and finally crouch down so as not to strike against the low places. He must also have counted his trips, for, when he had made the regular number, he refused to commence another, and they were compelled to take him back to his stall. Now old age had come, his cat-like eyes were occasionally clouded with sadness. Perhaps he vaguely beheld, as if in a dream, the last place where he toiled, the old mill at Mar-

chiennes, built upon the border of the Scarpe, surrounded by green trees gently stirred by the wind; dim recollections came up before him, and he stood, his head down, trembling upon his old legs, making futile efforts to recall the rest.

Meanwhile the work went on at the shaft. The signal of four blows was given for sending down the horse, filling him with emotion, for he had also arrived like that beast, seized with just such terror, disembarking almost dead. Above, when fastened by a cord, he had struggled desperately; then, as soon as he felt the ground giving way beneath him, he became as if petrified, disappearing without a movement, his eyes enlarged and fixed. This one was too large to pass between the guides, so they had been forced to suspend him from the under portion of the cage. The descent took four minutes; they had decreased the velocity as a precaution. Thus the fright was prolonged. Were they going to leave him on the road, lost in the night? At last he appeared, apparently lifeless, his great eyes dilated with terror. It was a bay horse, about three years old, named Trompette.

"Hold on!" cried Moque, whose duty it was to receive him; "lead him off; don't untie him yet."

Soon, Trompette was in a heap upon the iron flagging. He did not stir, feeling as though in a nightmare, in that dark hole, that profound blackness, resounding with tumult. They had commenced to untie him, when Bataille, who had just been unharnessed, stretched out his neck to scent this companion who had thus fallen from the earth above. The enlarged group of workmen joked. Well! what good smell did he find? But Bataille was happy. He had found the good odor of the open air, the forgotten smell of the sun on the meadows. And, all at once, he broke forth into a deep snorting, a tone of joy, which almost seemed to die away in a sob. It was a welcome, a reminder of those old things a whiff of which had returned to break the melancholy of that more than prisoner, who would only ascend when dead.

"Ah! that Bataille!" cried the workmen, overjoyed by these tricks of their favorite. "He's talking with his friend."

Trompette, perfectly satisfied, had not yet moved.

He remained upon his side, as if he still felt the rope tied around him, pinching the skin. Finally, they made him stand up; he was astonished, his legs shaking with great chill. And old Moque led away the two beasts who had fraternized.

"Are we ready now?" asked Maheu.

It was necessary to unload the cages, and at any rate, it still wanted ten minutes of the hour for descending. Little by little the drifts were emptied of the miners who returned by all the galleries. There were already fifty wet and shivering men there. Pierron, in spite of his kind face, boxed the ears of his daughter Lydie, because she had left the drift too early. Zacharie was slily pinching Moquette. But the discontent grew greater. Cheval and Levaque were relating the threats of the engineer, "the ears cut down in price, the timbering to be paid for in part," and many exclamations greeted this project. A rebellion was cropping out in this corner nearly six hundred metres below the earth. These men, stained with coal and chilled with waiting, accused the company of killing one half of its workmen below and starving the other half. Etienne listened, shivering.

"Hurry up! hurry up!" said Richomme, one of the overseers, to the loader.

He hastened the work, not wishing to be guilty of cruelty, pretending not to have heard their words. However, the murmurs had become such that he was forced to put a stop to them. Behind him they were saying that it would not always be like this, and some fine morning the mine would explode.

"You are reasonable," said he to Maheu, "do make those others be silent. When one is not the strongest he should be the most patient."

But Maheu, although he had become calm himself, was still dissatisfied, and would not interfere. Suddenly the voices ceased; Dansaert and the little Megrel were returning from their inspection at the end of the gallery, both covered with perspiration. The habit of discipline made the men fall in line, while the engineer passed through without a word. By a slight gesture he made known his wish to go up, and Pierron, who had prudently disappeared during the tumult, came forward.

The little nigger jumped into one car, Dansaert in another; the signal was given four times, and the cage ascended in the midst of a sullen silence.

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE going up in the cage with four others, looking like dirty bundles, Etienne resolved to resume his journey and famish on the roads. As well starve at once as to again descend to the bottom of that hell, and then not even earn his bread. Catherine, shrouded in darkness above him, was no longer by his side. But he must not think of such foolishness; for, with a deeper insight, he could not feel the resignation of these people, and, in the end, would strangle some official.

Suddenly, his eyes, habituated to the gloom below, were blinded by the transition to daylight. It was none the less a relief for him to feel the cage firmly secured. The door was opened, and the group of workmen sprang from the cars.

"Don't forget, Moquet," whispered Zacharie to a young man, "this evening at the Volcan."

The Volcan was a concert garden at Montson. Moquet laughed, winking his left eye. Short and fat, like his father and sister, he had the greedy air of a boy who ate all he could get, without thought of the morrow.

At that moment his sister, jumping from the cage, playfully slapped him on the back.

Etienne scarcely recognized the superintendent's office, last seen by him in the dim light of a lantern. It was very dirty. The daylight struggled through the dusty windows. The engine, alone, was bright; the steel cables, covered with grease, slid off like ribbon dipped in ink; and the drums above, the heaving framework which supported them; the cages; the cars, all increased the somber appearance of that room. The flagging constantly shook with ceaseless rolling of wheels, while, from the ascending coal, arose a fine black dust, covering the floor and walls as far as the tower.

Cheval, who had gone to look at the tally-list in the superintendent's office, returned furious. He saw that

two cars had been rejected, one deficient in quantity the other inferior in quality.

"We've done well to-day," he cried. "Twenty sous lost. . . . This is what we get for taking in lazy people, who use their arms as a hog does its tail!"

His side-long glance was directed to Etienne, as he finished the sentence. The latter was about to respond with a blow of the fist; then he asked himself what was the use when he was going to leave. That thought restrained him.

"Nobody can do well right off," said Maheu, to keep peace. "It'll be better to-morrow."

Still they were angry, anxious to quarrel. When they stopped to give their lamps to the keeper, Levaque swore at the man, whom he accused of slighting his work. But their anger abated somewhat in the waiting room, before the newly replenished fire, the reflection of which, upon the walls of that huge windowless hall, seemed to fill it with flames. Turning their backs to the reddening coals, for the moment, all was forgotten, save that they were warm.

"I'm going," said Cheval, laying his tools back in his chest and putting on his shoes.

No one replied. But Mouquette ran off behind him. The others sneered, knowing he was through with her; and Zacharie turned towards his sister with a laugh.

Meanwhile Catherine was talking to her father in a low tone. He appeared surprised, then gave an approving nod of the head, and calling Etienne, gave him his bundle.

"Listen," said he; "if you havn't a sou you'll starve before pay-day. . . . Don't you want me to get credit for you somewhere?"

The young man was embarrassed. Just at that moment he was going to ask for his thirty sous and leave. But pride prevented his doing so before the young girl. She watched him closely, thinking he was sulky.

"You know, I don't promise you anything," continued Maheu, "they can't do more than refuse us though."

Then Etienne consented. They would not keep him without money; he would eat something, and then go away. But on seeing Catherine's joy he regretted not

having said no; with a friendly glance she smiled, happy in the thought that she had helped him.

As they became warm, putting on their shoes again, one by one the miners left the room. Levaque and the Maheues, shutting up their chests, went off together. But, when they arrived at the screening shed, a quarrel arrested them.

It was in a large shed, the black beams of which were covered with coal-dust, with great windows, through which a current of air continually passed. The cars, brought here by boys, were emptied upon iron hoppers, on the right and left of which the screeners, armed with a shovel and rake, and mounted upon platforms of piled-up stones, pushed forward the good coal which finally fell through funnels into the wagons placed under the shed.

Philomêne Levaque, a small, pale girl with the slender form of a consumptive, her face projecting from a blue woolen rag, and her hands and arms black as far as the elbow, assisted the mother of Pierron in sorting the coal, the Brule, as they called her, who was a terrible old hag, with eyes like a screech-owl, and mouth drawn up as tight as the purse of a miser. These two were quarreling; the girl accused the old woman of stealing her coal. This was a continual cause of strife, as they were paid by the basket.

"Knock a hole in her!" cried Zacharie from above, to his girl.

The screeners all laughed. The Brule answered back:

"You'd better mind your own business."

Maheu tried to prevent his son from interfering; but at that moment an overseer came forward and all set to work again screening the coal.

Outside, the wind had suddenly calmed, but a cold dampness fell from the gray sky. The miners shrugged their shoulders, and separating, went forth swinging their arms. They had passed an entire day in the midst of dirt, and now came out black as negroes.

"Look! here's Bouteloup," said Zacharie, laughing.

Levaque, without stopping, exchanged a few words with his lodger, a large, dark man of thirty-five years, with a steady and honest mien.

"Is there any soup, Louis?"

"I think so."

"Then the old woman is in a good humor to-day?"

"Yes, I think she is."

Other miners were arriving, a new set, who one by one were swallowed up in the mine. It was three o'clock, the time for another shift. The mine never rested; day and night human insects dug in the rock six hundred metres under the beet fields.

The children had gone on before. Jeanlin was confiding to Bebert a plan for obtaining four sous' worth of tobacco; while Lydie followed respectfully at a distance. Catherine walked with Zacharie and Etienne without saying a word. Before the tavern *"A l' Avantage,"* Maheu and Lavaque joined them.

"Here we are, come on in," said the first to Etienne.

As they separated, Catherine stood motionless for an instant, taking a last look at the young man, her eyes limpid like clear spring water; then, smiling, she went off with the others up the road leading to their alley.

The tavern was at a cross-road between the mine and the village. It was a brick house, two stories high, whitewashed from top to bottom, and its windows ornamented with large sky-blue sashes. Upon a hanging sign nailed above the door were the words: "A l'Avantage, Inn, kept by Rasseneur."

In the rear, there was only a narrow yard, inclosed by a hedge. The company, which had endeavored to buy this place with its grounds, was greatly annoyed by this tavern, standing in the open field so near the exit of the mines.

"Go in," said Maheu to Etienne. It was a small, bare room with white walls. There were a dozen chairs, three tables and a bar made of spruce, behind which was a half dozen different drinks, three bottles of liquor, a decanter, a little tin cash box and a pewter tap for the beer—this was all. Not a picture, not a shelf, not even a game-board was to be seen. In the iron fire-place, varnished and bright, a block of coal was slowly burning. The roof was covered with a layer of white sand which absorbed the moisture of that damp country.

"Give me a drink," demanded Maheu, of a large

blonde girl, whose heavy face was pitted with small-pox. "Is Rasseneur here?"

The girl, waiting on him, nodded her head. Slowly, without taking breath, the miner emptied half the glass to wash down the dust, which choked him. He offered his companion nothing. One other customer was there, another wet and dirty miner, seated before a table drinking his beer in silence, with an air of profound meditation. At a gesture his third drink was served him, for which he paid; then, without having spoken a word, he went away.

Just then, a large, clean-shaven man, about thirty-eight years of age, entered, a jolly smile breaking over his round face. It was Rasseneur, a miner whom the company had discharged as the leader of a strike which had taken place three years before. Being a good workman who spoke well, he soon became the chief of the miners. His wife already kept a shop, like many miners' wives; and, when thrown out in the street, he became a tavern keeper, placing his saloon right in front of the Voreux as a menace to the company. His house, becoming a center, prospered, he enriched himself by the wrath which he had, little by little, infused in his old comrades.

"Here's a fellow I engaged this morning," explained Maheu immediately. "Are either of your two rooms empty, and will you trust him till the fifteenth?"

Rasseneur's face at once became clouded. He glanced at Etienne and replied without hesitation:

"It's impossible. My two rooms are taken."

The young man, expecting such a refusal, was not in the least disappointed. He marveled at his great desire to leave, and yet was unwilling to do so until he had received his thirty sous. One by one, other miners entered, and, after drinking, went off again alone. It was simply washing, without joy or pleasure.

"Is there anything new?" asked Rasseneur of Maheu, who was slowly drinking his beer.

The latter turned round, and seeing only Etienne, said:

"They've been wrangling again. It's about the timbering now."

As he narrated the affair, the tavern-keeper's face be-

came very red. Finally, with flashing eyes, he broke out:

"Well, they are beasts if they lower the price."

Etienne made him uncomfortable. He continued to eye him closely while speaking of the director, Hennebeau, his wife and nephew, little Megrel, without naming them personally, saying it could not always continue, the end was bound to come; the suffering was too great. He spoke of the works which were closed, the workmen who had gone away. For a month he had given out more than six loaves of bread a day. He had been told the evening before that M. Denneulin, the owner of a neighboring mine, feared he would be compelled to shut down. Moreover, he had just received a letter from Lille, filled with alarming details.

"You know," said he, "it came from that person you saw here one evening"

His wife had just entered, a tall, thin, but good-hearted woman, with long nose and high cheek bones. She was more of a radical than her husband.

"The letter from Pluchart," said she. "Ah! if he was master, it wouldn't be long before things would go better."

Etienne listening, became excited with these suggestions of revenge. That name, coming out so suddenly, made him start, and without thinking he said aloud:

"I know Pluchart."

They looked at him as he hastened to add:

"Yes, I am a machinist, he was my foreman. A fine man. I've often talked with him."

Rasseneur inspected him again and a quick change of sudden sympathy came over him. At length he said to his wife:

"Maheu brought this man; he is a wheeler, and he wants him to get a room here, and asks if we won't trust him till the fifteenth."

Then the affair was settled in a few words. They had a room; the lodger had left that morning; and the tavern-keeper very much excited, insisted that he asked no more than was reasonable. His wife shrugged her shoulders, waiving her right to speak.

"Good-night," said Maheu. "All this won't keep them from cutting down, and as long as they do that,

things will never mend. . . . Just think, you're a strong man, now that you've boen out of the mine three years."

"Yes, I'm much better off," said Rasseneur complacently."

Etienne went as far as the door with the miner, thanking him; but the latter nodded his head without a word, and the young man watched him going quietly up the road to the alley. Mme. Rasseneur, wishing to serve some customers, asked him to wait a minute and she would conduct him to the room where he could wash. Should he remain? Again he hesitated, with an uneasiness which made him long for the liberty of the highroads, a thirst for the sun as well as for the joy of being his own master. He felt as though some years had passed since his arrival there; and he hated to go back to those dark galleries to spend hours under the earth flat on his stomach. No, it was too hard, his pride revolted at the idea of being a beast that they first made blind and then wiped out altogether.

While Etienne was thus debating in his mind, he all at once became aware of the immense plain before him. He was astonished; he had not imagined it was so large when old Bonnemort had indicated it with a gesture amid the shadows. Before him lay the Voreux in a pile of dirt, with its buildings of brick and wood, its tarred screening shed, the tower with its slate roof, the engine room and the high chimney of a light red—all rising out of the murky atmosphere. A pavement extended around the buildings. He had not thought it so large, changed by the coal-dust into an inky lake, spanned by bridges and encumbered in one corner by an accumulation of timber that reminded one of a felled forest. On the right, an old mine intercepted the view, colossal as a giant's barricade, already covered with grass on one side, but on the other, scorched by an interior fire which had burned for a year with a thick smoke, leaving on the surface slate and sandstone, with long trails of bloody fire-blast. Then the fields spread out before him, interminable fields of wheat and beets, but bare at that time of the year; and marshes with stunted willows, while in the distance, thin rows of poplar trees

divided the plain, and, still farther off, were white spots indicating villages: Marchiennes on the north, Montson in front, while on the east the forest of Vandame, with its leafless trees bordered the horizon with a violet-colored line. Under the somber sky of that winter afternoon it seemed as though all the darkness of the Voreux, all the flying coal-dust, was thrown over that plain, powdering the trees, darkening the roads, covering the entire earth.

Etienne looked around, and that which surprised him above all, was a canal, which he had not observed in the night. From the Voreux to Marchiennes, a straight canal, two leagues in length extended like a silver ribbon; an avenue bounded with large trees, elevated above the low ground, going out into infinity with a perspective of green banks, while in its pale waters disported a multitude of fishes. Near the mine was a wharf, at which boats were moored, waiting to be filled from the cars; then the canal made a bend, cutting across the marsh, a huge transport way for coal and iron.

Etienne turned his eyes from the canal to the hamlet built upon the plain, of which he could only distinquish the red roofs in long, regular lines, at the end of a bend in the road; then they returned to the Voreux, pausing along the clayish slope at two enormous heaps of brick manufactured on the premises. A branch of the company's railroad passed lower down, turning at the mines. Doubtless this portion of the road had not been completed, for a number of men were pushing along a creaking car. It was no longer the unknown of the night shadows, with its inexplicable noises, and the flaming of strange looking lights. In the distance, the high furnaces and coke fires were subdued by the daylight. He stood motionless. The steam engine was puffing, with the same great, long breaths, and he now distinguished its ascending clouds of gray steam.

And now his decision was reached. Perhaps he thought of again seeing Catherine's bright eyes; perhaps it was still more the sickening air which came from the Voreux; he did not know himself. But he longed to again descend to the bottom of that mine, to

suffer with the others. He thought savagely of those people of whom old Bonnemort had spoken, of that unknown God to whom ten thousand famishing people were giving their lives without knowing him.

CHAPTER VII.

POIFAINE, the residence of M. Gregoire, was two kilometres east of Montson, on the road leading to Joiselle. It was a large, square, unpretending house, built at the beginning of the last century; but of the vast grounds which once surrounded it, only thirteen hectares remained, used as a garden that yielded the best fruit and vegetables in the whole country. A little wood extended over what, in former years, had been a park, while one of the greatest curiosities of that level plain, where one could count the large trees from Marchiennes to Beaugnies, was an avenue of old limes, forming an arch of leaves, reaching from the door-step to the road.

This morning the Gregoires arose about eight o'clock —an hour earlier than usual, for the tempest of the night had unnerved them.

During the absence of her husband, who had gone out to see what damage had been done by the storm, Mme. Gregoire, in her slippers and flannel dressing-gown, went down into the kitchen. She was fifty-eight years of age, short, fat, and with a cheerful face, contrasting strangely with the pale whiteness of her skin.

"Melanie," said she to the cook, "if you have made the milk bread, my husband is ready. Mademoiselle will not rise for a half hour, and she will eat it with her chocolate. . . . What a surprise it will be."

The cook, a scrawny old woman, who had served them for thirty years, laughed.

"That's true, 'twill be a surprise. . . . My fire is lit and the oven's getting hot; and then Honorine's going to help me a little."

Honorine, a girl of twenty years, who was taken when an infant and brought up in the house, now served as chambermaid. In addition to these two, there

were a coachman, named Francois, a gardener, and a florist. These domestics formed by themselves a little family, living together in good fellowship.

Mme. Gregoire, who, while in bed had planned the surprise of the milk bread, waited to see the dough put in the oven. The large kitchen was kept scrupulously clean with its arsenal of sauce pans and other cooking utensils. There was an agreeable odor pervading the whole room from the well-filled closets.

"I hope you have put plenty of eggs in it," said Mme. Gregoire, as she passed into the dining-room.

In addition to the furnace which warmed the whole house, a bright coal fire enlivened this room, and the large table, the chairs, a mahogany buffet and two easy chairs, all indicated a love of comfort. They scarcely ever entered the reception room; this was the living room of the family.

Just then M. Gregoire, becomingly dressed in a red fustian jacket, entered. He was sixty years of age, with large, honest features, and his curling snowy locks gave him a patriarchal look. He had seen the coachman and gardener; no greater damage had been done by the storm than the falling of a chimney. Each morning he loved to look over Piolaine, which was not large enough to cause much care, but from which he derived the happiness of a landlord.

"Where is Cecil?" he asked, "is she not going to get up to-day?"

"I do not know," answered his wife. "I think I heard her stirring, though."

The table, covered with a white cloth, had been laid for three.

Honorine was sent to see what had become of Mademoiselle. She returned immediately covered with smiles, and said on entering the room:

"Oh! if Monsieur and Madame could see Mademoiselle! . . . She sleeps like an angel. It is a pleasure to look at her."

The father and mother exchanged tender glances.

"Let us go up and see her," said he, with a smile.

"Ah! the poor darling!" murmured she, "I will go."

Together they went up stairs. The chamber whither they went was the only real luxury of the house; it was

hung with blue silk and provided with lacquer furniture, white with threads of blue, to please the whim of the spoiled child. In the fresh whiteness of the bed, under light falling from the window, the curtain of which was pushed aside, the young girl lay sleeping, with her cheek resting upon her bare arm. She was not pretty, but sound and healthy. Mature, though only eighteen, she had a superb skin and delicious freshness; her hair was auburn, and her face round, with a small, unbecoming nose. Her breath came and went so softly, there was no perceptible movement of the chest.

"That abominable wind must have prevented her from sleeping," whispered the mother.

The father, with a gesture, silenced her. Both stood, tenderly bending over and regarding her with admiration, as she lay there in her virgin purity; this girl, whom they had so long desired, given to them so late in life. They thought her perfect, as she still slept on, without feeling their presence. Then a shadow passed slowly over her immobile face, and, trembling lest she should awake, they crept silently from the room.

"Hush!" said the father at the door; "let her have her nap out."

"Certainly," said the mother; "we can wait."

Returning to the dining room, they installed themselves in their armchairs, while the servants, still smiling at Mademoiselle's long sleep, without a murmur kept the breakfast warm. He took a paper and Madame commenced knitting on a woolen foot blanket. It was very warm, and not a sound was heard.

Gregoire's fortune, almost forty thousand francs a year, was all in stocks of the Montson mines. They spoke of it with complaisance as commencing with the creation of the company.

At the beginning of the last century a company was formed for exploration for coal between Lille and Valenciennes. The first success of the patentees, which later on formed the company d'Anzin, encouraged every one. The ground was sounded in each commune; companies were established and grants were made out at once. In spite of the stupidity of that age, Baron Desrumaux had left behind him the memory of a great mind. For four years he had struggled on without

faltering, in the midst of continual obstacles. The first explorations were fruitless; new mines were abandoned after long months of work; there were cavings and sudden inundations, destroying the workmen; hundreds of thousands of francs were sunk; then there was government interference, the panics of the stockholders, and a contest with land owners resolved not to recognize the royal grants, if they refused to treat with them first. At last the company, Desrumaux, Fanquenoix & Co., was formed to explore the Montson grant, and the first mines had commenced to give some slight returns, when two neighboring companies, Cougny, belonging to Count Cougny, and Joiselle, belonging to the company of Cornille & Jenard, went under. The 23d of August, 1760, these three companies were consolidated and the company of the Montson mines, now existing, was created. The assessments they apportioned in accordance with the standard of the money of the time.

In those days the Baron owned Piolaine, and he had in his employ a clerk named Honore Gregoire, a boy from Ardennes, the great-grandfather of Leon, father of Cecile. At the time of the treaty of Montson, Honore, who had hoarded, in a stocking, a hundred thousand francs, tremblingly yielded them to his employer. With six thousand livres he took some shares in the mine, though fearing to rob his children of that sum. His son, Eugene, received very small dividends, and, when he had foolishly squandered the other four thousand francs of his paternal inheritance, became very penurious. But, little by little the interest increased. Fortune commenced with Felicien, who was able to realize the dream with which his grandfather, the old secretary, had rocked the cradle of his infancy, the purchase of Piolaine, for a paltry sum. Then followed years of reverses, the clouds breaking somewhat after the revolution, then lowering after the unfortunate downfall of Napoleon. It was Leon Gregoire who realized from the timid and uncertain investment of his grandfather, whose ten thousand francs multiplied with the rising prosperity of the company. In 1820, they yielded cent per cent, ten thousand francs. In 1844, twenty thousand. In 1850, forty. Then there were

two years that the dividend went up to the enormous sum of fifty thousand francs; the value of the stock had increased a hundred fold in a hundred and some years.

M. Gregoire, whom they advised to see when the stock went up so high, smilingly refused. Six months later an industrial crisis broke out and the dividends again fell to six thousand francs. But he still smiled, regretting nothing, for the Gregoires now had an obstinate faith in their mine. It would go up. God was good. A religious conviction was blended with a profound gratitude for an investment which, for a hundred years, had nourished them in idleness. It was well; their egotism lulled them into fancied security, while they fattened themselves at their well-filled table. This had continued from father to son; why venture to displease fate by doubting? And at length a superstitious belief possessed them that, if they converted their stock into money it would be lost. They preferred it deep down in the earth, where a company of miners, generation after generation dying of hunger, dug out a little each day, according to their wants.

Happiness was showered on that house. While young, M. Gregoire had married the daughter of a Marchiennes druggist, a homely girl, without a cent, whom he adored and who in return made him a good wife. She remained at home, happy with her husband, having no other will but his; a similarity of tastes united them; a single thought of comfort was theirs; and they had lived thus without care for forty years. It was an even life; the thirty thousand francs were quietly expended. But the late birth of Cecile ended their economy. All her caprices were gratified; a second horse, two more carriages, even toilets sent from Paris. She added to their joy and they could not find anything too beautiful for her, though they themselves, with a horror of finery, had retained the costumes of their youth. All unprofitable expense seemed foolish for them.

Suddenly, the door opened, and a strong voice cried:

"Well! what is this, have you breakfasted without me?"

It was Cecile, just up, her eyes still swollen with

sleep. She had simply combed her hair and slipped on a white woolen wrapper.

"No," said her mother, "you see we have been waiting for you . . . Well! that wind must have prevented you from sleeping, poor darling."

The young girl looked at them in surprise.

"Has it been blowing? . . . I knew nothing of it; I have not stirred all night."

This seemed so strange that they all laughed; even the servants, who were bringing in the breakfast, smiled at the idea of Mademoiselle's having slept so soundly for twelve hours.

"Ah! that is nice," said Cecile as she saw the milk bread. "That will be good in our chocolate."

They seated themselves at the table; the chocolate was smoking in the cups, and for a time, nothing was spoken of but the bread. Melanie and Honorine remained watching them devour it, saying, it was a pleasure to make anything when it was eaten with such enjoyment.

But the dogs began to bark violently; they thought it was the music teacher who came from Marchiennes on Tuesday and Friday. The governess also came, as the young girl was receiving her education at home, still ignorantly happy, with the caprice of a child throwing her book from the window when a question bothered her.

"It is M. Deneulin," said Honorine, entering the room.

Following her M. Deneulin, a cousin of M. Gregorie's, entered without ceremony; his loud voice and quick movement gave him the appearance of a cavalry officer. Although he was over forty, his close cut hair and large mustache were as black as ink.

"Yes, it is I; good-morning. Do not disturb yourselves."

He seated himself, while the family returned his greeting. Finally, they consented to finish their chocolate.

"Have you anything particular to say to me?" asked M. Gregoire.

"No, nothing at all," Deneulin hastened to reply. "I am out for a horse-back ride and in passing only stopped to say good-morning."

Cecile asked after his daughters, Jeanne and Lucia. They were doing well; the first was learning to paint, while the other, the elder, cultivated her voice. He added that his scape-grace son, Maurice, would soon become a captain. And his voice trembled slightly with an emotion which he shook off with an effort.

M. Gregoire resumed:

"And does everything go on as you wish, at the mines?"

"D——n it! I am turned topsy-turvy like my comrades by this crisis. . . . We always pay for the prosperous years! They have built too many workshops, made too many paved roads, and now the capital will not warrant increased expense. Happily, the case is not desperate as yet. I shall get out of it all the same."

His history was simple. Like his cousin, he had received, as an inheritance, some stock in the Montson mine. But he, incited with an anxiety for wealth, had hastened to sell when the stock had gone up to a million. For some months he had been cherishing a scheme. His wife had brought him the little grant of Vandame, in which there were only two mines, Jean-Bart and Gaston-Marie, both in such an abandoned state, and with material so defective, that the yield scarcely covered the expense of working. He thought of repairing Jean-Bart by renovating the machinery, enlarging the shaft and sinking it still deeper; and then keep Gaston-Marie only for drainage. The shovel would bring them gold, he said. The idea was a correct one. Only the million was gone and the industrial crisis had broken out at the very moment when everything was going right. A poor financier and good-natured with his workmen, he had allowed himself to be plundered ever since the death of his wife, leaving the management to his daughters, the elder of whom spoke of going on the stage, while the younger had already sent two landscapes to the salon, which had been refused. Both, however, were good little women, smiling even in the midst of their misfortunes. At home the threatened poverty had caused them to economize.

"You see, Leon," he resumed, his voice faltering,

"you should have sold when I did. Now everything is declining; you will be ruined. If you had intrusted your money to me just see what you would have made at Vandame in our mine."

M. Gregoire slowly finished his chocolate. Then he replied, decidedly:

"Never! . . . You know very well that I do not wish to speculate. I live tranquilly, it would be foolish for me to worry my head with the cares of business. And, with reference to Montson, it can continue to decline; we will still get enough from it. It is not necessary to be so grasping. Now listen to me: it is you who will bite your fingers some day, for Montson will go up, the grand-children of Cecile will still get their bread from it."

Deneulin listened with an uneasy smile.

"Then," said he, "if I asked you to put a hundred thousand francs in my business, you would refuse?"

But, seeing the disturbed faces of the Gregoires, he regretted having spoken so quickly; he should have put off his suggestion of borrowing until later, reserving it for a desperate case.

"Oh! I did not mean that, it was a joke. . . . Mon Dieu, perhaps you are right. . . . Money which you properly gain from others is what makes you prosper."

Then they spoke of other things. Cecile again talked of her cousins, and of the tastes that engrossed their attention, but which so displeased her. Mme. Gregoire promised to take her daughter to see those little darlings, the first pleasant day. Meanwhile, M. Gregoire, with preoccupied air, took no part in the conversation. Suddenly he said in a loud voice:

"If I were in your place, I would cease this stubbornness. I would negotiate with Monston. . . . They will do well again and you will receive your money."

He alluded to the old feud which existed between the company of Monston and that of Vandame. In spite of the small importance of the latter, her powerful neighbor was enraged to see inclosed within her vast territory, that square league, which did not belong to her; and, after having vainly tried to ruin it, they

plotted to buy it at a low price, when it was about to succumb. This contest continued without relaxation; each gallery stopped within two hundred metres of the other; it was war to the knife, although the directors and engineers observed the ordinary rules of politeness in their intercourse with each other.

Deneulin's eyes flashed.

"Never!" cried he. "As long as I live, Monston shall not have Vandame. . . . I dined with M. Hennebeau on Thursday and noticed his patronizing manner. When the directors were here last autumn, they made all sorts of love to me. . . . Yes, yes, I know them, these Marquises and Dukes, these Generals and Ministers! they are all robbers who would steal the very shirt from your back."

M. Gregoire did not defend the directors, the six administrators appointed by the agreement of 1760, who ruled while despoiling the company, and the surviving five, of whom, at each death, chose a new member from the wealthy and powerful stock-holders. The owner of Piolaine, with his upright impulses, was of the opinion that these gentlemen in their exaggerated love of money, were sometimes wanting in integrity.

Melanie had come in to clear away the table. Without, the dogs were again barking, and Honorine was already directing her steps toward the door, when Mademoiselle, overpowered by the heat, left the table.

"Never mind, that must be for my lesson."

Deneulin, also arose ; watching the young girl leaving the room, he asked, with a smile :

"Well! and what of that marriage with little Megrel?"

"Nothing is settled," said Mme. Gregoire. "It is merely an idea, which it is necessary to consider."

"Yes, yes," continued he with a merry laugh. . . . "I am astonished that Mme. Hennebeau wishes it, after the talk one hears."

But M. Gregoire became indignant: So distinguished a woman, much older than the young man: It was absurd. He did not like to hear people joke upon such subjects. Deneulin, still laughing, shook hands and left.

"It is not my teacher," said Cecile. "It is that woman with her two children, you know, mamma, the one we

met the other day. . . . Can they come in here?"

They hesitated. Were they very dirty? No, not very, and they could leave their shoes outside. The father and mother were already stretched out in their arm chairs; the thought of moving decided them.

"Let them enter, Honorine. Maheu's wife and the two little ones came in, nearly frozen and half-starved, and trembling with fear on finding themselves in that comfortable room, where the odor of breakfast still remained.

CHAPTER VIII.

In a darkened room, through the closed blinds, little by little, appeared the faint gray streaks of dawn, spreading themselves to the ceiling, but in a close atmosphere all continued their slumbers; Lenore and Henri in each other's arms, Alzire lying on her hump back, with head thrown backward, while old Bonnemort, with mouth open and snoring loudly, occupied alone the bed belonging to Jeanlin and Zacharie. Not a breath came from the little room where the mother had fallen asleep while nursing Estelle.

The wooden clock down stairs struck six; along the alley was heard the sound of closing doors, and the click-clack of wooden shoes on the sidewalk. It was the screeners going to the mine. Until seven o'clock all was again silent. Then shutters were thrown back, and through the wall came the sound of yawning and coughing. Now the grinding of coffee was heard; yet no one awoke in that room.

But, suddenly, the noise of slaps and barking aroused Alzire. Knowing what time it was, she ran barefooted to shake her mother.

"Mother! mother! get up, it's late. You know you have to go out. Take care, you'll mash Estelle."

And she pulled the child out from beneath its mother.

"Sakes alive!" stammered the woman, rubbing her eyes. "I'm so tired, I could sleep all day. . . . Dress Lenore and Henri, I'll take them with me; you

can mind Estelle, I don't want to drag her along, she'll catch cold in this weather."

She hastily washed herself and put on an old blue skirt, her best one, and a gray woolen jacket, on which she had sewn two patches the day before.

"What shall I do?" murmured she. "The little ones must have something to eat."

As her mother descended the stairs, Alzire re-entered the room, taking with her Estelle, who was crying. But she was accustomed to the rage of the little one; and though only eight years old, she calmed and amused her with the tender air of a little woman. Placing her in her still warm bed, she coaxed her to sleep again. Now another uproar arose, and she was obliged to make peace between Lenore and Henri who had at last awakened. These children only agreed when asleep. The girl of six years, on awakening, flew at the boy of two, who could not defend himself. Both had large heads, covered with yellow hair. Alzire pulled her sister out of the bed. Then they stamped while she washed them, and put on each article of clothing. They did not open the shutters for fear of arousing old Bonnemort, who continued to snore amid the confusion.

"Come on down, if you're ready," cried the mother.

Then she opened the shutters, raked the fire and put on some coal. A glance into the empty sauce pan dispelled the hope that the old man had left a little soup. She cooked a little handful of vermicelli which had been held in reserve for three days. The cupboard was empty; not a crust, not even a bone remained there. What would become of them if Maigrat stopped their credit and the rich people at Piolaine would not give her a hundred sous? When the men and girl returned from the mine there must be something for them to eat. They could not live without food.

"Come down, right away," she cried again, "I must be off."

When Alzire and the two children were there, she portioned the vermicelli out into three little plates, saying, she did not wish any. Although Catherine had already used the coffee grounds, left from the day before, a second time, she poured some water over them and

drank two great bowls of coffee so weak that it looked like water with a little iron rust. It was good all the same. It would strengthen her.

"Listen," said she to Alzire, "you must let your grandfather sleep, and see that Estelle does not break her neck; if she wakes up and cries too much, here's a lump of sugar you can melt and give her in spoonfuls. . . . I know your'e too sensible to eat it yourself."

"How about school, mamma?"

"That'll have to wait another day. I need you now."

"And the soup, don't you want me to make it if you're late?"

"No, you'll have to wait 'till I get home."

Alzire, with the precocious intelligence of an invalid, knew how to make soup. But she did not insist, she understood why she must wait. Now the whole alley was astir; troops of children were going off to school with loitering step. Eight o'clock struck; the sound of voices arose at the house of Levaque, on the left.

The wives' day had begun, which would be spent in going from house to house, their hands on their hips, their tongues running without a break.

At that moment a wan face, with large lips and a broken nose, was flattened against the window pane, while a woman cried:

"Listen! I've something new to tell you."

"No, not now," replied Maheu's wife. "I'm in a hurry."

And, refusing the offer of a cup of warm coffee, she set out, pushing Lenore and Henri before her. From the room above, Bonnemort's regular snore filled the house.

Outside, the mother was surprised to find it was no longer blowing. The sky was heavy, and a chilly thaw was dampening the walls and filling the roads with the mud peculiar to coal regions, black as soot, thick and clinging. Boxing Lenore's ears for heaping the mud on the toes of her shoes as upon the end of a shovel, she left the alley, passed along the canal-road, and then, to shorten the distance, cut through fields inclosed by moss-covered fences. Manufactories succeeded each other, with high chimneys, denoting a country of in-

dustry. Behind a group of poplars was the old mine Requillart, of which the carpenter-work of the tower alone remained standing. Now, turning to the right, the woman came out upon the main road.

"Stop! stop! dirty pigs!" cried she. "I'll make mud balls for you."

This time, Henri had gathered up a handful of mud and was rolling it into a ball. The two children, after being slapped, returned to their mother's side, laughing at the imprint of their hands in the middle of the road. They were already covered with dirt, and exhausted with their efforts to plod through that sticky mud.

On one side of Marchinnes, was two leagues of straight road, while the other side wound down into Monston, built upon a slope of the plain. These roads of the north, laid out by rule and line, between manufacturing villages, were well made; little by little, buildings were going up, tending to make of this part of the country only working towns. The small brick houses, to prevent sameness, were painted, some yellow, some blue, and others black, while a serpentine line of black ran across the village from right to left as far as the end of the hill. There were two low pavilions and houses belonging to manufacturing officials. The church, also of brick, resembled a new kind of furnace, with its square steeple, already dirty from the flying coal dust. And among the sugar-mills, ware-houses and wheel-shops, the dance-halls, smoking-rooms and saloons were so numerous that, of the thousand houses, five hundred sold liquor.

As she approached the ware-houses and shops belonging to the company, the mother decided to take the hands of Henri and Lenore. Before them was the house of M. Hennebeau, an enormous building which was separated from the road by a railing and garden, in which a few trees were reluctantly growing. A carriage had stopped before the door, from which a gentleman and lady were alighting, visitors arriving from Paris, for Madame Hennebeau, who appeared in the vestibule, gave an exclamation of surprise and joy.

"Come on now," muttered the mother, pulling the children out of the mud.

Very uneasy, she arrived at Maigrat's house, which

was next to the director's, a simple wall separating them. The store in front contained every saleable article, meat, fruit, bread, beer, crockery and notions. A former overseer of the Voreux—he had started out in a small way; then, thanks to the protection of the chiefs, his business had enlarged little by little, driving out all other shops in Montson. Having monopolized trade, he was able to sell cheaper and give credit. But he still remained in the hands of the company, which had built for him his little house and store.

"Here I am again, Monsieur Maigrat," humbly said the woman, finding him standing before his door.

He eyed her without a word. Fat, cold and polite, he prided himself on never changing his mind.

"You won't turn me away like you did yesterday, will you? We must have bread to eat until Monday. I know we've owed you sixty francs for two years."

She spoke in short, faltering sentences. It was an old debt, contracted during a strike. Twenty times they had promised to pay up, but were unable to do so; last pay day they had given him forty sous; then, a shoemaker whom they owed twenty francs threatened to have them arrested, and they were obliged to pay him all the money they had left. That was the reason they were now without a sou. At other times, like their comrades, their money held out until more was received.

Without opening his mouth and with arms crossed over his stomach, Maigrat shook his head at each supplication.

"Nothing, but two loaves of bread, Monsieur Maigrat. I'm reasonable, I don't ask for coffee. . . . Only two three-pound loaves a day."

"No!" he thundered at last.

His wife came forward, a wretched creature, who passed her days over a register without even daring to raise her head; but she moved away in fright on seeing the unhappy woman turn her beseeching eyes toward her. They said she yielded her conjugal relations to the girls of the town. It was a known fact, that when a miner wished a prolongation of credit, by sending his wife or daughter, whether pretty or ugly, if they were compliant, it was obtained.

Sick at heart and followed by the cold looks of Maigrat, the mother turned away, pushing her children before her.

"This won't bring you luck, Monsieur Maigrat, remember that!"

Only one hope remained; the rich people at Piolaine. If they would not give her a hundred sous, they must all lie down and die. Turning to the left she took the Joiselle road, in an angle of which was the director's house, a veritable brick palace, to which a number of the great men of Paris, princes and persons of authority, came each autumn to enjoy great dinners. Walking on, she planned how she would spend the hundred sous; first, some bread, then coffee, potatoes, a quart of beer, and, perhaps, a little hogshead of cheese for the men who needed meat.

The Montson priest, the Abbé Joire, passed her, picking his way through the mud like a well-kept cat who was afraid of soiling itself. He was a good man, who lived at peace with all the world.

"Good-morning, Monsieur le Curé."

He smiled at the children and passed on, leaving her standing in the middle of the road She was not religious, but the thought had come to her that the priest might give her something.

The journey through the black and sticky mud was resumed. There were still two kilometres to drag the now worn-out children. At each side of the road were the same moss-covered fences, inclosing manufactories discolored with smoke. Then came the open fields, large and flat, like an ocean of brown turf. Not a tree was visible, but a purpling line denoted the forest of Vandame.

"Carry me, mamma."

And tucking up her dress, with a desire to arrive as neat as possible, she carried them by turns. Twice she nearly fell in the soft road. When they had at last reached the doorstep, three large dogs jumped upon them, barking so loud that the little ones screamed with fear. as the coachman whipped them off.

"Leave your shoes and come in," said Honorine.

In the dining-room the mother and children stood motionless, overcome by the sudden heat, and uneasy

under the glances of the old gentleman and lady who were stretched out in the arm-chairs.

"You must attend to them, my daughter," said the latter.

The Gregoires charged Cecile with their alms-giving. That entered into their idea of a good education. It was necessary to be charitable, they said. But they flattered themselves that they dealt out charity with intelligence, having a continual fear of being mistaken and encouraging vice. Go, they never gave money, not ten sous, not even two; for it was well known that as soon as a beggar had two sous, he spent them for drink. Therefore, their charity especially consisted in the distribution of warm, winter clothing, to the poor children.

"Oh! the poor darlings!" said Cecile, "they are pale from the cold! . . . Honorine, go up stairs and get the bundle."

The maids were also eyeing these miserable people with the pity and feeling of girls never in want of a meal. While the chamber-maid went up stairs, the cook, forgetting herself, set the milk-bread back upon the table and stood looking on with folded arms.

"I still have two good woolen dresses and some little capes," said Mademoiselle. "The poor little things shall be warm."

Then Maheu's wife found her tongue, stammering:

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. . . . You're very good."

Her eyes filled with tears; she was sure of a hundred sous, she only occupied herself in studying how to ask for them, if they were not offered. The chamber-maid not returning, a moment of embarrassed silence followed. On each side of their mother, holding tight to her skirts, the little ones fixedly regarded the milk-bread.

"Have you only those two?" asked Madame Gregoire, to break the silence.

"Oh! Madame, I've seven."

M. Gregoire, who had resumed his paper, gave an indignant start.

"Seven children, good heavens!"

"It is imprudent," murmured the old lady.

The mother excused herself with an uneasy gesture.

At their house they never would have been able to live if two of the boys and the eldest girl had not been old enough to go into the mine. For it was necessary to feed the children, though they earned nothing.

"Have you worked in the mine for a long time?" asked Madame Gregoire.

The woman smiled.

"Ah! yes, I worked there until I was married. But my husband's people have been below for centuries. They struck the first blows of the pick at Requillart."

Again M. Gregoire dropped his paper and glanced at the woman and those children with waxen skins, faded hair and pinched features, slowly dying of hunger. Silence fell again. No sound was heard save the cracking coal, which threw out a jet of gas. The warm room had that air of comfort only found in the apartments of the rich.

"What is the matter with her," cried Cecile impatiently. "Melanie, go and tell her that the bundle is in the bottom of the armoire, on the left."

Meanwhile, M. Gregoire finished aloud the reflections with which these famished people had inspired him

"It is very true, there is some bad in this world; but, my good woman I cannot help saying the workmen are not always wise. . . . Instead of putting a few sous aside, like the peasants, the miners drink, run into debt and end by not having enough to feed their children."

"Monsieur is right," replied the woman sedately. "They're not always sensible. That's what I say to them when they complain. . . . I'm much behind, though my husband drinks but little. On wedding days he sometimes takes too much, but it always ends there. So that don't hold good with us, you see, for before he was married he drank all the time. And yet there are days like to-day, when you turn your pockets inside out, without finding a sou."

She was thinking of the hundred sou pieces, and her voice at first low and timid, became loud and eager, as she explained that fatal debt. They had paid regularly for some months; but one day, they got behind, then all was ended, for they could not catch up again. The hole grew larger, and the men were disheartened with

the work which did not pay them enough to keep straight. They could not get out of this scrape. But they must understand the whole affair. A shoemaker in want of a drink to wash down the dust, had begun their trouble. Perhaps it was no fault of his. At any-rate the workmen did not earn enough.

"The company gives you fuel and houses, I believe," said Madame Gregoire.

With a glance at the coal flaming in the fire-place she answered:

"Yes, they give us coal. It's not very good, but it burns. . . . The rent's only six francs; that don't seem like much to you, but sometimes its pretty hard to pay it. Why, to-day, if they were to cut me to pieces I couldn't hand them a sou, for you can't give what you haven't got."

The gentleman and lady were silent and yawned a little lanquidly, depressed and uncomfortable by the exposure of this misery. She fearing she had offended them, added with a wise and calm air of a practical woman:

"It does no good to complain. Things are so and we'll have to stand them. No matter how much we tried, we couldn't change anything. So, Monsieur and Madame, it's best to be honest and work on with the strength the good God has given us, isn't it?"

M. Gregoire nodded his head approvingly:

"With such sentiments, my good woman, one is above misfortune."

Honorine and Melanie brought in the bundle. Cecile opened it and took out two little dresses and capes, also some stockings and mittens. Those would do very well, and with the maid's assistance, she hastily tied up the bundle, for her piano teacher had arrived at last, and she pushed the mother and children towards the door.

"We are so short," stammered the woman. "If you've only a hundred-sou piece."

The words choked her, for the Maheus were proud and would not beg. Cecile uneasily glanced at her father, but he slowly refused with an air of duty.

"No, it is not our habit. We cannot."

Then the young girl turned to her mother, wishing

to give something to the children. They were still looking at the milk-bread, and cutting it in two she gave it to them.

"Here! this is for you."

Then she took it back and asked for an old paper.

"Wait, you can share with your brothers and sisters."

And, under the watchful glances of her parents, she ended by pushing them outside. The poor, hungry little things went off holding the bread carefully, their little hands benumbed with the cold.

Pulling her children along the road, the mother no longer noticed the barren fields, the black mud, or the livid sky. When she arrived at Montson, she resolutely entered Maigrat's store, begging so piteously that she ended by carrying away two loaves of bread, other provisions, and even a hundred-sou piece, which was lent her for a week. When he told her to send her daughter to get the provisions she understood his kindness. But she did not fear; Catherine was a good girl, and, for any insult, would slap his face.

CHAPTER IX.

It was eleven by the clock of the little church on the narrow street of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, a brick chapel, where the Abbé Joire said mass on Sunday. On one side, through the closed windows of the school-house, also of brick, came the sound of children's voices. The wide roads, separated by little gardens, back to back and four great rows of uniform houses, were deserted, and these gardens, ravaged by winter, were still strewn with the remains of their last vegetables. The smoking chimneys denoted preparation for dinner; at intervals, along the alley a woman opened the door and after a hasty glance again disappeared. There was a constant dripping from the waste pipes into casks. Although it was not raining, the gray atmosphere was filled with moisture. This village, built in the midst of vast fields surrounded by black roads as with a band of mourning, had nothing to relieve its sombreness, but those regular rows of red tiles, constantly washed by the storms.

La Maheude went to buy a few potatoes from the wife of an overseer, who still had some left from her crop. Behind a clump of poplars, the only trees of that part of the country, stood a group of isolated dwellings in rows of four, surrounded by gardens. When the company had reserved those houses for the overseers, the workmen had named that corner of the town the Bas-de-Joie; just as they had ironically called their alley—Paie-tes-Dettes.

"Here we are," said the mother, as, loaded with bundles, she pushed Lenore and Henri into the house.

Alzire was sitting before the fire, rocking in her arms the screaming Estelle, to whom she had given all the sugar without being able to quiet her.

"Give her to me," said the mother, as soon as she had thrown her bundles on the table. "She won't let us say a word."

The child began nursing, and they could at last hear themselves talk. All had gone well in her absence, the little economist had kept the fire up, swept and dusted the room, and in the silence, they heard the grandfather snoring the same rhythmical snore which he had not stopped for an instant.

"Here's some things," murmured Alzire, smiling at the provisions. "Shall I make the soup, mamma?"

The table was covered: a bundle of clothing, two loaves of bread, some potatoes, butter, coffee, chicory and half a pound of hogs-head cheese.

"Oh! the soup!" said the mother, with a weary air, "some sorrel must be picked and the leeks gathered first. . . . No, you can make that after a while for the men. . . . Put some potatoes to boil; we'll eat them with a little butter. . . . And don't forget to make some coffee."

Suddenly she thought of the milk-bread, and looked at the empty hands of Lenore and Henri, who had thrown themselves on the floor, already rested and happy. On the road these gourmands had slyly eaten it. She boxed their ears, while Alzire, who was putting the sauce-pans on the fire, tried to appease her.

"Leave them alone, mamma. If it was for me, you know I'm just as well off. They were hungry from walking so far."

Noon sounded; the children were heard returning from school. The potatoes were cooked and the coffee, one-half chicory, was passed through the filterer. A corner of the table was cleared; but the mother alone ate there; the children contented themselves with their laps; and the little boy, still hungry, without saying a word, constantly turned towards the hogs-head cheese, the greasy paper of which annoyed him exceedingly.

The mother was drinking her coffee in little swallows, warming her hands by holding them around the cup, when old Bonnemort came down. Usually, he arose later, and found his breakfast waiting for him on the fire. This morning he growled because there was no soup, but when his daughter-in-law told him people did not always get what they wished, he ate his potatoes in silence. From time to time he arose to spit in the fire; and no longer having teeth, he rolled the food in his mouth a long time, his head bent over, his eyes dull.

"Oh! I forgot, mamma," said Alzire, "our neighbor's been here. . . ."

Her mother interrupted her.

"She bothers me."

She was angry at Levaque's wife, who, the day before, had refused to lend her a few sous, although her lodger had just paid her a week's board in advance. The neighbors in that alley, would lend very little to each other.

"That puts me in mind," said the mother. I borrowed some coffee from Pierron's wife, day before yesterday. Wrap me up a mill-full and I'll carry it back to her."

When the child had prepared the package, saying she would return immediately to make soup for the men, she went out with Estelle in her arms, leaving old Bonnemort slowly eating his potatoes, while Lenore and Henri were fighting over the falling skins.

Fearing, if she appeared in the street, la Levaque would call her, she went across the gardens, passing through a hole in the old fence, which separated them. A well was there which was used by four families. Behind it was a coop, now full of old tools, in which they raised the rabbits, eaten on fete days. One o'clock struck. Not a soul was to be seen at the doors and

windows; one man, waiting for the time to go to work, was digging in his garden, without even raising his head as she passed. Suddenly the woman was surprised to see a gentleman and two ladies coming around the church corner. After a second look, she recognized them. It was M. Hennebeau, who was showing the alley to the guests who had arrived that morning.

"Oh! why have you taken that trouble!" said la Pierronne, on seeing the coffee. "I was in no hurry for it."

She was twenty-eight years of age and the handsomest woman in the alley, with a bright face, a low forehead, large eyes and a little coquettish mouth. A white cat was no cleaner than she, and never having had a child, her form was still perfect. Her mother, the Brule, widow of a digger who died at the mine, sent her daughter to work in a store, swearing she would never marry a miner; and when, later on, the girl became the wife of Pierron, a widower with a child of eight years, she had nearly died with rage. For two years they lived very happily, without a debt, meat twice a week and a house so cleanly kept that they could see themselves in the sauce-pans. The company had allowed her to sell cakes and candies, the jars of which were arranged upon shelves along the window. It was a gain of six or seven sous a day, and on Sundays, sometimes twelve. Yet, in the midst of that good fortune, the Brule stormed with rage and little Lydie received, in too frequent blows, the outbursts of her temper.

"How big she's growing," said Pierron's wife smiling at Estelle.

"Don't speak of it," replied the mother. "Ill weeds always grow fast. You're lucky not to have any. You can keep yourself clean."

And she threw an envious glance at this room where everything was in order, so neat as to be almost dainty, with roses upon the buffet, a mirror and three framed engravings.

Meanwhile this neat little housekeeper had been preparing to drink her coffee alone, as all her family were at that hour in the mine.

"You'll drink a cup with me, won't you?" said she.

"No, thanks, I was just starting to drink my own."

"What difference does that make?"

Then she accepted. And standing before the window they looked, between the bars, at the houses across the street, the little curtains of which betokened the cleanliness of the house-wives.

Levaque's, of real torchon, looked as though they had been used to wipe the pots and kettles.

"How is it possible to live in such dirt?" murmured la Pierronne.

Then her visitor burst out: "Ah! if I had a lodger like that Bouteloup, I'd get along well! When one is smart, a lodger is an excellent thing. But, they said that woman's husband drank, beat her and ran after the singing girls in the cafés at Montson."

La Pierronne shrugged her shoulders with an air of profound disgust. "Those horrible women. But what astonishes me is that you allow your son to go with their daughter. How's one going to help it? Their garden is next to ours. Why, last summer Zacharie and Philoméne were always courting behind the lilacs; we couldn't go to the well for water without surprising them."

It was a simple tale of the promiscuousness of that alley, where parents only became angry when their sons were in haste to marry their mistresses, as a married child was no longer a help to them, they said. "You'd better put a stop to it," said la Pierronne, "they've two children now, and they're bound to be married soon. His money will be a great loss to you."

The mother in a fury, threw out her hands. "Listen to this: I'll curse them if they do. . . . Don't Zacharie owe me some respect? He's cost us enough, hasn't he? Well, he's got to pay us back before he takes a wife. What would become of us if our children left us as soon as they grew up to work for others? Why, we'd all starve."

Then she became calm again.

"Well, we'll see how it ends. Your coffee is very good; it's strong."

And after a quarter of an hour spent in talking of her neighbors, she went off in haste, saying her soup was not made. The children were returning

from school. Now and then a woman appeared at the door, watching Mme. Hennebeau, who was going from one alley to another. That visit was creating a stir in the neighborhood. Two frightened hens were driven off in a garden, while the man at work there paused to watch the strangers.

When la Maheu arrived before Levaque's house, she ran against the wife who had started out to stop Doctor Vanderhaghen, the company's physician. He was a little man, always in a hurry, so overwhelmed with business that he gave advice while walking.

"Monsieur," said she, "I can't sleep. I feel sick all over. I must talk with you."

He responded, without stopping:

"Give me some peace? you drink too much coffee."

"And my husband, Monsieur," said Mahue's wife, "you ought to come and see him. . . . His limbs ache all the time."

"Let him take more rest then."

The woman remained motionless, watching the doctor's back disappear in the distance.

"Come in," said la Lavaque, as they finished shrugging their shoulders. "You must know something new. . . . And you'll have a cup of coffee; it's just been made."

La Maheu struggled to say no, but being weak, she consented to go in and have a drop, not to be disobliging.

The room was black with filthiness, the ceiling and walls were covered with grease, the sideboard and table sticky with dirt, while a disagreeable odor pervaded the whole house. Beside the fire, with both elbows on the table and his nose buried in his plate, Bouteloup, a young looking man of thirty-three, with great broad shoulders, was finishing his bouilli, while little Achille, the firstborn of Philoméne, two years old, watched him with pleading eyes. The lodger, very tender hearted, in spite of his great fierce-looking beard, from time to time drew a piece of meat from his mouth and gave it to the child.

"Wait, I'll sweeten it," said la Maheu, putting some brown sugar in the coffee.

Levaque's wife, six years his senior, was terribly hag-

gard, her figure wholly gone; she had a large square mouth and gray hair, always uncombed. He was as blind to her want of attractions as to the fact that his soup was not clean, or the sheets on his bed were not changed in six weeks. This all came with cheap board.

"I wanted to tell you," continued she, "that some one saw la Pierronne over at the alley Bas-de-Joie. That gentleman—you know who—was waiting for her behind Rasseneur's and they went off together along the canal. That's a nice thing for a married woman."

"Why!" said la Maheu, "before Pierron was married, he used to give that overseer rabbits, now I suppose he thinks it costs him less to let him make love to his wife."

Bouteloup burst out laughing, and threw a piece of bread, soaked in gravy, into Achille's mouth. The two women continued talking of la Pierronne, a coquette, they said, no handsomer than any other woman, who was always washing herself and putting on pomades. But that was the husband's affair; if he liked it, it was all right. There were some men so ambitious that they would kiss their chief's feet, only to hear them say thanks. Just then a neighbor came in, bringing the younger child of Philoméne, Desiree. This child had just finished its breakfast, having been taken down to the screeners, where its mother stopped her work to sit down in the coal and nurse it.

"I can't leave my baby a minute, or she'll scream," said la Maheu, looking at Estelle who had fallen asleep in her arms.

But she could not avoid the subject la Levaque was about to begin upon.

"Say now, it's most time to stop this."

At first the two mothers, without caring to speak of it, had agreed not to hasten the marriage. If Zacharie's mother wished to keep as long as possible the pay of her son, Philoméne's mother also hated to give up her daughter's. There was no hurry, the latter even preferred to keep the little one, as long as there was only one child; but when it grew large enough to eat, and another came, she found that she was losing money and became anxious to see her daughter the wife of Zacharie.

"There's nothing to stop it now," continued she. "Let's see, when shall it be?"

"At least, wait till the weather is good," replied la Maheu, embarrassed. "I won't say anything against it then. I'm tired of this business though. If Catherine ever gets herself in a fix like this I'll strangle her.

Levaque's wife shrugged her shoulders.

"Get out, she'll do as all the others have done before her."

Bouteloup, with the calm air of a man in his own house, went to the sideboard for some bread. On one corner of the table were the soup, vegetables, potatoes and beets, half peeled, resumed and abandoned six times amid continual gossiping. The woman had again seated herself before them, when she suddenly arose and went to the window.

"Who's that? Why it's Madame Hennebeau with some people. They're going to Pierron's house."

Then they both again began talking of La Pierronne. That was always the way. Whenever any guests of the company came there they were always taken straight to the house of that woman, because she was clean. Well, she could well be neat, with a lover who earned three thousand francs. If all was pure without, it was not the same within. And all the time the visitors remained, their tongues ran on without stopping.

"They're going," said la Levaque at last. "They're turning round. Look, my dear. I think they're coming to your house."

La Maheu was filled with fear. Who knows whether Alzire had cleaned up; her soup was not ready, and she was not dressed. She stammered "good-day" and flew off without turning her head.

But everything shone. Alzire, very sedate and with a house-cloth before her, was making the soup, seeing her mother did not return. She had pulled the leeks, and gathered some sorrel in the garden, and she was now cleaning the vegetables, while upon the fire a large kettle of water was heating for the men's bath on their return. Henri and Lenore were peaceable by chance, being very much occupied in tearing up an old almanac. The father Bonnemort was silently smoking his pipe.

As the mother drew a sigh of relief, Madame Hennebeau knocked and entered.

"You will permit me, will you not? my good woman."

She was a large blonde, a little heavy in the maturity of her forty years, and she smiled, without showing her fear of soiling her toilet, a dark green silk, covered with a black velvet mantle.

"Come in," said she to her guests. "There is nothing to be feared. . . . Well! is it not clean? This good woman has seven children. All our housewives are like this. . . . I have explained to you that the company rents them the house for six francs a month. There is one large room on the first floor, two bedrooms above, a cellar, and a garden."

The gentleman, who wore the insignia of some order, and the lady in a fur cloak, who had that morning arrived from Paris, opened their eyes in astonishment at this life, which was so entirely unknown to them.

"And a garden," repeated the lady, "why, it's charming."

"We give them more coal than they can burn, continued Madame Hennebeau. "A physician visits them twice a week, and when they become old, they receive pensions, although we do not deduct anything from their salaries now."

"A veritable country of Cocagne," said the gentleman, enchanted.

La Maheu arose hurriedly, offering them chairs. The ladies refused. Madame Hennebeau was already fatigued. For an instant she forgot her ennui in this role she had assumed; a herd of beasts, she thought, and repugnance immediately followed in this heavy atmosphere of misery, although she never made herself uneasy by thinking of these people, working and suffering beside her.

"The beautiful children!" murmured the lady, who in reality thought them frightful, with their immense heads, covered with straw colored hair.

Out of politeness, they asked their ages and also some questions about Estelle. Old Bonnemort had respectfully taken his pipe from his mouth, but he none the less remained an object for sympathy, so worn was he,

by his forty years at the bottom, his limbs stiff, his frame broken down, his face cadaverous; when a violent fit of coughing came upon him, he preferred to go outside to expectorate, fearing that black spittle would frighten these people.

Alzire was a great success. What a sweet little housekeeper. They complimented the mother on having such an intelligent child. No one spoke of her hump, although compassionate looks were frequently cast on the poor infirm being.

"Now," concluded Madame Hennebeau, "if they speak in Paris of our alleys, you will be able to reply. No more rumors like that, for mothers, old people and all are happy, as you see. Even we would become invigorated in this good air and perfect peace."

"It is marvelous, marvelous!" cried the gentleman, in a final burst of enthusiasm.

They went out, enchanted with this sort of phenomenal hut, and la Maheu stood in the doorway, watching them slowly going off talking very loud. The roads were full of people, and they were compelled to pass through groups of women attracted thither by the report of their visit which had passed from house to house.

Levaque's wife called to la Pierronne who was running past her door.

"Did you know la Maheu went to Piolaine this morning to beg, and that Maigrat, who had refused them bread, has given it to them? That's strange."

"Oh! he's after Catherine."

"She just told me she'd strangle Catherine if she did wrong. All I have to say is she'd better watch that big Cheval."

"Hush! here're the people." Then the two women, with a demure air and without impolite curiosity, contented themselves with looking out of the corners of their eyes. As soon as their backs were turned, they called la Maheu, who still had Estelle in her arms, and these three stood motionless, watching the retreating forms of Madame Hennebeau and her guests. When they were out of hearing the gossiping was resumed with renewed vigor.

"They've got some noney on their backs. Their clothing's worth more them themselves."

"I don't know anything about the others, but I would'nt give four sous for that one from here, fat as she is. They tell some strange stories about her."

"Well, what are they?"

"Oh! about men. The engineer is one of them."

"That little thing?"

"What difference does that make, if it amuses her? I don't think much of a woman who never acts as if she was pleased with anything. . . . Look! she turns her back on us, as if she despised us all. Is that right?"

Madame Hennebeau and her friends were going on with the same loitering step, still talking, when a landau drove up before the church, and from it alighted a dark gentleman, about forty-eight years of age, with a strong face, and his form muffled up in a long, dark overcoat.

"The husband," murmured la Levaque, lowering her voice as though he was by her side, filled with the strong fear which the director inspired in his ten thousand workmen.

Now, everyone in the alley was out-doors. The women's curiosity became greater and greater, and the groups drew closer together, becoming a perfect mob; while the dirty children lay upon the pavement with gaping mouths. The pale face of the school teacher was seen an instant peeping from the window. In the garden, the man who had been digging, rested his foot on the spade, while he watched with the others. And the murmur of the gossiping voices, swelled out little by little with a rustling sound like the wind sweeping through a forest of dead leaves.

The crowd was the thickest before Levaque's door. First, two women had approached, then ten and twenty. La Pierronne was prudently silent, now that there were so many ears to hear. La Maheu, one of the most reasonable women, was also contented to look on. But M. Hennebeau had assisted the ladies into the carriage, and after seating himself, it drove off on the Marchiennes road.

The church clock struck three. Another gang of workmen were starting for the mine, old Bonnemort, Bouteloup, and others. Suddenly, around the corner

appeared the first miners, returning from work, with black faces and clothing soaked, their arms folded, and shoulders thrown back. They produced a scattering of the women; all ran off, again entering their own doors, uneasy housekeepers, whom too much coffee and too much gossip had made forgetful of all else. So now nothing was heard save this troubled cry:

"Ah! Mon Dieu! my soup is not ready."

CHAPTER X.

When Maheu entered the house, after having left Etienne at Rasseneur's, he found Catherine, Zacharie and Jeanlin at the table, finishing their soup. On returning from the mine, they were always so hungry that they sat down to eat in their damp clothing without even washing their faces; the table remained set from morning until night, and there was constantly some one there swallowing his portion, at the risk of the exigencies of labor.

From the door, Maheu perceived the provisions. He said nothing, but his anxious face cleared up. All the morning, the empty cupboard, the house without coffee, or bread, had worried him. A sad thought came to him as he worked the vein in his drift: how would the wife make out? and what would become of them if she returned home with empty hands? Here he found everything. She would explain it to him later, and, while waiting, he smiled contentedly.

Catherine and Jeanlin had already risen, drinking their coffee standing, while Zacharie, his hunger only half appeased by his soup, cut for himself a large slice of bread, which he covered with butter. He noticed the hogs-head cheese which Alzire had put upon a plate, but he did not touch it, knowing that when there was only enough meat for one, it was intended for his father. All washed down their soup with a glass of fresh water, the good clear drink which they were forced to fall back upon a few days before pay day.

"There's no beer," said la Maheu, as the father sat down to the table. "I wanted to keep a little money.

But if you want it, the little one can run and get a pint."

He looked at her in astonishment. How was that? She had money, too.

"No, no," said he. "I've just drunk a mug, that's enough." And Maheu slowly swallowed a great bowlful of soup, made of bread, potatoes, leeks and sorrel. His wife, with Estelle still in her arms, assisted Alzire in waiting on him, handing the butter and meat and putting the coffee back on the fire to keep it warm.

In the meantime, near the cupboard, the bathing had commenced in a tub made from the half of a cask. Catherine, after emptying the warm water into it, tranquilly undressed and with face to the wall and back to the fire, rubbed herself vigorously with the soft soap. No one paid the slightest attention to her; when clean, she jumped from the tub and ran upstairs, leaving her wet clothing in a heap on the floor. A quarrel broke out between the two brothers. Jeanlin had hastened to get in the tub under the pretense that Zacharie was still eating; and the latter threw him out head over heels, claiming his turn, saying, though he was polite enough to let Catherine wash first, he didn't want boys' leavings, even if the water was black enough to fill all the ink-stands in the neighborhood. They ended by getting in the tub together, washing each other's backs; then, like their sister, entirely nude, they disappeared in the stairway.

"What a slop they've made!" said la Maheu, taking the clothing from the floor and hanging it to dry. "Alzire, wipe up a bit, will you!"

But a voice on the other side of the wall cut short her words. Oaths were heard, mingled with the screams of a woman, while now and then heavy blows resounded, as though some one was being struck with a tin pail.

"Levaque's beginning again," said Maheu, quietly, as he strummed on the bowl with his spoon. "That's strange; Bouteloup said the soup was ready."

"Ready," said his wife; "I saw the vegetables on the table not even peeled."

The cries grew louder; there was a terrible push which shook the wall; then all became silent. The

miner, swallowing a last spoonful, concluded with the calm air of justice:

"She deserved it, if the soup wasn't ready."

After drinking a glass of water, he cut a square piece off of the hogs-head cheese, eating it with some bread. No one spoke while the father was eating. He was thinking that it did not taste like the meat which came from Maigrat's; it must have been bought somewhere else; but he did not question his wife, only to ask if the old man was still asleep upstairs. No, the grandfather had gone out for his accustomed walk, and then silence again fell.

Henri and Lenore, playing in the water which had been spilled on the floor, seeing the meat, went and stood at their father's knee, watching each piece as it was lifted from the plate, their eyes at first full of hope which was gradually succeded by a look of consternation as it was lost to sight in his mouth.

"Haven't the children had any?" he inquired.

And when his wife hesitated he added:

"You know I don't like this unfairness. It takes away my appetite when they're around me begging like this."

"They've had some," cried she in anger. "If you'd listen to them you'd give them your part and the others' too; they'd stuff themselves till they burst. Alzire, didn't we all have some cheese?"

"Of course, mamma," replied the little hunch-back, who, under these circumstances, lied with the coolness of a grown woman.

Lenore and Henri stood motionless, shocked at these lies which they dared not contradict. Their little hearts swelled up, and they would have given anything to have been able to tell him they had not even tasted it.

"Go 'way," said their mother, driving them to the other side of the room. "You ought to be ashamed to hang around your father, as if he was the only one who had it. And at any rate, don't he work while you others do nothing?"

But Maheu called them, and taking Henri upon his left knee and Lenore on his right, he shared the remainder with them, cutting it in small pieces which the children greedily devoured.

After finishing, he said to his wife:

"No, don't give me my coffee now. I'm going to wash first. You may help me throw out this dirty water, though."

They grasped the handles of the tub, and were emptying the water into the gutter before the door, when Jeanlin came down, dressed in dry clothes, an old faded pair of pants and woolen blouse, much too large for him, they having belonged to his brother. As he was noiselessly slipping through the open door his mother stopped him.

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere."

"Nowhere? You're going to gather dandelions for a salad this evening. Now listen, do you hear me? if you don't bring some home, I'll settle with you."

"All right."

And he went out, his hands in his pockets, with the gait of an old miner, in spite of his ten years. Zacharie, in a black woolen shirt with blue stripes, descended next. His father called after him not to come home late, and he went out, nodding his head, without replying, and with a pipe between his teeth.

The tub was again filled with water and, at a glance from the mother, Alzire, as was her habit, led the children out to play before the door Their father did not wash himself before the family, although he considered it proper for the children to paddle around together.

"What are you doing up there?" cried la Maheu from the bottom of the stairs.

"I'm mending my dress. I tore it yesterday," replied Catherine.

"All right. Don't come down, your father's washing."

La Maheu placed Estelle on a chair, and for a wonder, finding herself comfortable in front of a fire, the child was quiet, watching her parents with the bewildered eyes of a little creature without thought. After removing his clothes, he plunged his head into the water, rubbing it with that soft soap which had discolored and bleached the hair of his race; then

lathering himself all over he stepped into the tub while his wife stood by looking on.

"Say now," she began, "I saw your look when you came in. You'd been worrying. Just think, the people at Piolaine wouldn't give me a son. Oh! they were very kind, they gave the little ones some clothing, and I was ashamed to beg for anything more."

She paused an instant to tie Estelle in her chair, fearing she would fall out. The father continued rubbing himself, without, by one question, hastening this tale which interested him, patiently waiting to be enlightened.

"Of course Maigrat refused. He drove me from his door like a dog."

He lifted his head, still watching her in silence. Nothing at Piolaine, nothing from Maigrat, who was it then? But she began rolling up her sleeves preparatory to rubbing his back, and taking up some soft soap she lathered his shoulders while he braced himself in order to stand the vigorous strokes.

"Then I went back to Maigrat's. I pleaded with him, saying it wouldn't do him any harm to be just. That bothered him; he tried to get away from me."

Now she was making his back shine like her three saucepans did on Saturday, using the back and forth movement of the arm until she became so winded that her words choked her.

"At last, calling me an old crank, he said we could have bread until Saturday; and the best of it is that he lent me a hundred sous. . . . I bought some butter, coffee, chicory and even a little hogs-head of cheese of him. Then I paid eighteen sous for potatoes, and I still have seventy-five left. So you see, my morning wasn't lost."

She was wiping him dry, while he, happy, not thinking of the debt, caught her up in his arms and kissed her.

"Leave me alone, goose! you're not dry yet. . . . I'm afraid, though, that Maigrat's thinking of something."

She was going to speak of Catherine, but paused.

What use to make him uneasy?

"What of?"

"Oh! of robbing us. We must watch him, that's all."

When he was thoroughly dry, Maheu simply put on a pair of pants. His greatest enjoyment, after his bath, was to sit for a time with arms and chest bare. In summer the men would all go outside after bathing, and, in spite of the damp weather, he went to the door for a moment to call across the garden to another man, with shoulders equally bare. Then others appeared at their doors, all smiling from the comfort of a good bowl of soup and a warm bath. Even the children, lying upon the pavement, raised themselves and laughed also at the happiness around them.

While drinking his coffee, Maheu told his wife of the engineer's anger about the timbering. He was calm now, and listened with an approving nod to the wise counsels of la Maheu, who showed a great amount of wisdom in these affairs. She always repeated to him that they would gain nothing by opposing the company.

Finally, she informed him of the visit of Madame Hennebeau.

"Can I come down? asked Catherine from the head of the stairs."

"Yes, your father is dry."

The young girl had put on her Sunday dress, a dark blue poplin, already faded and worn. On her head was a very simple black tulle bonnet.

"Why, you've dressed yourself up. Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Montson to buy some ribbon for my bonnet. I've taken off the old one; it was too dirty."

"Then you've got some money?"

"No, Mouquette promised to lend me ten sous."

The mother let her go as far as the door, then called her back.

"Listen; don't go to Maigrat to buy your ribbon. He'll rob you and believe we're rolling in gold."

The father, sitting by the fire, added:

"Don't stay out too long."

In the afternoon, Maheu worked in his garden. He had already planted some potatoes, beans and peas, and to-day he intended transplanting some cabbage and lettuce. This garden furnished them with all their

vegetables except potatoes, of which they never had enough. He thoroughly understood gardening, and even raised a few artichokes, a thing which his neighbors had never been able to do. As he went into the garden he saw Levaque who had come out to smoke a pipe and look at the lettuce which Bouteloup had planted that morning; if his lodger had not have had the courage to dig, nothing would have grown there but weeds. A conversation was begun across the fence. Levaque, excited at having hit his wife, vainly tried to drag Mahue to Rasseneur's. A drink didn't frighten him did it? They would have a game of skittles, take a stroll with their comrades and then return home. That was the only pleasure after coming from the mine; there could be no harm in it. But Maheu wished to transplant his cabbage which he said would be wilted next day. In reality he refused because not wishing to ask his wife for a liard of the hundred sous.

It was striking five when la Pierronne came to ask if her Lydic had gone off with Jeanlin. Levaque said it must be so, for his Bebert had also disappeared, and those three children were always together. But when Maheu told them they were gathering dandelions they were satisfied. Now that the school was closed all the little ones were in the alley, pulling and beating each other, while the fathers, who were not at the saloons, squatted in the same position as in the mine, smoking their pipes. At last Levaque decided to go off to Rasseneur's alone, but Maheu still went on planting.

Night had fallen; la Maheu lit the lamp, provoked that neither the girl nor boys had come in. She knew not one of them would come to join the only meal which they could take together. Moreover, she waited for the dandelions. What could they pick at that hour in that darkness? A salad was so nice with the stew which she had put on the fire, some potatoes, leeks and sorrel stewed together, and fried onions, of which the entire house smelt; that good odor which soon became rank and penetrated the bricks of the alley with such a smell that they could be scented afar off in the country.

Maheu, after leaving the garden when night came on, dozed on a chair, his head against the wall. As soon as he seated himself he slept. The clock struck seven,

Henri and Lenore broke a plate in obstinately trying to assist Alzire, who was setting the table. Bonnemort was the first to enter and, having hurriedly eaten his dinner, he returned to the mine.

"We may as well eat. . . . They're big enough to take care of themselves. The only thing that I don't like is there's no salad."

CHAPTER XI.

At Rasseneur's, after having eaten a soup, Etienne again went up into the little room under the roof, which he was to occupy. He had not closed his eyes for two days, and overcome by fatigue, without disrobing, he fell upon his bed and slept soundly. When he awoke, it was growing dark, he raised his head in astonishment, not recognizing where he was; then as a faintness came over him, he painfully arose, determined to get a breath of fresh air, and after eating his dinner, to retire for the night.

The weather was moderating; the leaden sky had become copper-colored, charged with one of those long rains of the north, of which the moistness of the air denoted the approach. Great smoky clouds rolled by, and in the distance settled down on that desert plain. Upon this immense sea of reddish earth twilight was falling. No sound was heard, not a breath of wind was stirring.

Etienne began walking, with no other purpose than to shake off his feverish feeling. In passing the Voreux, where as yet not a lantern shone out, he paused an instant to watch the six o'clock exit of miners, who went off in groups, mixing with the girls from the screeners, all laughing together among the shadows.

First came la Brule and her son-in-law, Pierron. She was quarreling with him because he had not taken her part in an argument she had just finished with an overseer.

"If I was a man, I'd be ashamed to let one of those overseers get the best of me."

Pierron, who had been silently walking on, said at last:

"Well, perhaps I ought to have jumped on the chief. But I've no time for that now."

"If my daughter had listened to me, she would never have had anything to do with you."

Their voices were lost. Etienne watched her disappear with her eagle-like nose, white hair and long thin arms which were gesticulating furiously. Now the conversation of two young people arrested his attention. He recognized the voices of Zacharie and Moquet.

"Are you coming?" asked the latter. "We will eat a sandwich and then go to the Volcan."

"After awhile; I've something to do now."

"What?"

The young man turning around percieved Philoméne, who was coming from the screenings. He understood.

"Oh, it's that? Well, I'll go on."

"Yes, I'll catch up with you."

As he moved off, Moquet met his father who was also leaving the Voreux; the two men simply said good evening, the son taking the main road while the old man slowly went off by the canal.

Zacharie had already stopped Philoméne, pushing her to one side of the road in spite of her resistance.

"I've something to say to you," said he impatiently.

Taking her arm he led her off in the darkness, asking her if she hadn't some money.

"What for?" she demanded.

Becoming confused he spoke of a debt of two francs which he owed.

"Shut up, now. I saw Moquet; you are going to the Volcan to see those nasty women singers."

He crossed himself, swearing it was not so. Then, when she shrugged her shoulders, he said suddenly:

"Come with us if you want to. You see that don't bother me. What do I want with those singers?"

"And the baby?" she replied. You know I can't stir, for she's always crying. Let me go home. They're mad now, I'll bet."

But he detained her, saying he did not want to appear foolish before Moquet whom he had promised. A man couldn't go to bed with the hens every evening. Van-

quished, she turned up the skirt of her dress, and ripping the hem, drew out some ten sou pieces. For fear of being robbed by her mother, she hid there the money she made at extra work in the mine.

"I've got five, you see," she said. "You may have three. Only first you must swear that you'll persuade your mother to let us get married. . . . Swear, swear first."

She spoke in the tired voice of a great sickly girl, without passion, simply weary of existence. He swore, saying that was already a promised thing; then, when she gave him the three pieces, he kissed her, and allowing her to return to the alley alone, cut across the fields to overtake his comrade.

Etienne had mechanically followed them, but, not hearing their words, believed it a simple rendezvouz. A little further on other voices were heard.

Seated on a heap of stones, there was Jeanlin, with Bebert on one side and Lydic on the other.

"What did you say? I'll give you a slap if you growl. Who thought of this first?"

Jeanlin, after lying for an hour along the canal, went to the meadows and gathered dandelions, assisted by the two others. Suddenly the thought came to him that they might be converted into money, and, instead of going home, they went to Montson, sending the little girl from door to door, selling the greens, until not one was left. They made eleven sous, and now with empty hands they were dividing the gain.

"That's not fair," said Bebert. "If you keep seven sous we'll only have two apiece."

"What's not fair," replied Jeanlin, furious; "didn't I pick more than you?"

The other generally yielded with timid a submission, a stupidity which rendered him the continual victim of his comrade. Older and stronger, he even allowed himself to be slapped. But this time, the thought of all that money excited him to resistance.

"He's stealing from us, isn't he Lydic. If he don't divide we'll tell his mother."

Jeanlin stuck out his tongue at them.

"Say one word and I'll go and tell them at your house that you've sold the salad to my mother. And

besides, you stupid fools, I can't divide eleven sous in three parts, don't you see? Here are two sous. If you don't want them I'll put them back in my pocket."

Subdued, Bebert accepted his portion. Lydie, who was afraid of Jeanlin, had said nothing. When he offered her the money she held out her hand with a submissive smile. But he suddenly changed his mind.

"What would you do with all that money? Your mother'll take it from you, for you don't know enough to hide it. I'd better take care of it for you. When you want some money you can ask me for it."

The nine sous disappeared. To prevent her from crying he tickled her, making her laugh, and then romping through the fields she soon forgot her childish grief.

A hundred steps farther on, Etienne met another couple, who were going to Requillart, where, around the old ruined mine, all the girls of Montson assembled with their lovers. The falling sheds, long since abandoned, were still standing, while here and there a half rotten coal car obstructed the way. A thick vegetation had covered that corner of the ground, a wild grass and some young trees already strong. In that spot all the girls were at home; there was room enough for all; some sat upon overturned logs, while others even took up their stay in the cars.

A keeper lived there, old Moque, to whom the company had given two rooms almost under the ruined tower, apartments which were constantly threatened with complete annihilation from the falling timbers. He had even been compelled to prop up the ceiling; but they lived very comfortably there, he and his son, in one room, the daughter in the other. When every pane of glass was gone from the windows, he had kept out the cold by nailing on some boards; they made it dark but then it was warm. This keeper occupied himself but little with that old mine, spending the most of his time in the Voreux caring for his horses.

Moque passed his old age there among these boys and girls, courting in every corner. His daughter began at ten years of age. Lovers succeeded each other; but, as she kept them from her home, he did not complain, only he growled occasionally when, on going

to gather wood for the soup, or to find some nuts for his rabbits, he would stumble over a couple seated in the grass with arms entwined round each other's waists. He nodded his head with silent regrets on turning aside from these young people. Oh! that youth which was gone.

Every evening, before dinner, old Bonnemort paid a visit to his friend Moque. These two old men spoke but little, exchanging scarcely ten words in the half hour they spent together. But they found happiness in thus sitting on a log with heads on their breasts, musing of the days gone by. No doubt they became young again, as around them floated the same kisses, whispers and laughs in which they had taken part forty-three years before. Ah! they also had passed happy hours there. And the two old men shook their heads, often leaving each other without even saying good-night.

That evening, just as Etienne arrived, Bonnemort started towards the alley, saying:

"Good-night, old boy! . . . Say, now, you knew la Rouisse, didn't you?"

Moque, for an instant, stood silent, then shrugging his shoulders he re-entered the house.

"Good-night, good-night, old fellow!"

Etienne sat down on the log which they had just vacated. He was sad without knowing why. The old man, whom he watched disappearing in the distance, recalled to him his arrival of the morning and the flood of words which the wind had caught up and carried away. Perhaps it saddened him to be alone at that hour, when all the others had gone off two by two. The heavy atmosphere suffocated him. Occasional drops of rain fell upon his feverish hands, adding to his discomfort.

As Etienne remained seated, motionless in the gloom, a couple coming from Monston passed without being noticed by him. The girl, as though brought there against her will, plead with low supplicating whispers, while the man without a word hurried her on. It was Catherine and Cheval. But Etienne had not recognized them in passing and he followed them with a glance of curiosity.

On leaving the alley, Catherine had gone to Monston. Ever since she had begun working in the mine, she had thus run the roads alone in that complete liberty of mining families. After passing the company's coal yards, she crossed the road and entered the house of a wash-woman where she was certain of finding Mouquette, who passed hours there each day. But she was disappointed. The girl could not lend her the money. To console her they offered her a cup of hot coffee, but she would take nothing. A sudden thought of economy arose in her mind, a sort of superstitious fear, a presentiment that, if she now bought the ribbon, it would bring her unhappiness.

Hastening back on the road to the alley, she was at the last house in Montson when a man, standing before the Piquette coffee house, called her:

"Halloa! Catherine, where are you running so fast?"

It was Cheval. She, however, was contrary, in no mood for laughing.

"Come in and take something, will you. Just a glass of something sweet."

She refused politely. It was growing dark; they were waiting for her at home. He advanced, begging her in a low voice to enter. But she smiled, saying she did not have time. Then, from one thing to another, she spoke on, and without thinking told him of the ribbon which she had been unable to purchase.

"I'll pay for one for you," he exclaimed.

She blushed, feeling it would be better for her to refuse, but, filled with a great desire to have her ribbon, at last she accepted on condition that the amount paid for it should be returned to him. This pleased him, for he was convinced that if she would not become his girl, she would return his money. Then another difficulty arose when he wished to go to Maigrat's shop.

"No, mamma said I shouldn't go there."

"Never mind, you don't have to tell where you go. He keeps the best ribbon in Montson."

When Maigrat saw them enter, like two lovers buying their wedding finery, he grew very red, throwing down his blue ribbon with the rage of a man who has been made a fool of. When they left the store he went to the door and watched them as they slowly moved away

in the falling night. When his wife timidly came to ask for some information, he turned upon her, heaping up abuse, exclaiming he would make those people who were wanting in gratitude repent some day.

On the road, Cheval walked close to Catherine, directing her steps without appearing to. Suddenly she noticed he had left the main road and was going toward Requillart. But he did not give her time to become angry; directing her thoughts with a continual flow of carressing words. She was foolish to be afraid of him; he would do her no harm. She, frightened, could find nothing to reply; and, closing her eyes on him, another form, that of the man engaged that morning, passed in the darkness before her.

Looking around her she perceived they had just entered the ruins of Requillart, and she shivered with fear before the blackness of the tumble-down shed into which he continued to push her.

Meanwhile Eteinne had not stirred. But growing weary of this love-making, he strode across the ground, thinking these two people were too much occupied to be disturbed. After taking about thirty steps, on turning around, he was surprised to see them coming along as though making for the alley.

Then, wishing to see their faces, Etienne paused at the first street lamp. He was stupefied on recognizing Catherine and Cheval. He could scarcely believe it; was that young girl in a dark blue dress the youngster he had seen in linen pantaloons, with hair knotted under a scarf? But he no longer doubted; he saw her eyes with their greenish limpidness, like spring water, so clear and so deep.

Catherine and Cheval had passed him, not knowing they were being watched. And he now followed them at a short distance, mad with rage at these lovers who seemed so happy. For a half hour this walk continued. When the couple approached the Voreux he still kept behind them, while they stopped now and then along the way as though too happy to go further. When he reached Rasseneur's, instead of entering the house, he accompanied them as far as the alley, standing in the shadows for a quarter of an hour while they said good-night. When he was positive they were no longer to-

gether he walked far off on the road to Marchiennes, too angry and too sad to shut himself up in his room.

An hour later, about nine o'clock, Etienne retraced his steps, saying to himself he must eat and sleep if he wanted to be out at three o'clock. Every one in the alley was sleeping in the dark night. Not a light shone from the closed window blinds. Only a frightened cat ran off across the empty gardens. It was the close of the workingmen's day, who fell from the table to the bed, overcome with fatigue.

At Rasseneur's, a machinist and two day workmen were still drinking. But before entering Etienne paused for a last look into the darkness. Again he found the same black immensity of the morning when he had arrived by the main road. Before him, the Voreux crouched like a night animal. The three fires of live coal burned in the air like reddening moons; and below, on the open plain, the darkness had submerged all, Montson, Marchiennes and the forest of Vandame, the vast fields of wheat and beets, while only the blue fires from the high furnaces and the red coke fires, shone out like beacon lights amid all that darkness. The rain was now falling, a slow, continued and monotonous streaming. One single sound was heard, the great, slow, respiration of the engine which, like a human being, day and night breathed on.

CHAPTER XII.

The next day and the days following Etienne resumed his labors at the mine. He became accustomed to the work and the new habits, which had seemed so hard to him at first. Before a half month was over, he was seized with a fever which racked his limbs, while with head as though on fire he dreamed in a half delirium that he was determinedly pushing his car to the end of a passage so narrow that his body could not enter. It was simply extreme lassitude from his apprenticeship, an excess of fatigue from which he soon recovered.

The days followed each other; weeks, months glided by. Now, like his comrades, he rose at three o'clock,

drank his coffee and went off, carrying his slice of bread and butter, which Madame Rasseneur had prepared for him the day before. Every morning on his way to the mine, he met old Bonnemort who was going home to rest, while, on leaving it, he met Bouteloup. He wore a blouse and breeches like his companions, and shivered with cold and warmed his back at the waiting room before the great fire. Then came the walk in bare feet, through the chilling air, to the superintendent's office. His attention was no longer attracted by the engine, shining out in the darkness with its copper and steel, the cables flying so silently, like birds in the night, the cages ceaselessly going up and down amid the uproar of the signals and the cars rolling over the flagging. His lamp burned badly, that confounded cleaner had not washed it; but he smiled good naturedly as Moquet slapped him on the back. The cage being unhooked, fell like a stone to the bottom of the shaft, without his even turning his head to see the daylight pass away. He had never thought such a fall possible, but he became more and more accustomed to that descent in the darkness under a beating shower. Below, in the main room, when Pierron had let them out with his air of hypocritical meekness there was stamping of feet as the miners went off, with lagging step, each to his own drift. He now knew the galleries of the mine better than the streets of Monston, knowing when to turn, when to stoop and where to avoid a stream of water. He had become so accustomed to these two kilometres under the ground that he could have walked without a lamp, his hands in his pockets. Each day he met the same people in the passage; an overseer lighting up the faces of the workmen, old Moque leading a horse, Bebert driving Bataille who was snorting, Jeanlin running behind a train of cars to shut the ventilating doors, and little Lydie pushing her car

Later, Etienne suffered less, both from the dampness and the confined air of the drift; even his section of the mine seemed less difficult; he would push through crevices where in olden times he would not have risked his hand. The coal dust no longer obstructed his breathing; seeing clearly in the night, perspiring freely, he had become accustomed to working from morning

until night, wet to the skin. No more strength was awkwardly wasted. He became a good workman so quickly that all were astonished. At the end of three weeks he was called one of the best pushers in the mine —none rolled his car to the incline more quickly than he or packed it more correctly. His beautifully formed arms, white as a woman's, possessed an iron strength. His manliness restrained complaint, even though almost dead with fatigue. They only reproached him for his unwillingness to take a joke. He was regarded, however, as a true miner, who, like them, from the force of habit, had become as a machine.

Among them Maheu especially respected Etienne as one who never slighted his work. And, like the others, he felt that this boy was his superior; he saw him read, write and even draw designs, while he talked of things even of the existence of which they were ignorant. That did not astonish him much; miners were rough men, with harder heads than machinists; but he was surprised at the courage of this boy, his coolness in accepting his fate rather than die of hunger. This was the first man he had known to so quickly fall into the ways of the mine. When the propping was urgent and he did not wish to disturb a miner, he assigned the work of timbering to him, certain of its correctness and solidity. The chiefs were always tormenting him about that cursed work; every moment he feared to see the engineer, Megrel, appear, followed by Dansaert. The propping of his pusher seemed to satisfy these gentlemen better; in spite of their dissatisfied airs and their remarks, that one of these days the company would take radical measures. These things developed a slow discontent throughout the mine. Even Maheu, ordinarily so calm, came to the point of shaking his fist.

At first a rivalry sprung up between Zacharie and Etienne, and, one evening, on coming to blows, the latter was the victor; but the former, showing no ill will, immediately offered him a drink. Even Levaque, professing the same political views, had now become friendly to him. But he still felt a great hostility toward Cheval; no coldness had sprung up between them, on the contrary, they had become comrades; only, at

times, even while joking with each other, a glance of hatred passed between them.

Spring had come. One day, on going from the shaft, Etienne felt upon his cheek the warm wind of April, and sensed the good smell of fresh earth, green fields, and pure air. Now each day the balmy spring air warmed him more and more after his ten hours of labor in eternal winter, amid that damp darkness which even summer could not dissipate. The days passed by. In May he descended at sunrise, when the gray dawn brightened into vermillion tints, lighting up the Voreux with misty rays of crimson and gold. The miners going to their work no longer shivered, for a warm breeze floated over the plain, while the rising larks caroled their matin song. Then, at three o'clock, he ascended the shaft to find the sun's declining rays tinging the whole earth with lustrous beauty. In June the wheat fields were already high, showing a light green, contrasting strongly with the more somber hue of the beet fields. It was one boundless waving sea, whose billows seemed to increase each evening with the growth of vegetation. Along the canal, the poplars with their leafy branches enhanced the beauty of the scene. Weeds interlaced with wild flowers covered the old mine, showing that mother earth at this vernal season had given all nature a new life.

Now, as Etienne, walked forth in the evening, it was no longer behind the old ruins that he surprised the lovers. He could follow them in the unobstructed wheat fields. Zacharie and Philoméne had returned to their old trysting place, while old mother Brule vainly sought the hiding place of Jeanlin and Lydic in the moving grain; and as for Moquette, one could not traverse a field without seeing her head rising from the stalks. Twice he saw Catherine and Cheval, at his approach, hide themselves in the midst of a field whose stalks remained motionless. Then that immense plain seemed too small to him; he preferred passing the evening at Rasseneur's.

"Give me a drink, Madame Rasseneur. . . . I won't go out this evening; I'm tired."

And he turned toward a comrade, seated at the end of the room, his head against the wall.

"Won't you take something, Jouvarine?"

"No, thank you, nothing at all."

Etienne had become acquainted with Jouvarine; he lived in the same house. He was a machinist at the Voreux, who occupied the room next to his, and was about thirty years of age, a slender blonde, with a fine head, covered with splendid hair, and a thin beard. His little, white pointed teeth, his small mouth and nose, with a pink and white complexion, gave him a girlish look and an air of careless amiability; but the pale reflection of his steel gray eyes at times flashed fiercely. His scantily furnished chamber contained a case of books and papers. He was a Russian, and his reticence in manner gave rise to the suspicion, on the part of his fellow-workmen that, with his little gentleman-like hands, he belonged to a higher class; perhaps he was an adventurer or an assasin, eluding punishment. But then, he had proved to be so friendly, giving to the children in the alley all the sous from his pockets, that they accepted him as a comrade, reassured by the words "political refugee" which had been circulated, those vague words in which they saw an excuse even for crime.

The first week, Etienne had found him reserved, almost fierce. He did not know his history until much later. Jouvarine was the last born of a noble family of Toula. At St. Petersburg, when he had studied medicine, the socialist rage which carried away all the Russian youths, had decided him to become a mechanic, mingle with the people, and so know and aid them as a brother. By that experience he was able to live now, having fled after an attempt on the life of the Emperor. For a month he had lived in the hut of a fruiterer. Disowned by his family, without money, marked as a stranger on the books of all the French workshops, they thought him a spy, and he was dying of hunger when the Monston company employed him in an hour of need. He had labored there for a year, a good workman, sober and silent, working alternately day and night, so faithfully, that the chiefs pointed to him as an example.

"Are you never thirsty," said Etienne laughing.

He replied in a sweet voice, almost without accent:

"I am thirsty when I eat." Then his companion joked him about the girls, swearing he had seen him walking with one a few nights before. He shrugged his shoulders, filled with calm indifference. "No," he wished no shackles, neither woman nor friend.

Every evening about nine o'clock, when the saloon was empty, Etienne remained there to talk to Jouvarine. He drank his beer in little swallows while the other continually smoked cigarettes, the nicotine from which had stained his delicate fingers. His thoughtful eyes seemed to follow, the smoke as though in a dream, while, to prevent the aimless fumbling of his left hand, hei nvariably took upon his knees a tame rabbit that had the freedom of the house. This rabbit which he had named Pologne, was greatly attached to him, and would stand erect, scratching him with her paws until he took her up like an infant. She nestled up to him, her ears turned over, shutting her eyes, while without cause, almost unconsciously carressing her, he passed his hand over her gray silky skin, calmed by the presence of that living warmth.

"Do you know," said Etienne one evening. "I've received another letter from Pluchart." There was no one there but Rasseneur. The last customer had just left, returning to the alley where every one was retiring for the night.

"Ah!" cried the landlord, standing before his two lodgers. "What does he say?"

For two months Etienne had been carrying on a regular correspondence with the machinest at Lille, whom he had at first informed of his engagement at Monston and who had subsequently desired that he should form a society from the Monston miners.

"He says that the association goes on very well. It seems that they conquer on all sides."

"What do you think of the idea?" said Rasseneur to Jouvarine.

The latter, who was tenderly scratching Pologne's head, emitted a cloud of smoke and said with his calm air:

"Foolishness."

But Etienne grew angry. He wished to form a branch of the International Association of Workmen,

that famous "International" which had just been established in London. "Was not this the country for such an effort, where justice would at last triumph?" In all parts of the world organizations of this kind were being established, to secure the lawful demands of the workmen. What a simple yet grand society; lowest of all the section which represented the commune; above that the federation; then the province which grouped the sections; still higher the nation; and above all humanity, incarnated in a general council where each nation is represented by a corresponding secretary. In six months they would conquer the world, they would dictate laws to all industries, regulating universal labor.

"Foolishness," repeated Jouvarine. "I've talked that all over. . . . Your Karl Marx is willing that this matter should govern itself and the only concerted effort should be with reference to increasing the wages of workingmen. I do not believe in your ideas. Burn everything; crush the people; annihilate all; and, when nothing remains of this rotten world, perhaps, from its ruins, a better one will arise."

Etienne commenced laughing. He did not always listen to the words of his comrade. This thing of distinction seemed to him futile. Rasseneur, still more practical, and with the knowledge of an experienced man, did not even condescend to become angry.

"Then you're going to attempt to form a branch in Monston, are you?"

That was what Pluchart, who was Secretary of the Federation of the North, desired. He particularly dwelt on the assistance the association would be to the miners, if they were to strike. Etienne thought a great deal of the coming strike; the affair about timbering would end badly; it needed only a very slight act of injustice on the part of the company to arouse all the miners.

"The great trouble is the dues," said Rasseneur in a contemplative tone. "Fifty centimes a year for the general funds, and two francs for the section; that does not seem like anything, but I am sure many would refuse to give it."

"So much the more reason why we should have a

saving fund," said Etienne. "It's time to think of all this. I'm ready, if the others are."

There was a silence. The oil lamp on the box was smoking. Through the open door, they distinctly heard the sound of a fireman engaged in replenishing the furnace.

"Everything is so dear," replied Madame Rasseneur, who had entered and was listening with a gloomy air, so stately in her eternal black dress. "Would you believe that I have paid twenty-two sous for eggs? This cannot last.

This time the three men were of the same mind. They spoke one after the other in a despairing tone, and complaints fell fast. The workman could not stand this; the revolution only increased his misery; since '89 the owners were rolling in wealth, leaving the miners to feel the pinchings of poverty. If the workmen had been permitted to share in the profits of the last hundred years things would have been different. It was absurd to call them free: yes, free to die of hunger, while *they* denied themselves nothing. It did not put bread in the cupboard to vote for men who would take their ease without thinking more of their people than of their old boots. This state of things should end. The children ought to be able to see that, if the old people could not, this century would not end without another revolution, this time of the workmen, a battle which would clean away society from high to low, and rebuild it with more propriety and justice.

"This must end," repeated Madame Rasseneur, energetically.

"Yes, yes," cried all three, "it must end."

Jouvarine was stroking Pologne's ears, whose nose was curled up with pleasure. He said, in a low voice, with eyes lost in the distance, as if speaking to himself:

"Increase the salaries. Why, they are fixed by an inexorable law at the smallest possible sum, just enough to allow the workmen to eat dry bread. If they fall too low, the workmen die, and the demand for new men makes them rise again. If they go up too high, the losses are so much greater that they drop again. It is the equilibrium of empty stomachs, the perpetual condemnation to a fate like that of the galley slave."

When he forgot himself in that way, approaching some subject of socialism, Etienne and Rasseneur became uneasy, troubled by his lugubrious remarks, to which they could not respond.

"Listen," he resumed in his usual calm manner; "it will be necessary to destroy all non-producers. Yes, even to bathe the earth in blood, to purify it by fire."

"Monsieur is right, said Madame Rasseneur, who, in her fits of revolutionary excitement, became very polite.

Etienne, in despair at his ignorance, did not wish to discuss the matter further. He arose, saying:

"Let us go to bed. All this cannot relieve me from getting up at three o'clock."

Jouvarine, with one last puff at his cigarette, arose, tenderly placing the rabbit on the floor. Rasseneur closed up the house and they all ascended the stairs in silence, their ears buzzing, their heads swelling with the great questions which had so stirred them.

Every evening there was some such conversation in the bar-room, over the cup which it took Etienne an hour to empty. The more he talked the greater his anxiety became to solve this vexed problem. For a long time he hesitated about borrowing some books from his neighbor, who unhappily, possessed little but English and Russian works. At length he procured from him a few books upon the co-operative system, more foolishness, as Jouvarine said. Every week he read a paper received by the latter, le Combat, an anarchist sheet published at Geneva. In spite of all that he read on the subject, he could not arrive at any definite conclusion as to the value of any of the theories advanced.

It was toward the middle of July that Etienne began the study of this subject. His monotonous life was interrupted by an accident; the workmen of the vein Guillaume came upon a strange sight in the bed, which indicated the presence of a dyke, and, in fact, they soon encountered a formation, of which the engineers, in spite of their experience in such matters, were still ignorant. It traversed the mine; they only spoke of the disappearing vein; without doubt it ran down on the other side of the dyke.

Like hounds following the scent of a fox, the old

miners apprehended danger. While waiting the diggers could not remain idle; and some placards announced that the company would open some new drifts.

One day, on leaving the mine, Maheu led Etienne aside and offered to employ him as a miner in place of Levaque, who had gone over to another drift. The affair had already been arranged with the overseer and the engineer, who were well satisfied with the young man. So Etienne accepted this sudden advancement happy at the growing esteem in which Maheu held him.

That evening they again returned to the mine to read the placards. The drafts for employment were found to be at the vein Filloniere, in the north gallery of the Vorenx. They seemed of little advantage; the old miner shook his head as the young man read to him the conditions. The day after, when they descended and went to look at the vein, he called attention to the distance from the main chamber, the insecurity of the ground, and the thin but tough layers of coal. But if one wished to eat it was necessary to work. So, on the following Sunday, they went together to the sale, which was to take place in the waiting-room. The mine engineer, assisted by the superintendent, presided in the absence of the engineer of the division. Five or or six hundred coal-miners were there in front of the little platform, built in the corner, and the sale began in such a tumult that one only heard a number of voices, while some figures were called out, only to be superseded by others.

At first Maheu feared he would not be able to obtain one of the four drifts offered by the company. All the competitors were uneasy at the cries, seized with fright by the cessation of labor. The engineer, Migrel, was anxious to obtain the lowest figures possible, while Dansaert, desirous of hastening the affair, lied about the excellence of the bargain. To obtain his fifty metres, Maheu was compelled to fight against a comrade, who also became excited; they each bid a centime a car; but the superintendent, Richomme, became angry, saying it could never be let at that price.

On leaving, Etienne swore, and he broke out before Cheval, who was going to stroll with Catherine in the

wheat fields, while her father occupied himself with the serious affairs.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, "now the workingmen are even forced to devour each other."

Cheval flew into a passion; he would never lower himself like that, and even Zacharie, out of sympathy, declared it was disgusting. But Etienne silenced them with a violent gestuae.

"This shall end; we will be masters one day."

Maheu, who had remained silent since the sale, seemed to rouse himself. He repeated:

"Masters? Well, it can't be too soon."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was the last Sunday in July, the day of the "Ducasse de Montson." On Saturday the good housekeepers had washed their rooms, with pail after pail of water thrown with great rapidity upon the hearth and against the walls. The floor was not yet dry, in spite of the white sand with which they had sprinkled it, an expensive luxury for the purses of the poor. The day commenced very warm, with one of those lowering, heavy skies foretelling a thunderstorm, which in summer, deluged, drowned these flat countries of the North.

At Maheu's they rose later on Sunday. This morning, after smoking a pipe in his garden, the father entered the house to eat a slice of bread and butter all alone while waiting for the others to come down-stairs. He passed the morning not knowning how to occupy his time. He mended the leaky tub, and put up under the clock a portrait of the Prince Imperial, which some one had given the little ones. At last the others came down, one by one. Old Bonnemort took out a chair to sit in the sun; the mother and Alzire busied themselves with preparing the morning meal. Catherine appeared with Lenore and Henri, whom she had just dressed. Eleven o'clock struck; the odor of rabbit, stewing with potatoes, was already filling the house,

when Zacharie and Jeanlin came down the last, their eyes swollen, and still yawning.

All the alley was astir, while, in holiday attire, they hastily ate their dinners, and started for Montson. Bands of children played around the doors; men, in their shirt-sleeves, lounged about lazily enjoying the day of rest. The windows and doors, wide open, gave a view of all the rooms with their occupants, while the hum of noisy voices floated out upon the warm air. And from one end of the alley to the other the smell of rabbit, contended that day with the odor of fried onions.

The Maheus dined at twelve o'clock. They took no part in the noise outside. For three weeks they had been on bad terms with their neighbors—the Levaques—on the subject of the marriage between Zacharie and Philomêne. The men were friendly, but the women refused to recognize each other. This quarrel had increased the intimacy with la Pierronne. But the latter, leaving her husband, mother and little Lydie, had set out early in the morning to pass the day with a cousin at Marchiennes. The neighbors joked over this, for they knew that counsin. She was the superintendent of the Voreux. La Maheu declared it was not right for her to leave her family on the "Ducasse" Sunday.

In addition to the rabbit, which they had fattened in the coop for a month, and the potatoes, Maheu had a rich, beef soup. The day before was pay day. They never remembered having such a treat. Even at the last Sainte-Barbe, that fête of the miners when they do nothing for three days, the rabbit had not been so fat or so tender. The ten sets of teeth, from those of Estelle which had commenced to push through to old Bonnemort with his few remaining stumps, worked with such vigor that the bones themselves disappeared. It was good, but would be digested badly, because they saw it so rarely. Nothing remained for the evening but a piece of boiled meat. So that they could add some slices of bread and butter if hungry.

Jeanlin was the first to disappear. Bebert was waiting for him on the other side of the garden. Lydie

managed to slip away from la Brule, who had decided not to go out and to keep the child with her.

When she found that the little one had gone, she screamed with rage, while Pierron, annoyed by this outburst, quietly went off for a stroll.

Finally Bonnemort started forth, and Maheu also decided to take the air, after having first asked his wife if she would go with him. But she could not; it was real drudgery with the little ones; perhaps later on she could join him. Outside, he hesitated, then entered his neighbor's house to see if Levaque was ready. There he found Zacharie waiting for Philomene; and her mother again began on the eternal subject of their marriage, saying that they imposed on her, she must have another talk with la Maheu. Was it right to keep her daughter without a husband and the children without a father? Philomêne quietly put on her hat and Zacharie led her away, saying that he was willing whenever his mother was. Maheu told them to talk to his wife and he also went off. Bouteloup, who was eating a piece of cheese with both elbows on the table, obstinately refused his offer of a drink. He preferred remaining at home.

By degrees the alley was vacated, all the men going off alone, one behind the other, while the girls walked away leaning on the arms of their lovers. When her father had turned the church corner, Catherine, perceiving Cheval, hastened to join him, taking the road to Montson. The mothers remained alone amid their disorderly children, not having the strength to leave their chairs, and pouring out cup after cup of coffee which they drank in little swallows.

Maheu, thinking that Levaque was at l'Avantage, slowly went off toward Rasseneu's. In the garden behind the shop, Levaque was one of a party at skittles. Bonnemort and old Moque stood by watching the balls, so much absorbed that they could not keep their thoughts to themselves. A burning sun shone down, and the only spot of shade was along the tavern, where Etienne sat at a table drinking his beer, weary of the book which Jouvarine had lent him to take up in his room. The machinist spent almost every Sunday writing and reading.

"Won't you play?" said Levaque to Maheu.

But the latter refused. He was warm and almost dying of thirst.

"Rasseneur!" called Etienne, "bring us a drink."

And then turning toward Maheu:

"This drink is with me."

Rasseneur seemed to be in no hurry. They called three times, and then it was Madame who, with her polite air, carried out the warm, insipid beer. The young man complained of the house. They were good people, no doubt, but their beer was bad and the soup execrable. He would have changed his boarding-house long ago, if he had not dreaded the walk to and from Montson. Some day he would try to find a family in the alley to take him.

"Yes," said Maheu, in his slow way, "you'd be better off in a family.

But laughs broke out. Levaque had won the game. Moque and Bonnemort, with their noses toward the ground, in the midst of all the tumult, maintained the silence of profound dignity. The laughs grew louder, as they perceived above the hedge, which surrounded the garden, the great jolly face of Moguette, who had been lying there for an hour, and was emboldened to approach on hearing the noise.

"How is it you're alone?" cried Levaque. "Where's your beau?"

"I haven't any," she replied. "I'm looking for one." They all offered themselves, but, with a shake of the head, she refused, laughing loudly. Her father, meanwhile, had not taken his eyes from the balls.

"Go for him," continued Levaque, throwing a glance toward Etienne. "But I don't think he wants you, my girl. You'll have to get him by force."

Etienne laughed, shaking his head, amused, but not having the least wish to make love to her. For some minutes she remained behind the hedge, watching him with her great, dull eyes; then she slowly went away, her face suddenly sobered, as though overcome by the hot sun.

In a low voice, Etienne had resumed the explanations which he was giving to Maheu upon the necessity

for the coal miners of Montson to establish a saving fund.

"The company pretends to leave us free," he said. "What do you fear? I know it gives pensions, but they are only according to their own fancy, without any reference to our needs. Now, it would be prudent to form a mutual aid association, upon which we could at least count in case of some immediate want.

And he entered into details, discussing the organization, and promising to take upon himself all the labor.

"I'm with you," said Maheu, finally. "If you can only get the others."

Maheu refused to take a second drink; they would see each other later; the day was not over yet. He had been thinking of Pierron; where could he be? no doubt at the smoking-room, at l'Enfant, and Levaque, Etienne and himself set out for Montson just as a new party of men began a game of skittles.

First they entered the saloon of Casamie, then the one called le Progris. Some comrades called them from the open door, and, unable to say no, they went in. Each time it was a beer, two if they returned the drinks. They remained in each place ten minutes, exchanging a few words and then going away. At l'Enfant they found Perron, who had finished his second drink, and, rather than refuse to touch glasses, was taking a third. Naturally, they drank there also, and then went off to see if Zacharie was not at the saloon Tison. That room was empty; they called for beers, saying they would wait a while for him. Finally they thought of the tavern Saint Elvi; they accepted there a round of drinks from the superintendent, Richomme, and, after that, they went from saloon to saloon without purpose, merely for a stroll.

"Let's go to the Volcan!" said Levaque, suddenly. And so they accompanied their comrade into the midst of the lively crowd of au fete day. In the long, straight room of the Volcan, upon a stage erected at the lower end, five cafe singers, the trash of Lille, were singing songs. All the youths of the mine were gathered there, drinking more gin than beer. A few old miners were also seated at the tables, laughing at the rough jokes.

As soon as their party was grouped around a little

table, Etienne took possession of Levaque, explaining to him the saving fund. He had the firm faith of a new convert who feels he has a mission to perform.

Each member, he explained, could well give twenty sous a month. With this sum in four or five years they could have a great capital, and when they had money they would be strong would they not? no matter what happened. Well, what did he think of it?

"I don't know," replied Levaque, with an absent air. "We'll talk over it."

He was interested in a large blonde, and was anxious to remain, when Maheu and Pierron, after having drunk more beer, wished to go without waiting for a second song.

Outside, Etienne saw Moquette who seemed to have followed them. She was always watching him with her dull eyes. But the young man laughed at her, and she went off in a passion.

"Where's Cheval?" asked Pierron.

"I guess he's at le Piquette," said Maheu. "Let's go there."

When they arrived at le Piquette the sound of a fight made them pause. Zacharie was threatening to strike a little nail maker, while Cheval, with his hands in his pockets, looked on.

"Stop! here's Cheval," said Maheu quietly. "He's with Catherine."

The girl and her lover had been walking the streets for five hours. In the broiling sun, along the Monston road, a constant stream of people moved on like a train of busy ants. From the dry black earth the dust arose in heavy clouds. At each side of the road, with open doors, the saloons invited one to enter, while tables were ranged as far as the pavement, before which street-venders displaying their wares, handkerchiefs, caps and mirrors for the girls and knives for the boys, while bon-bons and cakes were too numerous to mention. Before the church they were playing Archery; at the coal yards a game of spittles was going on; and on the road to Joiselles, in an inclosed lot, they came upon a cock-fight. There were two big, red cocks, armed with iron spurs, torn by which the throat of one was bleeding. Farther on, at Maigrat's house, they were playing

chequers and billiards. The crowd was getting bloated from the effects of beer and the intense heat, increased by the pans of boiling fat in which potatoes were frying.

Cheval bought a mirror for seventeen sous and a handkerchief for three francs, which he presented to Catherine. At every turn they met old Moque and Bonnemort, who had come to the fete, silenlty walking side by side with swollen limbs. But one experience made them indignant; they saw Jeanlin inciting Bebert and Lydie to steal some bottles of gin from a little shop. Catherine boxed her brother's ears, but the little one had already run off with a bottle. These terrible childeren would end in prison. When before the saloon called "La tête coupèe," Cheval insisted on the girls entering to watch a "concours de pinsons," which had been announced to take place there.

Some Marchiennes nailmakers had brought a dozen little cages in which the blind finches remained motiontionless, after being hung on a fence in the tavern yard. The idea was to see which one would sing the most in an hour. Each nailmaker, holding a slate, stood before his cage marking, and watching both his neighbor's cage and his own. The birds were started, the "Chichoneaux," with its rich song, the "batisecouics," with its sharp ringing. At first all were timed, only risking occasional notes; then, little by little, becoming excited, their voices swelled out until finally they were carried away with such a spirit of emulation that they fell back and expired. The men screamed to them to sing more, more, more; while the spectators, about a hundred persons, remained silent amid the furious music of a hundred and twenty finches, all repeating the same thrills. A "batisecouics" gained the first prize, a coffee-pot.

While Cheval and Catherine were there they saw Zacharie and Philomêne enter. After shaking hands they remained together. Suddenly Zacharie became angry at seeing a nail-maker pinch Catherine. She, blushing, made him be silent, fearing an attack from all the nail-makers, who would throw themselves upon Cheval and her brother. Her lover only laughed, and all four leaving the place the affair seemed ended. But just as they entered le Piquette to drink a beer, the

man again appeared insolently taunting them. Then Zacharie, from devotion to his sister, turned upon the saucy fellow.

"That's my sister, you pig! I'll make you respect her."

Their friends threw themselves between them, while Cheval said very calmly:

"Leave him alone. This is my business, anyhow. I don't care for him."

Maheu, on arriving with his party, quieted Catherine and Philomène, who were already in tears. They were all laughing now; the nail-maker had disappeared, and Cheval, at home in that saloon, treated his friends to drinks. Etienne was compelled to touch glasses with Catherine. All drank together, the father, the daughter and her lover, the son and his mistress. Then Pierron treated and they were all happy, when Zacharie again became excited on perceiving his friend Moquet.

"I want to speak to him. Here Cheval, take care of Philomène. I'll be back in a minute."

In his turn, Maheu paid for the drinks. After all, if his boy wanted to revenge his sister, it was not wrong. But on seeing Moquet, Philomène shook her head. Those two fools went off to the Volcan.

In the evening, this fête day ended with a ball at le Bon-Joyeux, given by the widow Lisia, a strong woman of forty years, round as a barrel, but so fresh-looking that she still had six lovers, one for each day in the week and the whole six on Sunday, she said. She called all the miners her children, having poured out their beer for thirty years. Le Bon-Joyeux had two rooms: the bar, in which was a counter and some tables, on a level with the great ball room, and a great hall with a wooden dancing floor. Two garlands of paper flowers were stretched from one end of the ceiling to the other, united at the center by a bunch of the same design; while hanging on the wall were some pictures in gilt frames: Saint Eloi, tutelar saint of the iron men; Saint Barbe, patron of the miners, and others. The ceiling was so low that the three musicians, in their little gallery, were obliged to bend their heads. Coal oil lamps were hung at the four corners of the room.

This Sunday they began dancing while the daylight was yet entering through the open windows. But at seven o'clock the rooms filled up. A storm was rising, blowing up great black clouds of dust, blinding the people and covering everything. Maheu, Etienne and Pierron entered and found there Cheval, who was dancing with Catherine, while Philoméne stood by all alone watching them. Neither Levaque nor Zacharie had returned. As there were no seats in the ball room, after each dance, Catherine seated herself at the table with her father. They called Philoméne, but she preferred to remain where she was. It began to grow dark. The three musicians were doing their best, but nothing was longer visible but the moving figures of the dancers. A shout welcomed the four lamps; suddenly all shone out upon the red and perspiring faces. Maheu, laughing, pointed out to Etienne, Moquette, who was waltzing in the arms of big Wheeler. She had been obliged to take a beau.

At eight o'clock la Maheu appeared with Estelle in her arms, followed by the children, Alzire, Henri and Lenore. She had come straight there to find her husband without fear of being mistaken later on they would sup, no one was hungry now with their stomachs drenched with either coffee or beer. Other women had arrived, who smiled on seeing la Levaque enter accompanied by Bouteloup who lead by the hand Achille and Desiree, the children of Philoméne. The two neighbors seemed on very good terms; on the road they had come to a decision. La Maheu had suddenly become resigned to the marriage of Zacharie, worried at losing the wages of her eldest, but vanquished by the right, which she no longer could deny. She tried to be cheerful, though she constantly asked herself how she would make the two ends meet.

"Sit down, neighbor," said she, on going up to a table near where her husband was drinking with Etienne and Pierron.

"My man is not with you, is he?" asked la Levaque.

Pushing two tables together they all sat down, calling for a new round of drinks. On perceiving her mother and children, Philoméne came forward, accepting a chair. She seemed happy to learn they were to

marry her at last, and when they looked around for Zacharie she said in a low voice:

"I'm waiting for him. He's not here."

Maheu had exchanged a glance with his wife. So she had consented. He became serious, smoking in silence, like her, filled with anxiety for the days to come, and angered at the children who married, one after the other, leaving their parents in misery.

The dancing was still going on; at the close of a quadrille, the ball-room was filled with a reddish dust, the walls shook, and the dancers came into the bar, covered with perspiration.

"Say now," whispered la Levaque in la Maheu's ear, "what was that you said about strangling Catherine, if she took a lover?"

Cheval had led Catherine to the family table, and they both stood drinking behind the father.

"Bah!" replied la Maheu, with a resigned air; "we all talk that way. I suppose I'll love her, too."

In the midst of all that noise, in a whisper, Maheu communicated to his wife an idea which had come to him. Why shouldn't they take a lodger? Etienne, for instance. They liked him, and he was seeking a boarding place. They'd have room enough when Zacharie was married. And the money which they would lose on that side, they would regain in part on the other. La Maheu's face brightened; that was a good idea, if it could be settled. She seemed saved from hunger another time, and her good spirits returned so quickly that she gave an order for a new round of drinks.

Etienne, meanwhile, was talking to Pierron of his saving fund—trying to obtain his promise to join when the association should be formed.

"And, if we strike, you see how useful that would be. You're one of us, ain't you?"

Pierron raised his eyes, paling at the thought of compromising himself. He stammered:

"I'll think over it. The best kind of aid for oneself is to behave properly."

At that moment Maheu turned to Etienne and offered to take him as a lodger. The young man accepted. He was very desirous of living in the alley,

where he could see more of his comrades. Everything was arranged, la Maheu declaring they need only wait for the marriage of Zacharie.

At last Zacherie, Levaque and Moquet arrived, bringing with them the odor of the Volcan, a smell of gin. They were very drunk, knocking each other's elbows and laughing as though at a huge joke. When he learned that they had at last consented to allow him to marry, Zacharie laughed so hard that he choked himself. Having no more chairs, Bonteloup moved over to share his with Levaque, and the latter, glad to see the whole family there together, called for some more drinks.

"We don't often have a good time," he said.

They remained there for six hours. Women were constantly arriving to rejoin and lead away their husbands. The room was so crowded that they sat shoulder to shoulder. Laughter resounded in the oven-like heat, and the violent dancing shook the building.

Some one told Pierron that his daughter Lydie was lying asleep across the pavement—she had drunk her half of the stolen bottle of gin and was intoxicated. He was compelled to carry her home while Jeanlin and Bebert followed him at a distance, thinking it very funny. That was the signal for departure. Maheu and Levaque decided to return to the alley, while old Bonnemort and Moque also left, in the same silence in which they had passed the evening. A thunder storm was coming on; it was very hot, though a faint breeze stirred the ripe wheat. La Pierronne had not returned home. Neither the Levaques nor Maheus relished their supper; the latter even went to sleep over the cold meat left from the morning, while Etienne led Cheval away to have one last drink at Rasseneus'.

"I'm with you," said Cheval, when his comrade had explained the affair of the saving fund to him. "Give me your hand. You're a good one."

Etienne was beginning to feel the effects of the beer. He cried:

"Yes, for justice I'd give up everything, drink and girls too. There's only one thing that makes me happy; it is that some day we'll get the best of the masters."

CHAPTER XIV.

TOWARD the middle of August, after the marriage of Zacharie and when he could procure from the company a house in the alley for Philomêne and the children, Etienne installed himself with the Maheus and for the first time he experienced an uneasiness before Catherine.

It was an intimacy of every moment, he replaced the eldest brother, sharing the bed with Jeanlin, in front of the one in which the large sister lay. On going to bed and on arising he was obliged to undress and dress before her, seeing her also take off and put on her clothing. She had that transparent whiteness of blondes; though her face and hands were already spoiled, her arms and neck were crossed by a line of sunburn like an amber collar. She was, however, never offended. If, in spite of himself, he was compelled to observe her movements, he avoided uttering any joke of a dangerous kind when she hurridly undressed and slipped into bed. The presence of her parents restrained him from the expression of any sentiment either of friendship on the one hand or rancor on the other. Soon their life became commonplace, at the toilet, at the repast, and during work. The only modesty assumed by the family was in the daily wash which the young girl now proceeded to take alone in the room above, while the men one after the other performed their ablutions on the lower floor.

At the end of the first month Etienne and Catherine no longer noticed each other. The former complained little of Jeanlin who held himself aloof from him. Alzire slept without a breath, while in the morning Lenore and Henri were always found with their arms entwined, just as they had lain down. In the dark house there was no sound save the snores of the mother and father, coming forth at regular intervals, like the blasts of a forge. In reality Etienne found that he was better off there than at Rasseneur's, the bed was not bad, they changed it every fortnight; the soup was better; he only suffered from a scarcity of meat. But for

forty-five francs he could not expect to have a rabbit at each meal. His money helped the family, who managed to get along with but few debts, and they evinced much gratitude towards their lodger. His linen was washed and mended, his buttons sewed on, his clothing kept in order, and he appreciated the neatness of the family. It was at this time when Etienne had commenced to understand the ideas which had filled his mind; up to this time he had only had the promptings of instinct amid the sullen actions of his comrades. He asked himself all sorts of confused questions: Why the misery of one? Why the wealth of others? Why this one under the control of that one, without the hope of ever changing places with him? His first lesson was to comprehend his ignorance; then a secret shame, a chagrin took possession of him; of the vigor of the laws he knew nothing; he no longer dared converse about the things which perplexed him, the equality of all men, the justice which formed a dividing line between them and the aristocracy. So he applied himself to the study of political economy only to learn its defects. Now he kept up a regular correspondence with Pluchart, through whose instructions he was launched in the socialist movement. He sent for some books of which the reading badly digested, served to exalt his views. A book of medicine especially, *l'Hygiéne du mineur,* and a treatise on political economy of an incomprehensible technical dryness, and some anarchist pamphlets, which only served to confuse him, in connection with a few old newspapers which he kept as a final resort to which he could refer for argument in any discussion that might arise. Jouvarine, however, took some volumes to him, and a work upon the co-operative society had made him dream for a month of a universal association of exchange, abolishing money, basing upon work the entire social life. Shame of his ignorance was followed by pride; he was able to think for himself.

During these first months, Etienne was possessed with the ravishing delight peculiar to a neophyte, his heart nearly bursting with generous indignation against the oppressors. He had not yet made for himself a system from the vagueness of his readings. The prac-

tical claims of Rasseneur intermingled in him with the distracting violence of Jouvarine, and when he went out of l'Avantage, where he continued almost every day to rail against the company, he walked away in a sort of dream, assisting in the radical regeneration of the people without its costing a broken window or a drop of blood. Nevertheless the means of execution were obscure; he preferred to believe that things would go very well for he lost his head as soon as he tried to form a programme of reconstruction. He occasionally repeated that it was necessary to banish the political for the social question, a phrase which he had read and which seemed wise to him to say among the phlegmatic coal men where he lived.

Now, every evening at Maheu's, they were a half hour later in going to bed. Etienne always spoke of the same cause. Since his nature had become refined, he found himself more and more offended by the promiscuousness of the alley. Were they beasts to be thus penned up one with the other in the midst of the fields; so crowded together that one could not change his clothing alone?

"Confound it!" said Maheu; "if we had more money we would have more ease. All the same, it's not easy for people to live like this."

The family took part in the talks, each speaking his mind while the oil from the lamp tainted the air of the room already smelling of fried onions. No, life was not funny. They worked like beasts at labor which was worse than a galley slave's, running the risk of being killed and then not earning enough to have meat once a day. They were obliged to eat sparingly or be devoured by debts; and when Sunday arrived they spent the one day passed above ground in a sleep of fatigue.

Now, la Maheu broke forth:

"The foolishness is when they say it can change; that happiness will come some day. I don't wish ill of any one, but there are times when this injustice sickens me."

They were silent. But when old Bonnemort was there he would open his eyes in amazement. In his time they did not trouble themselves in that manner;

they were born among the coal and dug the vein without demanding the why and wherefore; he now breathed an air which had filled the coal men with ambition.

"A good drink's a good drink," he murmured. "The chiefs are often scoundrels, but there'll always be chiefs, won't there? It's useless to break your own head in finding fault with theirs."

Immediately Etienne became excited. That was just it. Things would change, because the workmen were thinking of these things. In olden times the miner lived like a brute, always under ground, like a machine for extracting the coal, ignorant of what was occurring outside of the mine. The owners who governed them understood each other. The seller and buyer could eat their flesh, and the coal men were not even aware of it. But from this time on the miner was awake, and he would make himself felt as one of an army of men who would re-establish justice. Had not all citizens been equal since the revolution? They voted together. Why did the workingman remain the slave of the employer who paid him? At present the great companies with their machines wiped out everything. They no longer even had the guarantee of olden times. The men of the same trade must at least unite and defend themselves, and, thanks to instruction, there would be an explosion of everything one day. For, look in the alley even—the grandfathers would not have been able to sign their names as the fathers now signed, and the sons knew how to read and write like professors. The increasing knowledge pushed forward, little by little, a rude harvest of men ripening as under the sun. From this moment they no longer stuck, each in his place, throughout his entire existence, but they had the ambition to take the place of the next higher. Why, then, should they not use their fists in becoming stronger?

Maheu, though disturbed, remained full of opposition.

"If you did anything, they'd give you back your livret," he said. "No, the old folks are right; the miner'll always have to work with the hope of a leg of mutton, now and then, in recompense. That's fate, which nothing can change."

La Maheu, who had been silent for some moments,

broke out, as if in a dream, murmuring in a low voice· "Still, if what the priests tell us is true, the poor people of this world will be rich in the other."

A burst of laughter interrupted her. Even the children shrugged their shoulders. All were incredulous of this belief, having a secret fear of the mine's ghosts, but laughing at the empty sky.

"Fool!" cried the father. "If the priests believed that, they'd eat less and work more, to keep a good place on high for themselves. No; when we're dead, we're dead."

The wife heaved great sighs.

"Ah! mon Dieu! ah! mon Dieu!"

Then both hands fell upon her knees, with an air of deep dejection.

"Then it's true, we're fools."

All turned, looking at Etienne. Bonnemort spat in the fire, while Maheu, his pipe out, watched his mouth. Alzire listened between Lenore and Henri asleep by the table. But Catherine, her chin in her hand, seemed to drink in with her great clear eyes, every word he uttered, as he spoke of his belief, opening the enchanted future of his social dream. Around them the alley was in darkness, nothing was heard but the cry of an infant or the quarrel of an obstinate drunkard. In the room the clock ticked softly. A moist freshness went up from the sandy hearth in spite of the heavy air.

"And there are other thoughts," said the young man. "Do you need God and paradise to make you happy? Are you not able to make happiness for yourselves on earth?"

With an ardent voice he spoke of the wasted years. From the closed horizon a ray of light had shone out at last, displaying itself in the somber life of these poor people. The constant misery, the overpowering work, the beast-like life, in the end slaughtered for others, would all disappear at a blow and justice would descend from the sky; that justice which would bring happiness to all men, making equality and fraternity reign supreme. A new society would spring up in a day, with a wonderful country, where each citizen would live from work and take his part in the common joy. The old rotten world would fall in pieces; a young humanity,

purged of their crimes, would form a simple people of workingmen who would have for a motto "to each, merit according to his worth." That dream, constantly enlarged and embellished, became so enchanting as to rise higher than the impossible.

At first la Maheu refused to listen, filled with an unknown terror. No, no, it was too good; they shouldn't have such ideas, for it made life seem still worse; and to be happy they would have to kill everyone above them. When she saw Maheu's eyes shine, troubled, conquered, she became still more excited, interrupting Etienne:

"Don't listen, my man. You see he's telling us stories. Do you think the bosses would ever consent to work like us?"

But little by little the charm also acted upon her. With imagination awakened, sighing, she entered into the enchanted world of hope. It was so sweet to forget the sad reality for an hour. When they lived like brutes with their noses in the ground, they needed to treat themselves to things which they could never possess. But that which compelled her to agree with the young man was her sense of justice.

"There you're right," cried she. "It would surely be just to possess in our turn."

Then Maheu exclaimed:

"Great God! I'm not rich, but I'd give a hundred sous not to die until I've seen all that. What a turning upside down. Do you think it'll be soon, and how are people to go about bringing it around?"

Etienne again commenced to speak. The old society would break up; it could not last longer than a few months. He went into the work of execution more vaguely, mixing up what he had read, but not fearing before these ignorant people to launch out into explanations which even he did not understand. All the workings were smoothed down into a certainty of easy triumph, which would terminate the misunderstanding between the classes. The Maheus seemed to comprehend, approving, accepting the most miraculous solutions with the blind faith of new believers, equal to those Christians in olden times who waited for the coming of a perfect society upon the ashes of the old. Alzire, who understood part of this conversation, im-

agined this happiness to be a very warm house, where the children played and ate all they wished. Catherine, without moving, her chin always in her hand, never took her eyes from Etienne, and when he became silent she paled and shivered as though with cold.

But the mother looked at the clock.

"It's after nine. We'll never be able to get up tomorrow."

And they arose from the table in despair, their hearts ill at ease. It seemed to them they had been wealthy, and had now fallen back in the mire. Old Bonnemort started for work, growling that these stories didn't make the soup taste better, while the others went up to bed, more sensible to the damp but heavy air of the room.

At these evening talks a few neighbors often came in to listen—Levaque, who was excited at the idea of sharing in such happiness; Pierron, whom prudence sent off as soon as the company was attacked. Zachaire sometimes appeared; but politics wearied him. He preferred to go down and take a drink at Rasseneur's. But Cheval, who had become the firm friend of Etienne, was more forcible, wishing blood. He passed an hour with the Maheus every evening, and an unavowed jealousy had sprung up in him on seeing the attitude of Catherine while Etienne was speaking. He feared his comrade had stolen his girl from him. That girl of whom he had soon tired, suddenly became very dear to him when she lived in the same house with another man.

Thus Etienne's influence became enlarged. Little by little he revolutionized the whole alley, while he raised himself in the esteem of his friends. La Maheu, in spite of her defiance in the beginning, treated him with the consideration due a young man who paid his board regularly, and who drank but little, spending all his spare time over a book. She started his popularity among the neighbors, giving him the reputation of a smart fellow, for which he was annoyed by being constantly asked to write their letters. He became a sort of man of affairs, charged with the correspondence, consulted by the house-wives, in all cases. So by the first of September he commenced his famous saving fund. Not counting on the alley alone, he wished to obtain

the adhesion of the coal men in all the mines, and if the company remained passive he was confident of success. They appointed him secretary of the association, and he made some small sums by writing. That made him almost wealthy, for though a married man was not able to make both ends meet, he, a sober boy, was able to save a little.

From the first, with Etienne, a slow transformation had taken place, some instincts of comfort, which had slept in his misery, now showed themselves. He bought a pair of fine boots, a cloth suit, and he became their chief at once. All the alley grouped around him. A feeling of self-satisfaction came over him, he became intoxicated with these first caresses of popularity; from being at their head, a commander, he dreamed of the next revolution in which he should play an important role. His face changed, he became grave, listening to himself talk; while his growing ambition led him into the most radical ideas.

Meanwhile the autumn was advancing; the winds of October had ruined the little gardens of the alley, there only remained the winter vegetables, cabbage covered with white frost, leeks and onions. Again the storm beat upon the red tiles, running in torrents into the casks under the water-spouts. In each house the fire was kept up, rendering heavy the air of the small rooms. It was the commencement of another season of great misery.

In October on one of the first cold nights, Etienne, feverish after a lengthy talk, could not sleep. He waited until Catherine had slipped into bed, then blew out the candle. She also appeared excited. In the darkness, she lay as if dead; but he knew well she was not sleeping; and he felt she was thinking of him just as he was of her. Never had their hearts gone out so toward each other. Twice he raised from the pillow thinking he would tell her of that love he bore for her, but shame for the time and place withheld him. Almost an hour passed away, and they still lay with open eyes peering into the darkness asking themselves what was that barrier which kept them apart.

CHAPTER XV.

"LISTEN," said la Maheu to her husband; "when you go to Montson for your pay, bring me a pound of coffee and a half pound of sugar."

He was sewing up a rent in his shoe, to save having it mended.

"All right!" replied he, without turning from his work.

"Stop at the butcher's, too; I want a piece of veal. We haven't had any for a long while."

This time his head was lifted.

"You must think I'm going to get some thousands."

It was Saturday, the twentieth of October, and the company, under the pretense of a break in the engine, had suspended work in the mine. For some time, fearing a panic, not wishing to increase their already heavy stock, they had been using every excuse to stop the labor of their ten thousand men.

"You know Etienne's waiting for you at l'Avantage," resumed la Maheu, after a few moments of silence. "Go on; he'll be mad if he has to wait for you."

Maheu nodded his head. In the weariness of a day of enforced idleness, they had not breakfasted until noon, and the young man had gone to Rasseneur immediately upon arising from the table, saying he would wait there for Maheu. The clock struck two. The wife continued:

"You ought to hurry; and if those gentlemen are there, you must talk with them about your father. The doctor's wrong. He's able to work yet; ain't you, father?"

For ten days old Bonnemort had been utterly helpless; his limbs swollen twice their size. She was compelled to ask the question a second time. Then he growled:

"Of course, I'll work. Because I have the rheumatism once in a while, is no reason why I should stop for good. They're trying to get out of giving me my pension of a hundred and sixty francs."

La Maheu was thinking of the forty sous earned by the old man, which he perhaps would no longer bring her, and she groaned with fear.

"Mon Dieu! if this keeps on, we'll all be dead soon."

"We won't be hungry when we're dead," said Maheu.

He added a few nails to his shoes, and decided to set out, as he was to be paid that afternoon. All the men were starting from the alley, followed by their wives, who begged them to return at once. They had given them many commissions to prevent them spending the remainder of the day in the saloons.

At Rasseneur's, Etienne had learned some news. For a number of days, uneasy reports had been circulating. The company were growing more and more discontented with the propping. A conflict appeared sure, not only from that, but on account of other secret and grave causes.

As Etienne arrived at the saloon, a miner who was taking a drink, on his return from Montson, was telling the men that a notice was posted up in the cashier's room. But he could not read, so did not know what it was about. Man after man entered, each bringing a different story. It seemed, nevertheless, that they had all come to a resolution—a revolt was springing up.

"What do you say to it?" asked Etienne, sitting down to a table near Jouvarine, who, as usual, was smoking. The machinist went on with his cigarette.

It was easy to see they were going to try harsh measures. He was the only one with intelligence enough to analyze the situation. He explained in his quaint manner that the company, fearing a panic, were forced to reduce their expenses if they did not wish to go under, and naturally it was the salaries of the workmen which they would cut down first, under some pretense or other. The coal was not selling, nearly all the manufactories stood still. This saving fund was making the company uneasy; it was a threat for the future. A strike would clear it away while the funds were still low, and consequently they were trying to bring on that strike.

Rasseneur had seated himself near Etienne, and both listened with an air of consternation. They were able

to speak in a loud voice. No one was there now but Madam Rasseneur, who was leaning on the bar

"What an idea!" murmured the tavernkeeper. "The company can make nothing from a strike, or the workmen either. The best thing is to understand each other."

He was very wise, he always appeared reasonable. Ever since the growing popularity of his former lodger he had been exasperated at that system of rapid progress, saying one would obtain nothing which they insisted upon having all at once. Though, with the good nature of a fat man usually full of beer, a growing jealousy was arising in him, which was aggravated by the desertion of his saloon, where the workmen came less to drink and listen to him; and now he began protecting the company, forgetting the hatred which he, as a discharged miner, had felt for them.

"Then you're against the strike?" cried Madame Rasseneur, without leaving the bar.

And when he had replied yes, she made him be silent.

"You have no heart, let these gentlemen talk."

Etienne had been thinking with his eyes on the drink which had been served him. Finally he raised his head.

"All that our comrade says is very possible, and it will be necessary for us to strike if they force us to do so. . . . Pluchart has written me some very wise things on that subject. He does not approve of the strike either, for the workman suffers from it as much as the owner, without gaining anything. Only he sees in this an excellent occasion to decide our men to join his company. Well! here's his letter."

Pluchart, grieved at the distrust in which the Montson miners held the International, hoped to see them all adhere if a conflict with the company compelled them to strike. In spite of his efforts Etienne had only been able to obtain a few members, using his influence on behalf of the saving fund which was much better received. But that fund was still small; and the strikers must join the association, so that their brother workmen all over the country would come to their aid.

"How much have you in the fund?" asked Rasseneur.

"Scarcely three thousand francs!" replied Etienne. "You know the directors spoke to me of it the day

before yesterday. Oh! they were very polite, they told me they would not prevent the workmen from starting a saving fund; but I saw they wanted the control of it themselves. From the look of things I think we'll have to fight against them."

The tavern-keeper walked up and down the room, with an air of contempt. Three thousand francs! What good would that be? It would not last six days, and if they counted on strangers, the people of England, they might as well lie down and die at once. No, that strike would be too stupid.

Then for the first time, angry words were exchanged between these three men, who generally understood each other.

"What do you think of it?" said Étienne turning again to Jouvarine.

He, without taking his cigarette from his mouth, answered in his usual disdainful manner:

"Strikes? they're foolish." Then amid the angry silence which fell, he added slowly:

"After all I don't say no, if that amuses you, it ruins one and kills the other, so that is always that much made. . . . Only in that way, it would take a thousand years to renew the world. Commence, therefore, by blowing up with a barrel of powder that prison in which you are dying."

With his little hand, he designated the Voreux, the buildings of which could be seen from the open door. But an unforeseen occurrence interrupted him. Pologne, the large rabbit who had ventured out of the door, was driven back by stones hurled by a number of boys; and in her fright, with drooping ears, and tail upraised, she took refuge between his legs, scratching him to be taken up. When he had lain her across his knees, sheltering her with both hands, he fell in that sort of dream into which the caress of that soft skin always plunged him.

Just then Maheu entered. He did not wish a drink; in spite of the polite invitation of Madame Rasseneur, who sold her beer as though she were giving it away. Etienne rose, and both men went off toward Montson.

The fifteenth, on which the miners were paid, seemed like a fête day. A crowd of men were constantly leaving the alley. The cashier's room being very small,

they preferred to wait outside, and stood in groups on the pavement, blocking up the doorway from the line of men which was constantly increasing. Street venders, thinking to profit by the occasion, placed along the road their bazaars, containing every conceivable thing from crockery to meat. But the saloons reaped the richest harvest, for the miners stood at the counters while waiting for their turn to be paid, and, after receiving their money, returned to settle for those drinks, and always ended by having some others. They were wise men who did not spend a greater part of their earnings before reaching home.

Meanwhile, when Maheu and Etienne reached that crowd of men, they saw each one filled with a sullen exasperation, while hands were doubled up and violent words ran from mouth to mouth.

"Is this true?" asked Maheu of Cheval, whom he met before the saloon Piquette. "Have they really done this dirty thing?"

Cheval only replied with a low growl, casting a sidelong glance upon Etienne.

For some time a fierce jealousy of that comrade had been growing on him, he began to hate that newcomer who placed himself at their head, and who had become so popular in the alley. He had also quarreled with Catherine on his account, furious at the thought of her living in the house with that man.

Maheu asked him another question:

"Had the Voreux done what they threatened?"

And when he turned away, after having nodded his head, the two men decided to go on to the mine.

The cashier's room was a little square office, separated by a grating. Upon benches along the walls, five or six miners were waiting; while the cashier, assisted by an employe, was paying another man, who stood before the door, cap in hand. Above the benches, on the left, a yellow placard was pasted, still clean on that dusty wall. Since early morning, a constant file of men had passed before it. Entering the room in groups of twos or threes, they stood there motionless for a second, then went away, shrugging their shoulders with a dejected air.

Now, before the bill stood two men; one young, with

a square, brute-like head, the other old, with a thin, aged face. Neither one could read, and while the boy slowly spelled out the words, his companion stood stupidly looking on. Many entered thus to look without comprehending.

"Read that, will you?" said Maheu to his friend. Even he was only able to spell it out letter by letter.

Then Etienne began reading. It was a notice from the company to the coal men in all the mines. It notified them that owing to the fear of being compelled to inflict heavy fines for their poor propping, it had resolved to begin a new manner of payment to the coal diggers. Henceforth it would pay in part for the timbering, so much for every cubic metre of wood sent down and used. The price of the coal cars would naturally be cut down in proportion from fifty centimes to forty. And an obscure calculation was given to prove that the ten centimes lost on the cars was made up in the price paid for timbering. The company added that, wishing to give every one time to become convinced of the advantages presented by this new method, it had concluded not to put the plan into execution until Monday, the first of December.

"Read lower there!" cried the cashier. "We can't hear our own ears."

Etienne finished reading without noticing this observation. His voice trembled, and when he had concluded they all still fixedly regarded the card. Then the old miner and young man left the room with bent shoulders.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" murmured Maheu.

He and his companion seated themselves. Thinking with heads bent, while the defile still continued before that yellow paper, they were calculating. Was the company making game of them? They could never require from the timbering the ten centimes lost on the cars. At the most they could only reach eight centimes, and that left two of which they would be robbed, with counting the time they would lose in propping carefully. They had cut down their salaries in this disguised manner. The company economized by stealing from the miners.

"Nom de Dieu, de nom de Dieu!" repeated Maheu, raising his head. "We're fools if we stand this."

But the grated door opened, and he approached to be paid. The head miners alone presented themselves at the office. They received all the money earned by the men in their drift and afterward divided it among them.

"Maheu and consorts!" he called, "vein Felonnière! drift number seven!"

The employe looked over the lists made by the overseers each day from the board, on which the number of cars sent up were tallied. Then he repeated:

"Maheu and consorts! vein Felonnière! drift number seven! . . . One hundred and thirty-five francs."

The cashier held out the money.

"Pardon me," Monsieur, stammered Maheu in distress. "Haven't you made a mistake?" He looked at that small amount of money without touching it, shivering slightly. Of course he expected poor pay, but it could not be as little as that; they must have calculated wrong. When he would have given Zacharie his part and Etienne and the man who replaced Cheval, then he would only have fifty francs left to divide between his father, Catherine, Jeanlin and himself.

"No, we have not made a mistake," replied the employe. "We have deducted two Sundays and four days that there was no work; that leaves you only nine days to be paid for."

Maheu followed the calculation, added up in a low tone: nine days would give him about thirty francs, eighteen to Catherine, nine to Jeanlin; as for old Bonnemort, he had worked but three days. No matter, by adding the seventy francs of Zacharie and the two other men, that would surely make more.

"Don't forget the fines," said the employé. "Twenty francs for defective timbering."

The digger made a gesture of despair. Twenty francs fine and four days laid off. When Zacharie was not keeping house and Bonnemont worked he brought home a hundred and fifty francs every pay day.

"Go on, take it," cried the cashier impatiently; "don't you see there are others waiting? If you don't want it, say so."

When Maheu finally started to pick up the money with his great trembling hand the employé detained him.

"Wait, I have your other name. Toussaint Maheu, is it not? Monsieur le Secretaire General desires to speak to you. Come in, he is alone."

Astonished, the workman found himself in an office furnished in solid mahogany and faded green rep. And he listened for five minutes while the Secretaire General, a thin, pale man, spoke to him over the papers piled on his desk without raising his eyes. The buzzing in his ears prevented him from hearing. He vaguely comprehended that he was being questioned concerning his father, who was to be given the pension of a hundred and fifty francs, having been in service for forty years. Then the Secretaire's voice became harsh. He reprimanded him, accusing him of occupying himself with politics. An illusion was made to his lodger, also the saving fund; finally he advised him not to mix himself up in these affairs, he who was one of the best workmen in the mine. He wished to protest, but could only utter a few unconnected words, twisting his cap between his febrile fingers as he retired, stammering:

"Certainly, Monsieur le Secretaire . . . You're right, Monsieur le Secretaire."

Outside, when he had again joined Etienne, who was waiting for him, he broke out.

"I'm a fool. I ought to have been able to say something . . . Not enough money to buy bread, and abuse besides! Yes, they're down on you, he told me the alley had been poisoned. He says we must bend our backs and say thanks. He's right, it's the most wise."

Maheu was almost dead from rage and fear combined. Etienne was thinking with a gloomy air. Again they traversed the groups who barred the street. Anger was visible on all sides, the exasperation of a calm people, a sullen murmur constantly arose from that mass, accompanied by violent gestures. Men who could count had made a calculation, and the two centimes made by the company from the timbering, circulated, being clearly seen by the most dull men. But the greatest rage was that felt against the frequent shutting down of work and the fines. Even now they had not

enough to eat. What would become of them if they cut down their salaries still more? In the saloons, with throats parched from their anger, they left the most of the small sum received upon the bar.

From Montson to the alley not one word was exchanged between Maheu and Etienne. When the father entered, his wife, who was alone with the children, immediately saw he had not made the purchase.

"Well, you're a nice one," said she. "Where's my coffee and sugar and meat? A piece of veal wouldn't have ruined you."

He made no reply, struggling against the emotion which had seized him. Then across the rough face of that man, hardened in the mine, passed a look of despair, followed by great tears falling in a warm rain. He was broken down in spirits, and, crying like a child, he threw his fifty francs upon the table.

"Here! he stammered; here's what I bring you. It's for the work of all."

La Maheu looked at Etienne, and seeing him silent and crushed, she also burst into tears. How were nine people to live on fifty francs for fifteen days? Her eldest had left them, the old man could no longer make use of his limbs—they would all starve. Alzire, seeing her mother weeping, threw herself on her neck, while Lenore, Henri and Estelle cried with all their might.

And little by little, through the entire alley, the same cry of misery arose. Each house was lamenting that bad pay. Weeping women appeared at the doors as if their houses were not large enough to hold their anguish. A fine rain was falling, which they did not even feel, and calling from one door to the other, they held up the money received.

"Look! this is all he has given me."

"Look at me! I haven't enough to pay for the bread which we've used since last pay-day."

La Maheu had gone out like the others. A knot of women was found around Levaque, who was crying the loudest. Her drunken husband had not even returned home, and she knew that, great or little, his pay was vanishing at the Volcan. Philomêne was waiting for Maheu, who had not yet given Zacharie his

money. La Pierrone alone was calm, while her mother stood among the most excited, shaking her fist toward Montson.

"I saw your carriage go by this morning. Yes, you were sending your cook to Marchiennes for fish."

The women became violent. That servant of the Hennebeaus driving by in his master's carriage made them indignant. Even though their workmen were dying of hunger, they must have fish. Perhaps they would not always have it. The people's turn would come some day. And these ideas, first sown by Etienne, sprouted forth in that cry of revolt. They were impatient for the age of promised gold, in haste to have a part of the happiness beyond that horizon of misery where they seemed shut up as in a tomb. The injustice was becoming so great; they would end by exacting their rights from those who had taken the bread from their mouths. The women were anxious to begin at once the foundation of that ideal city where miserable people would no longer live. It was almost dark; the rain was increasing when they left the alley to go back to their screaming children.

That night at l'Avantage, they decided to strike. Even Rasseneur no longer fought against it, and Jouvarine accepted it as a first step. At once Etienne took in the situation; the company wanted a strike and it would have it.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WEEK passed, work continued, while depressed and suspicious they waited for the conflict.

At Maheu's one piece of bad luck followed another. Catherine ill from a terrible scene she had with Cheval, who was still jealous of her, was compelled to miss a day's work. A few days after, Jeanlin kept out of the mine for two days to play in the fields with Bebert and Lydie, without their knowing it.

That morning as the men and girl were starting for work la Maheu raised herself up in bed and cried to Jeanlin:

"I'll take the skin off of your back if you try that again."

Work was very hard at Maheu's new drift. That part of the vein Felonniére tapered off so much that the miners, squatting between the wall and roof, rubbed the skin from their elbows while at work. On account of the dampness a flood of water was feared every moment, one of those sudden torrents which stave in the rocks and carry off the men. The day before, Etienne, after violently driving his pick into the rock and then withdrawing it had received a jet of water in his face; but that was only an alarm, which had made the drift still more damp and unhealthy. He no longer thought of possible accidents, passing the days there like his comrades, unconscious of peril. They lived in the firedamp without even feeling its weight upon the eyelids. Certain days, however, when the flame of the lamp paled and grew dim, their thoughts reverted to the danger, and a miner would put his ear to the vein, listening for the little sound of gas and air bubbles coming through the cracks. But the greatest danger was from a cave-in, owing to the insufficiency of the propping, which was always done too hurriedly; the ground, weakened by the water, did not hold and would suddenly fall in enormous masses.

Twice that day Maheu had been forced to strengthen the props. It had taken them two hours and a half. The men had gone back to their places in the drift, and Etienne had just finished the mining of a block, when a shock like a peal of thunder shook the whole mine.

"What's that?" said he, throwing down his pick to listen.

At first he thought their gallery was falling.

But Maheu had already slipped through the opening to their drift, saying:

"It's a cave-in! hurry, hurry!"

All hurried off in fright. Their lamps flickered wildly in the death-like silence which had fallen. They ran in single file along the road with back bent, looking as if they were galloping on four paws, never slackening their pace. Where was it? in some drift perhaps. No, that sound came from below, in the car road.

When they arrived at the narrow slit through which they were obliged to descend, they rolled down one upon the other without concerning themselves about the places which tore the skin from their bodies.

Jeanlin, with back still red from the beating received from his mother the day before, had not made his escape from the mine that day. In his bare feet he was running behind a train of cars to shut the ventilating doors, and at times, when he did not fear meeting an overseer, he jumped up and rode along on the last car, a thing which had been forbidden, fearing the boys would go to sleep there. Each time his train got out of the way to enable another to pass, he would run along in front to find Bebert, who led the horse. Running behind his friend he pinched him, looking like the mischievous ape which he was, with his curly hair, great ears, little thin nose and greenish eyes which shone in the darkness.

In the afternoon these boys were given Bataille, whose turn for work had come, and when the horse snorted before an opening, Jeanlin, who was in front with Bebert, said to him:

"What's the matter with the old coward? He'll make me break my legs yet."

But Bebert did not reply; he was compelled to hold the horse on one side at the approach of another train. Bataille, from a distance, had recognized his old favorite Trompette, for whom he had been filled with a great tenderness ever since the day he had seen him disembark at the bottom of the mine. He had the affectionate pity of an old philosopher desirous of consoling a young friend, trying to teach him patience and resignation, for Trompette had not yet become accustomed to the mine. He wearily drew his car, still blind in that darkness, constantly regretting the sun. Thus each time Bataille met him he snorted and breathed upon his neck a caress of encouragement.

When Trompette had passed, Bebert returned to the subject of Bataille.

That old fellow's wise; when he stops like that, he scents a hole and he don't want to break his legs. I can't think what is the matter with him to-day at that

door. He pushes it and then keeps still. Is there anything wrong there?

"No," said Jeanlin. "Only some water up to my knees."

The train started off again. In the next trip, when he had pushed his head against the ventilating door, Bataille again refused to advance, snorting and trembling. At last after much coaxing he decided to resume his journey.

Jeanlin, after again shutting the door, remained behind. With the aid of his lamp he perceived that the wood had given way from the constant oozing of a jet of water. Just then a miner, known through all the alleys by the nick-name of Chicot, passed on the way to his drift. He also examined this spot, and as the boy darted forward to rejoin his train a cracking was heard, and a cave-in engulfed the man and child.

A great silence followed. A thick dust was rising in the roads. Blinded and suffocated men were arriving from all parts, even the most distant drifts, while their flickering lamps badly lit up that gallery filled with dark figures. When the first-comers ran against the cave-in, they cried out, calling their comrades. A second band of men from the lower drifts arrived at the other side of the mass which had fallen, blocking up the gallery. They soon found that the ceiling had given way upon ten metres at the most. The damage was nothing grave. But their hearts stopped beating as a death rattle came from the shadows.

Bebert, leaving his train, ran forward, calling:

"Jeanlin is under there!"

At that moment Mahen was arriving at the spot with Zacharie and Etienne. Filled with despair, he could only cry out:

"My God! my God!"

The women, who had also run forward, Catherine, Lydic and Moquette, began to sob, screaming with fright amid that terrible disorder which the darkness augmented. The men tried to silence them. but they became more hysterical at each rattle which came from the rocks.

Richomme, the overseer, had arrived, in despair that neither M. Megrel nor Dansaert was in the mine.

With ear pressed close to the ground he listened, and at last said the cries were not those of a child. A man was there. Then Maheu called Jeanlin. Not a breath came from the darkness.

The little one must have been crushed at once.

Then that death rattle again commenced. They spoke to the one in agony asking his name. The rattle alone responded.

"Make haste! make haste!" said Richomme, who had already gone to work. "They will die yet."

From both sides the miners attacked the cave-in with their picks and shovels. Chevel, Maheu and Etienne worked side by side without a word; while Zacharie directed the removal of the ground. The hour for ascending had come, no one had eaten; but they would not leave while comrades were in peril. Meanwhile, thinking the people at home would be uneasy if they did not return, they spoke of sending up the women. But neither Catherine, Moquette, or even little Lydic, would move; they were riveted there by the wish to save, aiding the men in the excavation. Then Levaque accepted the commission of announcing the cave-in, above. A simple damage which could be repaired. It was almost four o'clock; the workmen in less than an hour had done the work of a day. Half of the ground would already have been taken away had not a number of other rocks slid from the ceiling. Maheu, in a rage, refused with a weary gesture, when another approached to relieve him for an instant.

"Gently," said Richomme, at last. "We are coming to them. It will not be necessary to dig it all away."

The rattle had become louder and louder as they dug down. It was this continual sound which guided the workmen, and now it seemed to move forth directly under the picks. Suddenly it ceased.

Not a word was uttered. They all felt the chill of death pass by in the darkness. They dug with renewed strength, streaming with perspiration. A foot was encountered; they attacked the earth with their hands now, disengaging the limbs one by one. The head was not crushed. Lamps were held down and the name of Chicot ran from mouth to mouth. He was still warm, the vertebral column broken by a rock.

"Cover him up and put him on a car," said the overseer. "Now for the little one. Make haste!"

Maheu had not paused in his work. He gave a last blow of the pick and an opening was made communicating with the gang who were working on the other side. Those men cried out they had found Jeanlin, unconscious, both legs broken, but still breathing. The father took the little one up in his arms, crying between his teeth: "My God! My God!" Catherine and the other women again began to sob.

They quickly organized the cortege. Bebert had brought back Bataille, whom they harnessed to the two cars; in the first was the corpse of Chicot held up by Etienne, while in the second sat Maheu, holding on his knees Jeanlin, still unconscious, covered with a woolen cloth. On each car was hung a lamp, looking like a red star, which was followed by fifty shadows walking in single file. Worn out, they dragged themselves along, slipping in the mud, overcome by grief. It would take a half-hour to arrive at the foot of the shaft, and that funeral procession, under the ground, amid the blackness of night, went on through the winding galleries, turning and returning.

At the shaft-room, Richomme having sent on in advance, ordering an empty cage to be reserved, Pierron and three other loaders put the two cars on at once. In one Maheu remained with his little injured one across his knees, while in the other Etienne held in his arms the corpse of Chicot. Then when the workmen were piled in the other stories, the cage ascended. The ascent took two minutes. The cold rain fell from the tubbing while these men were never so impatient to see the light of day.

Happily, a boy sent after Dr. Vanderhaghen had brought him back. Jeanlin and the dead man were carried into the overseer's room, where, in spite of the pleasant weather, a huge fire was burning. They threw two mattresses upon the hearth, laying the man on one and the child on the other. Maheu and Etienne entered alone. Outside, the women and men were grouped together, talking in a low voice. As soon as the physician glanced at Chicot, he murmured:

"The devil! You can wash him."

Two overseers undressed and washed that corpse, black with coal, still dirty from the sweat of labor.

"The head is all right," resumed the doctor, kneeling before the mattress on which Jeanlin lay; "the chest sound. Ah! it is the legs which have suffered."

He undressed the child with the skill of a nurse, and the poor little insect-like body appeared, covered with black dust and yellow earth which was marked with spots of blood. They must wash him also; the doctor could see nothing. After the bath he seemed still more thin, with transparent skin through which they could see the bones. It was sad to see the degeneration of these miserable people who at one time or other were crushed by the falling rocks. When he was clean they saw the bruises on his white skin.

Becoming conscious, he uttered a cry, while his father, with great tears streaming from his eyes, stood at the foot of the mattress wringing his hands.

"You're his father, are you not?" said the doctor, raising his head. "Don't cry, try and help me. He's not dead yet."

He found two simple ruptures. But the right leg made him uneasy. He feared it would have to be amputated.

At that moment the engineer, Négrel and Dansaert, came in with Richomme. The first listened to the overseer's tale with an exasperated air. He flew into a passion. Always that bad propping! had he not told them a hundred times that they would kill some one? and those brutes spoke of striking because they were forced to prop more solidly. The trouble was that the company would have to pay for the damage. M. Hennebeau would be furious.

"Who is that?" said he to Dansaert, standing before the corpse, which they were about to cover with a sheet.

"Chicot, one of our best workmen," replied the superintendent. "He has three children . . . Poor devil!"

Meanwhile Doctor Vanderhaghen began talking to these gentlemen in a low voice. He said Jeanlin must be taken home immediately. Six o'clock struck. It was growing dark. It would also be well to get the corpse away.

The engineer gave orders that a wagon should be got ready at once. A litter was brought in and the injured child placed upon it, while they put into the wagon the mattress upon which at last rested the dead.

When the door opened, a silence fell upon the crowd waiting outside. A new cortege was formed, the cart before, the litter behind, and the people bringing up the rear. Leaving the mine they slowly wound up the road to the alley. The first winds of November were sweeping over the immense plain which night was slowly enveloping like a shroud falling from the livid sky.

Etienne advised Maheu to send Catherine on ahead to break the news to her mother. The father, who followed the litter, completely worn out, consented with a nod, and the young girl ran off, for they were nearly there. But they must have been perceived already. Women, half crazy, ran from their doors. Very soon there were thirty, then fifty, all filled with the same terror. That wagon held a corpse. Who was it? Levaque having assured them that no one was hurt, only made them feel the greater shock. They thought it was not only one man who had perished, but ten, and that cart was going to bring them home one by one.

Catherine found her mother terribly excited, and as soon as the first words were uttered, she cried:

"The father's dead!"

In vain the young girl protested, telling her of Jeanlin. The woman flew to the door, and on seeing the wagon stop near the church, she nearly fainted away. At each door women dumb with fright looked on, while others followed the cortege to know where the cart and litter would stop.

Then la Maheu saw the litter, behind which walked her husband. And when it was set down before her door, when she saw Jeanlin alive, though with both legs broken, there came such a sudden reaction that she was filled with anger, crying out, without a tear:

"That's it, is it? They cripple our children now! . . . What can I do to them?"

"Hush!" said the doctor, who had followed to dress the wounds. "Would you rather he had been killed?"

The woman became more and more angry amid the tears of Alzire and the little ones, and while waiting on

the doctor she abused the lot, asking where they thought she could find money to support cripples. It was not enough with the old one, but now this rascal had lost his feet; and she never paused a moment while the others cried. Weeping and wailing was heard coming from a neighboring house,—the wife and children of Chicot crying over the body. It was a dark night. The men, still excited, were at last eating their soup. The alley had become silent, save of those pitiful cries.

Three weeks passed. They had been able to save the limb, but the poor child would always limp. The company had given them fifty francs and had promised to give the little one some easy employment as soon as he recovered. It was but an increase of misery, for the father had received such a shock that he had fallen ill with a heavy fever.

On Thursday, Maheu had returned to the mine, and this was Saturday. That night, Etienne spoke for a long time of the first of December, which was close at hand, anxious to see if the company would carry out its threat. They waited up until ten o'clock for Catherine, who was out with Cheval. But she did not enter. At last la Maheu in anger bolted the door and they all ascended the stairs. Etienne was a long time in going to sleep, uneasy at that empty bed where Alzire took up so little room.

The young girl did not return the next day, and the day following on his return from the mine Maheu heard that Cheval would not allow his daughter to come home. They had been having terrible quarrels, and to avoid reproach she had decided to go and live with him. He had left the Voreux and was now working at the Jean-Bart, the mine belonging to M. Deneulin, taking her with him as wheeler. They were living at la Piquette in Montson.

At first Maheu spoke of going to knock the man down and bring his girl home. Then he became resigned. What good would it do? It was bound to happen sooner or later. But la Maheu did not take the thing so easy.

"Did I beat her when she went out with that Cheval?" cried she to Etienne, who listened in silence, though

very pale. "Tell me; you're a reasonable man. We've left her free, haven't we? I was young when my man married me, but I didn't leave my parents as young as her to work for a man who had no need of the money. Ah! it's disgusting."

And when Etienne only replied by nods of the head she resumed:

"A girl who went where she had a mind. What's the matter with her? Why couldn't she wait until I married her? We've been too good; we ought to have kept her in the house without letting her have a beau. That's always the way—give them an inch and they'll take a mile."

Alzire nodded her head, while Lenore and Henri, frightened at that sudden burst of anger, were sobbing very quietly. La Maheu now enumerated their bad luck. First Zacharie's marriage; then the old man helpless from rheumatism; after that Jeanlin's accident; who would not be able to leave his room for ten days yet; and now that goose of a Catherine had gone off and left them. The family was broken up. No one remained at the mine but the father. How were they going to live? Seven people without counting Estelle. They had better all go and throw themselves in the canal."

"It don't do any good to fret about it," said Maheu, in a harsh voice. "We're not at the end yet, perhaps."

Etienne, who was fixedly regarding the hearth, raised his head, murmuring, with eyes lost in a vision of the future:

"Ah! it's time, it's time!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT Monday the Gregoires, with their daughter Cecile, were to lunch with the Hennebeaus. After leaving the table, Paul Megrel had intended taking the ladies to visit the Saint-Thomas, a newly fitted up mine; although this visit was merely a pretense of Mme. Hennebeau's to hasten the marriage of Paul and Cecile.

That same Monday, at four o'clock in the morning, the strike had begun. On the first of December, when the company had put into execution its new system of salary, the miners had remained calm. At the end of fifteen days, on pay day, no one had made the least opposition. Every one, from the director to the overseer, thought the tariff had been accepted, and the surprise was great that morning, before the declaration of war, which seemed so general and in such perfect control that it indicated an energetic director.

At five o'clock Dansaert woke M. Hennebeau, informing him that not one man had gone down in the Voreux. In the alley of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, which he had passed, every one was sleeping with windows and doors closed. As soon as the director had leaped from his bed, his eyes half closed with sleep, he was overwhelmed with business—messengers running, dispatches falling on his bureau as thick as hail. At first he hoped that the revolt had limited itself to the Voreux. But the news became more serious each moment: It had extended to Crevecœur, Mirou, la Madeleine, where only the stable-men had appeared, the Victorie and Feutry-Cantel—the two best disciplined mines, where only a third of the workmen had descended; Saint-Thomas alone was all right, and seemed to keep out of the movement. Until nine o'clock he dictated dispatches, telegraphing on all sides, to the prefect at Lille, to the companies' Managers, informing the authorities, asking for orders. He sent Megrel to make a tour of the neighboring mines and gain some precise information.

All at once, M. Hennebeau thought of the breakfast, and he was going to send the coachman to inform the Gregoires that the affair was postponed, when he suddenly thought of his wife. He ascended to Mme. Hennebeau's apartments, where a maid was dressing her hair.

"So they have struck," said she quietly, when he had told her. "Well! what difference does that make to us? We are not compelled to stop eating, are we?"

She became stubborn when he told her the breakfast could not take place and the visit to Saint-Thomas must be put off. She found an answer to all. Why lose a

breakfast already on the fire? and as for the visit to the mine, they could give it up afterward, if it was found to be imprudent.

"Moreover," she resumed when the maid had left the room, "you know why I am anxious to see those good people. You ought to take more interest in that marriage than the stupidities of your workmen. Besides, I want it, so do not contradict me."

He looked at her in silence, and over his hard face passed the secret pain of a bruised heart. Then he moved toward the door.

"Very well," said he; "we will not countermand anything."

M. Hennebeau was born in the Ardennes. He had the difficult beginning of a poor boy thrown an orphan in the streets of Paris. After having slowly gone through the courses of a miners' school, he had, at twenty-four, started for Grand' Combe, as engineer of the mine Sainte-Barbe.

Three years later he became a divisionary engineer at Pas-de-Calais, in the mines of Warles; and it was there that he married the daughter of a rich mine owner of Arras. For fifteen years the couple lived in the same little provincial town, without an event to break the monotony of their life, not even the birth of a child. A growing irritation came upon Mme. Hennebeau, who, brought up to respect money, held a great disdain for that husband who had but an ordinary salary, from which she could not derive the luxury wished for. He, a strictly honest man, would not speculate, keeping at his station like a soldier The coldness had begun from this, and was aggravated by one of those singular misunderstandings which so often come between those who are tied to each other. Then, she having become entangled in a love affair, he decided to leave Pas-de-Calais and go to Paris, thinking she would be grateful to him. But Paris had finished the separation; that Paris of which she had dreamed since her first ball, and where she had become accustomed in eight days to fashionable life, throwing herself into all the foolish luxuries of the time. The ten years that she passed there were filled with a great passion, a public liaison. That time the husband could not pretend ignorance,

but he was forced, after numerous quarrels, to become resigned, disarmed by the quiet unconsciousness of that woman who took happiness where she found it. It was after the rupture, when he had seen her sick with chagrin, that he accepted the directorship of the Montson mines, hoping when down in that desert of black countries he could teach her to do right.

In the three years that they had lived in Montson, she fell back into the irritable weariness of the first years of their married life. At first, she appeared solaced by that great calm, soothed by the flat monotony of that immense plain; and she settled down like a worn-out woman; she affected to have a dead heart—so detached from all, that she did not even worry over her increasing flesh. Then under that indifference a fever declared itself, a wish to live again, that she amused herself for six months by furnishing to her taste the little house in which they lived. She declared it odious; she filled it with tapestry, ornaments, and all the luxury of art, until it was the most beautiful place between there and Lille. Now the country exasperated her, those endless beet-fields and eternal black roads with no shade of tree, swarming with a frightful population which disgusted and frightened her. The cries of the exile were commencing. She accused her husband of having sacrificed her for the appointment of forty thousand francs, which was scarcely enough to keep house on. Why did he not imitate others, demand a part, and finally succeed in something? and she insisted with the cruelty of a woman who has brought her husband a fortune. He always took refuge in a cold demeanor, through which the suffering of a tender nature dying in silence occasionally shone out. At the end of six months, when the house was all furnished and occupied no more of Mme. Hennebeau's time, she again fell into a great weariness, from which she would have been glad to escape by death.

At that time Paul Megrel arrived at Montson. His mother, the widow of a captain, living at Avignon, having a small income, had lived on bread and water to educate him at the polytechnical school, from which he had gone forth poorly ranked, and his uncle, M. Hennebeau, offered him the position of engineer at the

Voreux. From that time forward he was treated as one of the family, and as he lived with his uncle he was able to send his mother half of his salary of three thousand francs. To disguise that beneficence, M. Hennebeau pretended he needed the small house set apart for the engineer of the Voreux, and also said it would have been too lonely for the young man to live there all alone. Mme. Hennebeau took the part of an aunt toward him, looking after his personal comforts. The first months she was quite motherly, always ready with advice on every subject. That intelligent boy amused her, and she at once looked about for a wealthy girl to whom she could marry him.

Two years had gone by, when one day Mme. Hennebeau told her husband she had settled upon Cecile Gregoire as the wife for their nephew.

When he had descended from his wife's rooms, M. Hennebeau encountered Paul in the vestibule. The latter seemed to be enlivened by the strike; his eyes were bright, his voice loud.

"Well?" said his uncle.

"I've gone through all the alleys. They seem very quiet. They wish to send you some delegates."

At that moment Mme. Hennebeau called from the head of the stairs:

"Is that you, Paul? Come up and tell me the news. These men who are so happy are crazy to make beggars of themselves."

And the husband was forced to wait to learn more until the young man had told his story to Mme. Hennebeau; and, returning to his office, he sat down before a desk on which a pile of telegrams was already collected.

At eleven o'clock, when the Gregoires arrived, they were astonished to see the valet de chambre, on admitting them, cast uneasy glances up and down the road. The curtains in the salon were drawn tight, and they were immediately shown into M. Hennebeau's office, who excused himself from receiving them in this manner; but the salon opened upon the street, and it was useless to provoke the people more.

"Have you not heard?" said he, seeing them surprised.

When M. Gregoire learned that the strike had broken out at last, he shrugged his shoulders with a placid air. Bah! that would be nothing. With a nod, Mme. Gregoire approved of what her husband had said, while Cecile, very gay, looking quite pretty in a toilet of blue cloth, smiled at the word strike, which to her only meant a distribution of alms in the alley.

But Mme. Hennebeau appeared, dressed in black silk and followed by Megrel.

"Well, is not this tiresome!" cried she from the door. "These men might have expected it, though. Do you know that Paul refuses to take us to Saint-Thomas?"

"We can remain here," said M. Gregoire, obligingly. "That will be just as pleasant."

Paul shook hands with Cecile and her mother.

When Mme. Hennebeau heard the two young people laughing together, she threw on them a maternal glance.

Meanwhile M. Hennebeau had finished reading some dispatches, and was writing the replies. They were all talking around him; his wife was explaining that she had done nothing to that work-room, which had kept its old red paper, its heavy mahogany furniture scratched by use.

Three-quarters of an hour passed; they were just going in to sit down to the table when M. Deneulin was announced. The latter entered quickly, in great excitement, and bowed before Mme. Hennebeau.

"Why! Are you here?" said he, on perceiving the Gregoires. Then he began talking with the director.

"They have done it, have they? My engineer told me of it this morning. My people all descended this morning. But you know the strike may extend. I am uneasy. I want to know what you think of it?"

His tongue ran as fast as a horse, his uneasiness betraying itself in the high tone of voice and commanding gestures, which made him resemble a retired cavalry officer.

M. Hennebeau commenced to lay before him the exact situation, when the valet de chambre opened the dining-room door.

"Stay and lunch with us," said the director. "I will finish telling of it at the desert."

"Yes, if it will please you," replied Deneulin, so full of the affair that he accepted the invitation without other form.

But, conscious of his impoliteness, he turned toward Mme. Hennebeau with an apology. She, however, was charming, and ordering a seventh cover she seated her guests. Mme. Gregoire and Cecile at each side of her husband, M. Gregoire and M. Deneulin at her right and left, and Paul between the young girl and her father. Then, when the first course was served, she resumed with a smile:

"You will excuse me. I wanted to have some oysters. You know they arrive at Marchiennes on Mondays. I proposed that my cook should take the carriage and go for some, but he was afraid of being stoned."

They all laughed, thinking that funny.

"Dear me!" said M. Hennebeau, looking at the windows from which they could see the road. "It is useless to make known to the whole country that we have guests this morning."

"I hope, however, they will allow us to lunch," said M. Gregoire.

Laughs again broke forth. Every guest was at his ease in that room full of flaming tapestries and furnished with carved oak. Pieces of silverware shone on the buffet, while around the room were numbers of palm trees in majolica pots. It was a freezing cold December day, over which swept a piercing wind from the northeast. But not a breath entered this warm house, throughout which was the delicate odor of burning pine.

"Suppose we close the curtains," said Mégrel, who was amused at the thought of frightening the Gregoires.

The maid was called and sent to fasten them. Then one joke followed another: they would no longer put down a glass or fork without the greatest precaution; they saluted each plate like a waif escaped from the pillaging of a conquered city; but behind that forced gaity was a secret fear which betrayed itself in involuntary glances thrown towards the road as if a band of people, dying of hunger, watched the table from the outside.

After the poached eggs and truffles, came some brook

trout. The conversation had fallen upon the industrial crisis which had been increasing for eighteen months.

"The prosperity of the former years was too great," said Deneulin. "Think of the enormous capital motionless, of the railroads, the posts, the canals; of all the money sunk in most foolish speculations. Look here with us, at the sugar manufactories, built here, as if the beet fields would give three crops. And to-day money is scarce, and it will be necessary to wait until they recover the interest on the millions put out. This is what has caused the stagnation in business."

M. Hennebeau contended against that theory; but he was obliged to admit that the prosperous years had corrupted the workmen.

"Just think," cried he, "those people in our mines made as much as six francs a day; just double what they earn at present. And they lived well—almost luxuriously. . . . To-day, naturally it seems hard to return to their old frugality."

"Monsieur Gregoire," interrupted Madame Hennebeau, "I beg you take a few more trout. . . . They are delicious, are they not?"

The director continued.

"But I ask you, is that our fault? We are cruelly wronged also. Since the shops shut up one after the other we have had the devil's luck to get rid of our stock, and in the face of all this we are forced to cut down everywhere. But the workmen will not comprehend."

Silence fell. One servant was bringing in some roast partridges, while another poured out the chambertin.

"There is a famine in India," resumed Deneulin, in a low voice, as though talking to himself. "America, in stopping its orders for iron and brass, has given a heavy blow to our furnaces; a shock heavy enough to shake the world. And the empire was so proud of that industry."

He attacked a piece of partridge. Then, raising his voice:

"The worst of it is that, to lower expenses, it would be necessary to produce more; otherwise the blow will fall upon the salaries, and the workman is right when he says that he pays for the broken pitchers."

That acknowledgment raised a discussion. The ladies were not interested. Each one, however, occupied herself with the plate before her. As the servant entered, he seemed to wish to speak; then he hesitated.

"What is the matter?" asked M. Hennebeau. "If you have any dispatches, give them to me. . . . I expect some answers."

"No, monsieur; M. Dansaert is here. . . . But he fears to disturb you."

The director excused himself, and called the superintendent in. The latter remained standing a few feet from the table, while they all turned to look at the enormous man, out of breath with the news which he had hastened to bring. The alleys were quiet, but it was decided that a delegation should wait on M. Hennebeau. Perhaps is would be there in a few minutes.

"Very well; thank you," said M. Hennebeau. "I wish a morning and evening report from you, do you understand?"

And, when Dansaert was gone, the laughter commenced again; they flew at the Russian salad, declaring that if they wished to finish it they must hasten themselves. The fun was increased when Megrel asked the servant for some bread and she replied, "Yes, monsieur" in so low and terrified a voice that she must have thought she had behind her a troop ready for slaughter.

"You can talk," said Mme. Hennebeau complacently. "They are not here yet."

The director, who had just been handed a bundle of letters and telegrams, wished to read one of the letters aloud. It was from Pierron, where in respectful sentences he informed them he was forced to strike with his comrades to save being badly treated, and he added that he was obliged to be one of the delegation, though he was against that step.

"Well, he is a good one," cried M. Hennebeau.

Then returning to the strike, they asked his opinion:

"Oh!" answered he, "this is not the first one. It will be like all the rest, end after fifteen days of idleness. They will roam around the saloons; then when they are too hungry will return to the mine.

Deneulin shook his head, saying:

"I am not so easy this time, they appear better organized. Have they not a saving fund?"

"Yes, scarcely three thousand francs; what can they do with that? I suspect a man named Etienne of being their chief. He is a good workman; I shall be provoked if I am obliged to discharge him as I did the famous Rasseneur, who still continues to poison the Voreux with his ideas and his beer. In eight days half of the men will descend, and in fifteen the ten thousand will all be at the bottom."

He was convinced, though keeping an unavowed fear before the calm and discipline of the miners. His greatest uneasiness came from the possible disgrace which would fall on him if the owners held him responsible for the strike. For some time he had felt himself less in favor. And putting back on his plate the spoonful of Russian salad he had taken up, he re-read the replies he had received from Paris, each word of which he tried to weigh. They excused him, the repast had turned into a military lunch, taken upon the field of battle, before the first shot.

Then the ladies took part in the conversation. Madame Gregoire pitied those poor people who would starve of hunger, while Cecile already thought of carrying bread to them. But Madame Hennebeau became angry at any one speaking of the misery of the coal men of Montson. Were they not happy? Lodged, warmed and cared for at the expense of the company? In her indifference for those people, she had forgotten all save the lesson learned to astonish the Parisans who visited her. And she had at last come to believe her own tales; she was indignant at the ingratitude of the people.

Megrel was still trying to frighten M. Gregoire. Cecile did not displease him, and to satisfy his aunt he wished to marry her; but that experienced boy had no love for the young girl. He pretended to be a republican, although that did not prevent him from ruling his workmen with the most extreme rigor.

"I do not think with my uncle," he resumed. "I fear some grave ending to this. . . . So, Monsieur

Gregoire, I warn you to watch your house. They may try to rob you."

Just then, with a smiling face, M. Gregoire was speaking of the miners in a fatherly tone.

"To rob me," cried he in amazement. "And why to rob me?"

"Are not you a stockholder of Montson? You do nothing. You live from the work of others. Thus, you are the chief, and that is sufficient. . . . Believe me, if the social revolution was to triumph, it would compel you to return your fortune as stolen money."

Suddenly he lost that child-like calmness, the unconscious serenity of manner. He stammered.

"Stolen money, my fortune! Did not my great-grandfather work hard for the first sum put in the mine? Have we not run all the risks of the enterprise? Do I make a bad use of the income?"

Madame Hennebeau, alarmed at seeing the mother and daughter also filled with fear, hastened to interfere, saying:

"Paul is only joking."

But M. Gregoire was beside himself. When the servant passed a dish of crawfish he took three, without knowing what he was doing, and began to eat them.

"Ah! I do not say there are no stockholders who abuse their fortunes. For example, I have been told that some ministers have received some of the Montson stock for services rendered to the company. That is like a great nobleman, whom I shall not name, a duke, and one of our heaviest holders of stock, whose life is a scandal of prodigality. . . . But we who live quietly, like the good people which we are, we who never speculate, who content ourselves with living comfortably on that which we have and giving a part to the poor. . . . Why, your workmen would be robbers to steal from us."

Megrel tried to calm him while still laughing at his rage. The crawfish were still passing into his mouth while one could hear the shells crack. The conversation settled back on politics. In spite of all, still trembling, M. Gregoire said he was liberal; and he regretted Louis-Philippe. As for Deneulin, he was for a strong

government; he declared that the emperor slipped on the inclination of the lamented concessions.

"Do you remember '89," said he. "It was the nobility who rendered the revolution possible by its complicity, by its taste for philosophic novelties. . . . Well! the aristocracy of to-day are playing the same foolish game, with its madness for liberalism, its rage for destruction, its flatteries of the people. . . . Yes, yes, you sharpen the monster's teeth so that he can eat us up. And he will eat us, too."

The ladies made him be silent, and changed the conversation by asking him about his daughters. He spoke of them: Lacie was at Marchiennes, where she was singing with a friend; Jeanne had commenced the head of an old beggar. But he spoke of these things with an absent air; he had not taken his eyes from the director, who, absorbed in the reading of his telegrams, had forgotten his guests. Behind those thin leaves he seemed to perceive Paris—the orders of the managers who were going to decide the strike. Therefore he could not keep from the subject which so deeply interested him.

"After all, what will you do?" he asked, suddenly.

M. Hennebeau trembled. He answered in a vague manner.

"We will see."

"Well, you have some capital back, and can afford to wait," said Deneulin, thinking aloud. "But I will be lost if the strike reaches Vandame. I have just been to the expense of newly fitting up Jean-Bart, and I must have a constant production to get along."

That involuntary confession seemed to interest M. Deneulin. He listened, and a plan was formed. In case the strike was a bad one, he could let it run on until his neighbor was ruined, then purchase his mines at a low price. It was the most sure means to get himself in the good graces of the Montson owners, who for some years had longed to possess Vandame.

"If Jean-Bart is so much annoyance to you as that," said he, laughing, "why do you not let us have it?"

But Deneulin had already regretted his complaints. He cried: "Never, as long as I live."

They laughed at his earnestness, and, for the moment,

as the dessert appeared, the strike was forgotten. The ladies spoke about a receipt for the meringuee which they thought delicious, and the pine apple was declared equally good. The cheese and fruit, consisting of grapes and pears, brought to an end that exquisite lunch. They were all talking at the same time as the servant poured out the Rhine wine, used in place of champagne, which was considered common.

At that dessert the marriage of Paul and Cecile took a step forward. His aunt had cast such pressing looks on the young man that he became very agreeable to the Gregoires, whom he had frightened almost to death by his tales of plunder.

The servant had just brought the coffee as a maid entered filled with fright.

"Monsieur; monsieur, they are here."

It was the delegation.

"Show them into the salon," said M. Hennebeau.

For an instant the guests around the table looked uneasily at each other, then the jokes were resumed. One pretended to put the remainder of the sugar in his pocket, while they laughingly spoke of hiding the silver. But the director remained serious, and the smiles died away on their faces, while voices were lowered as the heavy steps of the delegates were heard in the next room.

Mme. Hennebeau said to her husband in a low voice:

"You will drink your coffee, will you not?"

"Certainly," replied he. "Let them wait."

He was nervous, listening at the least noise, though pretending to be occupied with his coffee.

Paul and Cecile rose from the table. Choking with laughter she placed her eye to the key-hole while he softly whispered:

"Do you see them?"

"Yes, I see a big one and two little ones behind him."

"Have they not abominable faces?"

"Why no, they are very good looking."

Suddenly M. Hennebeau left his chair, saying his coffee was too warm, he would drink it afterwards. As he was going out he put his finger to his mouth as if to say be silent. They had all seated themselves again,

remaining at the table in silence, not daring to move, listening to that which was going on in the next room, uneasy at the loud voices of those men.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE night before, at a meeting held at Rasseneur's, Etienne and some others had chosen the delegates who, the following day, were to wait on the director. When la Maheu found that her husband was chosen as one of them she was in despair, asking why he should thus mix in the quarrel. Maheu himself had not accepted without repugnance, he was ill at ease and terribly frightened. In spite of their misery, when the time for action had come, both felt almost resigned to their lot, trembling for the next day, willing rather to bend to the will of their superiors. Usually Maheu submitted to the good judgment of his wife who was a very reasonable woman. But that time he became angry at her advice, even though he shared her fears.

"Shut up," said he; "I'm doing my duty. I can't go back on my comrades."

After a long silence spent in thinking, she answered:

"You're right. You must go; but we're lost."

They lunched at noon, eating a few potatoes. A little butter still remained, but no one offered to touch it and it was carefully put away to use with the bread for the evening meal. At one o'clock the delegates were to meet at l'Avantage, and go from there to the director's house.

"You know they count on you to speak," said Etienne to Maheu.

The latter became speechless with fear.

"Ah! no, that's too much," cried la Maheu. "I'm willing for him to go there, but I forbid his being the leader. . . . Why do they take him in preference to any other?"

Then Etienne explained that Maheu was the best and most respected workman in the mine, whose good sense all believed in, and they wished him to tell the demands of all. At first they had chosen Etienne, but he had

been in Montson such a short time that he thought the director would be more apt to listen to the complaints of an old miner So, finally the men had confided their interests to the one they thought the most worthy. He could not refuse, that would be foolish.

Desperate, la Maheu cried out:

"Go, kill yourself for others, my man. I consent."

"But I don't know enough," stammered he. "I should say foolish things."

Etienne, relieved at having decided him, slapped him across the back.

"You can say what you know, and that will be very good."

With mouth full, Bonnemort, in whose legs the swelling was going down, listened, nodding his head. Then, after having drank a glass of water, the old man slowly murmured:

"Say what you please, it will all be as though you had said nothing. I've seen these times before! Four years ago they sent us from the directors' door with blows of their swords. To-day, perhaps, they'll receive you, but they'll give you no more satisfaction than that wall. They have money; they don't care."

A silence fell. Maheu and Etienne arose. Not a word was exchanged; they left the family sad at heart, seated before their empty plates. In the alley they stopped for Pierron and Levaque. Then the four men went to Rasseneur's, where the delegates from the neighboring alleys were arriving, one by one. When the twenty members were assembled, they all started out for Montson. The biting east wind swept past them. As the clocks were striking two, they arrived before the director's door.

At first the servant closing the door on them left them in the yard, then, when he returned, he showed them into the salon and threw back the curtains. A soft light entered through the lace; and the miners remaining alone in embarrassment dared not sit down. They were very clean though, having shaved that morning and dressed in their best. They twisted their caps between their fingers, cast side-long glances around the room, which was furnished in the peculiar style which a taste for antiquity brought into fashion: Henri

deux arm-chairs, Louis quinze chairs, an Italian cabinet of the sixteenth century, a Spanish contados of the fourteenth, a mantel lambrequin and curtains to match. All this gilt, silk and furs, this great luxury had filled them with a respectful uneasiness. The Turkish carpets seemed to cling to their feet. But that which especially overcame them was the heat, the good even warmth from a furnace which burned their cheeks, frozen by the wind on the road. Five minutes passed. Their uneasiness increased more and more in that warm, rich room.

At last M. Hennebeau entered, wearing in his buttonhole the knot of his decoration. He was the first to speak.

"Ah! here you are. . . . So you have struck."

He paused, adding with a stiff politeness.

"Be seated. We will talk."

The miners turned to find seats. A few risked themselves in the arm-chairs, while others, afraid of the richly-embroidered silks, preferred to remain standing.

Silence fell. M. Hennebeau, who had rolled his arm-chair before the fire-place, numbered them at a glance, trying to recall their faces and names. He had recognized Pierron standing in the last row, and his eyes were now fastened upon Etienne, who was seated before him.

"Well," said he, "what have you to say to me?"

He expected to hear the young man begin, and was so surprised to see Maheu rise that he could not conceal his astonishment.

"What! you, a good workman, whose family gave the first blows of a pick in the Montson mine! Ah! this is too bad; it makes me angry to see you at the head of these men."

Maheu waited with head bent. Then he commenced, with voice at first hesitating and low.

"Monsieur le directeur, it's just because I am a peaceable man that my comrades have chosen me to tell you that we're not hot-headed men anxious for a fight. All we want is justice. We are tired of being hungry, and we think it time to arrange so that we can at least have bread enough to eat."

His voice became firm. He raised his eyes and continued, looking straight at the director.

"You knew that we could'nt accept your new system. You accuse us of bad propping. It's true we don't give that work the time needed. But if we did we'd earn less than we do now, and in the end would be sure to starve. Pay us more and we'll prop better, we'll spend every hour at the timbering that you want. Won't you make some other arrangement? To get work done it must be paid for. Look at what you have done now, cut down the price of the cars and then pretend to make it equal by paying us in part for the timbering. Even if that was true you'd be stealing from us all the same, for the propping would always take us a longer time. But what makes us mad is that it's not even true, the company does'nt make up our loss, it simply puts two centimes per car in its own pocket."

"Yes, yes, it's true," said the other delegates on seeing M. Hennebeau make a violent gesture as if to interrupt him.

However Maheu prevented the director from speaking. Now he was launched, words came freely. For some moments he had listened to himself in surprise as if it was a stranger speaking. They were the thoughts gathered together deep down in his heart, things which he had not even known to be there, and which came forth in a burst of passion. He spoke of their misery, the hard labor, the beast-like life, the wives and little ones at home crying of hunger. He mentioned the last disasterous pay day when almost their whole salary had been taken from them for propping and fines. Did they wish to kill them?

"Then, Monsieur le directeur," said he in concluding, "we have come to tell you that we prefer starving at once, rather than to work without earning bread to eat. We have left the mines and will only go back when the company accepts our conditions. It wanted to lower the price of the cars and pay in part for the timbering. We want things to remain as they were, and also five centimes more per car. Now it is for you to decide if you are for justice and work."

"That's it," cried some of the men. "He's said our idea. We only ask for what's right."

Others, without speaking, approved with energetic nods.

The luxurious room, filled with its gildings, embroideries and mysterious heaps of antiquities, had all disappeared; they no longer even felt the soft carpet, which was crushed beneath their heavy boots.

"Allow me to reply," cried M. Hennebeau, who had now become angry. "In the first place, it is not true that the company gains two centimes per car on the new mode of salary. . . . I'll show the figures if you wish."

A confused discussion followed. The director, to try and divide them, appealed to Pierron, who, stammering some unintelligible words, retreated further in the background. Levaque, on the contrary, was among the most aggressive, confirming everything, even that of which he was ignorant. The heavy murmur of their voices was drowned among the numerous tapestries of that oven-like room.

"If you all talk at once," resumed M. Hennebeau, "we will never understand each other."

He had again become the calm ruler who gives an order and intends to have it respected. He constantly watched Etienne, endeavoring once or twice to draw him out of the forbidding silence in which he was buried. So, abandoning the discussion about the two centimes, he suddenly broke forth:

"Now, tell the truth, you are obeying some one's instructions. It is a pest now which has blown upon the workmen and corrupted the best of them. . . . I need no confession. I see very well that you are changed; you who until now were so peaceable. Have they not promised you more butter than bread, telling you that your turn had come to be masters? . . . I bet you have already joined the International, that army of robbers whose dream is the destruction of society."

Then Etienne interrupted him.

"You are mistaken, Monsieur le directeur. Not a coal man of Montson has adhered. But, if you push them too far, perhaps all the mines will enroll themselves. It depends on the company."

From that moment the fight was carried on between

M. Hennebeau and Etienne, as though the other miners were not even there.

"The company is good to its men; you are wrong to threaten it. Only this year it has spent three hundred thousand france in building houses, without speaking of the pensions, the coal and the medicine which it gives away. You seem intelligent, for in a few months you have become one of our most clever workmen. Would you not do better to think over these truths, than to associate yourself with people of bad reputation? Yes, I wish to speak of Rasseneur, whom we were compelled to discharge in order to save our miners from his socialist rot. . . . You are always at his house, and he must have advised you to organize that saving fund. That we would allow willingly if it was only a saving fund, but if it became a missile against us, a reserve fund with which to pay the expenses of war, I must add that the company insist upon having control of it."

Etienne allowed him to continue, looking straight into his eyes, while he nervously bit his lips. He smiled at the last sentence, answering simply:

"This is still a new imposition of which Monsieur le directeur has spoken to us. . . . But unhappily, our wish is that the company should occupy itself less with us, and instead of playing the role of benefactor, that it should show itself just in giving us that which belongs to us, the gain of which it robs us. Is it honorable for them to let the workmen die of hunger to save the dividends of the stockholder? Monsieur le directeur cannot honestly deny that the new system has only been started as a means of cutting down the salaries, and that which angers us is that when the company is forced to be economical, it always begins on the workman."

"Ah! here it is," cried M. Hennebeau. "I was waiting for the accusation that it lived by the sweat of a famished people. How can you talk such nonsense, you who ought to know what enormous risks the stock holders run in this business. A mine all equipped costs from fifteen hundred thousand francs to two millions; why it is scarcely possible to draw even a slight interest from such an enormous cost. Nearly half of the mining companies in France are bankrupt. It is

stupid to accuse those who are still working of cruelty. When their workmen suffer, they suffer also. Do you not believe the company has as much to lose as you in an actual crisis. It is not the mistress of salaries; it obeys competition under fear of ruin. Look at the facts. . . . But you do not want to hear, you do not want to understand."

"Yes," said the young man. "We understand very well that there is no possible improvement for us as long as things go on as they do, and on that account, one day or another, the workmen will try and arrange things to suit themselves."

These words were pronounced with such conviction that a thoughtful silence followed them. An uneasiness, filled with fear, seemed to pass through that salon. The other delegates, who did not comprehend all that had been said, felt, nevertheless, that their comrade was fighting for them, and they again threw sidelong glances on all that luxury, those baubles, which would have fed them for a month.

Finally, Mr. Hennebeau, who had been lost in thought, arose to dismiss them, and as Etienne nudged Maheu's elbow, the latter again began speaking.

"Then, monsieur, I must say to the others that you refuse?"

"Me, my good man!" cried the director. "I refuse nothing. I am paid a salary, and have no more will here than your smallest child. They give me orders, and my only duty is to see that they are carried out. I have said to you what I believed was right, but I am not the one to decide. You have made known your demands, which I shall send to the company, after which their answer will be given you."

He spoke in a decided manner, explaining himself to be a simple instrument in the hands of the owners. And the miners now looked on him with suspicion, asking themselves what interest he could have in lying —what he would derive by thus putting himself between them and the true masters. He, a paid workman, and living so well.

Etienne again spoke out:

"Why can't we plead our cause in person? We would explain a great many things which would neces-

sarily escape your memory, if we only knew where to address the masters."

M. Hennebeau only smiled.

"Ah! so you no longer trust me. Well, it would be necessary for you to go down there."

The delegates had followed his uncertain gesture, his hand being stretched toward one of the salon windows. Where was that? Paris, no doubt. Still, they did not know where they would find that unknown God throned. They would never see him, and only felt in him a power which bore down upon the ten thousand coal men of Montson. And when the director was speaking, it was that power which he had behind him.

They were all discouraged. Even Etienne said it was time they left, and, as Maheu started for the door, M. Hennebeau touched him on the shoulder, asking after Jeanlin.

"That should have been a lesson to you, but it was not; and now you are striking when you know that before a week has passed you will all die of hunger. I calculated on your having some wisdom left, and shall expect you all to descend by Monday at the latest."

All the men started forth, leaving the parlor without answering a word to that hope of submission. The director accompanied them to the door, still thinking over the affair. The company on one side with its new tariff, the workmen on the other with their demand for an increase of five centimes per car. Well, he could only promise a prompt answer from the company; but, in advance, not to leave them any hope, he informed them that their conditions were sure to be refused.

"Reflect before doing anything foolish," said he, uneasy at their silence.

In the hall Pierron bowed very low, while Levaque started to put on his cap. Maheu was searching for a last word when Etienne again knocked his elbow, and they all went off in that threatening silence, the door alone closing behind them with a great noise.

When M. Hennebeau returned to the dining-room, he found his guests still seated motionless at the table. In a few words he told his uneasiness, which made a deep gloom settle down upon the face of Deneulin. While he was drinking his now cold coffee, they tried to speak

of other things. But even the Gregoires returned to the strike, astonished that there was no law to compel the workmen to return to their work. Paul reassured Cecile by saying that they could send for the gendarmes.

M. Hennebeau called the servant.

"Hippolyte, before we go into the salon, open all the windows and let in some fresh air.

CHAPTER XIX.

FIFTEEN days had passed, and on Monday of the third week, the account sent in to the director showed a new decrease in the number of workmen who had descended. They had counted on the miners beginning work again that day. But the obstinacy of the owners not to yield had exasperated them. It was not only the Voreux, Crèvecoeur, Minon, la Madeleine that were standing still; but la Victoire and Feutry-Cantel now counted scarcely a quarter of its men; and even the workmen at Saint Thomas had gone over to the fight. Little by little the strike had become general.

A heavy silence fell over the Voreux, from which no longer black forms could be seen returning from their day's labor. Under the gray December sky stood three or four forgotten cars, adding to the desolation.

Under the thin trussels of the bridges the stock of coal was growing low, leaving the ground bare and black; while the provision of wood lessened under the heavy rains. At the canal wharf a half-loaded boat quietly lay in the muddy water, and on the desert plain stood a cart with its shafts sticking up toward the dull sky. But the buildings especially seemed deserted, the screening-shed was closed up. In the tower was no longer heard the constant rolling of cars, while in the boiler room where the fires were low the air was almost as cold as the day outside. The giant chimney was too large now for the slight smoke which curled from it. The engine was only run in the morning when the stablemen descended to care for the horses; the overseers worked alone at the bottom, watching for disasters which injured the paths as soon as they were no longer

kept up, so after nine o'clock the ladders were used. And above those dead buildings shrouded in their sheet of black dust, there was not even heard, but for a short time in the morning, the escaping steam, blowing its long and loud whistle.

Nearest the Voreux was the alley, Deux-Cent-Quarante, which also seemed dead. The prefect of Lille had arrived, gendarmes paced the roads. But before the calmness of the strikers, prefect and gendarmes had returned home. The alleys had never been so quiet. The men, to avoid going to the saloons, slept the entire day; the women, by putting themselves on short allowance of coffee had become reasonable, less anxious to talk and quarrel; and even the bands of children seemed to be infected with that calm, for they ran with their bare feet and would slap each other without making a noise. It was an order which had run from mouth to mouth: be quiet and be wise.

Nevertheless there was a continual going and coming from Maheu's house. Etienne, the secretary, had divided off the three thousand francs of the saving fund to the needy families. This sum had been enlarged by some hundred francs given by subscription. But, to-day, the supply was used up, the miners had no more money to support the strike and the end was threatening them. Maigrat, after having promised to trust them for two weeks, at the end of eight days suddenly changed his mind; cutting off their provisions, even refusing them bread. He received all the orders of the company; and perhaps it wished to end the fight by starving the people. And it was especially to the Maheus whom he shut his door with a spiteful rage. For a week they had been living from the saving fund, but now that it had given out, where would they find bread? To add to the misery it began snowing, the women soon lessened their pile of coal thinking uneasily that there was no more to come until the men went back to work. It was not enough to be slowly starving, but they must suffer from cold also.

At Maheu's everything was gone. The Levaque's had almost used up the twenty franc piece loaned them by Bouteloupe. The Pierrons always had money, but appeared as starved as the others, fearing they would

wish to borrow from them. Since Saturday many families had gone supperless to bed, and though the future looked terrible, not a complaint was heard, all obeyed the word of command with a quiet courage. In Etienne they placed absolute confidence, a religious faith, the blind gift of a population of believers, for he had promised them the era of justice and they were ready to suffer for the conquest of universal happiness. Hunger turned their heads; never had dark horizon expanded into anything so bright as that which they imagined. With eyes dim from suffering, they saw the ideal city of their dreams, with its brotherhood of people, its golden age of work and its common repast. Nothing disturbed the conviction which had gradually come upon them. The fund was exhausted, the company would not yield, each day their situation became more grave, but they still hoped on. They showed their contempt by smiling at facts. That faith took the place of bread and made them forget their hunger.

From this time forward Etienne was the unquestioned chief. In the talks held each evening he became an oracle. He read constantly, receiving a great number of letters; and he even subscribed to the *Prolétaire*, a socialist paper published in Belgium, and that journal, the first which had ever entered the alley, had raised him still higher in the estimation of his comrades. His growing popularity filled him with a delicious intoxication. He now kept up an extended correspondence discussing the workingman's lot at the four corners of the world, consulted by all the miners of the Voreux and listened to attentively by every one, from the old mechanics down to the diggers with hands greasy and black. As if mounting a ladder he went up step by step into that refined state which he could hardly believe possible. A single thing caused him to worry, his want of instruction, the lack of knowledge which made him uneasy and timid when he found himself face to face with a gentleman. He continued to instruct himself, devouring everything, but the want of method made his progress very slow. At certain times he experienced great uneasiness as to the wisdom of his actions, perhaps they should consult a lawyer, a learned man capable of speaking and acting without exposing

him or compromising his comrades. But he immediately revolted at that idea. No, no; not lawyers, they use their skill to enrich themselves from the people. It would come right of its own accord, the workmen should attend to their own affairs. And his wish for popularity decided him. Monston at his feet, Paris not far off, and he pictured to himself the amazement of the aristocracy on seeing a workingman in Parliament.

For some days Etienne had been perplexed. Pluchart had written letter after letter offering to come to Montson to warm up the zeal of the miners. He wished to organize a society which the mechanic should preside over, and he thought to win for the International the most of the miners who had been so mistrustful. Etienne feared creating a disturbance, but nevertheless he would have allowed Pluchart to come if Rasseneur had not been so violently set against it, for in spite of his power, the young man still went to the saloon-keeper for advice.

This Monday about four o'clock, another letter arrived from Lille. Etienne was alone in the house with la Maheu, for Maheu, incapable of being idle, had gone fishing under the lockage of the canal, hoping to have the luck to catch a big fish which they could sell to buy bread. Old Bonnemort and little Jeanlin had gone for the first walk since they had lost the use of their limbs, while the children were out with Alzire who passed hours trying to pick up a few cinders.

When the young man held up the letter, she asked:

"Is it good news? Are they going to send us some money?"

As he shook his head, she answered:

"I don't know what we're going to do this week. But we've got the right on our side, so we can hold out."

She upheld the strike now. It would have been better to force the company to be just without leaving work. But as they had left it they ought not to return until their demands were agreed to. It would be better to die than give in and say they were wrong, when they were right.

"Ah!" cried Etienne. "If the cholera would come we would get rid of those who take advantage of us."

"No, no," she answered. "We must never wish death to anybody, it would do us no good if they died, for others would come up in their places. I only ask that they be brought around to more reasonable ideas. There are some good people everywhere."

She did not like his violent words, his constant wish to fight against everything. What was the use of his occupying himself with so many things, with the masters and the government? Why meddle in other people's business when it would do him no good. She only respected him because he did not drink and gave her his forty-five francs for board. When a man was steady one could forgive everything else.

Etienne then talked about the republic which would give bread to every one. But la Maheu shook her head, for she remembered the year of forty-eight which had left them still worse off. And forgetting all else she told him of that year of suffering.

"Not a liard," murmured she. "The mines stopped running and the people died of hunger."

At that moment the door opened, and both were speechless with astonishment as Catherine entered. She had never before reappeared in the alley since she ran away with Cheval. In confusion, she still held the door open, standing on the threshold as though afraid to enter. No doubt she expected to find her mother alone, and the sight of the young man made her forget the speech which she had prepared on the road.

"What do you come here for?" said la Maheu. "I don't want you, go away."

Then Catherine spoke out.

"I did a little work, and I thought of the children. I've brought some coffee and sugar."

She drew from her pocket a pound of sugar and another of coffee, which she placed on the table. While she worked at Jean-Bart the strike in the Voreux worried her, and under pretense of thinking of the little ones, she had come to help her family. But her kindness had no effect upon her mother, who replied:

"Instead of bringing us some sweets, you would have done better to have stayed to work for us."

She threw up to her all that she had said to Etienne. To run away with a man when only sixteen years old

and when her family was in need too, she ought to have been the last to have done such a thing. Had they ever kept her tied up? Not at all, she was free as the air; they only asked her to come home to sleep.

Catherine stood listening before the table. Her slight form shook, she tried to answer, interrupting her mother.

"It wasn't me. It was him. What he want's I have got to want, don't you see, he's the strongest. Do people know how things come about? they're done and can't be undone. And, besides, he's going to marry me."

She defended herself as best she could, without shame, only trembling to think her mother treated her so badly before that young man whose presence oppressed her.

Etienne arose, pretending to rake up the fire, which was out, and their eyes met. He thought her pale and tired looking, but still pretty with her clear eyes. He felt a singular feeling toward her; his illness was gone, he simply wished to see her happy with the man she preferred to him. He would liked to have gone to Montson and forced the other to treat her better. She saw his pitying glances, but thought he must despise her to look at her thus. Then with heart almost bursting, she stood silent unable to find other words of excuse.

"If that's it, you'd better shut up," replied the mother, implacable. "If you've come back to stay, all right; if not, get out right away, and consider yourself happy that I have got Estelle here in my lap, or I'd have kicked you from the door."

Suddenly, as if that threat had been realized, Catherine received a violent blow on the back. It was Cheval who had been watching her for some time from the still open door.

"I've followed you," he howled. "I knew you were coming here to be insulted and kicked out. So you've been buying them coffee with my money."

La Maheu and Etienne, stupefied, did not move, as Cheval moved toward the door.

"Get out of here now." and when the girl took refuge in the corner he began cursing the mother.

Then taking Catherine by the arm he shook her, dragging her outside.

Etienne, mad with rage, flew after him, and the two men were face to face, with murder in their eyes. It was an old hatred, an unacknowledged jealousy, which now burst forth. One or the other must win now.

"Take care," yelled Etienne, "I'll kill you."

"Try it," answered Cheval.

They glared at each other for a few seconds, panting for breath. Then Catherine dragged her lover away, and pulling him out of the alley, she flew on without looking behind her.

"What a brute!" said Etienne, slamming the door to.

La Maheu had not moved. She shrugged her shoulders, and a painful silence fell.

"He is a pig," said she at last.

Then Etienne arose and went out, while she, laying Estelle on two chairs, began raking the fire. If the father caught and sold a fish they would have some soup.

Outside, a bitter cold night was coming on. With head bent, Etienne walked on filled with gloomy sadness. He no longer felt angered toward the man, or pity for the poor, illtreated girl. The brutal scene was effaced by the sufferings of all those miserable people. He saw these women and little children who had not bread to eat, trying to forget their hunger, and the doubt which before now had passed through his mind, came upon him again in that melancholy twilight. What a terrible responsibility he had charged himself with. Should he push their resistance still farther, now that he had neither money nor credit? How would it end if assistance did not arrive, and hunger abated their courage? Suddenly a vision appeared to him of the future. Children dying and dead, mothers crying and fathers, emaciated and weak, going back to the mines. He still walked on, stumbling over stones, while this idea occurred to him that the company would be the stronger, and he would have made all this unhappiness for his comrades, filling him with terrible anguish.

When he raised his head, he saw that he was before the Voreux. The gloomy mass of buildings were even darker under the growing night. In the midst of the desert plain these great motionless shadows

looked like the corner of an abandoned fortress. At that hour in the evening everything was still, no light was seen, not a voice heard. And even the sound of escaping steam seemed to come from a greater distance than that dreary mine.

Etienne looked on, and the blood flew back to his heart. If the workmen suffered from hunger, the company was losing millions. Why should it be the stronger in that fight of labor against capital? In either case victory would be dearly bought. He was filled with a wish to fight on, even though it ended in death. Was it not as well for the people to die at once, as to starve to death by inches? Some badly digested readings returned to him; accounts of people who had burned their town to stop the enemy; tales where mothers saved their infants from slavery by beating out their brains upon the pavement, while men died rather than eat the bread of tyrants. That exalted him; his gloomy sadness and doubt disappeared, while he felt ashamed of his cowardice of an hour before. And in that return of confidence, bursts of pride reappeared and carried him still higher; then followed joy at being their chief, obeyed by all. He imagined the time when authority should be in the hands of the people, and he would be master.

But he started as the voice of Maheu rang out in the darkness, telling him of a superb trout caught and sold for three francs. They would have some soup. Then he left the comrade who said he would return home in a short time, and entering l'Avantage Etienne sat down at a table near Jouvarine waiting for the departure of a customer to frankly tell Rasseneur that he intended writing to Pluchart to come immediately. His resolution was taken, he wished to organize a private mutiny, for victory seemed sure, if the coal men of Montson would all adhere to the International.

CHAPTER XX.

THE meeting was to be held on Thursday at two o'clock at the Bon-Joyeux. The old woman was exasperated at the misery which had been made for her children, the coal men, especially as her saloon was always empty. Never had strikers been less thirsty, even the drunkards fastened themselves in their homes rather than disobey wise orders given them. The streets of Montson which were so crowded on fête days now bore a mournful air of desolation. No more beer was handed over the bars. Before le Casemuir and le Progress nothing was to be seen but the pale faces of the saloonkeepers, watching the road, l'Enfant, Tison, Piquette, Tete-coupee all were deserted, only Saint-Eloi which was frequented by the overseers, drinks were still poured out. Even at the Volcan, which was kept by a woman, no sound was heard.

"Great heavens!" cried old Desir. "The gendarmes would be after me if they found it out, but I must fool them."

She had acceeded with pleasure to the demands of Etienne. Her entire house should be given up to the miners, she would lend them her ball-room gratuitously, and even send out the invitations if they wished. On the following day the young man carried her fifty letters to sign, which had been copied by the neighbors who knew how to write. These invitations were sent off to the delegates and some other men whom they could trust. The business of the day named was to discuss the continuation of the strike, and as Pluchart was expected they counted on a talk from him to win the men over to join the International.

Thursday morning Etienne became uneasy. Pluchart who had sent a dispatch saying he would be there on Wednesday evening, had not yet arrived. What was the matter? Etienne was in despair at not being able to have a talk with him before the meeting. At nine o'clock he went to Montson, thinking that the mechanic had perhaps gone straight there without stopping at the Voreux.

"No, I've not seen your friend," said old Desir. "But every thing's ready. Come in and see."

She led him to the ball-room. The decoration remained the same, garlands of paper flowers reaching across the ceiling, but the musician's stand was replaced by a table and three chairs, and a number of benches ranged along the walls.

"It's all right," said Etienne.

"You must make yourself at home now. Bawl all you please. The gendarmes will have to pass over my body if they come."

In spite of his uneasiness he could not help smiling at her words.

At that moment Rasseneur and Jouvarine entered, and when the old woman left them together in the great empty hall, Etienne cried:

"What! you here already?"

Jouvarine had come in out of simple curosity. The machinists of the Voreux were not on a strike and he was now working at night. Rasseneur had seemed uneasy for two days; his round fat face had lost its jolly smile.

"Did you know that Pluchart hasn't come yet?" said the young man to him.

He turned his face aside and at last replied between his teeth:

"That don't astonish me. I don't expect him."

"Why?"

Then looking the other in the face he replied with a brave air:

"Because I wrote to him, if you wish to know, and in that letter I begged him not to come. Yes, I thought you ought to attend to your own affairs without asking strangers to help you."

Etienne, trembling with rage, stammered out:

"You did that; you did that?"

"Certainly, I did that; and you know moreover I have some confidence in Pluchart. He's sly, but a person can get along with him. But your ideas would make one crazy. Politics, government—all that sets me crazy. What I want is to see the miners better treated. I worked at the bottom for twenty years, and suffered so much misery that I swore to obtain some

ease for the poor devils who are there still. I know very well that you'll get nothing at all with your foolishness; you'd make the life of the workmen still more miserable. When hunger forces them to go back to work they'll be ground down still more, the company'll pay them back with blows like an escaped dog which has been made to return to his kennel. I want to prevent that if I can. Do you understand?"

His voice grew louder, and his calm, reasonable nature clearly shown out in his words, which came freely, without effort. Was it not stupid to think that they could change the world in a moment—to put the workmen in the place of aristocrats and divide the money like a lot of apples? It would take thousands and thousands of years to do that. Why did they ruin their peace of mind by talking of miracles? The most stupid person should know better than that. Instead of making fools of themselves, why did they not endeavor to lead the company by their good conduct to make a better condition of things?

Etienne, filled with indignation, allowed him to speak on, then he cried:

"Great heavens, have you no blood in your veins?"

To resist a temptation to strike him, he walked up and down the room with great strides, occasionally sitting down on one of the benches; at last he opened the door leading to the bar room.

"Shut the door," said Jouvarine. "We don't want people to hear us."

On coming in the engineer had seated himself on one of the chairs before the desk. After rolling a cigarette, he watched the two others with his keen, yet sharp eyes, his lips curled with a slight smile.

"It does no good to get angry," resumed Rasseneur. "I saw from the first that you had some good sense. It was very wise of you to take command of the strikers, to force them to remain at home, using your wisdom to obtain order, but now you are trying to get them into trouble."

At each of his turns Etienne flew up to the saloon-keeper and taking him by the shoulder shook him, crying his replies in the man's face.

"Yes, I have imposed discipline on them. I still

advise them not to give in. But it was not necessary for you to make a fool of me in this way. . . . You pride yourself on keeping cool; as for me there are times when I fear I am going mad."

He mocked at his first impressions as those of a neophyte, at his religious dream of a place where justice would soon reign between men who had become brothers. Let them cross their arms and wait if they wished to see until the end of the world men devour one another like so many wolves. No, they must take things in their own hands or injustice would be eternal, the rich always sucking the blood of the poor. He could not pardon himself for being foolish enough to have formerly said that they must banish the political from the social question. He was ignorant then, but since he had read and studied his ideas had become matured; he now boasted of having a system. However, he explained it badly, in confused sentences which still kept a little of all the theories gone over and successively abandoned. At the head remained the ideas of Karl Marx, that capital was the result of spoliation and that work had the right and should enter into that stolen riches. Only things became confused as soon as he passed on to a practical programme. At first Proudhon had tempted him with the chimera of mutual credit, a vast bank of exchange which would abolish all others; then he fancied the co-operative society of Lasalle, endowed by the commonwealth which little by little would transform the earth into a single industrial town, then the question of honest managers and the difficulty of control had disgusted him with it, and he had paused for a time at collectiveness, which demanded that all the instruments of labor should be rendered up into a collection. His rallying cry in the strike was: "La mine au mineur!" He did not yet know how to realize his new dream, which again brought up scruples as to its being sensible and right. He simply said that it was the question to take possession of the government before all. Then they would see.

"But why have you changed; why have you gone over to the owners' side?" continued he, returning and standing before the saloon-keeper. "You have owned up to it yourself."

Rasseneur slowly reddened.

"Yes, I said so, and I'm no more of a coward than any other. . . . Only I refuse to be with those who get everything into a mess just to make a position for themselves."

Etienne appeared uneasy. The two men became disagreeable, their sullen rivalry gaining on them. It was in the end the question of persons which angered them, throwing one into a revolutionary exaggeration and the other into affected prudence, carrying them away in spite of themselves above their true ideas into these fatal roles which they otherwise would not think of choosing. And Jouvarine, who listened with discrete curiosity, showed upon his blonde, girlish face a contemptuous silence, the overwhelming scorn of a man ready to give his life obscurely without even posing as a martyr.

"You mean that for me, do you?" demanded Etienne. "You're jealous."

"Jealous of what?" replied Rasseneur. "I don't pose as a great man, nor do I try to form a society in Montson to become its secretary."

The other endeavored to interrupt him, but he added:

"Be frank now; you're only using the International as a pretense to play the gentleman and commence a correspondence with the famous council of the north."

A silence fell: then Etienne, very pale, replied:

"I never thought to be reproached by you. I have always consulted you, for I knew that you fought here long before me. But when you would allow no one to say a word but yourself, I acted alone from that time on. And from the first I warned you that the meeting would be held even if Pluchart didn't come, and that the men would adhere in spite of you."

"They haven't done so yet," murmured the saloon-keeper; "wait until they are asked for an assessment."

"The International doesn't compel workmen on a strike to pay their dues at once. They can pay later on, and the society will come to our aid at once."

Rasseneur suddenly became furious.

"Well, we'll see! I'm here and I shall speak. I won't let you turn the heads of your friends. I will enlighten them upon their true interests. We'll see

whom they'll follow—me, whom they've known for thirty years, or you, who have turned everything upside down in the one year that you've lived here. No; give me peace, and we'll soon see who's for war."

And he went out, slamming the door. The garlands trembled; the shields swung to and fro on the wall. Then the great room again fell into its peaceful quiet.

Jouvarine was still smoking at the table. After having walked the floor for an instant in silence, Etienne burst forth. Was it his fault if the people had left that great fool to come to him? And he defended himself for having become popular. He did not even know how it had come about, this good feeling of the whole alley, the confidence of his companions, the influence which he now had over them. He could not endure being accused of working for ambition, for his heart was as pure as an infant's. He grew indignant, protecting his fraternity.

Suddenly, he paused before Jouvarine, crying:

"If I was to cause a friend to shed one drop of blood, I would go to America at once."

The machinist shrugged his shoulders, and a smile again crossed his face.

"Blood," murmured he. "What difference does that make? The earth needs it."

Etienne, watching him, became calm, and seated himself on the opposite side of the table. That blonde face, with those thoughtful eyes, sometimes made him flush up with uneasiness, while it acted singularly upon his will. Without one word from his comrade, conquered by that silence alone, he felt himself calmed little by little.

"What would you do if you were in my place?" he asked. "Am I not right to wish to act? It's best, is it not, for us to join that society?"

Jouvarine after having slowly blown out a jet of smoke replied by using his favorite word.

"Yes, it's foolishness, but the International will soon spread out. He's becoming interested."

"Who?"

"Him."

He pronounced that word in a low voice, with an air

of religious ferver, looking toward the east. It was of the master he spoke Bakounine the Exterminator.

"He alone can do good, the others are all cowards," continued he. Before three years have passed the International under his government should overthrow the whole world.

Etienne had become attentive. He burned for instruction, to comprehend that passion for distruction of which the Russian spoke of in but few words as though wishing to keep the mystery to himself.

"But explain it to me, what do you wish to do?"

"To destroy all. No more nations, no more government, no more proprietors no more God nor religion."

"I understand. Only what will that bring you to?"

"To the common place without form, to a new world, to a recommencement of all."

"And the means of execution, how do you expect to get to them?"

"By fire, by poison, by the knife. Brigands are the true heroes, the popular avengers, the veritable revolutionists in action without phrases learnt from books. It will be necessary for a series of terrible occurences to happen in order to terrify the rich and awaken the people."

In speaking, Jouvarine became terrible. He rose from his chair while a mystical flame shot from his clear eyes and his delicate hands were pressed against the table as though to crush it. Seized with fear, Etienne watched him, thinking of the tales which he had been told in confidence of boombs thrown into the palace of the czar, police chiefs beaten down by blows of a hammer like wild boars. A mistress of this man's, the only woman he had ever loved, hung at Moscow one May morning, while in the crowd he kissed her eyes for the last time.

"No, no," murmured Etienne, with a gesture as if to ward off these abominable visions, "we haven't come to that yet. The assassin, the incendiary, never! It is terrible, it is unjust. All the miners would aid in strangling an assassin."

He did not understand. His race refused the somber dream of the extermination of the world, mowed down close to the ground like a field of rye. But what

should they do, how beat back the people? He demanded a reply.

"Tell me your plan? We want to know what to do.

Then Jouvarine, who had resumed his cigarette, said quietly, with a lifeless and lost look:

"All reasonings upon the future are criminal, because they prevent destruction and impede the march of revolution."

Etienne laughed in spite of the chill which crept over him at that reply, and he willingly confessed that there was some good in all that; he already comprehended more and more, and perhaps later on he would believe. Only that would give too good a chance to Rasseneur if he related these words to his companions. He tried to be practical.

Old Desir entered to invite them to lunch. They accepted and passed into the saloon which a movable partition separated from the ball-room during the week. When they had finished their omelette and cheese, still an hour remained. Etienne was uneasy for he had counted on Pluchart. At half-past one the delegates commenced to arrive and he was obliged to receive them, for he wished to watch the entrances, fearing that the company might send their usual spies. He examined each letter of invitation, looking each person in the face. Those whom he knew, even though without invitations, were admitted. At two o'clock Rasseneur, who had been quietly smoking a pipe before his own counter, returned. That sight unnerved Etienne all the more, especially as some fellows had come there simply for fun, Zacharie, Moquet and some others; these boys laughed at the strike, thinking it nice to do nothing, and sitting down at a table spent their last two sous for drinks. They laughed at their comrades, telling them they were going to do some foolish things.

A quarter of an hour had passed when Jouvarine came out to say that the men were growing impatient. Then Etienne in his despair became resolute, and he was about to follow the machinist back to the ball-room, when old Desir, who had been watching the road, cried:

"Here's your gentleman."

They flew to the door. It was really Pluchart. He had arrived in a carriage drawn by a winded horse. He

immediately jumped out upon the pavement. He was slight, insipid-looking, with a large square head, looking like a well-to-do workmen dressed in his Sunday best. For five years he had not done a stroke of work, and he took great care of himself, being particular about the manner in which his slightly gray hair was combed. His limbs were still stiff, and the nails of his large hands had never grown again after leaving off work. Very active, he rendered an honest service to his ambition beating about the provinces without rest to advance his socialistic ideas.

"Ah! don't bear any ill will against me," said he, anticipating the questions. "Yesterday there was a meeting at Preuilly in the morning and in the evening a conference at Valencay. To-day I was obliged to meet Lauvagnat at Marchiennes. . . . Then I was able to procure a carriage to bring me here. But I am weary, you can tell by my voice. Still that makes no difference. I'll speak, all the same."

He was entering the Bon-Joyeux when a thought struck him.

"Gracious! I've forgotten the cards. We must do things right."

He returned to the carriage which the coachman was already turning around, and he took from the seat a little black wooden case, which he carried in under his arm.

Etienne, happy, walked behind him, while Rasseneur ill at ease, held out his hand, which the other took, speaking a hasty word about the letter; what a strange idea! Why should they not have that meeting, they should always have one when they were able. Desir asked him to take a drink, but he refused, he could talk without drinking, and he was in a hurry as he must be at Joiselle that night. He wished to have a talk with a man there named Legoujeux. They all entered the ball room together. Maheu and Levaque, who had just arrived, followed them in and the door was locked, in order to be more private.

A hundred miners were waiting there. Heads were turned and whispers heard as the newcomers sat down in the empty seats. They looked at the gentleman

from Lille, whose black frock coat caused a surprise and uneasiness.

But, on the proposition of Etienne, they constituted the bureau. He called the names and the others approved by raising their hands. Pluchart was made president, then Maheu and Etienne were chosen assessors. There was a moving of chairs and the bureau installed itself. For an instant the president disappeared under the table where he placed the little box which he had not yet let go of. When he again appeared he struck a light blow with his fist to call the meeting to order, then he began in a hoarse voice:

"Citizens. . . ."

A small door opened. It was Desir who had come around by the kitchen bearing six drinks on a waiter.

"Don't disturb yourself," said she. "When a person speaks they're bound to be thirsty though."

Jouvarine, sitting near the gentleman, took the waiter from her and set it on a corner of the table. Pluchart could now continue, he thanked them for his good reception, excusing himself for being late, spoke of his fatigue and sore throat. Then he sat down to allow Rasseneur to speak.

The saloon-keeper had already stationed himself near the table beside the drinks. A turned over chair served him as a platform; he was much confused and coughed before letting out his full voice:

"Comrades. . . ."

That which gave him power over the miners was the facility with which he spoke, the good nature shown to them, without ever growing tired, risking no gestures, he remained grave yet smiling, astonishing them so much that they cried, "Yes, yes it's true, you're right." But this day from his first words he felt a sullen opposition as he prudently advanced. He only discussed the continuation of the strike, waiting to be applauded before attacking the International.

Without doubt, honor forbade them to yield to the unreasonableness of the company; only what misery, what a terrible future was before them if they held out longer. And without speaking of becoming submissive he weakened their courage by pointing out the people in the alleys dying of hunger; he wished to know upon

what resources they counted. The applause of a few friends only served to emphasize the cold silence of the greater number whose disapprobation became greater and greater. Then in despair of winning them back his rage carried him away. He predicted unhappiness and grief for them if their heads were turned by the words of a stranger. All arose in anger, wishing to prevent him from saying more, after he had insulted and treated them like children incapable of taking care of themselves. And he, drinking gulp by gulp some drafts of beer, spoke in the midst of the tumult, crying violently that the man was not yet born who could prevent him from doing his duty.

Pluchart stood up, and having no bell, he beat on the table with his fist, saying in his hoarse voice:

"Citizens; citizens. . . ."

Finally he obtained a slight calm and the meeting called to order. They took the word from Rasseneur. The delegates who had represented the miners in the interview with the director led on the others with their ideas. It ended in a determined vote to advance.

"What difference does it make to you? You've got enough to eat," yelled Levaque, shaking his fist at Rasseneur.

Etienne, behind the president, was trying to quiet Maheu who had flashed up with a terrible rage at that canting talk, while Jouvarine looked on little by little becoming warmed up, a flame at the bottom of his clear eyes.

"Citizens," said Pluchart, "permit me to speak."

A profound silence fell. He began speaking in a hoarse voice but he was accustomed to talking and little by little he inflated his throat, drawing out some pathetic efforts. With outstretched arms he accompanied his sentences with a singular movement of the shoulders. He had the eloquence of a clergyman or lecturer with a habit of letting fall the close of his sentences of which the humming monotone ended by convincing.

And he began his discourse on the greatness and goodness of the International. He explained its aim, the emancipation of workmen; he showed them the enlarging structure, at the bottom the commune, above that the province, still higher the nation, and at the

top of all humanity. His arms were slowly extended, massing up the stories, uplifting the immense cathedral of the future world. Then came the interim administration. He read the laws, spoke of congresses, the continual progress of the work, the enlarging of the programme which set out the discussion of salaries, attacking now the social liquidation so as to end with a higher salary. No more nationality, the workmen of the entire world would unite in a common wish for justice, sweeping away the rotten rulers, at last founding a free society where those who did not work could not reap. He cried out now; his breath seemed to frighten the very flowers under the smoky ceiling.

They nodded their heads: some cried:

"That's true. . . . We're with you."

He continued. Before three years the world would be conquered. Adherents poured in on all sides. No new religion ever had so many followers. Then, when they could be masters, they would dictate the law to their superiors, they should in their turn have their fists upon the others' throats.

"Yes, yes; they will fall."

With a gesture he demanded silence. Now he was approaching the question of the strike. In principle he did not approve of what they had done, for that was a slow means which only aggravated more the sufferings of the workmen. But, on understanding that it was inevitable, they must make the best of it; they at least had the advantage of disorganizing the capital. And in that case he held up the International as a providence for the strikers; he cited some examples: In Paris, at the time of the strike of the bronze workmen, the owners had suddenly agreed to all, seized with terror at the news that the International was sending aid; at London it had saved the coal men by sending back, at its own expense, a gang of men from Belgium, sent for by the mine-owners. It sufficed to win them over; the workmen entered into the grand army of workingmen, deciding to die for each other sooner than remain the slaves of a society of capitalists.

Applause interrupted him. He wiped his face with his handkerchief, refusing the drink which Maheu

passed him. When he wished to proceed new applause cut short his words.

"It's all right," said he to Etienne. "Quick, hand me the cards."

He plunged once more under the table and reappeared with the black case.

"Citizens," cried he above all the noise, "here are the cards of membership. If your delegates will come forward I will give them up and they can distribute them. . . . Later on we will regulate all."

Rasseneur arose to again protest. Etienne was agitated fearing he should be compelled to speak. An extreme confusion had come upon him. Levaque threw out his fists into the empty air as if he was going to beat himself. Standing, Maheu was speaking without their being able to hear a single word. And Jouvarine at last interested, knocked on the table with both fists trying to assist Pluchart in obtaining silence.

Suddenly the little door opened. Desir thundered forth:

"Be quiet for God's sake. Here are the gendarmes."

It was the commissary of that district coming to break up the meeting. Four gendarmes accompanied him. For five minutes the old woman had kept them outside her door, saying that she had a right to entertain her friends. But they had thrown her aside and she had run to warn her children.

"You can all go through here," she resumed. "There is a gendarme guarding the yard; that makes no difference, my little woodshed leads into an alley, so make haste."

The commissary was already rapping at the door with his fists, and when they would not open he threathened to break it in.

In the hall the trouble was augmenting. They could not run away, they had not even voted either for the adhesion or the continuation of the strike. Every one tried to speak at once. Finally the president thought of a plan to vote by acclamation. Arms were raised, the delegates hastily declared they would adhere in the name of their absent comrades. And it was thus that the ten thousand coal men of Montson became members of the International.

In the meantime the flight had commenced. Protecting the retreat Desir leaned against the door while the gendarmes clubs shook her back. The miners jumped over the benches and flew through the kitchen and woodshed. Rasseneur was one of the first to disappear and Levaque following him forgot his anger so much as to offer him a drink. Etienne, after seizing hold of the little case, waited with Pluchart, Maheu and Jouvarine, who felt it was honorable to be the last to leave. When they left Desir turned the key and the commissary found himself in the presence of the old woman who was all alone.

"You did a big thing, to break into my house, didn't you. You see there's no one here."

The commissary, a slow man, who had become weary from some drinks he had been taking, simply threatened to put her in prison, and went off to draw up a report, turning around his four gendarmes, who were of no use to him now. Zacharie and Moquet, standing outside, laughed at this armed party.

Outside, in the alley, Etienne, incommoded by the case, flew on, following the others. Suddenly he thought of Pierron. He asked why he had not been there, and Maheu, still running, replied that he was ill—a good illness, the fear of compromising himself. They wished to detain Pluchart; but, without pausing, he declared that he must set out for Joiselle at once. Legoujeux was waiting there for orders. Then they wished him a pleasant journey, and did not slacken their speed, with arms swinging, all rushing from Montson. Some words were exchanged, intersected by their panting breath. "That has commenced to make progress," said Jouvarine, amused at the departure of Rasseneur. Etienne and Maheu laughed with confidence, certain now of triumph, when the International should have sent them assistance. It would be the terrified company that, with clasped hands, would beg them to go back to work. And in that ray of hope, in that gallop of heavy shoes sounding upon the paved roads, there was another thing, something gloomy and fierce, a violence with which a breath had enfevered the alleys at the four corners of the country.

CHAPTER XXI.

Another fifteenth glided by. The first days of January had come with a biting cold, which enveloped the great plain. In the alleys the misery was still increasing, people were sinking from hour to hour under the growing poverty. Two thousand francs sent from London by the International had not supplied them with bread for a day. After that they had received nothing but vague promises, of which the realization was deferred from time to time. Their courage failed them. What could they expect now, when their brothers had abandoned them? They were isolated from the world, deserted in the midst of the terrible winter.

One Monday, when all resources had failed them, Etienne had vainly called the delegates together; they opened new subscriptions in all the neighboring towns, even in Paris they organized conferences; but the feeling which had at first prevailed settled down into a calm indifference. These few alms were hardly sufficient to sustain the poorest family. The others had lived by pawning their clothing and selling their furniture piece by piece. Everything went to the second-hand dealers, clothing, mattresses, kitchen utensils, even the chairs. Little by little the houses were emptied. Once they thought themselves saved, the little shopkeepers, whose business had been ruined by Maigrat, offered everyone credit to try and bring back their custom, and, for a week Verdonck the grocer, the two butchers Canouble and Smelton, kept their shops open to all; but their advances were wasted, they were not able to continue. Bailiffs laughed at this, for it only resulted in a heaping up of debts, which for a long time would weigh on the miners. That ended all credit, even the saucepans were sold. They could lie in a corner and eat like dogs.

Etienne had gone to Marchiennes and pawned his best pants and coat to make the pot of the Maheu's boil once more. Now nothing but the fine boots remained, which, he said, were kept to hold his feet firm. His

only regret was that the strike had began too soon before the saving fund had grown large. In it was the cause of their disaster, for the working men would certainly have triumphed over the owners if they had held the money necessary to exist some months. And he recalled the words of Jouvarine, who accused the company of pushing on the strike to break up the saving fund.

The sight of these poor people without bread and fire drove him to distraction. He preferred turning his back on their misery, and wore himself out by long walks. One evening, on passing Requillart, he perceived near the old mine an old, fainting woman. Doubtless she was dying of hunger, and after having revived her, he called to a girl whom he saw on the other side of the fence.

"It's you, is it?" said he, recognizing Moquette. "Help me, will you, we must make her drink something."

Moquette, crying from pity, ran into the house, their old hovel where the father was economically keeping himself in darkness. She immediately returned with some gin and a bit of bread. The drink revived the old woman, who, without speaking, greedily bit into the bread. It was the mother of a miner living in one of the alleys, and she had fallen there on her return from Joiselle, where she had vainly tried to borrow ten sous from a sister. After she had eaten she went off with faltering step.

Etienne stood watching her retreating form.

"Won't you come in have a drink?" said Moquette.

Then when he hesitated, she added:

"Are you still afraid of me?"

He followed her, won by her laugh. It touched him to see her give that bread with such a good heart. She did not wish to receive him in her father's room, so led him into her own little chamber and immediately poured out two glasses of gin. That room was very clean. He complimented her upon it. Her family did not seem to want for anything; the father continued his work of groom at the Voreux, and she, not wishing to live with folded arms, had taken in washing, at which she earned thirty sous a day.

"Say," murmured she suddenly, touching him on the back, "why can't you like me?"

They both laughed at the coquettish remark.

"But I do like you very much," responded he.

"No, no; not like I want."

It was true. For six months she had wished him to become her lover. He had noticed her following him, and now her face was raised to his in such a supplicating manner that he was touched by it. Her large, round face was not beautiful, with its yellow skin spotted with coal, but her eyes shone like stars, and there was some charm about her.

When he left her she kissed his hands, grateful for the half hour spent with her.

Etienne was a little ashamed of that visit, and on going away swore never to return. But he kept for her an amicable remembrance. She was a good girl.

When he returned to the alley some news which he heard made him forget his adventure. It was said that the company might agree to a concession if the delegates were again to wait upon the directors. Some overseer had said this. The truth was, that in this fight the mine suffered still more than the miners. On both sides obstinacy was costing them dear. While the workman died of hunger the capital was destroyed. Each day the mine was idle hundreds of thousands of francs were lost. Stopping ruins the machinery, the material and tools are spoiled, the money quietly melting away like water absorbed by the sand. For a week the mine's stock of coal had been exhausted, and the buyers, who spoke of sending to Belgium, made some dangerous comparisons between the tariffs in the two countries, which was a threat for the future. But that which especially frightened the company, though it had been carefully hidden from every one, was the increasing ravages in the galleries and drifts. The overseers did not suffice, there were not enough men to do the propping which was needed. Very soon the disasters would become such that they would require long months of repairing. Throughout the country they were already telling that at Crevecoeur three hundred metres of the ceiling had caved in, blocking up the road to the vein Cinq-Paumes; at La Madeleine the vein Maugretout

was filled with water. The directors refused to acknowledge it, but suddenly two accidents, one following the other, confirmed the reports. One morning close to Polaine they found the ground outside of the top gallery bursting; the next day it gave way. The day following a corner of the Voreux sank so much that two houses nearly disappeared.

Etienne and the delegates hesitated to risk another visit without knowing something of the intentions of the owners. Dansaert, whom they questioned, avoided a positive answer. Certainly, they deplored the misunderstanding; they would do anything in the world to come to some definite agreement. Then they decided to return to M. Hennebeau, thus showing their reasonableness; for they did not wish later on to be accused of having given the company no chance to admit being in the wrong. Only they swore to yield to nothing but their own conditions which were the only just ones. This second step would affirm their right and wisdom.

The interview took place on Tuesday morning. It was less cordial than the first. Maheu again spoke, explaining that the comrades had sent him to ask if those gentlemen had anything new to say to them. At first M. Hennebeau affected surprise, answering that no order had reached him, that things could not change as long as the miners were headstrong in their detestable revolt, and that stiffness of authority produced the most unpleasant effect, and if they had arrived there with good intentions the way in which they were received would have sufficed to make them more obstinate. Finally the director wished a mutual concession; for example, the workmen should accept the payment of the woodwork in part, while the company would increase that payment the two centimes of which the men accused it of profiting. He added that he took that upon himself, as nothing was as yet decided, but he flattered himself to be able to obtain that concession. But the delegates refused and repeated their demands: A return to the old system with an increase of five centimes per car. Then he admitted that he could treat with them at once; he pressed them to accept in the name of the wives and children who were dying of hunger. With eyes on the ground, and a determined air

they still said no, no. They separated in anger. M. Hennebeau slammed the door after them. Etienne, Maheu and the others went off, stamping with their heavy heels on the sidewalk, in the silent rage of men pushed to a last extremity.

At two o'clock the women in the alley attempted a last appeal to Maigrat. It was an idea of la Maheu's who too often counted on the good heart of people. La Brule and la Levaque decided to accompany her, but la Pierronne excused herself, saying she was not able to leave Pierron, who had not yet recovered. Other women joined the company, there were about twenty in all. When the rich people of Montson saw them coming along the gloomy road, they raised their heads with uneasiness, closing their doors and locking up their silver. At Maigrat's there was a violent scene. He had invited them to enter, laughingly asking them if they had come to pay their debts? Then when la Maheu began talking, he became angry. What did she take him for? More credit? no; not a potatoe, not a mite of bread, and he told them to go to the grocer Verdonck, to the butchers Canouble and Smelton. The women listened to him with a frightened air, excusing themselves. But he pushed them toward the door. When they insisted he became brutal. After reaching the pavement they still entreated him, while la Maheu, in a burst of revengeful indignation, raised both arms above her head asking that he might be struck dead, for such a man should not live.

The return to the alley was one of sadness. When the wives came in with empty hands, the men looked at them in silence. It was done, the day would end without a mouthful to eat, and the days to come stretched out like icy shadows from which not a hope stood forth. But no one spoke of yielding. That great misery rendered them all the more obstinate, like beasts driven into a hole who would die rather than come forth. Who would have dared be the first to speak of submission? They had sworn to keep together, and a man would as soon have thought of leaving his comrades buried beneath the ground in a cave-in as to desert them now. That was their duty, the mine with its toils and privations was a good school in which to learn resigna-

tion and patience; they could easily stand hunger for eight days when they had gone through fire and water since the age of twelve years; and like soldiers, proud of their calling, they strove against death, making no boast of the sacrifice.

At Maheu's, that evening was a terrible one. They were all silently seated before the dying fire in which smoked the last piece of wood. After having emptied the room piece by piece, the evening before they had decided to sell the clock, and now without its familiar tic-tac the house seemed naked and dead. On the cupboard remained no other ornament than the pasteboard box, an old gift of Maheu's which his wife had kept as if it was a jewel. The two good chairs were gone; Bonnemort and the little ones were seated upon an old mossy bench brought in from the garden. And the falling shadows seemed to increase the cold.

"What shall we do?" said the mother, crouching in a corner, near the stove.

Etienne stood looking at the pictures of the Emperor and Empress hanging against the wall. He would have sold them a long time before, but the family could not part with them.

"Just think, we could get two sous for that foolishness which is watching us starve."

"Suppose I sell the box," said the wife, after hesitating for a moment.

But Maheu, seated on the edge of the table, his legs swinging and head bent over, suddenly straightened himself up.

"No."

Slowly the wife arose and walked around the room. Why did God allow them to be reduced to such misery, without a crust, and nothing left to sell? The fire was going out, also. She grew angry at Alzire, whom she had sent out that morning to pick up cinders, but the child had returned empty-handed, saying they had chased her away from the mine. Could the company be so hard on them as not to allow the little ones to pick up the bits of worthless coal?

"And that fool of a Jeanlin!" cried the mother. "Where can he be? He ought to bring us some dandelions; we could have eaten them, anyhow. You see,

he doesn't come home. He staid out all last night, and the rogue always acts as if he had plenty to eat."

"Perhaps he begs on the roads," said Etienne.

She became almost frantic.

"Great heavens! if I knew that! . . . My children beggars! I'd rather they'd kill themselves, and me too."

Lenore and Henri, astonished at having nothing to eat, began to moan, while Bonnemort silently rolled his tongue in his mouth in order to deceive his hunger. Not a word was spoken. The aggravated troubles stunned them all. The grandfather coughed, and again spit black. His rheumatism was now turning to dropsy.

Then, in the shadows shrouding this room, filled with mournful sadness, Etienne, who had hesitated for an instant, decided with heart nearly bursting:

"Wait; I'm going somewhere," said he.

And he went. He had thought of Moquette. She must have a loaf of bread, and she would willingly give it to him. It made him angry to be forced to return to Requillart, but he could not leave his friends in trouble. He would still be kind to her if it was necessary.

"I'll go and look, too," said the wife. It's too foolish to sit here."

She again opened the door and went off behind the young man, leaving the other occupants of the room silent and still in the faint light from the end of a candle which Alzire had just lit. Outside the woman paused a moment reflecting, then she entered Levaque's house.

"I lent you a loaf of bread the other day. Can't you give it back to me?"

But she stopped, seeing but little encouragement. That house was in worse misery than her own. La Levaque, with a stony glare, sat before her dying fire, while Levaque, who had become intoxicated with some nailmakers, was lying asleep upon the table. Bouteloup leaned against the wall looking at this scene of desolation with dismay.

"A loaf of bread from me?" answered la Levaque. "Why, I was just going to borrow another somewhere."

Then when her husband groaned in his sleep, she beat his face against the table.

"Shut up, pig. Instead of letting your friends pay for your drink, you'd better asked them to lend you twenty sous."

She continued her complaints. Her son, that fool of a Bebert, had also been away since morning, and she cried that it would be a good riddance if he never came back. Then she declared she was going to bed. She could at least be warm there.

And telling Bouteloup that it was not worth while to light the candle only to see the empty plates, she started for the stairs, yelling:

"That drunkard can freeze if he likes."

When she was again outside, la Maheu resolutely cut across the gardens on her way to Pierron's house. She knocked, but there was a sudden silence. After a little time the door was opened.

"It's you, is it?" said la Pierronne, affecting surprise. "I thought it was the doctor."

And not giving her a chance to speak, she continued, as she turned toward Pierron, seated before a great coal fire:

"He's sick; he's always sick, though he looks healthy. He must be kept warm, so I'm burning all I have."

Pierron seemed very well; his complexion was florid, and he was quite fat—but he breathed slowly to appear ill. But on entering, la Maheu had smelt a strong odor of rabbit. They must have cleared off the table; some crumbs were on the floor, and she suddenly perceived a bottle of wine that had been forgotten.

"Mother has gone to Montson to try and get a loaf of bread," resumed the daughter. "We're afraid to see her come back for fear she brings none."

But her voice trembled. She had followed the glance of her neighbor and her eyes fell on the bottle. But she composed herself immediately, saying it was some wine the rich man of Piolaine had brought there for her husband, for whom the doctor had ordered claret. And she was lavish in her thanks. What good people, especially the young lady, they were; not proud, for

they came to the workmen's houses and distributed their own alms.

"I know," said La Maheu,—"I know them."

Her heart was bursting at the thought that the most was always given to the least poor. That was always the way. These people of Piolaine would carry water to the river. How was it she had not seen them in the alley? Perhaps they would have given her something.

"I came," said she at last, "to know if there was no more food at your house than at ours. Have you a little vermicelli to lend me?"

La Pierronne noisily replied.

"We have nothing at all, my dear; not even a grain of semoule. Mother has not come back, and if she hasn't succeeded we'll have to go supperless to bed."

Just then the sound of tears came from the cellar, accompanied by blows on the door. It was Lydie, who was shut up, she said, to punish her for not coming in until five o'clock, after running the roads for a whole day. They had no control over her.

La Maheu still remained standing, dreading to leave. That fire penetrated her with a sad warmth. The thought that they had been eating only made her hunger the keener. They had evidently sent away the old woman, shut the little one up, to stuff themselves with their rabbit.

"Good evening," said she, suddenly.

The moon, occasionally peeping from behind the clouds, shone on the ground with a pale light. Instead of again crossing the gardens, la Maheu walked on, fearing to enter her house. What good to knock at other doors? they were all as miserable as she. In the weeks that they had been slowly starving, even the odor of onions had left the alleys, that strong odor which could be detected a long distance in the country. Occasional sounds were heard,—stifled tears mingled with oaths. But little by little a silence fell, broken only by the moans of these half-famished people, who even in sleep could not forget their hunger.

As she passed the church, she saw a shadow rapidly disappearing. A faint hope induced her to hasten on, for she had recognized the Cure of Montson, the Abbe Joire, who said mass at the chapel on Sunday. He was

coming from the vestry. Some clerical duties had called him. With bent back, he still hurried on; a fat, jolly man, desirous of living at peace with all the world. She comprehended why he had come there in the night; he did not wish to compromise himself with the miners. They said he was shortly to be transferred to a larger town, and he was now with his successor, a thin man with very red eyes.

"Monsieur le Cure; Monsieur le Cure!" called la Maheu.

But he did not stop.

"Good evening, my good woman."

When she again reached her own door her limbs would carry her no further, and she entered.

No one had stirred. Maheu was still on the edge of the table, old Bonnemort and the little ones huddled together on the bench trying to keep warm. The piece of candle had burned so low that even their light would soon leave them. As the door opened the children turned their heads, but on seeing the mother had brought back nothing their eyes were again lowered, while they kept back a great wish to cry for fear of being scolded. The mother fell back into her old place near the stove, in which now scarcely a spark remained. They asked no questions, the silence had not been broken. All comprehended they thought it useless to fatigue themselves more by talking, and utterly crushed they waited on for the aid which Etienne might bring them. The minutes went by and a death-like coldness came on.

When Etienne arrived he had in a cloth a dozen cold baked potatoes.

"Here's all I've found," said he.

At Moquette's the bread had also given out, and she had insisted on his carrying off her dinner, kissing him with all her heart.

"Thanks," said he to la Maheu, who offered him her share; "I've eaten."

It was untrue, and with a gloomy air he watched the children throw themselves on the food. The father and mother held back to leave more for the others, but the old man greedily swallowed all. They were obliged to take a potato away from Alzire. In three minutes

the table was clear. They looked at each other, still very hungry.

Then Etienne said that he had learned some news. The company, irritated at the obstinacy of the strikers, was going to discharge all the workmen compromised. It was war to the death. But a still more grave report was circulated. They were boasting that a number of the miners had decided to begin work again on the following day. The Victorie and Feutry-Cantel would be almost complete; that would even have some gangs of workmen at the Miron and Madeleine. The Maheus were exasperated.

"Great heavens!" cried the father. "If they are traitors we must settle with them."

And standing up, yielding to the rage from his sufferings, he screamed.

"Tomorrow evening in the forest! . . . If they can prevent us from hearing each other at the Bon-Joyeux, we're at home in the forest."

That cry awakened old Bonnemort, whose gluttony had overcome him. It was the old rallying cry, the place of meeting where the miners in old times went to plot their resistance to the soldiers of the king.

"Yes, yes, at Vandame," said he. "I'm with them if they go there."

The wife threw out her arms.

"We'll all go. That'll end this injustice and this betraying."

Etienne decided that the whole alley should be notified of the meeting which would take place the following evening. But the fire was dead, and the candle suddenly went out. There was no more coal and no more oil; they were forced to grope their way up to bed in the intense cold, from which the children were crying.

CHAPTER XXII.

JEANLIN was now able to walk, but, though he ran as fast as ever, he waddled like a duck.

That evening at dusk, upon the Requillart road, the boy, accompanied by his inseparable companions, Lydie

and Bebert, was begging. He was hiding behind a fence in front of a small grocery shop. An old blind woman had for sale there four sacks of beans black with dust; an old dry codfish hung before the door and the child watched it with his small eyes. Twice he had sent Bebert to steal it, but each time someone had appeared on the road.

First came a gentleman on horseback, and the children threw themselves down close to the fence on recognizing M. Hennebeau. Since the strike they often saw him traveling alone on the roads and through the alleys, filled with rebellious people, with a sort of tranquil courage, trying to see for himself the state of the country. Not a stone whizzed past his ear; he only met a few silent men who were slow to salute him.

"Thank goodness he's gone," said Jeanlin. "Go on now, Bebert; pull it down by the tail."

But two men were now coming along the road, and the boy stifled an oath as he heard the voice of his brother Zacharie telling Moquet he had found four sous concealed in his wife's skirt. Both laughed at this, slapping each other on the back. Moquet told the other they would have a good game of cricket the next day. They would start from Rasseneur's and go over near Marchiennes to play. They were about to turn the corner of the road when Etienne, who was coming from the canal, stopped and spoke with them.

"Goodness sakes!" resumed Jeanlin, exasperated, "we don't want to stay here forever. It's getting dark, and the old woman will take the things in."

Another miner was walking down toward Requillart. Etienne stopped him, and as they passed the fence the children heard them speaking of the forest. They had been compelled to postpone the meeting one day longer, so as to communicate with all the people.

"Say now," whispered the boy to his comrades, "did you hear that? We must be there. We'll go in the afternoon, too."

Then, as the road was at last clear, he pushed Bebert forward.

"Go on now, and look out for the old woman's broom."

Happily it had grown dark. Bebert, with a bound,

seized the codfish, the string of which broke, and flew off like a deer, followed by the two others. The woman, in astonishment, ran from the shop, but could not distinguish those forms fast disappearing in the darkness.

These youngsters had become the terror of the whole country, which they had invaded little by little like a band of savages. At first they were content to play in the Voreux coal-yards, from which they emerged looking like negroes; then they went to the old mine, where they would spend an entire day at play; then they ran through the meadows, eating all sorts of herbs, without bread, and catching fish on the banks of the canal, which were eaten raw; then they went as far as the forest of Vandame, where in the spring they filled themselves with wild strawberries, and in winter gathered nuts and myrtle; and shortly they explored the whole plain.

But their motive in thus running the roads from Montson to Marchiennes, casting their eyes all around like young wolves searching for prey, was to steal. Jeanlin was captain of these expeditions, sending the children after all sorts of plunder, ravaging the onion fields, breaking into the orchards, and attacking the shop windows. In the country the miners, who were on the strike, were accused of all this. One day this boy had even forced Lydic to rob her mother; he had made her bring him two dozen bars of rock candy, which la Pierronne kept in a jar on one of the shelves of her window; and the cunning child did not betray him; she trembled with fear before him. The worst of it all was, he always took the lion's share for himself. Bebert was compelled to give up all his spoils to him, and was happy if his ears were not boxed when he asked for a share.

For some time Jeanlin had been accustomed to beat Lydic, and he ruled Bebert with a rod of iron, though the latter, who was much larger and stronger than he, could have killed him with a blow from his fist. He despised them both, treating them like slaves, telling them he had a home which was so unearthly that he could not take them to it; and, in truth, at times he would disappear at a turn in the road, ordering them to

go back to the alley. But first he would put all the spoils in his pocket. This was what happened that night.

"Give it to me," said he, snatching the codfish from his comrade, when they had all stopped at a bend in the road near Requillart.

Bebert protested.

"I want it. You know I took it."

"What!" said he. "You'll have some if I choose to give it to you—not to-night, though. If there's any left to-morrow I'll see about it."

He stood them in a line like soldiers on drill, then passed behind them.

"Now, you're to stay there five minutes, without turning round. If you do turn, some beasts will eat you. And after that you're to go straight home."

Then he disappeared in the shadows, so lightly that they did not even hear the sound of his feet. The two children remained motionless for five minutes, without daring to turn their heads for fear of receiving a blow from some invisible person. Gradually a great affection had risen between them in their mutual terror. When the limited time was over they slowly moved away through the darkness toward the alley.

At that hour Etienne had also entered Requillart. The day before Moquette had begged him to come back, and he complied with her request, not able to resist the pleading looks of that girl who loved him better than her God. It must be broken up, he said to himself; he would see her and explain that she must follow him no more, on account of his comrades. It was not right to be thus making love, when people were dying of hunger. She was not at home when he arrived, but he decided to wait for her at the old mine.

Beneath the ruined tower the old shaft was half covered up. A beam, which supported a piece of the roofing, looked like a gallows above some black hole; and two trees, a sorb and a platane, which had partially fallen into the hole, seemed to spring from the bottom of the earth. It was a corner of savage abandon, filled with old hawthorn and sloe-trees, which the birds filled with their nests in spring time. To avoid the great expense of keeping it in repair, the company had for some time proposed to fill in that old mine,

but they desired first to establish at the Voreux a ventilating furnace, in place of the old one at Requillart, which had been used for airing both shafts. They had joined the tubbing and abandoned the upper gallery, so as to utilize only the gallery at the bottom, in which flamed an enormous brazier of coal, with a draft so powerful, that the air blew like a tempest from one side to the other of the neighboring mine. Orders were given to keep the ladders in repair as far as the furnace, which was at five hundred and twenty-five metres from the top; but as no attention was paid to the command, they had been rotted by the dampness, and some rungs had already given way. The entrance was blocked up by a large rock, and as the first ladder had lost its rungs it was necessary to let oneself down by the roots of the sorb-tree, then fall, come what might, into the darkness.

Etienne was concealed behind a bush when he heard a rustling among the branches. He thought it the frightened flight of a snake. But the sudden light from a match astonished him, and he was stupefied on seeing, a short distance off, Jeanlin light a candle and then disappear in the ground. A sudden curiosity seized him and he glided to the edge of the hole. The boy was lost to sight, but a faint light came from the second ladder. An instant he hesitated, then dropped through the opening, feeling a rung break beneath his feet. He commenced to descend quietly. Jeanlin could not have heard him, for Etienne still saw the shadow sinking down while the little one's long wavering shadow danced with the limping of his infirm limbs. He descended like a monkey, holding on with his hands, feet and chin when the rungs failed. The ladders, seven metres in length, followed one another, some still solid, while others shook and cracked as though they would fall apart; the landing-places had become so green that he felt as though he was walking on moss; and as they went down the heat became terrible, a furnace-like heat from the ventilating room, which, happily, was not much used since the strike, for when the mine was going they would have been roasted there.

"Where is the young villain going?" thought Etienne, suffocated.

Twice he had nearly fallen head over heels, his feet slipping upon the damp wood. If he only had a candle like the child! He hit himself every moment, not being guided by the vague light beneath him. He reached the twentieth ladder and the descent still continued. Then he counted them aloud, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, and still deeper down. He was becoming giddy from the heat; he felt as though he was falling into a furnace. At last, on arriving at a level, he perceived the candle going on at the end of one of the galleries. Thirty ladders; that was about two hundred and ten metres.

But the road on the left, which led to the stables, was blocked by a cave-in. The journey was becoming more painful and more dangerous. Frightened bats flew out from the arches of the drifts. He was compelled to hasten, so as not to lose sight of the light. He kept in the same gallery, but where the child glided along at his ease, with the suppleness of a serpent, he could not slip through without bruising his limbs. Those galleries, like all old roads, were being brought closer and closer together each day by the continual pressure of the rocks, and now in certain places there was nothing but a gut, which in the end would be altogether closed. He was constantly in peril from the broken timbers, which threatened to run splinters into him as sharp as swords. Advancing with caution, stooping almost to his knees, he groped his way along in the darkness. Suddenly a number of rats flew at him, running down his back in fright.

"Great heavens! here we are at last," he groaned, with limbs half broken, and out of breath.

They had arrived. At the end of a kilometre the tunnel enlarged as they came out into a piece of the road admirably preserved. It was the old car road, which had been cut through the rock and was like to a natural grotto. He stopped, seeing the child, some metres off, place his candle between two stones, and then seat himself with the air of a man happy to have at last reached home. That end of the gallery had been changed into quite a comfortable dwelling; on

the ground, in one corner, a heap of hay made a soft couch; upon a table, made from pieces of old wood, was quite a collection of articles,—bread, candles and bottles of gin as yet unopened. It was a real robber's cavern. The spoils had been accumulating for weeks, and among them were even useless things, such as bars of wax, stolen for the pleasure of stealing. The boy surveyed this plunder with the joyous air of an egotistical brigand.

"So this is your hole, is it?" said Etienne, after breathing a moment. "You come down here to take your ease, while we're dying of hunger above."

Jeanlin tremblingly started. But on recognizing the young man he regained his composure.

"Will you dine with me?" said he. "Just a piece of broiled cod. I'll show it to you."

He had not lost his codfish, and he sat down to prepare it with a beautiful new knife,—one of those dagger-knives with a bone handle on which a device is inscribed. On this one was simply the word 'Love.'

"You have a pretty knife," remarked Etienne.

"It's a gift from Lydie," responded Jeanlin, who neglected to add that the girl had stolen it on his order from a stand in Montson placed before the Tete-Coupee.

Then, still scraping the fish, he added with a fierce air:

"Ain't I well off here! It's a little warmer than up there."

Etienne had seated himself, anxious to make him talk. He was not angry, but began to feel an interest in that terrible child, so brave and so industrious in his vice. And it was really very comfortable in that hole; it was no longer too warm, an even temperature reigned there, with the moist, pleasant air of a bath-room, while above the rough winter blasts almost froze the miserable people. On growing old the galleries had been purified of the bad gases; all the fire-damp had departed; they only smelt the odor of the old mouldy wood. That wood, however, was interesting to look at; it was of a palish yellow hue, partially covered with mushrooms, while white butterflies, bees and flies made their home there among the white cobwebs. A population without color, ignorant of the sun.

"Then you're not afraid?" asked Etienne.

Jeanlin looked at him in astonishment.

"Afraid of what? When I'm all alone?"

But the fish was scraped at last. He lit a little wood fire, evened it off, and started to boil his cod. Then he cut a loaf of bread in two. It was a terribly dirty repast, but good, all the same. Etienne accepted his portion.

"I'm not astonished now that you're growing fat, while the others become lean. Don't you know it is wicked to steal? And don't you ever think of the others?"

"What makes the others so stupid?"

"You should break yourself of stealing; for if your father learned that you stole he'd fix you."

"Don't the rich people steal from us? You've always said so. When I grabbed that loaf of bread from Maigrat it was surely one that he owed us."

The young man was silent, with mouth full. He looked at that boy, with his little nose, green eyes and large ears, who had the cunning and craft of a fox. This mine would end by breaking his limbs, though.

"And Lydie," asked Etienne; "do you bring her here sometimes?"

Jeanlin laughed.

"The little one; ah, no indeed! . . . Women talk too much."

And he continued to laugh, filled with great disdain for Lydie and Bebert. There never were such stupid children. The thought that they believed all his stories, and went off with empty hands while he ate the codfish, made him laugh. Then he concluded, with the gravity of a little philosopher:

"It's better to be alone. You're sure to get along well then."

Etienne finished his bread and drank a swallow of gin. He asked himself if it would not be acknowledging the hospitality of Jeanlin badly to lead him off by the ear and report him to his father. But on examining this profound retreat a thought came to him; how did he know that he would not need it for his comrades, or himself even, in case things went wrong above. He made the boy swear not to go to bed, for he sometimes

forgot himself and went to sleep in the hay; and taking one of the candles he went off, leaving Jeanlin to arrange his house in peace.

Moquette, seated on a log, had just begun to despair of seeing him. When she perceived the young man she threw herself on his neck, and it was as if he had thrust a knife into her heart when he told her he should see her no more. Oh God! did she not love him enough? Not wishing to enter the house with her he drew her off toward the road explaining, in the kindest way possible, that she would compromise him in the eyes of his comrades and in the cause of politics. She thought he was ashamed of her; but that did not wound her; it was very natural that he should be, and she offered to allow him to beat her, so that people would think he did not wish to have anything to do with her. But he would see her again, if only once in a while, wouldn't he? In a state of distraction she plead with him; she would keep out of his way at all other times, if he would only come to see her for five minutes now and then. He, though very much disturbed, still refused. He must do so. Step by step they had arrived as far as the first houses of Montson, and, standing beneath the big round moon, they were in each other's arms when a woman, passing close to them, gave a sudden start, as if she had knocked against a stone.

"Who was that?" asked Etienne, uneasily.

"It was Catherine," replied Moquette. "She's on her way home from Jean-Bart."

The woman had gone on with limbs feeble and head down, as though very weary. The young man looked after her, desperate at having been seen by her, his heart bursting with a remorse which had no cause. Was she not living with a man? Had she not made him suffer with the same suffering, there upon that road to Requillart? But, in spite of all that, it drove him wild to have done the same to her.

"If you don't want me, it's because you want some one else," said Moquette, as she left him with tears in her eyes.

The next day the weather was superb—a clear sky, though freezing cold,—one of those beautiful days of December when the hard earth sounds like glass under

the feet. At one o'clock Jeanlin started out, but he was obliged to wait behind the church for Bebert. Lydic's mother had given her a basket and told her if she did not bring it back full of dandelions they would shut her up with the rats for the entire night. So, filled with fear, she wanted to go to the meadows at once, but Jeanlin made her start off with them, saying they could see about that later on. For a long time Rasseneur's great Pologne had been worrying him. As he passed the Voreux the rabbit started out on the road. He seized it by the ears, flung it in Lydic's basket, and all three children ran off. They could have lots of fun with it, making it run after them like a dog, as far as the forest.

But they stopped to watch Zacharie and Moquet, who, after taking a drink with two other comrades, began their game of cricket. The prize, a new cap and red silk handkerchief, was deposited with Rasseneur. The four players commenced the game at the first turn from the Voreux to the Paillot farm. In opening the game Zacharie started by betting seven knocks, while Moquet demanded eight. They placed the cholette, a little wooden egg, on the ground, with the point standing up; then laid hold of their mallets. Two o'clock struck as they began. Zacharie, with the first strike, sent the cholette more than four hundred metres across the fields. This game was forbidden to be played in the villages for fear of accidents.

But the game went on, and, as they ran, their feet were bruised by the frozen pieces of ploughed ground.

At first Jeanlin, Bebert and Lydic enthusiastically watched the players. Then they thought of Pologne, still in the basket, and they drew him out, curious to see if he could run fast. The rabbit ran away, with the children following after. For one hour they chased it, yelling as loud as they could to frighten it, quickly opening their arms and closing them again on empty air.

Suddenly a volley of oaths made them turn; they had again fallen upon the cricket party. It was Zacharie who was swearing at having nearly split his brother's skull. The players were now at their fourth turn, they had made two leagues and a half in an hour and had

stopped to drink at le Vincet and a place called le Trois-Sages. Moquet still had two knocks left to him, and his victory was sure, when Zacharie laughingly batted with all his strength and the cholette rolled into a deep ditch. Moquet's partner could not get it out; this was a disaster. All became angry, for they were neck to neck and they would have to commence again. Then they concluded to refresh themselves at Lerenard's.

Jeanlin had a new idea. He let them start, and then he took a string from his pocket which he tied to one of Pologne's legs, the left hind one. It was very amusing; the rabbit ran behind the three childern, limping in a most lamentable manner. Finally they tied the string to its neck, and when it grew tired they dragged it along upon its back. This lasted for more than an hour and it was almost dead, when they quickly put it back in the basket on hearing the players returning to their game.

Poor Zacharie, Moquet, and the two others, played on without other rest than a moment here and there to drink in all the saloons which they frequented. The hard ground resounded with their heavy feet as they ran on at the risk of breaking their limbs. In the dry air the heavy blows of the mallet rang out. The muscular hands grasped the handles, while they exerted their muscles with strength enough to slay an ox. For this game, strong and vigorous chests, with supple joints, were necessary. At four o'clock, tired out, they paused in their game.

The clocks struck five; it was already dusk; but they wanted one more turn to see who won the cap and handkerchief; and Zacharie jokingly said, with his indifference to politics, that it would be jolly to go down and see the fun.

As for Jeanlin, since the departure of the people in the alleys, he had struck out for the forest. With an indignant gesture, he threatened Lydic, who was taken with remorse, and spoke of going back to gather dandelions. Would she go and leave everything? It would be too funny to hear what the old people would have to say. He pushed Bebert along, proposing to enliven the walk by letting out Pologne and beating her with pebbles; his hidden motive was to torture her to

death, and then he could carry her away and eat her in his hole at Requillart. The rabbit started off with head down and ears up. One stone skinned her back, another her tail, and, in spite of the increasing shadows, she would have been killed, had not the children perceived Etienne and Jourvarine standing near them. They quickly threw themselves upon the rabbit, putting her back into the basket. At that moment Zacharie, Moquet and the others came up. Since dusk, in the entire country, through all the roads and paths over the plain, a silent procession of shadows moved on toward the forest. Every alley was deserted. Even the women and children started out under that clear sky. Now that the roads had become obscure, one could no longer distinguish those marching forms who were all making for the same goal. Along the bushes there was a slight rustle, while through the trees came a vague sound of voices in the night.

M. Hennebeau, riding along on his horse, listened to all these sounds. He had met some couples, but thought them merely lovers out for a walk on that beautiful winter's night; and with bent head he rode on, envying these miserable people.

CHAPTER XXIII.

At the Plan-des-Dames, a large clearing had been made by the felling of trees. A smooth slope, inclosed by a high hedge, extended for some distance.

Through the whole forest of Vandame were scattered superb beech-trees, while a number of giant stumps arose from the dead grass, and toward the left a heap of cut timber was arranged in regular order. As night came on, the cold increased ; the frozen moss cracked under the footsteps. It was very dark ; the high branches reached far up in the pale sky, shutting out from view the full moon and little twinkling stars.

Almost three thousand people were at the rendezvous ; a swarming crowd of men, women and children gradually filling the clearing, standing in groups under the distant trees, while the late comers, still arriving,

added to the line of shadows spreading out as far as the hedge. In that still and frozen forest, a dull, rumbling sound went up like the wind of an approaching thunderstorm.

Etienne, Rasseneur and Jouvarine were standing on the hill overlooking the slope. A quarrel arose, to which the men standing near were attentively listening; Maheu in gloomy silence, Levaque with his hands closed, Pierron turning his back in despair at being no longer able to simulate a fever; and there was also Bonnemort and Moque seated side by side upon a stump engaged in meditating. In the background were Zacharie, Moquet and some others, who were there only for sport, while on the other side a number of women were gathered, looking as solemn as though they were at church; Maheu's wife as quiet as he, shaking her head at the oaths uttered by Levaque.

Philomêne was coughing, having been troubled all winter with bronchitis. Moquette was laughing, showing her beautiful teeth, amused at the manner in which le Brule treated her daughter, an unnatural child who had sent the mother away while she stuffed herself with rabbit and who had a coward for a husband. Jeanlin had pushed Lydie upon the top of the woodpile, leaving Bebert to follow them, and these three children high up in the air looked down on the people beneath them.

The quarrel was commenced by Rasseneur, who wished to proceed regularly by the election of a bureau. His overthrow at the Bon-Joyeux had enraged him and he swore to be revenged, flattering himself his old authority would return when he was before the whole mining people. Etienne rebelled, thinking a bureau foolish in that forest. It was necessary to act like savages when they dealt with blockheads. Seeing no end to the dispute, the young man suddenly took possession of the crowd by springing on the trunk of a tree and crying out:

"Comrades! comrades!"

The confused noise of those people ended in a long sigh, while Jouvarine stopped the protestations of Rasseneur. Etienne continued in a low voice:

"Comrades, when they forbid us to speak, when they

send the gendarmes after us as if we were robbers, it is necessary for us to sustain each other. Here we are free, we are at home; none can compel us to be silent, any more than they can hush the song of birds or the noise of beasts."

Thunderingly they replied, with cries and exclamations:

"Yes, yes! the forest is ours, we can speak here!"

Then Etienne paused a moment, standing motionless upon the trunk of the tree. The moon, low in the horizon, shone only upon the high branches, and the spot where he stood was enveloped in darkness. He at the top of the hill stood out a black bar in the shadows.

Slowly extending his arms he commenced; but his voice no longer trembled, he had taken the cold tone of a simple mandatory of the people giving his accounts. He began his speech where they had left off at the Bon-Joyeux, and he started a rapid history of the strike, speaking first of his repugnance against this fight: the miners had not wished it, the company had brought it on by their new tariff of propping. Then he recalled the first visit of the delegates to the director, the bad treatment by the company, and, later on, the second visit, its tardy concession, the two centimes returned which it had tried to steal from them. Next, the saving fund was spoken of: with hasty calculations he showed how it, and also the aid sent from London, had been used up. In a few sentences he excused the International, Pluchart, and the others who, in trying to conquer the world, had forgotten them. The situation was becoming more and more desperate; the company threatened to discharge them and take some workmen from Belgium; besides, it had been intimated that there were some cowards among them,—men who had decided to go back to work. In a monotonous voice he spoke of their hunger, of the hope destroyed, while courage was fast disappearing in that terrible fight. And suddenly he began his closing remarks without once raising his voice.

"Under these circumstances, comrades, you should come to a decision this evening. Do you wish the continuation of the strike? And in that case, what do you count on doing to triumph over the company?"

A profound silence fell from the starred sky. In the darkness, that crowd remained silent under these words which had come from his almost bursting heart, and beneath the trees nothing was heard save the painful breathing of the people.

Then Etienne continued in a changed voice. It was no longer the secretary of the association who spoke; it was the chief of their band; the apostle bringing truth. Were they cowards to break their word? What! after suffering for a month would they return to the mine with heads bowed down, and allow that eternal misery to commence once more? Was it not better to die at once, trying to shake off that tyranny from which the workmen were starving? Was it not foolish to yield before that hunger which, in the first place, had thrown the calmest of them into a revolt? And he pointed out that the miners were alone compelled to suffer from the hard times, without food, although the strike had necessarily lowered the price of everything. No, the new tariff of wood was not acceptable; it was only a disguised economy; the company simply wished to steal from each man an hour of work per day. It was too much. The time had arrived when the miserable people pushed to an extremity would have justice.

He remained standing with outstretched arms. At the word justice, the throng swayed slightly and then burst out into thundering applause, while voices cried:

"Yes! It is time for justice."

Little by little Etienne had warmed up. He did not have the easy flow of speech of Rasseneur. He was often at a loss for words, his sentences coming out with an effort. Only he was so energetic and so much in earnest that he won his audience; while with the gestures of an ordinary workman, his elbows were turned in; then doubling up and throwing his fist forward, his jaw was extended and his words rang out. They all said he was not great, but he made them listen to him.

"This paying wages is only a new form of labor," said he in a loud voice. "The mine should belong to the miners as the sea does to the fisherman, as the ground to the farmer. Do you hear? The mine belongs to you who over a century ago paid for it with blood and misery."

Then he discussed some obscure questions of right, the special laws of the mine, in which he became lost. The ground below as well as above should belong to the nation; it was wrong for the state to give the monopoly to companies, as to Montson, for instance. But the mining people must conquer this estate; and with outstretched hands he indicated the entire country beyond the forest. At that moment the rising moon, peeping through the high branches, lit up the spot on which he stood. When the crowd, still in darkness, perceived him standing thus as in a broad light, distributing fortune with his open hands, they again applauded.

"Yes, yes, he's right, bravo!"

At this point Etienne mounted his favorite hobby, the prerogative of instruments of labor by the collectivity, which he repeated in a phrase whose roughness grated pleasantly upon him. At home, the evolution was complete; leaving the softened fraternity of the catechumens, seeking to reform the pay department, he ended in the politic idea of suppressing it. Since the reunion at Bon-Joyeux, his collectivity, still humanitarian and without formula, had crystalized into a complicated programme, of which he scientifically discussed each article. In the first place, he held that liberty could only be obtained by the destruction of the state. Then, when the people had the reins in their hands, reforms would commence. They would return to a primitive community; they would substitute family equality for family immorality, and instead of oppression, absolute, civil, political, and economical equality; they would gurantee individual independence, thanks to the possession and the entire productions of the instruments of labor; and, finally, professional education would be gratuitous—paid for out of the common fund. This involved an entire reconstruction of the old rotten society; he attacked marriage, and the right of making a will; he regulated the fortunes of each; re-razed to the ground the iniquitous monuments of the dark ages, with a grand gesture of his arm always the same, the gesture of a mower who sweeps down the ripe harvest; and then, with the other hand, he reconstructed, he built up the humanity of the future, the edifice of truth and justice rising in the

dawn of the twentieth century. The excitement of his brain was so great that reason wavered, and there remained only the fixed idea of an extremist. The scruples of feeling and good sense vanished; nothing could be easier than the realization of this new world, he had provided for everything; he spoke of it as of a machine which he could bring out in two hours, and neither fire nor blood were worth a thought.

"Our turn has come," shouted he in a final outburst. "Power and wealth are coming to us at last."

From the depths of the forest an acclamation reached him. The moon, now silvering all the glade, defined in sharp outlines the mass of heads, as far as the dim underwood afar off, between the gray trunks. And below were furious faces, sparkling eyes, open mouths, a crowd of people, men, women and children, famished, and ready to regain by force the rights of which they had been dispossesed. Cold was felt no longer; these burning words had warmed them through and through. A religious exaltation raised them above the earth; the fever of hope known to the early Christians of the church, awaiting the coming reign of justice. Many obscure phrases had escaped them; they understood but little of those technical and abstract reasonings; but even the obscurity, the abstraction, enlarged the field of promises, dazzling the imagination. What a dream! to be masters! to cease to suffer; at last to enjoy.

"That's right; we're with you. Death to the people who leave us to starve!"

The women were especially excited. La Maheu lost her usual calmness; sick from hunger, la Levaque screamed with all her might; old Brule waved her witch-like arms, and Philomêne was overcome with a fit of coughing, while Moquette became so aroused that she cried tender words to the orator. Among the men, Maheu was frantic with rage at Pierron, who was trembling, and Levaque, who had cried out too soon, interrupting the speaker; while Zacharie and Moquet, though ill at ease, laughed with astonishment that their comrade had been able to speak so long without a drink. But Jeanlin, on the woodpile, made the most noise,

screaming at Bebert and Lydic, shaking the basket in which lay Pologne.

The uproar could not be calmed. Etienne rejoiced at his popularity. It was as if he held his power there materialized in these three thousand breasts, whose hearts he could move with a single word. Near him, Jouvarine had applauded his own ideas as soon as he recognized them, contented with his comrade's progress toward anarchy; sufficiently pleased with the programme, except the article on education; the remains of sentimental folly, for holy and salutary ignorance, ought to be the bath for reinvigorating men. But Rasseneur shrugged his shoulders with disdain and rage.

"Will you allow me to speak?" said he to Etienne.

The latter jumped from the tree trunk.

"Speak; we'll see if they'll listen to you."

Rasseneur had already taken his place, and, with a gesture, called for silence. The noise did not diminish. His name ran round among the foremost ranks, who had recognized him, as far as the last, lost under the beeches; and they refused to hear him. He was an overthrown idol, and the sight of it alone was enough now to make his old worshipers angry. His easy style, his flowing words and his good humor, which had charmed so long, became at this hour only lukewarm, chiefly useful in putting cowards to sleep. In vain he spoke in the noise; he wished to resume the soothing process, to show the impossibility of changing the world by blows of the law; the necessity of leaving to social evolution time to work itself out. They made fun of him; they mocked him; his defeat at Bon-Joyeux was worse now, and becoming irremediable. They ended by throwing handfuls of frozen moss at him. A woman cried, shrilly.

"Down with the traitor!"

He explained that the mine could not become the property of the miner; they should prefer to participate in the benefits; the workman became then the child of the house.

"Down with the traitor!" repeated a hundred voices, while stones commenced to fly.

Then he grew pale, and despair filled his eyes with tears. This was the end of all, twenty years of ambi-

tious comradeship had given way under the ingratitude of the mass. He stepped from the stump with beating heart, unable to continue.

"That makes you laugh," he stammered, addressing Etienne, who had triumphed. "Very well, I hope this will happen to you too."

And, as if casting off all responsibility in the unhappiness which he foresaw, with a great gesture, he started off all alone across the silent and white country.

As they were hooting after him, they were surprised to see Bonnemort standing upon the stump, trying to speak in the midst of the tumult. Up to that time he and Moque had been reflecting in that spot which brought the past up so vividly before them. Then he was taken with one of the sudden fits of loquacity which at times stirred up the past so violently as to cause him to talk for hours.

A great silence fell, they listened to this old man, pale as a spectre, in the moonlight, and when he talked on of things not pertaining to the discussion, a rambling talk which they did not understand, the deep impression increased. Next he spoke of his youth, the death of two uncles crushed in the Voreux, then of the consumption; which carried off his wife. However, he did not abandon his first idea; they had not made much progress, nor never should. They had met in this forest before: when the king did not wish to diminish the hours of work. Then, though out of breath, he commenced the recital of other strikes, for he had seen many such. They had all met under these trees, either here at the Plan-des-Dames, there at the Charbonniere, or still lower down at the Jaut-du-Loup. Sometimes they froze, while at other times it was warm, and once it had rained so hard they returned home without being able to say a word, while another night the king's soldiers had arrived and driven them back with their guns.

"We've raised our hand like this; we've sworn not to go down again. . . . Yes! I swore, I swore."

The people were becoming weary, when Etienne, who had been watching them, again leaped upon the stump, keeping the old man at his side. He had just recognized Cheval among the first row. The thought that Cath-

erine might be there filled him with new ardor and a wish to speak before her.

"Comrades, you have heard; here is one of our old men telling us what he has suffered, and what our children will also suffer, if we do not end these thefts and tortures."

He was terrible; never had he spoken so violently. With one arm he supported old Bonnemort, showing him as an example of misery and grief, crying vengeance. In rapid sentences he went back to the first Maheus, pointing out that entire family, devoured by the company, in worse circumstances after having worked a hundred years. Then with them he compared the owners, who for a century had been nursed in luxury. Was it not frightful for men to starve at the bottom, from father to son, to pay for the minister's wine and the fêtes of the rich ladies and gentlemen?

He had been studying the diseases of miners; they all died from some terrible disease, the scrofula, the black bronchitis, the asthma, which suffocated them, and the rheumatism, from which in the end they were paralyzed. These miserable people were worked like machines, lodged like beasts, the great companies had subdued them little by little, threatening to form them all into regiments, millions of arms fighting for the fortune of a thousand idle ones. But the miner was no longer an ignorant brute crushed under the earth, an army pushing on in the profoundness of the night. They were a crowd of citizens whose seed had taken root and would spring up and bring forth in a day of great promise. After forty years of service they had dared to offer an old man the pension of one hundred and forty francs, a man sixty years of age whose lungs were coated with coal dust and whose limbs were crippled from the water in the drifts. Yes, work would demand some account from the capital, from that omnipotent God, unknown to the workman, who was crouched somewhere in the recesses of his tabernacle, where he assisted in starving those who worshiped him. They would do well to see his face in the light of incendiary fires; they would have the blood of that impure hog, that monstrous idol gorged with human flesh.

He became silent, but his arms were still extended,

designating the home of their enemy somewhere in the distance. This time the noise of the crowd was so great that the wealthy people of Montson heard it, and went to listen at their windows, uneasy, filled with the fear of some terrible accident. Night birds were flying about under the pale light of the now dying moon. Then quieting the tumult, he concluded:

"Comrades, what is your decision? . . . Do you vote for a continuation of the strike?"

"Yes! yes!" screamed the many voices.

"And what measures do you propose? Our defeat is sure if the comrades descend to-morrow."

The voices resumed with a trumpet-like blast:

"Death to the cowards."

"You decide then to recall them to duty, to their sworn faith. . . . That is what you wish to do: we will present ourselves at the mines, bring back the traitors by our presence, show the company that we are all in accord, and that we will die sooner than yield."

"That's it, to the mines! to the mines!"

While they were speaking, Etienne had been looking for Catherine among the heads before him. She was not there, decidedly. But he still saw Cheval, who was laughing and shrugging his shoulders, devoured with jealousy, ready to sell himself for a little of that popularity.

"And," continued Etienne, "if there are any spies among us, comrades, any men whom we mistrust, we know them. . . . Yes, I see the coal men of Vandame, who have not left their mine."

"Is that meant for me?" demanded Cheval, with an air of bravado.

"For you or any other. . . . But since you have spoken, you should know that those who have plenty to eat should have nothing to do with those who are hungry. You are working at Jean-Bart."

A voice interrupted him:

"Him work! no, he has a wife who works for him."

Cheval swore and his face reddened.

"Good God! is it forbidden to work, then?"

"Yes; when the comrades are enduring misery for the good of all, it is forbidden for any one to go over on the side of the owners. If the strike was general,

we would have been masters long before this. . . . Is it right for a single man of Vandame to go down, when all Montson has stood still? The great blow would be struck if work was to stop from one side of the country to the other, at M. Deneulin's mines, as well as here. . . . Do you hear? There are traitors in the drifts of Jean-Bart. You are all traitors."

Around Cheval the crowd was growing threatening; fists were raised, while cries broke forth: "To the death! to the death!" commenced to spring up. He had grown pale with fear. But in his anxiety to triumph over Etienne, an idea came to him, and he cried in a loud voice:

"Listen to me, now! Come to Jean-Bart to-morrow and you will see if I work. . . We are with you; they have sent me to say so. Even the machinery will have to stop, for even the machinists are going to join the strike. It will be all the better if the pumps are stopped; the water will burst into the mine, and ruin everything."

He was furiously applauded, even Etienne became excited. Speakers followed each other, gesticulating in the noise, making wild propositions. It was a moment of blind madness, the bloodthirsty impatience of a fanatical sect, which, weary of waiting for an expected miracle, at last determined to face the event. Their senses distracted by hunger, pictured sanguinary visions, dreamt of fire and blood, from which rose universal happiness, in an apotheosis of glory. The silvery moon bathed that multitude in peaceful light; the deep forest absorbed in its profound silence that cry of slaughter. Only the frozen moss crackled under their feet; while the trees, standing up in their strength with the delicate tracery of their branches dark against the white sky, neither perceived nor heard the miserable creatures who were exciting themselves at their feet.

As they pushed each other in the crowd, la Maheu again found herself close to her husband, and both, losing their good sense, carried away by the exasperation to which they had been slowly wrought up for months, applauded Levaque, who repeatedly demanded the heads of the engineers. Pierron had disappeared. Bonnemort and Moque, both speaking at the same time,

were uttering wild and violent thoughts which no one understood. In derision Zacharie demanded the destruction of the church, while Moquet, who had kept his mallet, beat the ground to increase the noise. The women were mad with excitement, la Levaque especially, who, with her hands on her hips, was trying to quarrel with Philomêne, whom she accused of laughing. Moquette was also excited, while old Brule screamed the loudest of any; perceiving Lydic without her basket, she boxed her ears and continued to pour out curses upon the absent masters.

Jeanlin was frightened for an instant, Bebert having learned from another boy that Madame Rasseneur had seen them steal Pologue, and that they were searching for them; but when Bebert desired to return and secretly lay the rabbit at the door of l'Avantage, Jeanlin howled loudly and opened his new knife, brandishing the blade in a threatening manner. The wild clamor still continued, while the thin lips of Jouvarine, calm in the midst of the turmoil, parted in a smile.

"Camrades! comrades!" shouted Etienne in a hoarse voice, trying to obtain a moment of silence, for the purpose of arriving at something definite.

At length they listened to him.

"Comrades! to-morrow morning at Jean-Bart, is it agreed?"

"Yes, yes, at Jean-Bart. Death to the traitors."

The thunder of three thousand voices filled the air and died away in the pure light of the moon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

At five o'clock it was very dark, the moon having gone down. Every one at Deneulin's was asleep; the old brick house was silent and dark, with doors and windows closed. A badly-kept garden separated it on one side from the mine Jean-Bart. On the other side ran the deserted town of Vandame, a great market-town, three kilometres behind the forest.

Deneulin, completely tired out, having passed half of the day before at the bottom of the mine, was snor-

ing with his face turned toward the wall, when he dreamed some one was calling him. He awoke and, really hearing a voice, ran to open the window. It was one of his overseers, who stood in the garden under the window.

"What's the matter?' he asked.

"Monsieur, it's a strike; half of the workmen don't want to work, and have come to prevent the other half from going down."

He scarcely understood, his head being still heavy from sleep. A cold wind came in through the window, almost freezing him.

"Compel them to go down," he stammered.

"It has been going on for an hour," resumed the overseer. "Then we thought we had better come and look for you. Perhaps you can make them listen to reason."

"All right, I will go."

He dressed quickly. His mind had become clear now, and he was very uneasy. They might have ransacked the house, for neither the cook nor other servant had as yet stirred. But, from the other side of the hall came the sound of alarmed whispers, and when he went out he saw the door of his daughters' room open, while both girls stood on the threshold, dressed in white wrappers, hastily put on.

"What is the matter, father?"

Lucie, the elder, was twenty-two years of age, a tall brunette, with a superb carriage; while the younger, Jeanne, scarcely nineteen, was still prettier, being small, with golden hair and a winning grace.

"Nothing of any consequence," he replied, to reassure them. "It appears that the strikers are making some little trouble at the mine. I am going to see about it."

But they did not wish him to go out without first taking something warm. Otherwise, he would return home ill. He broke away from them, saying he was in a hurry.

"Listen," said Jeanne, hanging on to his neck, "you are going to drink a little glass of whisky and eat a couple of crackers, or I shall remain like this and you will be forced to carry me off with you."

He was obliged to resign himself, though he swore that the biscuits would choke him. Then, candle in hand, both girls ran down stairs before him. In the dining-room they hastened to serve him, one pouring out the whisky while the other ran to the closet to find a paper of crackers. Having lost their mother very young, they had been badly brought up, spoiled by their father. The elder wished to become an operatic singer, while the younger was anxious to paint well. When they were compelled to cut down their expenses on account of the great embarrassment in business affairs, these girls, before so extravagant, became very careful housekeepers, who discovered the errors of centimes in the family accounts. Now, they kept the purse, and cut down these expenses, and quarreled with the dealers; but constantly repaired their toilets, and in other ways made the house more comfortable.

"Eat, papa," said Lucie.

Then, noticing the preoccupied air into which he had again fallen, silent, overwhelmed, she again became uneasy.

"It must be serious, or you would not look as you do. Say, now, we will remain at home with you; they can do without us at that lunch."

She spoke of a party which had been planned for that morning. Madame Hennebeau was first going to drive to Gregoire's to get Cecile, then she would come and take them in the landau, and they were all going to Marchiennes to lunch at the Forges, where they had been invited by the wife of one of the directors, for the purpose of visiting the workshops, the high furnaces and the coke fires.

"Certainly, we shall remain at home," declared Jeanne.

But he became angry.

"What an idea! I tell you it is nothing. Do me the pleasure of going back to your beds, and then at nine o'clock dress yourselves and keep your engagement."

Embracing them, he hastily went out, and they heard the sound of his feet upon the frozen earth in the garden.

Jeanne silently put away the bottle of whisky, while

Lucie locked up the crackers. This apartment had the deserted look of all the dining-rooms in which the table is not set. Both girls took advantage of this early morning visit to see if anything remained from the day before. A soiled napkin was out of place; the servant must be reprimanded. At length they returned to their room.

As he cut across the shortest paths of the garden, Deneulin thought over his lost fortune, that million which he had realized from Montson, intending to increase it, and which to-day was in such great risks. It had been a continuation of bad luck; there were enormous and unforeseen repairs, ruinous explorations; and, then, the industrial crisis came on just at the time when the profits began to appear. If the strike broke out with him, it was all over; it would kill him at one blow. He pushed open a little door; the buildings of the mine were distinguishable in the dark night by a deepening of the shadows, lighted by some lanterns.

Jean-Bart had not the importance of the Voreux, but the refitting had made it an attractive mine, according to the report of the engineers. They had not contented themselves with enlarging the shaft fifty metres and sinking it seven hundred and eight metres deeper, but they had newly equipped it; there was a new engine, new cages, and all the improvements provided by the latest advances of science; and there was a studied elegance even in the construction of the screening shed, which was of artistic shape; the tower was ornamented with a clock; the superintendent's room and the engine room were shaped like the nave of a church of the Renaissance, and the chimney rose above them with a mosaic spiral made of black and red bricks. The hoisting engine was placed upon the other shaft of the grant —at the old mine Gaston-Marie, reserved entirely for this purpose. Jean-Bart, besides that for the cage of extraction, had only two openings, one for the steam ventilator and another for the ladders.

In the morning, at four o'clock, Cheval was the first to arrive. He talked with his comrades, and convinced them that they must imitate the miners of Montson, and demand an increase of five centimes per car. Soon

the four hundred workmen went from the waiting-room to the superintendent's office, amid a tumult of gestures and outcries. Those who wished to descend, took their lamps, bared their feet, and put their tools under their arms; while the others, still with their shoes on and their coats upon their shoulders, owing to the terrible cold, barred the shaft; and the overseers made themselves hoarse trying to preserve order, begging them to be reasonable and not to prevent those who wished, from going to work.

Cheval was furious when he saw Catherine in pants and vest, her head covered with a blue scarf, ready to descend. That morning he had brutally told her not to leave their room at Montson. She, in despair at the stoppage of work, had followed him, all the same, for he never gave her any money, and she was often forced to pay the expenses of both. What would become of her if she did not earn anything? She was filled with fear, the horror of a house of shame at Marchiennes where so many of the mine women, without bread and without home, ended.

"What in the name of God are you doing here," said Cheval.

She stammered that she had not the rent and wished to work.

"Then you put yourself against me, fool! . . . Go back right off or I'll give you a kick."

In fear, she shrank back, but did not return, being resolved to see how matters would turn.

Deneulin arrived by the stairway of the screening shed. In spite of the feeble light of the lanterns, with a quick glance, he took in the scene, that crowd among the shadows, each face of which he recognized, the diggers, the loaders, the wheelers, the pushers even to the small boys. In the nave, new and still clean, work paused in suspense; the engine under pressure, gave out slight puffs; the cages remained suspended by the motionless cables; the cars, abandoned on the way, encumbered the flagging. Scarcely twenty-five lamps had been taken from their places; the others were still burning in the lamp-room. Without doubt a word from him would suffice and work would be resumed again.

"Well! what is going on here, my children?" he

asked, in a loud voice. "What are you angry about? Explain it to me; we must understand each other."

Usually he was paternal toward his men, even though exacting heavy work. Authoritative and brusque by nature, he tried at first to control them by a good nature, which had the showiness of a clarion; he often made himself loved, and the workmen especially respected him as a man of courage, always with them in the drifts, and the first in danger whenever an accident occurred at the mine. Twice, after explosions of fire damp, they had lowered him by a rope fastened under his arms, when the bravest among them had refused.

"You see," said he, "you will make me repent that I placed confidence in you. You know that I have refused a guard of gendarmes. Speak calmly and I will listen."

All were silent now, abashed, and yielding to him; but Cheval at length said:

"It's this, Monsieur Deneulin: We can't keep on working like this; we want five centimes more a car."

He appeared surprised.

"What! five centimes! What is your reason for this demand? I do not complain of your propping. I have not imposed a new tariff on you, like the company at Montson."

"That's so, but the comrades of Montson are right, all the same. They won't have the tariff, and they want five centimes because they can't work right with this poor pay. . . . We want five centimes, too, don't we, you others?"

A number of voices approved; the clamor began again with violent gestures. Little by little they had all gathered round in a circle.

Deneulin's eyes flashed, but he clenched his fist for fear of yielding to a temptation to choke them one after the other. He preferred to discuss the matter, to talk reasonably.

"You wish five centimes, and I admit the work is worth it. But I cannot give them to you. If I make this advance I shall simply be ruined. . . . You should understand that I must make a living in order that you may live. And I am at the limit; the least increase in price of labor would throw me head over

heels. . . . Remember, two years ago at the last strike I yielded, I was not able then. But that raise of salary has almost ruined me, though I have struggled along for two years. . . . To-day I would rather leave the business at once, than not to know where to get the money to pay you next month."

Cheval laughed disagreeably in the face of this master who so frankly told them of his affairs. The others, were obstinate and incredulous, unable to comprehend that a chief did not earn millions from his workmen.

Then, Deneulin was forced to insist. He explained his strife against the Montson company who were always on the watch, ready to devour him if the slightest chance occurred. Just at present he was forced to economize, the increased depth of Jean-Bart had made the expense of hoisting still greater, the unfavorable conditions of affairs scarcely compensated for the thick bed of coal found. He would not have raised the salary of the miners at the last strike had he not been obliged to imitate Montson for fear of seeing his men leave him; but if they had have done so although they would have succeeded in compelling him to give up his mine, they would also have made their own condition more deplorable by joining the Montson company. He was not enthroned in some tabernacle afar off; he was not one of those men who paid managers to strip the miners, and who was never seen by them; he was a master who risked other things than his money, he risked his intelligence, his health, his entire life. A stoppage of work would simply be his death. He had no stock on hand, and moreover it was necessary for him to execute his orders. On the other side the capital could not sleep without causing disaster. How could he keep his engagements? how could he pay the interest on the sums intrusted to him by his friends? He would be sure to fail.

"And it is just this, my good men!" said he in conclusion. "I wish to convince you. . . . You do not ask a man to ruin himself, do you? If I should give you the five centimes, or you should join the strike, it would be cutting my throat."

As he became silent, growls were heard. But a part

of the miners seemed to hesitate. Several started toward the shaft as if resolved to descend.

"At least," said an overseer, "let every one be free. Who are those who wish to work?"

Catherine was one of the first to advance. But Cheval, furious, pushed her back, crying:

"We're all together; it's only cowards who leave their comrades."

A reconciliation appeared impossible. The cries had again commenced while at a risk of mashing the willing ones against the wall the strikers pushed them away from the shaft. For an instant the director, desperate, tried to drive them back, but it was useless, and he was obliged to give up. Out of breath he seated himself on a chair in the superintendent's room, so aware of being powerless that not an idea of what to do came to him. At length he became calm; he sent an overseer to find Cheval; then when the latter had consented to an interview he sent every one away with a gesture.

"Leave us alone."

Deneulin's idea was to see what the fellow had in him. He at once found him to be vain, and devoured with jealousy. Then he commenced to flatter him, affecting to be astonished that a workman of his merit should compromise his prospects in such a manner. For a long time he had had his eyes on him for a rapid promotion, and he ended by squarely offering to make him overseer later on. Cheval listened, at first silent with hands clenched, then little by little he quieted down. Meanwhile he began thinking; if he remained in the strike he could never hope to be more than a lieutenant under Etienne, while now another step was open to him, that of being one of the chiefs. A flush of pride mounted to his face, he became intoxicated. Then again, the band from Montson which he had been expecting since early morning, would certainly not come now, some obstacle must have kept them back, gendarmes perhaps; it was time to yield. But he no more refused, with a shake of the head, he played the role of an uncorrupted man, laying his hand on his heart. Finally without speaking to the director about the meeting he had given to the Montson men at this

mine, he promised to calm his comrades and influence them to descend.

Deneulin remained concealed, even the overseers held aloof from that fight. For an hour they heard Cheval haranguing, discussing, as he stood upon a car before the superintendent's office. A party of workmen shouted at him, a hundred and twenty went off indignant, obstinate in their resolution which he had compelled them in the first place to take. It was already more than seven o'clock. Daylight had long since broken on a bright, clear day, cold and frosty. And all at once the noise of the mine began again, the work continued. The machinery was first set in motion, while the cables began to wind and unwind. Then, as the signals were shouted, the descent began, the cages filled up, sank down and arose again; the shaft swallowed its daily allowance of boys, girls and men, while on the iron flagging the wheelers pushed their cars, making a thundering noise.

"Great God! what are you doing now?", said Cheval to Catherine, who was waiting her turn. "Why don't you go on down?"

At nine o'clock, when Mme. Hennebeau and Cecile arrived in the landau, they found Lucie and Jeanne, beautifully dressed, awaiting them. But Deneulin was astonished on perceiving Mégrel, who had accompanied the carriage on horseback. But Mme. Hennebeau explained, in a natural manner, that she was afraid, the roads were so full of hard-looking people, and that she had preferred to bring a protector. Megrel laughed, reassuring them; nothing was serious—it all, as usual, ended in threats; not one of them would dare to throw a stone into a pane of glass. Joyful at his success, Deneulin told them of the subdued rebellion at Jean-Bart. Now everything was quiet, and upon the road to Vandame, after the young ladies had gotten into the carriage, they all became very cheerful in that bright weather, without guessing that, at a short distance off in the country, a long murmur was spreading out, while, if they had pressed their ears to the ground, they could have heard the tramp, tramp of the people.

"Well! it is understood," said Mme. Hennebeau; "this evening you will come and dine with us and take

the girls home. Madame Gregoire has also promised to come for Cecile."

"Yes, you can expect me," answered Denculin.

The landau started off toward Vandame and Jeanne and Lucie looked back to smile at their father who remained standing in the road; while Megrel rode gallantly behind them.

They crossed the forest and took the road between Vandame and Marchiennes. As they approached Tartaret, Jeanne asked Mme. Hennebeau if she knew the Côte-Verte road; and when the latter, in spite of her five years' residence in this country, acknowledged that she had never gone that way, they turned into the road. Tartaret, on the edge of the woods, was an uncultivated piece of land of volcanic barrenness, under which, for some centuries, had been burning an old coal mine. The miners of that country told its history. The fire from heaven had fallen on that spot for the evil doings of the boys and girls of the mine, and it had come down so quickly that they had no chance to ascend, and that to-day they are still below burning in that hell. The rocks of a dark red well covered with an efflorescence of alum. Sulphur seemed to grow from a yellow flower which sprang up on the edge of the fissures. At night the bravest ones, who had dared risk an eye to one of those holes, swore that they saw flames and the wicked ones' souls just shriveling up in the still buried coal. Stray lights rose from the ground; hot steam continually poured out. And thus, as a miracle of eternal spring, in the midst of that miserable land of Tartaret, the Côte-Verte was always covered with green turf, its trees of which the leaves were constantly renewed, while its fields had as many as three harvests a year. It was a natural hot-house, warmed by the heat from the burning coal. The snow never remained there. The enormous growth of verdure and the trees spread out without having even been reddened by the frost.

Soon the carriage rolled into the open country, Megrel jokingly told the legend; then explained how the fire began at the bottom of that mine by the fermentation of the coal dust, and when they could not get control of it it burned on and on forever. He told of a mine in Belgium which they had flooded without

putting out the fire. But he became silent, every moment bands of miners passed the carriage. Though they walked by in silence, angry looks were cast on that luxury which forced them to stand aside. The crowd became more numerous as the horses crossed the little bridge of the Scarpe. What was the matter that these people were all on the road thus? The women began to be frightened; Megrel began to suspect something was going on in that quivering country; and it was a relief when they at last arrived at Marchiennes. Under the sun, which seemed to extinguish them, the rows of coke fires and the furnaces threw out their smoke, from which the eternal soot filled the air.

CHAPTER XXV.

At Jean-Bart, Catherine for an hour had been pushing her car; and she was so covered with perspiration that she stopped for a moment to wipe her face.

From the end of the drift, where he was at work with some other comrades, Cheval was astonished that he no longer heard the sound of the wheels. The lamps were burning badly, the coal dust prevented him from seeing.

"What's this?" cried he. When she answered him that she was surely going to melt, and that her heart was feeling queer; he answered her in anger:

"Fool, do as we do, take off your shirt."

They were seven hundred and eight metres at the north, in the first road of the vein Desiree, which was three kilometres from the shaft-room. When they spoke of that part of the mine the miners of the country paled and lowered their voices as though they were speaking of hell; and they contented themselves more often with shaking of their heads, not wishing to talk of that hot region. As the galleries went toward the north they approached Tartaret, they penetrated into the interior fire, which coated the rocks above. The drifts in which they were now working had arrived at a temperature of forty degrees. They found themselves in a horrible underground place, in the midst of the

flames which the people overhead saw through the fissures, and which emitted sulphur and abominable vapors.

Catherine, who was already without her blouse, hesitated, and then took off her pants, and with bare arms and legs, her chemise tied around the waist with a string, she again began to push.

"That's better," said she, in a loud voice.

Mingled with her sufferings from the heat, a great fear filled her. In the six days she had worked there, she constantly thought of the stories which had been told her in childhood of those boys and girls in olden times who had been so terribly punished for their misbehavior. Of course she was too old now to believe such nonsense; but she could not help thinking what she would do if she was to see a red-hot girl come out of the wall, and that idea made her perspire still more.

Sixty metres from the drift another pusher took the car and rolled it sixty metres farther on, as far as the foot of the inclined plane, up which the receiver sent it.

"Heavens! you're making yourself comfortable," said that woman, a slight widow of thirty years, when she saw Catherine in the road.

"I don't care," replied the girl, "I suffer too much."

She went off, pushing an empty car. The worst of it was, in that bottom road, another cause joined Tartaret to render the heat unsupportable. At the old works was a gallery, Gaston-Marie, very deep, in which ten years before an explosion of fire-damp had set fire to the vein, which still burned behind a clay wall that had immediately been built there and was always kept in repair to limit the disaster. Deprived of air the fire ought to have gone out; but a draft from somewhere or other still kept it alive. It had been burning for ten years, heating up the wall like the bricks of an oven until they could have cooked upon them. And along that wall of more than a hundred feet the car road was made in a temperature of sixty degrees.

After two trips, Catherine again became suffocated. Happily the road was large and commodious, that vein, Desiree, being one of the thickest in the mine. The bed was seventy metres thick and the men could work

standing. But they would have preferred to work with their necks twisted and to have a little fresh air.

"Are you asleep down there," screamed Cheval, when he no longer heard Catherine moving. "Go on; no, fill your cart and roll."

She was at the bottom of the drift, leaning on her shovel; and almost overcome, she looked at him with an imbecile air without obeying. She saw badly in the flickering rays of the lamp. But they could see her for the picks ceased, and they laughed at her for taking off her blouse.

"Take care, you'll catch cold."

Catherine again began filling her car, then pushed it off. The road was too large for her to knock herself against the sides. Her bare feet were twisted between the rails seeking a support; while she slowly went forward with the muscles of her arms stiff, her back bent. And when she went along the wall her agony was increased, the prespiration fell from her whole body in enormous drops, like the rain from a thunder storm, and she arrived at the end of her journey blinded and also covered with a black mud.

What was the matter with her that day? She had never felt such a giving way in her bones. There must be some bad air. That out of the way road was badly aired at any rate. They breathed all sorts of gas which came out of the coal with a little sound like the bubbling of a spring, so abundant sometimes that the lamps refused to burn; then there was the fire-damp about which they no longer troubled themselves, the whole vein smelt of it from one day's end to another. She knew it well, that bad air, that air of death as the miners called it. Since her childhood she had inhaled so much of it that she was astonished not to be able to stand it better that day, for her ears were ringing and her head was as though on fire. Surely, it was the heat that was making her sick.

Then she concluded to remove her chemise, for even it was a torture, as the least wrinkle in it cut and burned her, but she started to push again without doing so. After a few minutes she said to herself that she would put it on before she came to the end of her journey, so she untied the string and let the last article

of clothing drop; she was in such agony that she would have torn her very skin off if she had been able. Then entirely nude, she went on with her terrible labor.

But she began to despair, it had not eased her one bit. What could she take off now? The buzzing in her ears made her giddy; she seemed to be pressed as in a vice. She fell upon her knees. Her lamp wedged in on the coal in the car seemed to be going out. Amid her confused ideas the thought came to her to turn up the wick. Twice she started to examine it and both times just as she got before it she saw it become dimmer as if she were blowing it. Suddenly it went out entirely. Then in the shadows everything commenced to go round, her heart almost stopped beating, and overcome with the great fatigue she fell over on the ground, flat upon her back, to die in that air of asphyxy.

"I believe she's still laying around," growled Cheval.

He listened at the top of the drift, and, not hearing the sound of wheels, called "Catherine."

His voice was lost in the distance of that black gallery, and not a breath responded.

"Do you want me to come and make you move?"

Nothing stirred. There still reigned the same death-like silence. Furious, he descended, running so fast that he fell upon the body of the girl, who barred the way.

He looked at her in amazement. What was the matter with her? It was a shame to pretend to be sick just to get a nap. But, as he lowered the lamp to look in her face, it threatened to go out. He turned it up, and it went down again; then he understood, it must be bad air. The anger was all gone, the miner's devotion awoke before that comrade who was in peril. He seized her in his arms just as she was, raising her up as high as possible in the fresher air, and, when the men had thrown over his arm the clothing of both, he set out on foot, running, sustaining his unconscious burden with one hand and carrying his lamp with the other. The deep gallery wound down; he ran on, first to the right, then to the left, going to seek for life in the freezing air from the plain which blew from the ventilator. At length the sound of running water made him pause, and he found himself at the cross-road of a now abandoned

rolling gallery, which was formerly used for the Gaston-Marie. There it blew like a tempest, and it was so cold that he shivered as he seated himself on the ground with the girl in his arms, who was still unconscious, her eyes closed.

"Catherine, look up; good God! don't fool. Take care, or I'll put you in the water."

He was afraid, to see her so still. But he wet a corner of her chemise in the water and bathed her face in it. She looked as if she was dead, buried already at the bottom of the earth. Suddenly she opened her eyes, stammering:

"I'm cold."

"Ah! that is better," said Cheval, relieved.

And he began dressing her, swearing at the trouble which he had in putting on her blouse, for she was not able to assist him a great deal. She was amazed, not comprehending where she was or why she was naked. Then, when she remembered, she was ashamed. How had she gotten there? and she questioned him. Had any one seen her that way. He, to tease her, told some stories how he had brought her there in the midst of all their comrades. Then, when she almost cried with shame, he gave her his word that he had run so quickly no one was able to see her.

"I'm dying of the cold," said she, hastening on her clothes.

She had never known him to be so good to her; for one kind word he said to her, she received two harsh ones. A tenderness penetrated her in her fatigue; she smiled on him, and murmured:

"Put your arms around me."

He did as she asked, then stretched himself out beside her while waiting for her to be able to walk.

"You see," continued she, "you were wrong to yell at me so for I couldn't keep on. It's not as hot in the drift, but if you only knew, why it's like an oven in that road."

"Yes," replied Cheval, "of course we'd be better off under the trees. I knew it was hard on you there, my poor girl."

It touched her to hear him speak so kindly.

"Oh! it's a bad place. We'll end up there sometime

or other. And then to-day the air is bad. . . . But I won't be any trouble to you. When a person has to work they must do it, mustn't they? Why, I'd die sooner than give in."

He was silent. With his arm thrown around her he held her to his breast to prevent her from taking cold. Although she already felt the strength to return, in her delight at his tenderness she forgot everything else.

"Only," murmured she in a low voice, "I do want you to be kinder to me. A girl is so content when her lover has some little love for her."

And she began to cry softly.

"But I do love you," cried he. "Haven't I taken up with you?"

She only replied with a sorrowful shake of the head. Men often took up with women whose love they laughed at. Her tears fell thick and fast. It made her desperate to think of the happy life she might have lead if she had fallen upon another man, whose arm would have been always passed thus around her waist, and whose kisses would have been given unasked. And in her great emotion the image of another came up before her. But that was ended. She wished to live with this one until the end, only if he would not treat her so badly.

"Why can't you be like this always?" said she.

And as she still cried he embraced her again.

"You're crazy! Yes, I swear to be good to you. One man is no worse than another."

She looked at him and smiled. Perhaps he was right; happy women were seldom heard of. Then she gave herself up to the joy of seeing him amiable. If it could only have lasted! Suddenly steps were heard. Three comrades who had seen them pass were coming to inquire what was the matter.

They went off together. It was almost ten o'clock, and the men had commenced to eat their lunch. When they had finished the sandwich and were about to drink their coffee, a rumbling noise was heard coming from the distance. They grew uneasy. What now? was this another accident? They all ran off, miners passed them every second, and none knew what was the matter. They were all crying that it must be something terrible.

Little by little the entire mine had become upset, shadows filled the gallery, the lantern danced in the darkness. Where was it? Why did no one tell them?

Suddenly, an overseer passed them, crying:

"The cables are cut, the cables are cut."

Then the panic increased. They ran rapidly across the dark roads, almost out of their minds.

Why had they cut the cables? and who had cut them when the men were at the bottom? That was monstrous. But the voice of another overseer broke out, then became lost. The Montson people cut the cables.

When Cheval comprehended he stopped Catherine. The thought that he would meet the Montson miners if he went out, frightened him. So they had come, that band whom he believed in the hands of the gendarmes! For an instant he thought of retracing his steps and going up by the Gaston-Marie, but as they no longer worked there, he would have needed some ropes. He swore, filled with fear, as he said that it was foolish to run like that. Perhaps they were not going to leave them at the bottom.

The voice of the overseer was again heard coming nearer.

"To the ladders! to the ladders!"

And Cheval, in spite of his rage, was carried on with his comrades. Then the panic seized him, he shoved Catherine, accusing her of not running fast enough. Did she want them to stay in the mine alone, to die of hunger? for those robbers of Montson were capable of breaking the ladders, without waiting for the people to come out. That abominable supposition drove them all distracted. In the galleries were only a stream of fools, all trying to go up first. Cries broke out that the ladders were broken, that no one could go out. And when they commenced to pass by frightened groups into the shaft room, they threw themselves toward the shaft and broke in the door to the ladders; while an old stableman who had just prudently put the horses back in the stable, watched these men with an air of unconscious disdain, accustomed to the nights passed in the mine, certain that some one would draw him out of it.

"Great heavens! Can't you get in front of me?"

cried Cheval to Catherine; "I can hold you, then, if you fall."

Suffocated by that run of three kilometres which had once more covered her with perspiration, she gave up and allowed herself to be elbowed about by the crowd. Then he pulled her along by the arms, nearly breaking them; and her tears broke forth again; he had already forgotten their talk, she could never be happy.

"Go on!" screamed he.

But he frightened her too much. She resisted him and the throng of frightened people pushed them on one side. The water running down from the shaft fell in great drops and the floor of the shaft room shook under the stamping, trembling above the water-sump ten metres deep where all the water collected. Two years before at Jean-Bart a terrible accident had occured; a cable broke and threw the cage to the bottom of the sump, and two men who were in one of the cars were drowned. And everyone thought of it, on going there when a great number stood upon the boards which planked it over.

"Mercy on me!" cried Cheval; "die then, I'll be free."

He went on and she followed him.

From the bottom to the top there were a hundred and two ladders, nearly seven meters in length, each placed upon a straight landing; the small opening which led to them only just permitted the passage of the shoulders. It was like a chimney seven hundred high steps between the side of the shaft and the partition of the hoisting compartment, a long, damp and narrow gut, black and seemingly without end where the ladders were placed almost straight and by regular stories. It took twenty-five minutes for a strong man to go up that giant column. However, the ladders were only used in case of a catastrophe.

At first, Catherine went up easily. Her naked feet had grown accustomed to climbing and did not yet suffer from the rungs which were covered with iron to prevent wear. Her hands, hardened by rolling, clung without fatigue to the mountings too great for them. And even that occupied her, almost putting an end to her chagrin, that unforseen ascent, that long, serpentine

line of men, slowly pulling themselves up, three on a ladder, and the leader would arrive at the top when the last man was about to start from the bottom. But they were not there yet for the first of them were only a third from the top. No one spoke, the feet went on and on with a dull sound; while the lamps equal to moving stars, sparkled from above to below in an always enlarging line.

Behind her, Catherine heard a boy counting the ladders. She also started to do so. They had already gone up fifteen and had arrived at a level. But at that instant she hit against the legs of Cheval. He swore, telling her to be more careful. At times the whole column paused, motionless. What was the matter? what had happened? And each one questioned in terror. The agony increased as they left the bottom fearing what was above. Some one cried that it was necessary to go down again, that the ladders were broken. That was the thought of all, the fear of finding themselves before emptiness. Another terrible story descended from mouth to mouth, the accident of a man slipping from a ladder. They did not know precisely what cries prevented them from hearing. Were they going to remain there? At last without any warning the ascent was resumed with the same slow and painful movement, amid the shaking from the feet and the dancing lamps. Surely, higher on, the ladders would be broken.

At the thirty-second ladder, when they had passed a third level, Catherine felt her limbs becoming stiff. At first she felt the skin slightly tingle, then she lost all feeling in her feet and hands. A great weakness came upon her little by little, attacking the muscles. And in the giddiness which came upon her she remembered a tale of her grandfather's that in his early days the boys of ten years used to go up these ladders with the coal upon their shoulders, and they were so open and badly built that when one of the boys slipped, or a piece of coal fell from a basket, three or four of the children would tumble down at one time. But to-day one could not fall but a few metres. That tale frightened her, becoming a veritable nightmare, for the cramps in her

limbs became insupportable, and she said to herself that she could never go to the end.

Three pauses gave them all an opportunity to draw a breath. But the terror which they felt at each new arrest overwhelmed them. Above and below one could hear the heavy breathing. It confused the girl, who now began to feel nausea, adding itself to her other horrible feelings. She was suffocating, dizzy in the half darkness, angry at the scraping of her flesh on the sides; and she also suffered from the dampness, her body was in a shivering perspiration from the great drops which soaked her. They were approaching a level. The rain beat so strong that it threatened to extinguish the lamps.

Twice Cheval had questioned Catherine without obtaining any answer. What was she doing down there? Had she fallen? She might, at least, tell him she was holding on. They had been going up for a half hour, but so slowly and with so many pauses that they were only at the fifty-ninth ladder. Still forty-three. At last Catherine told him she was still there. He would have abused her if she had spoken of her weariness. The iron of the rungs was now cutting her feet. They seemed to have sawed into her as far as the bone. After each pull she expected to see her hands leave the rungs above her, skinned and so stiff that the fingers would not shut; and she felt as if she would fall backwards; her shoulders scratched, her thighs strained from her continual efforts. It was especially a fear of those steep ladders which increased her sickness, those which were placed almost straight and compelled her to pull herself up by the strength of her thumbs. The furious breathing of the people drowned all other sound, a sort of rustling noise which came up from the bottom and expired at the top. Whispers ran from one to the other, a boy had just torn open the top of his head against a landing.

Catherine still went on. They passed a level. The rain had ceased, the heat increased, weighing down their chests in thick case-like air, poisoned with an odor of old iron and damp wood. Mechanically she still kept on counting, sixty-one, sixty-two, sixty-three, still nineteen, she could never arrive. These figures repeated

over and over, sustained her with their rythmical balance, for she was no longer conscious of her movements, she bent her limbs to the acquired strength in a state of sad somnambulism. Around her the lamps seemed to dance. She thought she was dying, the least breath would have knocked her over. The worst was that those from below were pushing now, the entire column was rushing on yielding to the rage of fatigue and a furious wish to again see the sun. Some comrades, those ahead, had gone out; there was therefore no broken ladders; but the thought that they could yet break them, to prevent the last from getting out when the others were already breathing above, ended by setting them wild. And when a stop was made again, oaths burst forth, and they went on; pushing each other, wishing to pass over the bodies of those who were almost there.

Then Catherine slipped. She cried to Cheval in a despairing appeal. But he did not hear; he had beaten his way higher up by pushing aside some comrades. And she fell and was trampled upon. In her fright, it seemed to her that she was one of those little boys in olden times, and that a piece of coal falling from a basket above her head had thrown her down the shaft, like a stone. Only five ladders remained to climb; they had taken nearly an hour for the ascent. She never knew how she arrived, though she was carried on some one's shoulders. Suddenly she found herself in the dazzling sunlight, in the midst of a howling mob who hooted at her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

From early morning, confused murmuring was heard in the alleys, that sound which swelled out through the roads and the entire country. But the intended departure had not taken place. News burst upon them; the gendarmes were upon the plain. Some one told how they had arrived from Douai during the night, and they accused Rasseneur of having betrayed his comrades by warning M. Hennebeau; and a woman even swore that

she had seen the servant pass who carried the message to the telegraph station. The miners doubled up their fists, and watched the gendarmes from behind their shutters in the pale light of the young day.

Towards half past seven, when the sun had risen, another report was circulated, reassuring the impatient ones. It was simply a military parade, such as they were compelled to make at the time of a strike, upon the order of the Prefect of Lille. The strikers held in execration that officer, whom they accused of having deceived them by the promise of a conciliatory interview; but who had limited himself to send his troops to Montson only for eight days. Thus, when they saw the gendarmes quietly go away, on the road to Marchiennes, after having contented themselves with deafening the alleys with the trot of their horses upon the frozen earth, they laughed at the prefect and his gendarmes, who started off just as things were about to warm up.

Up to nine o'clock they behaved very well, peacefully keeping indoors, while their eyes followed the backs of the last gendarmes. The wealthy people of Montson, with heads pressed on their pillows, were still asleep. At the director's, they saw Madame Hennebeau set forth in her carriage, while M. Hennebeau was no doubt at the works, for the house seemed silent. No mine was militarily guarded, it was the fatal improvidence for the hour of danger, the natural stupidity about catastrophies, and it would be impossible for a government not to commit errors when they have not yet learned the facts. But nine o'clock had scarcely struck, when the coal men had started off on the Vandame road to show themselves at the meeting place which had been decided on the evening before in the forest.

However Etienne comprehended at once that he should not have at Jean-Bart the three thousand comrades upon which he had counted. Many believed the manifestation postponed, and it was too late to send another command through the alleys for those who were already on the road might compromise the cause if he was not at their head. Almost a hundred who had started out before daylight must be hidden under the bushes in the forest waiting for the others. Jouvar-

ine, whom Etienne went to consult, shrugged his shoulders; ten resolved men would do more work than a mob; and he went back to the open book before him, refusing to be one of them. That threatened to again turn the sentiment, when he might have so easily made Montson explode. However, he promised his comrade to join them if things went on well.

When Etienne descended the stairs and went out by the alley of the house he perceived Rasseneur seated in front of the hearth, very pale, while his wife, still looking very grand in her eternal black dress, was speaking to him in decisive yet polite words.

Maheu thought that they should keep their word. Such a rendezvous was sacred. Nevertheless the night had calmed the fever of them all. He now feared misfortune; and he explained that their duty was to go there to sustain their comrades in the right. La Maheu approved of what he said. Etienne said with complaisance that it was necessary to act revolutionary without waiting for any one else. Before going away he refused the share of bread which had been given them the day before with a bottle of gin; but he drank three small glasses of the gin one after the other, to keep out the cold; he also carried away a small flask. Alzire was to take care of the children. Old Bonnemort, whose legs had given out from the walk of the night before remained in bed.

From prudence they did not all go together. Jeanlin had disappeared a long time before. Maheu and his wife went off together, while Etienne struck out across the forest, wishing to join the comrades whom he ought to find there. On the road he met a band of women, among whom he recognized old Brule and la Levaque. Moquette had brought them some chestnuts and they were eating them while walking on. But in the forest he found no one, the men were already at Jean-Bart. Then he hastened on and arrived before the mine at the moment when Levaque and about a hundred others were walking across the flagging. The miners were coming from all sides, the Maheus by the main road, the women across the fields; all arrived without chiefs, without arms, as though it was as natural to collect there as for water to run down hill. Etienne perceived

Jeanlin seated on a bridge, as if at a play. He had run fast and was among the first to enter. There were scarcely three hundred there in all.

"They hesitated when Deneulin appeared at the head of the stairs leading to the office."

"What do you want?" said he in a strong voice.

After having seen the landau disappear, in which his daughters were still smiling, he had returned to the mine filled with a vague uneasiness. But everything there was in good order, the descent had taken place, coal was being brought up and he again became easy; he was talking with the superintendent when he saw the approach of the strikers. He had quickly placed himself behind a window of the screening room, and on seeing that crowd enlarge and fill up the flagging, he became conscious of his powerlessness. How could he defend these buildings which were open on all sides? He should scarcely be able to get twenty of his workmen around him. He was lost.

"What do you want?" he repeated, filled with rage, but making an effort to accept this disaster.

Low growls came from the crowd. Then Etienne spoke out, saying:

"Monsieur, we do not come to hurt you. But it is necessary for work to cease everywhere."

Deneulin treated him like an imbecile.

"Do you believe you will do me any good if you stop work at my mine? It is the same as if you were to fire a shot straight into my back. Yes, my men are at the bottom, and before they come up you will have to kill me."

That rough speech raised a clamor. Maheu was forced to hold Levaque, who became violent, and Etienne still talked on trying to convince Deneulin that their action was right. But the owner replied that work was alone right. However, he refused to discuss this foolishness. He wished to be master of his own works; his only remorse was that he had not forty gendarmes to clean out that mob.

"It is my own fault, I merit all that happens to me. With fellows like you nothing but force will answer. It is like the Government who thinks to buy you by

some concessions. You would crush it down when it had armed you."

Etienne trembled, but contained himself. He lowered his voice.

"I beg you, monsieur, to give the order for your workmen to come up. I can do nothing with my comrades, and you will save yourself trouble."

"No; leave me to attend to my own affairs. Do I know you? You do not belong to my mine. You have no right to come here with your strike. You are only robbers coming through the country to steal."

His voice was drowned by the noise, the women especially insulted him. He continued to be obstinate, feeling a relief in that freshness which emptied his heart of authority. It was the ruin of everything, and he was not afraid to speak out. But their numbers were still increasing, nearly five hundred people were already on the spot, and he was going to beat his way through them when his superintendent roughly pulled him back, saying:

"Oh, Monsieur! this will be a slaughter. What use is it to kill men for nothing?"

He struggled, he protested in a last cry thrown at the mob:

"You set of thieves! look out when we again become the strongest."

They led him away. In the shoving of the crowd those in front were thrown violently against the staircase, of which the hand-rail was broken. It was the women who were pushing, screaming and exciting the men. The door gave way at once. It was without lock, being simply shut with a latch. But the staircase was too narrow; the crowd could not have been able to enter for a long time if the last end of the besiegers had not have thought of entering by the other opening. Then they spread out over all parts, in the waiting-room, in the screening-shed and in the engine-room. In less than five minutes the entire mine was theirs; they filled every floor, while, with furious gestures and cries, they were utterly carried away with the victory over that owner who resisted them.

Maheu, becoming frightened, was one of the first to rush up to Etienne, saying:

"They must not kill him!"

The latter had already run forward, but when he found that M. Deneulin had shut himself up in the superintendent's room, he answered:

"After all, would it be our fault? Such madness!"

Nevertheless, he was filled with uneasiness; still too calm to yield himself to the rage of the others. He also suffered in his pride of chief in seeing the crowd escaping from his authority, becoming enraged at the cold execution of the people's will, which he had not foreseen. In vain he shouted, telling them to be calm, crying that their useless destruction was wrong.

"To the boilers!" screamed old Brule. "Put out the fires!"

Levaque, who had found a file, shook it like a sword, ruling the tumult by a continued cry:

"Let's cut the cables! Let's cut the cables!"

Every one soon repeated it, only Etienne and Maheu continued to protest, overwhelmed, speaking in the uproar without obtaining silence. At length the first was able to say:

"But there are men at the bottom, comrades!"

The noise increased; voices cried from all parts.

"No matter! They had no business to go down! It will serve them right! They can stay there! And besides there are the ladders!"

At the thought of the ladders they became all the more obstinate and Etienne saw he must yield. In the fear of a greater disaster he hastily went toward the engine, wishing to at least bring up the cages, so that when the cables were cut they would not fall down the shaft on those below. The engineer had disappeared, also some other workmen employed at the top; and he was forced to take possession, running the engine as Levaque and two others were climbing up the carpenter work which supported the drums. The cages were scarcely fastened upon their bolts when they heard the squeaking noise of the file sawing the steel. There was a great silence, that sound seemed to fill the entire mine, everyone raised their heads, watching, listening, seized with emotion. As the sound was first heard Maheu felt a fierce joy as if the teeth of that file was delivering them from unhappiness by destroying the

cable of one of those holes of misery into which they would descend no more.

But old Brule disappeared by the waiting room stairway, still yelling.

"We must put out the fires, to the boiler room!"

A number of women followed her. La Maheu hastened after them to prevent them from breaking up everything. Just as her man was trying to argue with the comrades, so was she the most calm of the women; they could demand what was right, without destroying everything in other people's buildings. When she entered the boiler-room, the women had already driven away the two firemen, and Brule, armed with a long shovel, was squatted before one of the fires, and was violently emptying it, throwing the coal out upon the bricks, where it still continued to burn with a thick, black smoke. In this manner the women went to each one of the ten fires. La Levaque worked her shovel with both hands, Moquette tucked up her clothes so as not to get on fire; they were all blood-red from the reflection of the fire, perspiring and with disordered hair. The heap of coal grew into a high pile, while the terrible heat scorched the ceiling of that vast place.

"This is enough," cried la Maheu. "The room is on fire."

"I'm very glad of it," replied old Brule. "It'll be some good work done. I said I'd make them pay dear for the death of my man."

At that moment they heard the shrill voice of Jeanlin, which came from above the boilers:

"Hold on! I'll put this one out."

One of the first to enter, he had run among the crowd, delighted with fight, seeking what harm he could do; and the thought came to him to let off the steam. The streams ascended with the violence of flames of fire, the fire boilers were emptied as quick as lightning, hissing in such a terrible manner that their ears nearly split. Everything disappeared in that steam, the red-hot coal became white, the women were no longer more than shadows. The child appeared in the gallery alone, behind that mass of white foam, with a delighted air he contemplated his work, grinning with joy to have thus turned loose that hurricane.

That lasted nearly a quarter of an hour. They threw buckets of water on the smoldering coals so all fears of fire would be removed. But the rage of the crowd did not diminish. Men came down with hammers, after the cables were cut; the women had armed themselves with bars of iron; and they spoke of bursting the generators, breaking the engines and demolishing the mine.

Etienne ran around with Maheu. He began to feel himself carried away with that hot fever of revenge. But he still fought against it, conjuring them to act calmly. Now that the cables were cut, the fires out, the boilers empty, work became impossible. But they would not listen to him, they were going to look for something else to destroy when shouts came from a little low door which was the opening to the ladders.

"Down traitors! . . . Oh! the dirty cowards! Down with them! down with them."

It was the beginning of the workmen's exit from the bottom. The first dazzled by the bright light, afraid of falling in the midst of that howling mob, remained where they were with quivering eyelashes. Then they ran off, seized with fright, trying to reach the road and fly.

"Down with the cowards! down with the false brothers."

All the strikers had run forward. In less than two minutes, not a man remained in the buildings, the five hundred from Montson ranged themselves in two lines, to force the men of Vandame to pass between them. And, as each new miner appeared at the opening with his clothing wet and stained with the black mud of their work, the hooting increased. Then they saw Cheval standing before them.

"Great God! is this the meeting you called us to?"

And they tried to throw themselves on the traitor. What! only the day before he had sworn to be one of them, and now they had found him at the bottom in company with the traitors. This was how he made fun of the people.

"Bring him out! bring him out!"

Cheval, pale with fright, tried to explain himself, but Etienne interrupted him. He was now aroused by the fury of the mob.

"You wanted to be one of us, and so you shall be. Come on out, rascal."

Another clamor drowned his voice. Catherine had just appeared, also dazzled by the bright sun and afraid of falling in the midst of those savages. And, with legs nearly broken from the hundred and two ladders, her hands bleeding, she was gasping for breath, when her mother, on seeing her, threw herself upon her, throwing out her hands.

"Ah! you too, wench. . . . When your mother is dying of hunger you betray her for your lover."

Maheu, to prevent her from hitting the girl, held her hands. But he also reproached the girl, crying at her as loud as the comrades.

The sight of Catherine even exasperated Etienne. He cried:

"Let us go to the other mines! And you shall come with us, too, traitors."

Again a deafening tumult broke forth. Cheval scarcely had time to go to the room and put on his shoes and fling his coat over his frozen shoulders. They dragged him on, forcing him to run among the others. Catherine, distracted, also put on her jacket, and then ran behind her lover. She would not leave him, for they were surely going to kill him.

In a few minutes Jean-Bart was empty. Jeanlin who had found a call-horn was blowing on it as if he was calling the cows. The women Brule, la Levaque, and Moquette ran off together. Other comrades were still arriving, there were almost a thousand now, without order, without chief, running on the road like an overflown stream. The way out was too narrow and fences were broken down. Outside in the strong air the cries seemed still louder.

"To the mines! Down with the traitors! No more work!"

At Jean-Bart a great silence had suddenly fallen. Not a sound was heard. Deneulin went out of the superintendent's room and all alone, sending the others back with a gesture when they would have followed him, he went over the mine. His rage gone he was now very calm but pale. First he stopped at the shaft, and raising his eyes he looked at the cut cables, the

ends of steel hanging useless, the file had done its work, leaving a fresh cut which shone out from the black grease.

Then he went up to the engine and for a long time contemplated the crank stopped in mid air, equal to a large body struck with paralysis; and on touching the already cold metal, which was so cold as to make him shiver, he felt as though he was touching a dead body. Then he went to the boiler-room, walked slowly before the fires which had been put out, and then flooded. He touched the generators with his foot, and they sounded empty, though the steam was still coming from them. It was over. His ruin was complete. Even if he mended the cables; if he again lit the fires, where would he find men to work? He was ruined. And in that certainty of his disaster, he no longer felt a hatred for the miners of Montson. This owner, a brave man, was intelligent enough to see that it was a general fault. They were brutes, without doubt, but brutes who did not know how to read and were dying of hunger.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Across the level plain, all white with the frost, under the pale winter sun, the mob went off, running along the roads and across the beet-fields.

From the Fourche-aux-Bœufs Etienne had taken command of them. Without stopping, he called out his orders, and organized the march. Jeanlin ran on ahead, blowing his horn. In the first ranks were the women, some armed with sticks; la Maheu, with savage eyes, seemed to seek from afar the city of promised justice; old Brule, la Levaque, and Moquette stalked along like soldiers going to war. In case they met the gendarmes, they would see if they would beat back the women. And the men followed in a confused flock, a straggling line which constantly enlarged, armed with bars of iron, led by Levaque, carrying an axe, the edge of which shone in the sun. In the center, Etienne never lost sight of Cheval, whom he forced to walk before him; while Maheu, behind, with

a gloomy air, now and then glanced at Catherine, the only woman among those men. But she was determined to walk near her lover, so that they could do him no harm. Their bare heads were disheveled by the wind; nothing was heard but the sound of their wooden shoes, which was like the gallop of cattle, carried away by the sound of Jeanlin's horn.

All at once, a new cry arose.

"Bread! bread! bread!"

It was noon; the hunger of that six weeks strike had awakened as they ran across those fields. The small crust of bread, eaten in the morning, and the few chestnuts which Moquette had given the women, were not enough, and now hunger was added to their rage.

"To the mines! no more work! bread!"

Etienne, who had refused to eat his share that morning, began to feel a gnawing in his stomach. He did not complain, but every moment he took out his flask and swallowed a small quantity of gin. He was so weak that he could not have gone on without it. Then his cheeks began to burn and a flame lit up his eyes. But he kept his head; he still wished to avoid useless devastation.

As they reached the Joiselle road, a Vandame miner who had joined the band wanted to go to the right, and yelled:

"To Gaston-Marie! we must stop the pumps so that the water will flood Jean-Bart."

The enraged mob had already turned in spite of the appeals of Etienne, who implored them to let that alone. What good would it do to destroy the galleries? that roused his workingman's heart. Maheu also thought it unjust; but the miner still shouted, and Etienne, trying to drown his voice, screamed with all his might.

"To Mison! there are some traitors at the bottom of Mison! . . . to Mison!"

With a gesture he drove the crowd back, while Jeanlin still blew the horn; and Gaston-Marie, for the time at least, was saved.

The five kilometres which separated them from Gaston-Marie were crossed in a quarter of an hour. It was a foot race across the broad plain. The canal on

the side of the plain was covered with ice, and the trees on the bank covered with frost looked like huge candelabra. A small hill hid Montson and Marchiennes, while before them extended a boundless level. When they arrived at the mine they saw an overseer standing near the screening shed to receive them. They all recognized old Quandieu, the oldest overseer in Montson, a venerable man with white skin and hair, who at seventy years of age was a very miracle of good health.

"What do you want here, you mob of mischief makers?" said he, in a voice which was still strong.

The crowd stopped. This was not an owner, but a comrade; and respect for that old workman restrained them.

"There are some men at the bottom," said Etienne. "Make them come out."

"Yes there are some men at the bottom," answered Quandieu; "there are about seventy-five, the others were afraid of you rascals! . . . But I warn you, not one will come out; you can attend to your business with me."

Growls were heard, the men pushed and the women advanced. The overseer quickly stepped forward to bar the door.

Then Maheu interfered.

"Old man it's our right; how can we make the strike general if we do not force our comrades to join us?"

For an instant the old man remained silent. Evidently his ignorance in matters of coalition equaled that of the digger. At length he replied:

"I don't say it's not your right. But I have my orders. . . . I am alone here. The men do not come up until three o'clock, and they shall stay there until then."

His last words were drowned in the shouts. They threatened him with their fists; the women already deafened him; and he felt their hot breaths on his face. But he was courageous; with head erect, showing his large mustache and white hair, he spoke out so distinctly that he was heard above all that uproar.

"No, my God! You shall not pass! . . . As true as the sun shines upon us, I would rather die than let the cables be touched. . . . Do not push any

more, or I'll throw myself in the shaft before your eyes."

The crowd trembled and paused; then they moved back as he continued:

"Don't you understand? I'm only a workman like all of you. They told me to stand guard, and I do so."

His intelligence went no further; this old man well understood his military duty and he straightened himself up and looked at them out of eyes dimmed with a gloomy sadness by reason of the half century spent at the bottom. His comrades watched him moved, having somewhere in them the echo of what he had said; that soldier-like obedience, that devotion and resignation in danger. He believed that they were hesitating and he repeated his words:

"I'll throw myself in the shaft before you."

They turned away and ran off up the road; and then their cries again rang out:

"To the Madeleine! to Crevecœur! no more work! bread! bread!"

But in the madness of the march they began to shove each other. Some one said that Cheval was trying to escape. Etienne caught his arm, threatening to break his back if he attempted any treachery. Cheval struggled and protested violently.

"Why all this? ain't a man free any longer? . . . I'm freezing, and I want to wash myself. Let me alone."

In reality he was suffering from the coal dust which the perspiration had stuck to his skin, and his knit jacket protected him but little.

"Go on; we'll wash you," answered Etienne.

They were still running; at last he turned towards Catherine. It made him desperate to feel her near him, to know that she was so miserable, shivering under her old blouse, and with muddy pants. She must be nearly dead with fatigue. But, all the same, she ran on.

"You can go, if you want to," said he finally.

She did not seem to hear. Her eyes, on meeting those of Etienne, flamed up with reproach. She did not stop. Did he wish her to abandon her man? Sure, Cheval was not very good to her, and beat her sometimes; but he was her man, the one she had accepted,

and it enraged her that all these people were against him; from pride, not tenderness, she would defend him.

"Go away!" said Maheu.

This order from her father made her pause an instant. She trembled, and tears fell from her eyes. But she went forward again and took her old place behind her lover. Then they let her stay.

After following the Joiselle road for some distance, they turned off toward Coagny. Off that way manufacturing chimneys stood out on the flat horizon; some sheds of tarred wood and brick workshops, covered with coal dust, followed each other in rapid succession. From time to time they passed alleys filled with low houses, the Deux-Cent-Vingt, then the Joixante-Seize; and from each one, at the call of the horn, joined in the clamor of the people; families came out, men, women and children, who also fell in behind their comrades. When they arrived at the Madeleine there were quite thirteen hundred of them. The road descended a smooth slope, and the murmuring crowd of strikers was compelled to go over a large square of ground before reaching the mine.

At that moment it was little more than two o'clock, but the overseers, having been warned, had hastened the ascent; and when the mob arrived nearly every one was out of the mine; there only remained in the pit about twenty men, who were soon disembarked from the cage. They followed them, throwing stones after them. Two men were knocked down, another left with them a sleeve of his jacket. This chase after the men saved the materials. They touched neither the cables nor the boilers. Then the crowd pressed on to the next mine.

The Crèvecœur was only five hundred metres from the Madeleine. There the mob also fell on them just as they were leaving the mine. A girl was beaten by the women; the boys were slapped as they went by; the men ran off with their sides black and blue and noses bleeding. And, in the increasing ferocity, that wish for revenge which had turned all their heads, the cries of death to the traitors continued. They tried to cut the cables, but the file did not work; it was too long.

Now that the fever was on them, they would go to extremes.

A tap was broken in the boilers, while bucketsful of water were thrown in the fire, which burst the iron.

Outside, they talked of going to Saint Thomas. That mine was the best disciplined of all. The strike scarcely reached it. Nearly seven hundred men must have gone to work there that morning; and this incensed the mob. They would have a battle with bricks to see who should remain on the ground. But a report was circulated that the gendarmes were at Saint Thomas—those same gendarmes who had been before the alley in the morning, and whom they had mocked. How did they know that? No one could vouch for it, for they had not been there. No matter, they were seized with fear, and decided to go to Feutry-Cantel. So they went, rushing off on the road to that mine, crying, "To Feutry-Cantel! to Feutry-Cantel! The cowards are still there."

Feutry-Cantel was situated about three kilometres off, in the valley of the Scarpe. They were already on the hill near the Platrières, beyond the Baugnies road, when an unknown voice said that the gendarmes were there also. Then, from one end of the line to the other, it was repeated that the gendarmes were there. Their steps slackened; a panic was coming on them across the country, silent, from the stoppage of work which they had brought on. Why had they not yet come across the gendarmes? This impunity troubled them with the thought of repression which they felt was coming.

Without their knowing why, a new order was sent along the line.

"To la Victoire! to la Victoire!"

Their were no gendarmes there. All were reassured and, turning round, they descended the hill toward Montoise, cutting across the fields to again reach the Joiselle road. A railroad obstructed their way; they crossed it by breaking down the fences. Now, they were again approaching Montson; a small hill was before them, while in the distance were seen the black houses of Marchiennes.

This time they had a run of five long kilometres. They were so excited that their fatigue was not felt,

and they were unaware that their feet were bruised and frost-bitten. The crowd was always increased by the comrades picked up in the roads and alleys. When they had passed over the canal by the Magache bridge, and had arrived at la Victoire they numbered two thousand But three o'clock had struck; the men had come up; not a man remained at the bottom. Vain threats were uttered, but they were only able to drive off with their brickbats the workmen who had come to take the place of the gang that had been relieved. These men ran away, and the deserted mine was in their possession. In their rage at not having one of the traitors to beat, they attacked the mine. The grudge which had been slowly gathering in their hearts burst forth. After years and years of hunger they would have their revenge in destroying all.

Behind a shed Etienne perceived some loaders who were filling a coal car.

"Will you go away!" cried he. "Not a piece shall be moved."

Under his orders a hundred of the strikers ran forward; and the men had only time to save themselves. The horses were unharnessed and allowed to run away; while the cars were upset and broken.

Levaque, with violent blows of his axe, attacked the trestles which held up the bridges. Then the idea occurred to tear up the car tracks. Soon the entire band was at this work. Maheu tore up the flagstones with his bar of iron, which served him as a crowbar.

In the meantime old Brule led the women to the lamp room, where they broke up the lamps, la Maheu and la Levaque assisting. They were all soaked with oil, and Moquette wiped her hand on her skirt laughing at being so dirty. Jeanlin had emptied a lamp down her back.

But this vengeance gave them nothing to eat. And the cries broke forth once more:

"Bread! bread! bread!"

At la Victoire an old overseer had left his bucket behind him. Without doubt, taken with fear, he had abandoned the building in haste. When the women returned and the men had finished destroying the road, they grasped the bucket; the top was removed at once.

But they found no bread; there were only two pieces of raw meat, and some potatoes. But in looking around they found fifty bottles of gin, which disappeared like a drop of water drank up by the sand.

Etienne, who had emptied his flask, was able to refill it. Little by little a terrible intoxication, the intoxication of hunger had made his eyes blood shot, and, like a wolf, his teeth shone out between his pale lips. Suddenly he perceived that Cheval had run away in the midst of the tumult. He swore, and some of the men ran and brought back the fugitive, whom they found with Catherine concealed behind a lot of wood.

"So you're afraid of compromising yourself, are you? you rascal!" yelled Etienne. "In the forest didn't you speak of the engineers' strike and say it would stop the engines? And now you try to get out of our way? . . . Well; we're going to return to Gaston-Marie, and you can break that engine yourself. Yes, you shall break it."

He was drunk, he turned himself and his men against the very engine which he had saved some hours before.

"To Gaston-Marie! to Gaston-Marie!"

Every one applauded him, and Cheval was seized by the shoulders, dragged and violently pushed along, while he still asked that he be allowed to wash.

"Go way now," cried Maheu to Catherine, who had again begun to run.

She threw angry looks at her father and continued to run on.

The band again went over the smooth plain and then through the long straight roads spreading out over the country. It was four o'clock; the sun was going down, leaving upon the frozen ground the shadows of the mob with their furious gestures.

On passing Montson, they went further up the Joiselle road; and, to avoid the turn at Fourche-aux-Boeufs, they passed the walls of Piolaine. The Gregoires had just started out to call on some friends, before going to dine with the Hennebeaus, where they were to meet Cecile. The property seemed asleep with its avenue of limes and its deserted garden and orchard. Everything was quiet in the house, even the windows being closed; and from that profound silence

arose a suggestion of happiness and well being, the thought of good beds, a good table, and the joy, discreet and without luxury, in which the lives of the owners were passed.

Without pausing the crowd cast threatening looks over the iron railings, along the protecting walls, and even on the white front of the house. The cries again commenced:

"Bread! bread! bread!"

The dogs alone replied by ferocious barks; they were a pair of large Danish dogs, having a tawny coat, who stood erect with open jaws. Behind a closed shutter there were the two maids, Melaine, the cook, and Honorine, the chambermaid; who, attracted by the cry, turned pale when they saw those savages. They fell on their knees; they thought they were going to be killed on hearing a stone, only one, break a pane of glass in a neighboring window. This was a trick of Jeanlin's; he had made a sling with a piece of cord and was only firing a salute to the Gregoires as he passed their house. He had already begun blowing his horn again, and the cry grew lower as the crowd moved off in the distance.

"Bread! bread! bread!"

On arriving at Gaston-Marie, with a still larger body of two thousand five hundred enraged men, they broke everything around them, with the increased force of a falling stone. Some gendarmes had passed there an hour before; but they had gone on to Saint Thomas, misinformed by the peasants; and in their haste they had not even taken the precaution to leave a squad of men to guard this mine. In less than a quarter of an hour the fires were destroyed, the boilers emptied, and the buildings overrun and devastated. But it was especially the engine that they attacked. It was not sufficient for it to stop with the last expiring breath of steam; but they threw themselves upon it as on a living person, whose life they sought.

"You shall strike the first blow!" said Etienne, putting a hammer in the hand of Cheval. "Come on, now, you swore with the others."

Cheval tremblingly drew back and the hammer fell; but his comrades, without waiting, beat the engine with blows of their iron bars, with bricks and everything

they could lay their hands on; some even knocked on it with sticks. The screws were loosened, the pieces of steel and brass were knocked off. A heavy blow of an axe, given with all the strength of their strongest man, broke to pieces the iron tank of the engine, and, as the water escaped and it became empty, there came forth a rattling sound like a person in his death agony.

That was the end; the mob went outside, crazy, running behind Etienne, who had not yet let go of Cheval.

"Death to the traitor! To the shaft! to the shaft!"

The miserable man became livid, stammering some explanations, and then going back to the stupid idea that he must wash himself.

"Wait, if that's what makes you uncomfortable," said la Levaque. "Why, here are the buckets."

There was a pond there, made from the water which ran from the engine. It was white with a thick layer of ice. They pushed him to it, broke the ice and forced him to stick his head into the cold water.

"Dive in now," said old Brule. "My God! if you don't get in we'll put you in. . . . And now you shall drink some; yes, yes, like a beast with its nose in the trough."

He was forced to lie down and drink. They all laughed with the unconscious laugh of cruelty. One woman pulled his ears; another threw a handful of frozen mud in his face. His old jacket came apart. And, almost wild, he fell upon them, giving blows right and left to get away.

Maheu had pushed him, la Maheu was among the most violent; both were satisfying the old grudge they had against him; and Moquette, who usually was good friends with all her old lovers, was so enraged at this one that she did everything she could to him.

Then Etienne cried out:

"You have all done enough now. I want to have my revenge."

And turning to Cheval:

"If you wish we'll fight it out together."

His hands closed, his eyes were lit up with the fury of a homicide, as if the drink which he had taken had made him wish to murder.

"Are you ready? One of us shall fall here. . . . Give him a knife. I have mine."

Catherine, exhausted and in fear, looked at him and she remembered his confidences that first day when they had talked of his wish to kill as soon as he drank. She ran forward, and held him back with both hands, crying to him, filled with anger.

"Let him alone! This is too much. You want to kill him now that he can't stand up."

She turned toward her father and mother; she turned toward all the others.

"You are cowards! cowards! Kill me too. I'll mash your faces, if you touch him again. Oh! you cowards."

And she stood before her man and defended him, forgetting the blow, forgetting the life of misery, roused at the thought that she belonged to him, and that it was her shame, when he was treated thus.

Etienne, under the taunts of the girl, had become very pale. At first he would have liked to strangle her; then, after wiping his face, he said to Cheval in the midst of great silence:

"She's right. That's enough. Go away."

Cheval at once began to run, and Catherine started after him. The crowd watched them disappear at a bend in the road; only la Maheu complained.

"You're wrong; you ought to have kept him. He'll surely go and play traitor again."

But the crowd had resumed the march. Five o'clock sounded; the sun, bright red, was at the edge of the horizon, casting blood-red stains over that immense plain. A pedler who was passing told them that the dragoons were coming over the Crevècœur road. Then they turned back, and the order ran:

"To Montson! to the directors! Bread! bread! bread!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

M. Hennebeau had placed himself at the window of his office to see the departure of the carriage which was taking his wife to breakfast at Marchiennes, after

stopping at the Gregoires and at the Deneulins to take up the young ladies. He had watched Mégrel for an instant, on horseback, trotting near the carriage door; then he had returned and quietly seated himself at his desk. With neither his wife nor his nephew to cheer him with their noisy bustle, the house seemed empty. The coachman was driving Madame; Rose, the new chamber-maid, had a holiday until five o'clock; and there only remained Hypolite, the valet-de-chambre, dragging his slippers through the rooms, and the cook, entirely absorbed since daybreak in the dinner which his masters were giving that evening. Therefore M. Hennebeau promised himself a good day's work in the profound silence of the deserted house.

Towards nine o'clock, notwithstanding that he had received orders to admit no one, Hypolite took the liberty of announcing Dansaert, who said he brought serious news. It was only then the director learned of the meeting held the previous evening in the forest of Vandame; and the details were so minute, that he listened to him with a feeble, unconscious smile, thinking of the amours of la Pieronne, so well known that two or three anonymous letters every week denounced to him the wanderings of the master overseer. Evidently the husband had talked; he had strong suspicions. He embraced this opportunity, and let it be understood that he knew all, but contented himself with recommending prudence, for fear of a scandal, which would force him to act. Startled by this remonstrance in the midst of his report, Dansaert denied, stammered out excuses, while his large nose confessed the crime by its sudden redness. For the rest, he did not insist, glad to get off so cheaply; for usually the director displayed the implacable severity of a pure man, as soon as an employe amused himself with a pretty girl in a mine. Conversation continued on the strike; that meeting in the forest was as yet but the blustering of braggarts, no serious danger threatened. In any case the alleys would not stir that day, because of the respectful fear with which they had been impressed by the military display that morning.

When M. Hennebeau found himself alone again, he was, nevertheless, on the point of sending a dispatch to

the Prefect. The fear of giving an unnecessary sign of uneasiness restrained him. He had not yet forgiven himself for having failed to scent it; for having said everywhere, for having even written to the owners, that the strike would not last a fortnight at the most. To his great surprise it had gone on for nearly two months; and he was in despair about it; he felt himself daily growing weaker, compromised, forced to seek for some brilliant stroke if he wished to regain the favor of the managers. He had just asked for precise orders in the event of a dispute. The answer was delayed; he was expecting it by the afternoon courier. And he said to himself that it would be time enough then to issue telegrams for the military occupation of the mines, if such should be the advice of those gentlemen. In his opinion, it would certainly be a battle ending in bloodshed and death; and a proportionate responsibility troubled him, in spite of his habitual energy.

Up to eleven o'clock he worked quietly without any other noise in the dead house than Hypolite's waxing stick far off in a room at the other end. But, one following the other, he received two dispatches, the first announcing the invasion of Jean-Bart by the band from Montson, the second telling of the cables cut, fires put out, in fact all the vandalism. He did not understand. What were the strikers doing at Deneulin's, instead of attacking one of the company's mines? As for the rest, the pillaging of Vandame was of no consequence; it would ripen the plan for conquest which he was meditating. And at noon he lunched, all alone in the vast dining-room, served in silence by the servant whose steps he did not even hear.

This silence deepened his preoccupation; he felt himself chilled to the heart when an overseer, running at full speed, was introduced and told him of the march of the mob upon Miron. Just as he was finishing his coffee a telegram informed him that la Madeleine and Crevecœur were menaced in their turn. Then his perplexity became extreme. He expected the courier at two o'clock; ought he to ask for troops immediately? Would it not be better to wait a little longer, so as not to take any action before knowing the orders of the managers? He returned to his office; he wished to

read a note which he had charged Mégrel to write for the Prefect the previous evening. As he could not find it he thought the young man might have left it in his room, where he often wrote at night before going to bed. And without coming to any decision, thinking only about this paper, he went up to the room above to look for it.

On entering it, M. Hennebeau was surprised; the room had not been put in order, doubtless from forgetfulness or from idleness on the part of Hypolite, left alone by the absence of the maid servant. A moist warmth prevailed there, the inclosed heat of a whole night, aggravated by the open register of the furnace; it attacked his nostrils, and he suffocated with a penetrating perfume which he thought was the odor from the numerous bottles of perfume on the toilet table. The room was in great disorder, clothes scattered about, wet towels thrown over the backs of the chairs, and the bed unmade, one sheet drawn off dragging on the carpet. At first he hardly noticed all this; he had gone to a little table encumbered with papers, and was looking for the missing note. Twice he examined the papers, one by one; certainly it was not there. Where could that idiot Paul have hid it.

As M. Hennebeau returned to the middle of the room giving a *coup d' œil* to each piece of furniture, he perceived in the open bed a sharp point which shone like a spark. He approached mechanically and put his hand in. There, under two folds of the sheet, bruised, crushed, was a small gold flacon. He immediately recognized it as a flacon of Madame Hennebeau's; the flacon of ether which never left her. But he did not yet understand how that article could have been in Paul's bed. Suddenly he became frightfully pale; his wife had been there.

"Pardon," murmured Hypolite's voice on the other side of the door, "I saw Monsieur go up."

He had come in, the sight of the room filled him with consternation.

"My God! it's true, the room is not done up! And Rose went out leaving all the work on my back."

M. Hennebeau had hidden the flacon in his hand, clenching it tightly.

"What do you want?"

"Monsieur, there's another man. . . . He comes from Crevecœur; there is a letter."

"Very well! leave me, tell him to wait."

His wife had been there! When he had secured the bolt, he looked at the flacon, which had left a red mark on his flesh. Suddenly he saw, he understood; this game had been carried on at his house for two months past. He remembered his old suspicion. Yes! it was his wife who had been there!

Falling on a chair in front of the bed at which he was looking fixedly, he remained for long minutes as if stunned. A noise aroused him; they were knocking at the door, trying to open it. Again he recognized Hypolite's voice. "Monsieur. . . . Ah! Monsieur has locked himself in. . . ."

"What is it now?"

"It seems urgent, the workmen are breaking everything. Two other men are below. These are dispatches also."

"Let me have peace! In a moment!"

The thought that Hypolite would himself have discovered the flacon, if he had made the bed in the morning, ran through him like a chill. And besides, he must know; he must have often seen the same traces of her presence. If he seemed eager to come up, it was from malice. Perhaps he had remained with his ear at the door, enlivened by the disgrace of his master. Then, M. Hennebeau was motionless again. He again sunk on a chair, looking ever at the bed. The long suffering of the past came before him; his marriage with this woman; their immediate discord in mind and body; the lovers she had had beyond a doubt; the one whom he had tolerated during ten years, as we tolerate the depraved taste of a sick person. Then came their arrival at Montson; a foolish hope of curing her; months of languishing, of drowsy exile; the approach of old age which would return her to him at last. Then their nephew appeared; that Paul to whom she became a mother, to whom she spoke of her dead heart, buried under the ashes forever. And, imbecile husband, he foresaw nothing; he adored this woman who belonged to him, whom other men had had, whom he alone could

not have; he adored her with a blind passion, even to falling on his knees, if she would only take him after the others! And after the others, she took this child!

The stroke of a bell in the distance, at this moment, made M. Hennebeau shiver. He recognized it as the signal given by his orders on the arrival of the courier. He rose, he spoke aloud in a stream of coarse words with which his aching throat was bursting.

"Ah! I don't care for their dispatches and their letters!"

Then he was seized with rage. He wanted a sewer to push in all these impurities with his heel. This woman was shameless. He sought for uncoined words to apply to her. Suddenly the idea of the marriage which she was so tranquilly arranging between Cecile and Paul completed his madness. There was then no longer even any passion, any jealousy at the bottom of this changeful sensuality? At this hour it was only a plaything, a need of a lover-like recreation taken as the usual dessert. He blamed her for everything, almost exonerating the child whom she had bitten in this reawakened appetite as one bites the first ripe fruit stolen on the road. Whom would she eat, how far would she fall when she could no longer have complaisant nephews practical enough to accept in their family, board, bed, and wife? There was a timid scraping at the door, and the voice of Hypolite whispered through the key-hole:

"Monsieur, the courier. . . . and M. Dansaert has also returned, and says that they are killing each other. . . ."

"My God! I'm going down!"

What should he do to them? Drive them out on their return from Marchiennes like two unclean beasts whom he would no longer have under his roof. He would arm himself with a cudgel and would command them to carry elsewhere the poison of their association.

It was from their sighs, their united respirations, that the heaviness of the warm moisture of the room arose, the penetrating odor which had suffocated him. It was the scent of musk which his wife's person exhaled, another perverse taste, the vulgar need of strong perfumes. Every article in the room seemed to bear witness

to the crime. In a rage at his own impotence, he threw himself on the bed, beating it with both fists.

But suddenly he thought he heard Hypolite coming up again. Shame stopped him. He remained there a moment longer, out of breath, wiping his forehead, calming his fast-beating heart. Standing before a mirror, he looked at his face, so discomposed that he could not recognize it, a prey to sorrow and fear. Then, when he had seen it grow gradually calmer, by a strong effort of will, he slowly descended.

Below, five messengers were standing, without counting Dansaert. All brought him tidings of increasing gravity respecting the march of the strikers around the mines; and the master overseer related to him at length what had taken place at Miron, saved by the noble conduct of old Quandieu. He listened; he shook his head, but he understood nothing; his mind was upstairs in the room. At last, he dismissed them. He said he was going to take necessary measures. When he found himself alone again, seated before his desk, he appeared to doze, his head between his hands, his eyes hidden. His courier was there, and he decided to examine there the expected letter, the reply of the owners, the lines of which danced at first. Nevertheless, he at last understood that those gentlemen wanted a collision. True, they did not tell him to make matters worse; but they let it be seen that outbreaks would hasten the end of the strike, by provoking energetic repression.

He hesitated no longer; he sent out dispatches in all directions to the prefect of Lille, to the corps of troops at Douai, to the gendarmerie of Marchiennes. It was a relief to him; he had to shut himself up at home; he even gave it out that he was suffering from gout. And all the afternoon he hid himself at the back of his office, receiving no one, contenting himself with reading the dispatches and letters which continued to rain in upon him. Thus from afar, he followed the mob from the Madeleine to Crevecœur, from Crevecœur to la Victoire, from la Victoire to Gaston-Marie. From another quarter, he received information of the fight of the gendarmes and of the dragoons, wandering on the road, always turning their backs on the attacked mines.

They might throttle each other and destroy everything; he had again put his head down between his hands, his fingers over his eyes; he was wrapped in the profound silence of the house, which nothing broke except the occasional rattle of the sauce pans in the kitchen by the cook, in vigorous action before the fire, preparing her dinner for the evening. Twilight already darkened the room; it was five o'clock, when a tumult made M. Hennebeau tremble, dizzy, inert, his elbows still in his papers. He thought it was the two wretches returning. But the tumult increased; a terrible cry arose at the moment he was approaching the window.

"Bread! bread! bread!"

It was the strikers who were invading Montson, whilst the gendarmes, believing in an attack on le Voreux, galloped, with their backs turned, to occupy that mine. Exactly at the distance of two kilometres from the first houses, a little below the meeting of the highway and the road to Vandame, Madame Hennebeau and the young ladies had just witnessed the passing of the band. The day at Marchiennes had passed gaily; a pleasant breakfast at the house of the director of les Forges; then an interesting visit to the workshops and to the glass-works in the vicinity to fill up the afternoon; and, as they were returning at last in the clear evening light of a fine winter's day, Cecile was taken with a fancy to drink a cup of milk when passing near a little farm skirting the road. All then got out of the landau, Megrel gallantly jumping from his horse; while the peasant woman, bewildered by this gay company, rushed in saying she would spread a table-cloth before waiting on them. But Lucie and Jeanne wished to see the milking; they even went to the stable with their cups; they had a partie champêtre of it, laughing much at the litter in which they found themselves.

Madame Hennebeau, with her complacent matronly air, was drinking with the tips of her lips, when a strange noise outside made her uneasy.

"What is that?"

The stable, built on the edge of the road, had a large door for the carts, for it served at the same time as a barn for hay.

Already the young girls, stretching out their heads,

were astonished as they distinguished to the left a black wave, a howling crowd streaming from the Vandame road.

"The devil!" muttered Megrel; "are our brawlers going to end by getting angry?"

"Perhaps it's the coalmen again," said the peasant woman. "This is the second time they have passed. Things don't go well it appears; they are the masters of the country."

Each word was carefully spoken; she watched the effect on their faces, and when she saw the terror of all, the profound anxiety into which this incident had thrown them, she hastened to add:

"Oh, the rascals! the rascals!"

Megrel, seeing that it was too late to reënter the carriage and reach Montson, ordered the coachman to bring the landau quickly into the farm-yard, where the horses remained concealed behind a barn. He tied his own horse under this barn, a boy having hitherto held it by the bridle. When he returned he found his aunt and the young girls bewildered, ready to follow the peasant, who proposed that they should take refuge at her house. But it was his opinion that they were safer where they were; that no one would come to look for them among this hay. The cart door, however, shut very badly, and there were such crevices between its rotten planks that from the interior everything that passed on the road could be seen.

"Come! courage!" said he, trying to turn the adventure into a jest. "We'll sell our lives dearly."

His laugh increased their fear; the noise grew louder; nothing was seen yet, but on the empty road, a stormy wind seemed rising already, like the sudden gusts which precede great tempests.

"No, no, I don't want to look," said Cecile, throwing herself in the hay, her hands over her eyes, as she would cover them to shut out the lightning. Madame Hennebeau, very pale, enraged with these people who again spoiled one of her pleasures, kept herself in the back ground with a look of disgust; while Lucie and Jeanne, in spite of their trembling, kept an eye held to a crack so as not to lose anything that was going on. The

thundering roll drew nearer; the ground shook, and Jeanlin was the first to appear, blowing his horn.

"Take your smelling bottles, the riff-raff of the people are passing," said Megrel, whose republican proclivities induced him to jest with the ladies about the canaille.

But his joke was lost like a straw in the whirlwind of gesticulations and cries. The women had appeared; nearly a thousand women, with streaming hair, disheveled by the race, in rags showing the bare skin, half-naked women tired of giving birth to children only to see them die of hunger. Some held their little ones in their arms; raised them; waved them about like a flag of mourning and vengeance. Others, younger, with the swollen throats of warriors, brandished sticks; while the old ones, frightful-looking, howled so loud that the cords of their scraggy necks seemed to be breaking. Then the men streamed along; two thousand furious men, errand-boys, miners, repairers, a compact mass rolling on in a single serried column, crowded together in such a manner that neither the faded breeches nor the old woolen jackets could be distinguished, all being uniform in the blackness of dirt. Their eyes were burning, the openings only of their dark mouths were seen, singing the Marseillaise, the verses being lost in a confused roar, accompanied by the clattering of their sabots on the hard ground. Over the heads of the people was carried on high an axe, as the standard of the people, and in the clear heavens the sharp blade shone out like a guillotine.

"What atrocious faces!" said Madame Hennebeau with a shudder.

Megrel forced himself to laugh again; but even he was growing frightened. He muttered between his closed teeth:

"The devil take me if I know one of them. Where do these ruffians come from?"

And in reality, rage, hunger, these months of suffering and the mad tramps around the mines, had extended their jaws like beasts, entirely changing the once placid faces of the coal men of Montson. The sun was setting; the last rays of a sombre red illumined the plain. The road seemed filled with blood and the women and

men continued to pass, dyed like butchers in the midst of slaughter.

"Oh! it is superb!" said Lucie and Jeanne in a low voice, their artists' taste aroused by that horrible splendor.

Still, they trembled; they stepped back near Mme. Hennebeau, who had become so weak that she laid down upon a trough. The thought that only a look through the cracked door would be enough for them all to be slaughtered, made her shiver. Megrel felt himself growing pale; though ordinarily courageous, he was now seized with a fright superior to his will. Cecile, still in the hay, never moved. And the others, in spite of their desire to turn away their eyes, could not do so and still kept on looking.

It was the red morn of a revolution which will carry all before it in a bloody night before the end of the century. Yes, one evening the people let loose, unbridled, will run thus on the roads and spill the blood of the citizens; they will carry their heads on poles and scatter the gold from their safes. The women will shriek; the men will have their wolf-like jaws open to bite. Yes, there would be the same rags, the same thunder of heavy shoes, the same terrible crowd of dirty skins and infected breaths, killing the old people in their savage pushing. Houses would be burned; not a wall of the cities would remain; they would return to to the wild life of the woods after great feasting; when the poor in the night would beat down the women and empty the cellars of the rich. There would be nothing left—not a cent—of the great fortunes; it would be like a new land. Yes, it was these things which passed on the road like a force of nature, and they received the terrible truth in their faces.

A great cry was heard above the Marseillaise:

"Bread! bread! bread!"

Megrel was still pale. Lucie and Jeanne pressed closer to Mme. Hennebeau whose limbs were growing weak. Was it that evening even that the old society trembled? What they next saw stupefied them. The mob passed on until none were left, but the last few ranks, when Moquette appeared. She was lost; she watched for the rich people behind the gates of their

gardens, at the windows of their houses; and when she discovered them, not being able to spit in their faces, she did whatever she could to express her contempt.

The crowd went off towards Montson, and when the carriage was brought out the coachman did not wish to take upon himself the risk to drive back Mme. Hennebeau and the young ladies, for fear the strikers still held possession of the roads.

"We must return, for dinner will be waiting for us," said Mme. Hennebeau, out of temper with herself, exasperated at her fright. Those dirty workmen might have chosen some other day than the one on which she had guests for dinner.

Lucie and Jeanne were busy pulling Cecile from the hay. She did not wish to come out, as she thought the savages were still passing. At length they all took their places in the carriage. Megrel jumped on his horse and he thought to pass by the lane to Requillart.

"Go slowly," said he to the coachman, "the road is in a terrible condition. If there is any one near the house you can stop by the old mine and we can go through the little door of the garden, while you can put up the horses and carriage at an inn."

They started, the mob at a distance were now coming from Montson. Everyone was becoming frightened at them, and the notary was especially alarmed, for he had received an anonymous letter informing him that a barrel of powder was buried in his cellar, all ready to blow him up, if he did not declare himself in favor of the people.

When the Gregoires came to the house to pay a call, this letter was discussed and laughed over, and when the mob invaded the house, they peeped from the curtains refusing to admit that they feared any danger; it would all end peaceably, they said. Five o'clock struck; but they were compelled to wait until the road was clear before going to meet Cecile at Hennebeau's. In Montson no one else seemed to feel so confident as they; doors and windows were fastened; frightened people were running to and fro; and across the street Maigrat was closing up his store with heavy iron bars, so pale and so trembling that his little weak wife was obliged to fasten the bolts.

A cry rang out; the mob had stopped before the director's house.

"Bread! bread! bread!"

M. Hennebeau was standing at the window of his office, when Hypolite entered and closed the shutters, for fear the window panes would be broken by the stones. He shut all the windows of the ground floor; then passed to the first story above and one by one the shutters were heard flying together. Unhappily, the kitchen windows would not shut, and the fire and bright sauce-pans shone out upon the road.

M. Hennebeau, who wished to see, ascended to the top of the house and entered Paul's room, and from behind the window blinds he watched the crowd. But he glanced round that room; it had all been put in order, and, as he looked, the anger of the morning gradually passed away. What good would it do to make a scandal? Nothing was changed with him; his wife had simply another lover; what difference did it make if she had chosen him from among her husband's relatives; it was only an affair calling for a little more contempt from him. A dreadful bitterness filled him that he should still adore that wretched woman.

Under the window the yells had burst out with increased violence.

"Bread! bread! bread!"

"Fools!" said M. Hennebeau, between his teeth.

He heard them abusing him in reference to his large appointments. The women had perceived the kitchen and a storm of imprecations followed for the cook, who was among the greasy sauce pans.

"Bread! bread! bread!"

"Fools," repeated M. Hennebeau. "Am I happy?"

A fierce anger was arising against those people who could not understand. He would have given them all he had to have been without regrets. Yes, his luxury, his education, his home, the directorship, all would have been willingly given up, if he could but enjoy the wedded life of the poorest of those miserable creatures.

But the shouts still rang out:

"Bread! bread! bread!"

Then he became exasperated, he cried furiously in the noise:

"Bread! does that suffice fools?"

His entire life arose before him. Because one had bread is no sign that he was happy. Who was the idiot that said wealth brought happiness? Those revolutionist dreamers could demolish society and build another. They could not add to the joys of humanity, they could not take away from man a sorrow, by cutting off for each one his slice of bread. Even that would increase the unhappiness of the earth, and make the very dogs howl in despair. No, the only good thing was not to be; or if one did exist, then to be a tree, a stone, or better still, a grain of sand which cannot bleed under the heel of the passer by.

And, in his anguish, tears filled his eyes and then rolled down his cheeks. Twilight was settling down on the road, when the stones began to rain against the front of the house. Without anger now against those furious people, enraged only by the sharp wound in his own heart, he continued to murmur, amid his tears:

"The fools! the fools!"

But the hungry cry still rang out, a tempestuous yell, overpowering everything:

"Bread! bread! bread!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ETIENNE, whom Catherine's slap had sobered, ran on ahead of his comrades. But as he ordered them on toward Montson, another voice within him cried, "Why all this?" How was it that, when he had started for Jean-Bart, intending to act calmly, and, if possible, prevent a disaster, he had finished the day with violence and by besieging the director's house?

When the mob spoke of going to the yards of the company and destroying everything, he shouted, "Stop!" Now that the stones had already begun to deface the front of the house, he asked himself—without finding an answer—upon what legitimate prey he could set his men, in order to avoid greater misfortune. He was alone, powerless in the middle of the road, when some one called him. It was a workman standing on the

threshold of the saloon Tison, the proprietress of which had hastily fastened up the shutters, but left the door open.

"Come in, we're all here."

When he recognized Jouvarine, Etienne entered. Thirty men and women, most of them from the alley of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, who came to this saloon every night and morning to get the news of the strike, had taken refuge there at the approach of the mob. Zacharie occupied one table with his wife, Philomène, and his his friend Moquet. At another Pierron and his wife sat with their faces hid. No one was drinking, they simply came there to hide themselves.

"This is senseless," said Jouvarine, as he lit a cigarette. "I knew you would wear yourself out without doing any good. . . . A little cask of powder thrown in that house would have done more good than all this noise."

But Etienne was not listening to him. He had seen Rasseneur standing against the counter, and, as he turned round at once to go back into the road, the latter said:

"The sight of me annoys you, does it not? I told you annoyances would begin. Now, when you demand bread, they will give you lead."

Then Etienne stepped back towards him, answering:

"What annoys me is the comrades who stand by with folded arms and watch us risking our lives. And I say this for you also, Jouvarine, for you annoy me, too, with your talk about destroying all when you would not hurt a fly."

The engineer smiled tranquilly, showing his sharp little teeth.

"Oh! your affairs are none of my business."

"Your idea is to keep right on in this foolishness, then?" said Rassanuer.

"My idea is to stick to my comrades, and, if need be, to die with them."

And the young man went out again desperate, ready to die.

In the road he met three children throwing stones. He gave them a hard kick, telling them to stop, it did no good to break windows.

It was Bebert and Lydic who had just met Jeanlin, who was learning to handle his sling with dexterity. They were all throwing stones and betting as to who could do the most damage. Lydic had just cut a woman's head, and the two boys roared with laughter, while Bonnemort and Moque were seated on a log watching them. The former had with difficulty dragged himself along all this distance on his swollen legs.

They no longer paid any attention to Etienne. In spite of his order, the stones continued to fly; he was astonished and frightened before these brutes unmuzzled by him, so slow to be moved, but at last terrible with a ferocious tenacity in their rage. All the old fiery blood was there, which, at first slow and quiet, it had taken months to excite, but, after it was stirred up they threw themselves into the most abominable excesses, caring for nothing. He fought with Levaque trying to snatch his axe from him; he could not restrain the Maheus, who were throwing stones with both hands. The women especially frightened him, la Levaque, Moquette and the others, showing their teeth and nails; they howled like female dogs under the guidance of old Brule who had become their leader.

But there was a sudden pause; the surprise of a moment caused a little suspension of hostilities, which Etienne with all his shouting could not obtain. The Gregoires had decided to take leave of the notary and start across the road to the director's house; and they seemed so peaceable, so smiling, they had so much the air of believing it all a joke on the part of their fierce miners, whose patience had nourished them for a century, that the mob, astonished, overwhelmed, ceased throwing their stones, for fear of hitting that old gentleman and lady, who, they believed, had fallen from the sky. They allowed them to enter the garden, ascend the door steps, and knock at the barricaded door, which the occupants within seemed in no haste to open. Just then the chambermaid, Rose, returning from her day out, smiled at the furious workmen, all of whom she knew, as she was from Montson. And she, by pounding on the door with her fist, compelled Hypolite to open it half way. It was time, for the Gregoires had but just disappeared within, when the

shower of stones again commenced. Recovering from its surprise the mob clamored still louder:

"Death to the aristocracy; long live the socialists!"

Rose continued to laugh, and standing in the hall she said to the cook:

"They're not bad; I know them."

M. Gregoire hung his hat on the rack and, when he had assisted his wife to take off her heavy cloth mantle, he said:

"No doubt in their hearts there is no malice. When they have had enough of it they will go and endure once more."

At this moment M. Hennebeau came down from the top of the house. He had been watching the scene and he now came to receive his guests with his usual manner, cold and polite. The pallor of his face alone showed the tears that he had shed. The man was sunk out of sight; there now only remained the engineer, the correct administrator, determined to fulfill his duty.

"The ladies have not returned yet," he said.

For the first time the Gregoires felt uneasy. Cecile not there yet! How could she enter if the jokes of those miners should be prolonged?

"I have thought of having the house cleared," said M. Hennebeau. "But the worst of it is I am alone here and I do not know where to send the servant to bring me four men and a corporal, who would soon clear out this rabble."

Rose, who had been forgotten, again murmured:

"Oh! Monsieur, they are not bad."

The director shook his head as the tumult increased outside and the stones were heard cracking against the house.

"I have no grudge against them. I know very well how things have gone on; but if they were not so stupid they would see that we are excited by their unhappiness. But I wish to be quiet. Just think, they tell me the country is full of gendarmes, and yet, since morning, I have not been able to find one."

He interrupted himself, and, standing before Madame Gregoire, said, with rather stiff politeness:

"I pray you, Madame, do not remain here. Go into

the salon, where, though it is not yet night, we shall be obliged to light the lamps."

But the cook was in despair; he was waiting for a pastry cook from Marchiennes, who was to make the vol-au-vent and all the dessert; he would not be reponsible for the dinner if he had to make them himself. Perhaps the baskets had been stolen by those people. At any rate, he would rather throw his dinner in the fire than have it a failure on account of this riot.

"Have a little patience," said M. Hennebeau; "nothing is lost yet; the pastry cook may come."

As he turned toward Madame Gregoire, holding open the door of the salon, he was surprised to see sitting on a bench in the hall, a man whom he had not distinguished until then, on account of the increased darkness. He recognized him, and cried:

"Why, it's you, Maigrat. What is the matter?"

Maigrat arose, and his face appeared still fatter, but very pale from fright. He had slipped into the director's house, to claim help and protection, if they should attack his store.

"You see that I am also threatened, and I have no one," answered M. Hennebeau. "You would have done better to have remained at home to protect your goods."

"But I have put up the iron bars and left my wife there."

The director grew impatient, without trying to conceal his contempt. That delicate creature was a fine guard.

"I advise you to return home at once, and try to defend yourself, for they are again crying for bread. Listen."

The cries had began again and Maigrat thought he heard his name. Then he became almost wild. It was no longer possible to return; they would cut him in pieces. But, on the other hand, the thought of his ruin troubled him. He remained with his face pressed close to the glass pane of the door, perspiring, trembling, watching the riot; but the Gregoires decided to go into the salon.

Quietly, M. Hennebeau tried to do the honors. But he vainly begged his guests to be seated; the closed and

barricaded room, lit by two lamps although it was yet day, seemed filled with fear at each new clamor outside. They talked of nothing but the riot. The director was astonished at not having been warned; but then, the police force was so badly kept up; he was especially angered at Rasseneur, whose evil influence he said he recognized. However, the gendarmes were sure to come, it was impossible that they would abandon them in this manner. As for the Gregoires, they only thought of their daughter, the poor darling was so easily frightened! perhaps before this, on account of the danger, the carriage had returned to Marchiennes. They waited another quarter of an hour, unnerved by the noise from the road and by the stones beating from time to time on the closed shutters, sounding like drums. The situation was becoming intolerable; M. Hennebeau was speaking of going out and chasing the brawlers away himself, and then going to meet the carriage, when Hypolite ran into the salon, crying:

"Monsieur! monsieur! here is madame; they are killing madame."

As Megrel feared, the carriage had not been able to pass through the narrow road of Requillart in the midst of those threatening crowds. Then he thought they could walk the hundred metres which separated them from the house and enter by the little gate opening into the garden, which was near the servants' quarters; the gardener would hear them and open the gate. At first the plan had worked splendidly, Madame Hennebeau and the young ladies were already at the little gate, when the women, informed by a boy, had thrown themselves in the narrow passage. Then all was spoiled. The gate would not open. Vainly Megrel tried to force it in with his shoulders. Then pushing before him his aunt and the young ladies he tried to run and reach the steps. But this attempt only angered the crowd more. They would not allow them to go. A howling mob followed them, some astonished at those beautifully-dressed ladies who had fallen among them. From that moment the confusion became such that it brought about one of those incidents which are always inexplainable. Lucie and Jeanne first arrived at the step and ran in the door, which had been partially

opened by the chambermaid. Madame Hennebeau succeeded in following them, and then Megrel entered and bolted the door, satisfied that Cecile had been the first to pass in. But she was not there. Carried away by her fright she must have run from the house and rushed right into the mob.

Suddenly the cry arose:

"Long live the socialists! Death to the aristocrats! Death to them!"

Some one in the distance, under the veil which hid her face, took her for Madame Hennebeau. Others said she was a friend of the Madame's, the young wife of a neighboring owner, hated by his workmen. But more than all, it was her silk dress, her fur cloak, and the white feather in her hat, which exasperated them. She had a watch, and the pure skin of an idle person who did not touch the coal.

"Let's tear her clothes off!" cried la Levaque.

Then Moquette rushed up.

"Yes, yes, we must beat her."

And the women were suffocated with their savage jealousy, each one wishing some piece of the clothing worn by that rich girl. This injustice had lasted long enough; they would force them to dress like workmen, these wretches who dared spend twenty-five cents for the washing of a skirt.

Amid these furies Cecile shivered; her limbs trembled, and she unceasingly stammered the same sentence:

"Mesdames, I beg of you; mesdames, do not hurt me."

But a hoarse shriek broke from her lips; cold hands took her by the throat. It was old Bonnemort, who held her. He was ignorant whether he wished to save or strangle her. He seemed drunk by hunger, stupefied by his long misery, suddenly coming out from his patience of a half century, without being able to understand what had called forth his hatred. After having saved in his lifetime a dozen of his comrades from death, risking his own life in the fire-damp and cavings, he now gave himself up to an impulse, for which he would not have been able to account, a wish to do this deed, a fascination for the white throat of that young girl. Although that day he had been silent,

he wrung his hands with the air of an old infirm beast, recalling some recollection.

In the house, as soon as they perceived the absence of Cecile, Megrel and M. Hennebeau again opened the door to run out and save her. The mob now threw themselves against the railing around the garden, and it was not easy to get out. A struggle was about to commence, when the frightened Gregoires appeared on the door-step.

"Leave her alone, old man! it's the daughter of the Piolaine people," cried la Maheu to the grandfather, as she recognized the young girl whose veil a woman had snatched off.

Etienne, ashamed of retaliations taken against a child, and wishing to make the crowd let her alone, with a sudden inspiration brandished the axe, crying:

"To Maigrat's. He has bread there. Let's break down Maigrat's shop."

He ran and gave a first blow to the shutters of the shop. Some comrades had followed him, Maheu, Levaque and others. But the women were excited. Cecile had fallen from the hands of Bonnemort into those of old Brule; while Jeanlin, Bebert and Lydic were pulling at her clothes, tearing them in peices. Suddenly a man on horseback appeared, whipping aside those who did not move quickly enough.

"You beasts, what are you about?"

It was Deneulin, who was coming hastily to the dinner. He quickly jumped into the road, took Cecile by the waist with one hand and with the other led the horse, making him kick and jump from side to side to clear a path for them. At the railing of the garden the battle continued. However he passed through, though bruising their limbs some. This unforseen assistance delivered Megrel and M. Hennebeau, who were in great danger, in the midst of the oaths and blows. And, while the young engineer returned into the house with Cecile who had fainted, Deneulin, who covered the director with his large body, at the top of the door-step, received such a hard blow with a stone that his shoulder was disjointed.

"They have broken up my machinery, and now they break my bones," said he.

He pushed open the door, on which a shower of pebbles struck.

"How desperate they are!" said he again. "Two seconds more and they would have burst my skull. One can say nothing to them. They do not know any more what they want. The only thing left to do is to beat them to death."

In the salon, the Gregoires were crying, though Cecile had regained consciousness. She was not injured, not even scratched; only her veil was lost. But their fright increased when they saw before them their cook Melanie, who told them the mob wanted to demolish Piolaine. Filled with fear, she had run to inform her masters. She had entered by the half-open door during the wrangle, without any one noticing her; and, in her exaggerated story, the one stone thrown by Jeanlin, which had broken a single pane of glass, became a regular cannonade by which the very walls were split open. Then the opinions of M. Gregoire were changed about. They strangled his daughter; they broke down his house. It must be true, then, that those miners had a grudge against him, because he lived, as an honorable man, by their labor.

The chamber-maid, who had brought a towel and some cologne water, repeated a third time.

"It's strange, all the same they're not bad."

Madame Hennebeau, who had seated herself, was very pale, not having yet recovered from her shock; and she only smiled when they congratulated Megrel. It seemed it was not Deneulin, who had saved Cecile. The parents especially thanked the young man; the marriage now appeared to be settled. M. Hennebeau looked on in silence; from his wife to her lover whom he had wished to kill that morning; and then to the young girl, who would no doubt be very soon gotten rid of. He felt no hatred now; a single fear remained to him, that of seeing his wife fall lower, to some footman perhaps.

"And you, my little darlings," said Deneulin to his daughters, "they have not hurt you, have they?"

Lucie and Jeanne had been very much frightened, but they were glad to have seen it. They were laughing now.

"Sapristi!" continued the father, "this has been a nice day. . . . If you want a dowery, you will have to earn it yourselves, and you may yet be forced to feed me."

He joked in a trembling voice. His eyes filled when his two girls threw themselves into his arms.

M. Hennebeau had heard that acknowledgment of ruin. His face lighted up. Vandame would yet belong to Montson; it was the compensation waited for, the stroke of fortune which would restore him in the favor of the owners. In every disaster of his life he had taken refuge in the strict execution of orders received; he maintained military discipline where he lived, which was his idea of happiness. But they calmed down. The salon fell into a weary quiet with the tranquil light of the two lamps and the warmth of the hangings. What was going on now outside? The fools were silent, stones no longer beat against the front of the house, and they only heard dull, heavy blows, the blows of an axe striking on wood, in the distance. They wished to know what it was, and returned to the hall and risked a glance through the broken glass. Even the women went up to peep from the windows on the second story.

"Do you see that rascal, Rasseneur, in front of us upon the doorstep of the shop?" said M. Hennebeau to Deneulin. "I knew he was there, he is always one of the first."

Nevertheless, it was not Rasseneur, it was Etienne who was breaking in Maigrat's shop with an axe. And he kept calling his comrades; did not the goods in there belong to the coalmen? Was it not just to make this robber disgorge—this wretch who had traded on them so long, who starved them at the slightest word from the company?

Gradually all abandoned the house of the director and ran to pillage the neighboring shop. The cry: "bread! bread! bread!" was shouted again. They would find bread behind that door. A rage for bread had seized them again, as if, all at once, they could wait no longer without dying on the road. They rushed against the shutters in such a manner that Etienne was in fear of wounding his comrades at each blow of the axe.

Meanwhile, Maigrat, who had left the vestibule of the

house at the time of the scuffle, had taken refuge first in the kitchen below; but he heard nothing there; he imagined his shop would be attacked, and he had just re-ascended to hide behind the pump outside, when he clearly heard the crashing of his door, and the shouts of the rioters, in which his name mingled. It was not the nightmare then; he did not see, but he heard now; he followed the attack with eager ears. Every blow of the axe struck full on his heart. A bolt must have given way; two minutes more and the shop would be taken. All this was depicted in his brain in frightful reality; the brigands sacking the house, drawers broken open, bags emptied, everything eaten, everything drank, the house itself carried off, nothing left, not even a stick to go and beg with through the villages. No, he would not let himself be ruined in that manner; he would rather give them his life. Since he had been there, he perceived at a window of his house, the thin profile of his wife, pale and troubled, behind the panes; doubtless she was watching the blows with her dumb look, like that of a poor beaten creature. Below there was a stable, placed in such a manner that, from the garden of the house, it could be reached by clutching the trellis-work of the partition wall: after that it would be easy to creep along the tiles as far as the window. And the idea of thus getting into his house again tortured him now, in his remorse for having left it. Perhaps he could have barricaded the door with furniture; he even invented other modes of heroic defense—boiling oil, lighted petroleum poured out from above.

But this affection for his goods struggled furiously against his fear; he recoiled from the fight with coward-ice. All at once a louder blow from the axe decided him. Avarice carried the day; he and his wife would cover the sacks with their bodies sooner than yield a loaf of bread.

Shouts broke out at once:

"Look! Look! . . . The monkey's there! Go for him!"

The mob had just perceived Maigrat upon the roof of the shed. Though a heavy man he had climbed the fence with alacrity, without caring for the breaking wood; and now he had flattened himself out along the

tiles, trying to reach the window. But the slope was very steep and his nails were torn away. Nevertheless he would have dragged himself up to the top, if he had not begun to tremble with a fear of being stoned; for the crowd beneath him still continued to cry:

"Go for him! We'll cut him to pieces!"

Suddenly, losing his hold, he rolled like a ball and fell upon the wall, and from there dropped over on one side of the road, with his skull fractured. His brains gushed out; he was dead. His wife, up-stairs, pale and trembling behind the window panes, had seen the whole occurrence.

At first a stupor came upon them. Etienne paused with the axe still in his hand. Mahue, Levaque and the others, forgetting the shop, turned their eyes toward the wall from which slowly ran a small red stream. The cries ceased; a shivering silence came in the growing shadows.

But suddenly the cries again commenced. It was the women alone this time.

"It served him right!"

They surrounded the still warm dead body; they laughed at him, spitting in the face of the dead the hatred of their long life without bread.

"I owed you sixty francs; there you are paid, thief!" said la Mahue. "You'll not refuse my credit any more. Wait till I fatten you more!"

With her ten fingers she tore up the earth, and taking her two hands full she stuffed it in the dead man's mouth.

"Eat, now! eat! you who were eating us!"

The insults increased; they all seemed wild; while the dead man, lying on his back, steadily stared with his large open eyes up into the immense sky from which night was falling. That earth stuffed in his mouth was the bread he had refused them, and that was the only bread he would eat now; it had not brought him happiness to starve the poor people. Up at the window, the widow Maigrat never moved; but under the last light of the setting sun, the imperfections in the window glass spotted her pale face which seemed to smile. Beaten every hour, her shoulders bent from morning

until night over the register, perhaps she was happy at the thought of her ended sufferings.

In frozen horror, Etienne and Mahue had looked on, without interfering. Then, as the women ran off, they stood motionless, looking after those furies. At the door of Tison's saloon, heads were thrust out. Rasseneur pale with rage, Jouvarine with eyes shining like candles, and Zachaire, Moquet and Philomêne, stupefied by the horrible spectacle they had seen. The two old men, Bonnemort and Moque, seriously shook their heads. Jeanlin alone laughed.

Etienne again flourished the axe. But the horror could not be cast off; that dead body lay across the road, protecting the shop; many moved away. It seemed a recompense, which quieted them all. Maheu remained quiet, but a voice said in his ear, "Run away." He turned and recognized Catherine, still in her man's coat, dirty and out of breath. With a gesture, he pushed her away. He did not wish to listen to her, and threatened to beat her. Then she was in despair and, after hesitating a little, ran to Etienne:

"Run away! run away! here are the gendarmes."

He also drove her away, abusing her, as he felt the blood rush to his cheek from the slap she had given him. But she was not discouraged. She made him throw down the axe. She pulled him away with both arms with an irresistible strength.

"Won't you listen to me, when I tell you the gendarmes are coming? It's Cheval, who has gone to get them, if you want to know. It disgusted me, so I came to warn you. Save yourself. I don't want them to take you."

At that instant the heavy sound of horses' feet was heard and the cry burst forth: "The gendarmes! the gendarmes!" They ran off so quickly that in two minutes the road was free, absolutely clear, as if swept by a storm. The corpse of Maigrat made the only dark spot upon the white earth. At the door of the Tison saloon there only remained Rasseneur, who applauded the arrival of the gendarmes; while in deserted Montson the rich people remained behind closed shutters, covered with a cold perspiration, and their teeth chattering. The plain spread out under the dark night, there

were only the high furnaces and coke fires burning in the dark sky. The heavy galop of the gendarmes was coming nearer; they rushed on without being distinguishable, in a dark mass. And behind them in their care, the carriage of the pastry cook of Marchiennes at last arrived; a cart from which jumped a cook boy, who, with a quiet air began to unpack the dessert, the pastry, and the vol-au-vent.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER fortnight passed. The first days of February had arrived, with the black frosts which prolonged the hard winter pitiless to the poor. Officials had again searched the country, the Prefect of Lille, a Procurator, and a General. And the gendarmes had not sufficed; some of the troops had come to occupy Montson—a regiment. The men encamped from Beaugines to Marchiennes. At all the trenches sentinels guarded the wells; armed soldiers were before each engine; the director's house, the company's yards, even the houses of certain well-to-do men were bristling with bayonets. Nothing else was heard on the long pavement but the slow step of the patrol. On the stump of Voreux a sentinel stood immovable like a look-out above the barren plain in the icy wind which whistled above, and every two hours, as in an enemy's country, re-echoed the challenge of the guard.

"Who goes there? Advance, and give the countersign."

But under this military despotism, in the terror which pervaded the country, labor had nowhere recommenced. On the contrary, the strike had extended. Crevecoeur, Miron, la Madeleine stopped the roll-call, like the Voreux, Victoire, and Feutry-Cantel lost their people every morning. At St. Thomas, even men were missing. It was now a dumb obstinacy contending with this display of force, which exasperated the pride of the miners. The alleys seemed deserts in the midst of the best fields. Not a workman stirred, hardly could even one be met with, solitary, with dark and sullen look and lowered

head before the red-trousered soldiers. And under this mournful silence, this passive stubbornness beating against the guns there was a false calm. The forced and patient obedience of caged beasts with eyes fixed on their keeper ready to devour him the instant he turned his back. The company which this stagnation of work was ruining spoke of hiring the miners of the Borinage, on the Belgian frontier, but they did not dare, and so the battle rested there between the coalmen in revolt and the silent pits guarded by the soldiers.

A calm suddenly fell, on the next day after the riot, hiding such a panic, that the damages and atrocities of that terrible day had been kept as secret as possible. The inquest decided that Maigrat died from his fall, and the frightful mutilation of the corpse remained a mystery, surrounded by a rumor. There had been no pillage of the store. On the other side, the company did not acknowledge having sustained any damages, any more than the Gregoires, who did not care to compromise their daughter through the scandal of a law suit, where she would have to give evidence. Notwithstanding some arrests had been made of men who were astounded, witless, and knew nothing. By mistake Pierron had been taken handcuffed as far as Marchiennes, and the country still laughed at it. Rasseneur also just escaped being dragged off between two gendarmes. The director contented himself with sending in discharges to the principals. Maheu had received his, Levaque also, and thirty-four of their comrades had been treated likewise. But all the blame fell upon Etienne, who had been missing since the evening of the fight, and sought for everywhere in vain. Cheval, in his hatred, denounced him, and only refused to name the others at the entreaty of Catherine, who wished at least to save her parents. The days passed; it was felt that all was not over; the end was awaited in the midst of intolerable anguish, stifling every breast during this ominous and deceitful calm. At Montson the peasants awoke at night with a start at the sound of an imaginary alarm bell, and the strong, familiar smell of powder. But that which astonished them most was a sermon from the new Cure, the Abbe Ranvier, the lank priest with red-looking eyes, who had succeeded the Abbe

Joire. How far removed was he from the smiling prudence of the latter, the sole aim of the good fat man being to live in peace with all the world! Had not the Abbe Ranvier undertaken the defence of the abominable robbers about to dishonor the district? He found excuses for the rascalities of the strikers, he violently denounced the peasantry on whom he laid all the blame.

It was the peasantry who, dispossessing the church of her ancient liberties to misuse them themselves, had made this world an accursed abode of injustice and suffering; it was they who prolonged misunderstandings, who brought on a frightful catastrophe by their atheism, by their refusal to return to the faith and the brotherly traditions of the early Christians. And he had dared to threaten the rich; he had warned them that if they still refused to hear the voice of God, He would surely take the side of the poor; He would take their fortunes from these sceptics; He would distribute them among earth's lowly ones, for the triumph of His glory, for the glory of His name. The devout trembled at it; the notary declared that it contained pure socialism; all seemed to see the Curé at the head of a mob, brandishing a cross, demolishing, with heavy blows, the peasantry of eighty-nine.

M. Hennebeau, when informed, with a shrug of his shoulders, said: "If he worries us too much, the bishop will rid us of him."

While the panic thus spread from one end of the plain to the other, Etienne lived underground at the bottom of Requillart, Jeanlin's cave. There he hid himself; no one thought him so near; the calm audacity of this retreat into the mine itself, into this deserted gallery of an old shaft, saved him from pursuit.

Above, the acacia and hawthorn trees, growing through the broken framework of the tower, concealed the opening; no risk was incurred, for the initiated could only enter by hanging to the roots of the mountain-ash, dropping fearlessly to the few rungs remaining in the second ladder; and other obstacles added to his security—the suffocating heat of the old shaft; a hundred and twenty metres of a dangerous descent; then the painful groping on one's stomach for a quarter of a

league between the narrow walls of the gallery before arriving at the villainous cavern filled with plunder.

He lived there in the midst of plenty; he had found gin there, the remainder of the dried codfish and provisions of all kinds. The large bed of hay was excellent; not a draught of air was felt in this equable and pleasant atmosphere. Want of light only was threatened. The boy, who had constituted himself his caterer, with the prudence and cunning of a savage, delighted to outwit the gendarmes, brought him even pomatum, but could not manage to get hold of a package of candles. After the fifth day Etienne only used a light at his meals. The candle ends would not last if used at night. This interminable night, with its unvarying blackness, was his great trial. Notwithstanding that he slept in safety, had bread and comfortable shelter, never had night weighed so heavily on his brain. It seemed as if thought itself were crushed. Now he was living on the spoils of robbers. In spite of his communistic theories, the old scruples of early education arose. He contented himself with dry bread and gnawed his bone. But what was to be done? He must live, for his task was not yet done. Another trouble oppressed him, remorse for his savage drunkenness from gin imbibed during the severe cold on an empty stomach, causing him to attack Cheval armed with a knife. This affected him with a nameless terror, the hereditary malady, the long inheritance of drunkenness, aggravated to such a point that a single drop of alcohol roused to homicidal fury. Would he then end by becoming an assassin? Reaction took place, and a revolt against his socialistic theories followed. When he found himself in shelter, in this hole, in the profound silence of the earth, he was weary of violence; he had slept for two days like a beast filled and gorged. The softening of his heart went on; he felt bruised in spirit, with a bitter mouth and aching as if at the end of some terrible carousal. A week passed. The Maheus, warned, could not send a candle; he must give up the luxury of a light, even when eating. For hours together Etienne now remained stretched on his hay. Vague ideas, unknown hitherto, traversed his brain. A feeling of superiority arose, setting him apart from his

comrades; an exaltation of himself individually, in proportion as he became instructed and refined.

Never had he reflected so much; he asked himself whence came his disgust the day after the furious race around the mines, and he dare not answer—recollection disgusted him, the base envyings, the vulgar instincts, the scent of all this wretchedness borne on the wind! In spite of the torturing darkness, he began to dread the hour of his return to the alley. The thought of those wretched creatures bundled in a heap, living in a trough, nauseated him! Not one with whom he could seriously talk on politics, a bestial existence—the stifling air always poisoned with onions. He wished to enlarge their heaven, to elevate them to the well-being and good habits of the peasantry, by making them the masters; but, how long it would be! and he no longer felt courageous enough to wait for victory in this gallery of hunger. Slowly, his vanity at being their leader, the constant pre-occupation of thinking for them, had infected him with the spirit of one of these peasants whom he execrated. One evening Jeanlin brought a bit of candle stolen from the lantern of a wagoner, and it was a great comfort to Etienne. When the darkness stupefied him and drove him mad, he lighted it for an instant; then, recovering himself, he would blow it out, husbanding the light, as necessary to his life as bread. The silence tinkled in his ears, he heard nothing but the scampering of a lot of rats, the crackling of the old timbering, the slight noise of a spider weaving his web. With open eyes in this vapid nothingness, he returned to this fixed idea: what his comrades were doing above and what they expected of him. Disertion on his part would have appeared to him the extreme of baseness. If he thus concealed himself, it was to remain free, to counsel and to act. His long dreams had brought his ambition to a focus; while awaiting better times, he would wish to be Pluchart, give up labor, occupied with politics only; but alone, in a clean room, under the pretext that mental labor absorbed existence entirely and required silence around.

At the end of the week, the child having told him that the gendarmes believed him to be in Belgium, Etienne risked himself out of his hole as soon as night had

fallen. He wished to judge of the position of affairs, and see if it were expedient to prolong the contest. His party was compromised. Before the strike, he had felt doubtful of the result; he had simply yielded to circumstances. And now, after steeping himself in the revolt, his former doubts returned, and he despaired of compelling the company to surrender. But he did not yet own it to himself. Uneasiness oppressed him when he thought of all the misery which defeat would entail; of the heavy responsibility of suffering which would rest upon him. Would not the end of the strike be the end of his career, of his earthly ambition, and his life return again to the brutality of the mine and alley? And honestly, without deceit, he endeavored to regain his faith; to prove to himself that resistance was still possible; that capital would destroy itself, opposed by the heroic suicide of labor.

In fact, the whole country re-echoed with ruin. At night, when he wandered through the black roads, like a wolf from his lair, he seemed to hear the crashing of bankruptcy from one end of the plain to the other. As he went along the deserted roads, he saw only closed, dead works—the timbers rotting under the pale sky. The sugaries especially had suffered. The Fauville sugary, after having reduced the hands like the Hoton, succumbed in its turn. At the Dutilleul mill, the last stone had stopped on New Year's day; and the Blenze rope-walk for the cables of the mines was ruined by this hopeless standstill.

On the Marchiennes side, disasters multiplied; at the Gagebois glass works all the fires were extinguished; continual dismissals at the Sonneville workshops; not one of the three blast-furnaces of Forges lighted; not one battery of the coke furnaces burning on the horizon. The strike of the coalheavers of Montson, springing from the industrial crisis begun two years back, had extended and precipitated the out-break. To these causes of suffering—the suspension of orders from America, the sinking of capital in over production, were now added the unexpected want of coal for the few boilers still in use; and this was the climax of wretchedness, this failure of the moving power which the pits no longer supplied. In view of the general

distress, the company had feared to increase their stock, diminishing their product, starving their miners; thus at the end of December they found themselves without a bit of coal on the floor of their pits. The scourge traveled far and near—one fall brought down another, manufactories crushing each other as they tumbled down in such a series of rapid catastrophes, that the rebound reverberated throughout the neighboring cities, Lille, Douai, Valenciennes, where families were ruined by absconding bankers. Often, at the turn of a road, Etienne stopped, in the icy night, to listen to the falling rubbish. The darkness animated him, and a hope arose that a day would dawn on an exterminated old world, the leveling scythe of equality having passed over the earth. But the mines of the company especially interested him in this dissolution.

He resumed his walks in the darkness, visiting one after another, happy with each fresh discovery of damage done. The fallings-in continued to take place, and the forced abandonment of the roads aggravated the disaster. Above the north gallery of Miron the sinking of the ground increased at such a rate that the road to Joiselle for a distance of one hundred metres was engulfed as by the shock of an earthquake, and the company, uneasy at the rumors to which these accidents gave rise, reimbursed the proprietors of the abandoned fields, without any discussion. Crevecœur and la Madeleine, composed of crumbling stone, were more and more blocked up. Rumor spoke of two overseers swallowed up at Feutry-Cantel; a flood of water had inundated La Victoire; a kilometre of the gallery of St. Thomas had required a wall, the woodwork breaking on all sides. It was thus from hour to hour, enormous expenses, open gaps in the dividends of stockholders, a rapid destruction of the pits which must terminate at last by eating up the famous stock of Montson, multiplied a hundredfold in a century. Thus from these repeated blows Etienne's hopes revived; he deceived himself, inducing the belief that a third month of resistance would finish the satiated and weary monster, cowering over there like an idol in the recesses of its tabernacle. He knew that the disturbances at Montson had excited much attention in the Parisian journals, a vigorous

warfare being carried on between the official organs and the opposition press, terrifying recitals, aimed especially at the International, of which the empire after having encouraged it was becoming afraid; and the administration being no longer able to turn a deaf ear in the midst of this tumult, two of the managers had at last condescended to come and make an investigation, but with an air of reluctance, without appearing to trouble themselves about the issue, and so disinterested that in three days they had already returned, pretending to say that everything was going on well. Notwithstanding, it was said elsewhere that these gentlemen during their stay held protracted sittings, displaying a feverish activity, deeply engaged in matters of which none around them breathed a word. And he accused them of breaking faith, and looking upon their departure as a despairing flight; he felt certain of victory since these terrible men abandoned all.

But the next day Etienne again despaired. The company held the reins too firmly to have them broken so easily; even if they lost millions, they would regain them later on by stinting the laborers' bread.

One night, having reached Jean-Bart, he surmised the truth when an overseer told him that they spoke of giving up Vandame to Montson. At Deneulin's the wretchedness was pitiful—the wretchedness of the rich—he, sick from impotence, aged by the cares of wealth; the daughter contending with the contractors, striving to save their last chemises. There was less suffering in the famished alleys than in this rich man's house, where even water had to be drunk secretly. Work had not been resumed at Jean-Bart and it had been necessary to replace the pumps at Gaston-Marie; and in spite of all the haste made, an inundation had commenced which necessitated great outlay. Ruin was becoming universal. Deneulin had at last risked an appeal for a loan of 6,000 francs from the Gregoires, whose refusal, though expected, finished him; if they refused it was from affection for him, to save him from a fruitless contest; and they counseled him to sell. He vehemently refused; it enraged him to pay the expenses of the strike, the blood rushing to his head and his throat choked with apoplexy; he hoped at first to die of it. What was

there left to do? He had listened to the offers; they ridiculed him; they depreciated this superb plant, this repaired shaft newly equipped, where the want of funds alone prevented the working. Fortunate would he be could he only extract enough to indemnify his creditors. For two days he had striven against the owners of Montson, furious at the cool manner in which they took advantage of his embarrassments, screaming "*never*," with his loud voice, when they calmly announced their resolution of returning to Paris to await his reply.

And thus the matter stood. Etienne suspecting these compensations for disasters, was discouraged again by the invincible power of large capital, so strong on the battle-field enriched by the blood of the slain. Happily on the morrow Jeanlin brought him good news. At Voreux the tubing of the shafts had broken up to such a degree that the water threatened the mine. Leaks appeared on all sides, and the corps of carpenters hastily summoned to make repairs, worked in constant danger.

On the following night Etienne ran out for information. Up to that time he had avoided the Voreux where the eternal black shadow of the sentinel remained stationary above the plain. It could not be shut out from sight—there it was, commanding the whole region, like the flag of a regiment holding the country crushed and sullen. About three o'clock, the sky being cloudy, he went to the mine, where he was fortunate enough to meet Jouvarine. The machinist left his work at night. Briefly, he explained the bad state of the tubing, adding that it was imprudent not to have it entirely re-made, as it would thus serve for two months' use. Then he spoke of the horses, whose unhappy fate alone touched him, his hatred of men causing his naturally tender heart to turn to animals. Had not the poor horses remained forty-eight hours without food at the time of the Montson disturbances? And in scorn, he ridiculed the breaking of a few panes at the director's.

"What a row about nothing! I knew well that you would slave yourself to death to no purpose. . . . One little ton of powder, and it was so easy to blow up the store!"

Enfeebled, Etienne replied:

"Why don't you blow it up yourself? You astonish me, talking of demolishing everything, while you can't even fillip a fly!"

Jouvarine opened his lips, looked him in the face, and withdrew silently, as if possessed by a fixed idea which seemed to glitter like a steel nail from the depths of his pale eyes.

For a long time Etienne wandered around the mine, listening to the hammers of the carpenters working at the shaft. This gladdened his heart—this fresh wound which must be staunched; but the damage was never great enough; he in his turn, dreamed of destruction, a profound shock which would engulf a whole mine, without finding courage enough to set off the barrel of powder of which the machinist spoke; and words came back to him with the necessity of making a startling attempt to frighten the powerful and rouse the people. At dawn, when Etienne decided to return, he found the sentinel still posted on the dump. This time he must certainly be seen. He walked on, thinking of these soldiers taken from the people and armed against them. How easy would have been the triumph of the revolution had the army promptly declared in its favor! It only required that the workman, the peasant in the barracks, should remember his origin. This was the great dread, the supreme peril which made the peasants grind their teeth when they thought of a possible desertion by the troops. In two hours they would be swept off, thrown into the mine with all the spoils of their iniquitous life. Already it was said that whole regiments were infected with socialism. Was it true? Was justice coming, thanks to the cartridge boxes distributed by the peasantry? And, springing to another vision, Etienne beheld the regiment whose sentinels guarded the shaft, join the strikers, shoot the company en masse, and give the mine to the miners. He then perceived that he was ascending the dump, his head buzzing with these thoughts. Why should he not have a chat with this soldier? He would know the color of his ideas. With an air of indifference, he continued his approach, as if he wished to gather the old bits of wood

remaining in the rubbish. The soldier remained motionless.

"Halloo, comrade, deuced bad weather!" at last said Etienne. "I think we're going to have snow."

He was a little soldier, very light complexioned, with a pale, mild face, covered with reddish spots. He seemed, in his watch-coat, to have the embarrassment of a recruit.

"Yes, I think so too," he murmured.

And with his blue eyes, he looked long at the livid sky, the smoky dawn, while the soot weighed like lead over the plain.

"How stupid they are to plant you there to freeze your bones!" continued Etienne. "One would think they were expecting the Cossacks. . . . And there's always such a wind here."

The little soldier shivered without complaint. There was, nevertheless, a stone hut where old Bonnemort took shelter in tempestuous nights, but the order was not to leave the summit of the dump, and the soldier remained at his post, his hands so stiff with cold that he no longer felt his gun. He belonged to the post of twenty-five men guarding Voreux; the worst of it was he had to return to this cruel post every third day; twice already, with frozen feet, he had risked being unable to leave at all. The profession required this; a passive obedience stupefied him at last, he replied to questions by wandering words like a dreaming child. In vain, for a quarter of an hour, Etienne endeavored to make him talk on politics. He said "yes" or "no" without appearing to understand; some of his comrades said that the captain was a republican; for himself, he had no idea—it was all the same to him. If he were commanded to fire, he would fire! he could not do otherwise. The workman listened with an access of the people's hatred of the army, against their comrades whose hearts they changed when putting them into the red pantaloons.

"What's your name?"

"Jules."

"And where do you come from?"

"From Plogof, over there?"

By chance he had stretched out his arm. It was in

Brittany—he knew no more. His little pale face became animated; warmed again, he commenced to laugh.

"I have my mother and my sister. They are expecting me very certainly. Ah! it won't be for to-morrow. . . . When I left they came with me as far as Pont-l'Abbe. We had taken the Lepalmec's horse, and he nearly broke his hoofs at the foot of the Audierne hill. Cousin Charles was waiting for us with sausages, but the women were crying too much; they stuck in the throat. . . . Ah, my God! my God! how far it is from home!"

His eyes moistened, while his laughter continued. The desert land of Plogof, that wild, storm-beaten cape of Raz, appeared to him in dazzling sunlight in the rosy heather season.

"Do tell me," said he, "if I am not punished; do you think they would give me leave for one month in two years?"

Then Etienne spoke of Provence, which he had left when quite small. The day wore on, flakes of snow commenced to float in the dull sky. And at last he became uneasy as he perceived Jeanlin, wandering about the briers, with a stupefied look at seeing him up there.

With a gesture the child called him. Why go on with this attempt at fraternizing with the soldiers? it would still take years to effect it—his fruitless effort dispirited him as much as if he had expected success.

But instantly he understood Jeanlin's signal. They were coming to relieve the sentry and he went away, and with a run returned to his hiding place at Requillart, heart-broken once more by the certainty of defeat; while the gamin, galloping near him, accused that dirty trooper of having called to the guard to fire on him.

At the end of the dump, Jules remained motionless, amid the falling snow. The corporal approached with his men, the regulation calls were exchanged.

"Who goes there? . . . Advance and give the countersign!" and the heavy steps were heard returning, reverberating as if in a conquered country. Notwithstanding the advanced hour, nothing stirred in the alleys; the whole of Montson remained silent and enraged under the heel of the military.

CHAPTER XXXI.

For two days the snow had fallen. It ceased in the morning. An intense frost iced the immense plain, and this black country, with inky roads, walls, and trees powdered with coal dust, was now all white, purely, beautifully white. Under the snow the alley of Deux-Cent-Quarante lay dead. Not even the faintest cloud of smoke rose from the roofs. The fireless houses, cold as the stones on the road, did not melt the thick covering on the tiles. It was but a quarry of white flagstones in a white plain, the ghost of a dead village draped in its grave-clothes. The patrols, who alone passed, had left the length of the streets the muddy mess of their stamping. At the Maheus, the last shovelful of coal cinders had been burned the night previous. It was impossible to think of gleaning on the dump in this terrible weather, when the sparrows could not find a blade of grass. Alzire, from perseveringly searching with her poor hands in the ice, was dying. La Maheu had wrapped her in a bit of blanket while awaiting Dr. Vanderhaghen, to whose house she had been twice without finding him. The maid promised nevertheless that monsieur would visit the alley before night, and the mother watched standing at the window. While the little invalid, who had wished to come down, remained with chattering teeth on a chair, deluded with the idea that it was warmer there near the cold oven. The father, Bonnemort, seated opposite, his legs attacked again, appeared to be sleeping. Neither Lenore nor Henri had returned yet, having left with Jeanlin to beg for sous on the road. Across the bare room Maheu alone walked heavily, stumbling at each turn against the wall, with the stupid look of an animal which no longer sees its cage. The petroleum was also finished, but the reflection of the snow without continued so white that it gave a vague light to the room, though night had fallen.

There was a noise of sabots at the door and la Levaque entered like a whirlwind, crying from the threshold to la Maheu:

"It was you, then, who said that I forced my lodger to give me twenty sous!"

The other shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't bother me—I have said nothing. . . . Who told you that?"

"I was told that you said so, you need not know. . . . . And besides you said that you had heard our doings behind your partition. . . . Say again that you did not say so, eh?"

Quarrels broke out each day in consequence of the ceaseless gossip of the women, especially among the households living side by side, brickerings and reconciliations took place daily. But never had such bitter malice set them by the ears. Since the strike, hunger aggravated their anger and prompted to blows; the slightest altercation between two old gossips ended by murder between the two men.

At that instant Levaque arrived, bringing in Bouteloup forcibly.

"Here's the comrade—let him say whether he gave twenty sous to my wife."

The lodger, his fear concealed by his large beard, protested and stammered:

"Oh! no; never anything, never!

Instantly Levaque became threatening, with his fist under Maheu's nose.

"You know that won't do for me. When one has a wife, if they like they'll break her back."

"But, great God!" cried Maheu, furious from being diverted from his melancholy. "What's all this fuss about? Haven't we trouble enough already? Shut up now or I'll give you a kick. Who said my wife said that?"

"La Pierronne."

From that moment it was no longer possible to be heard. All were angry at the Maheus; the Levaques asserted that la Pierronne had said many other things about them.

"Did she?" cried Maheu. "Well, I'm going there and she'll have to take back what she says or I'll give her a knock in the jaw."

He darted out; the Levaques followed as witnesses,

while Bouteloup, who hated quarrels, quietly went back home.

La Maheu was going out also when a groan from Alzire held her back; she crossed the end of the blanket over the shivering body of the little one, and returned to her watch at the window.

And still the doctor came not. Before Pierron's door Maheu and Levaque had just found Lydie who was tramping through the snow. The house was shut; a glimmer of light came through a crack in the shutter, and the child at first replied to their questions with embarrassment; no, her papa was not there, he had gone to the wash house to rejoin mother Brule, to bring back the bundle of clothes. Then she became uneasy, and would not say what her mother was doing. At last she told all, with a sullen and bitter laugh; her mother had put her out the door because M. Dansaert was there, and she prevented their talking. Since the morning he had been walking about the alley, from door to door, with two gendarmes, trying to entice workmen to engage to work, frightening the weak, announcing everywhere that if they did not come down on Monday to the Voreux the company had decided to hire Belgians, and as night had fallen, he had sent back the gendarmes on finding la Pierronne alone; then he remained at her house to drink a glass of gin before the good fire.

"Hush! be quiet, we must see them!" said Levaque with his coarse laugh.

"Yes, indeed," replied Maheu. "Be off, little hussy!"

Lydie drew back a few steps while he put an eye to the chink in the shutter. He stiffled a little cry, then la Levaque looked in; but shé said that it disgusted her. Maheu, who had pushed her, saying that he also wished to see, declared that they had the worth of their money, and they commenced again, each in turn taking a peep, as at a comedy. The parlor, shining with neatness, was brightened by a large fire; there were cakes on the table, with a bottle and two glasses; in short, a veritable feast; so much so, that what they saw within exasperated the two men, who under other circumstances would have been entertained by it for six months.

But, wasn't it piggish to have such a large fire and

be able to strengthen oneself with biscuits when one's comrades hadn't even a crust of bread or a cinder of coal?

"Here's papa," cried Lydie, as she scampered off.

Pierron was quietly returning from the wash-house with his bundle of clothing on his shoulder. Maheu immediately called him.

"Say! I've been told that your wife has said some nasty things about us. I think you'd better look in your own house before you talk."

Pierron could not understand, but when la Pierronne, seized with fear at hearing the noise, lost her wits so far as to half open the door to see what was the matter, the guilty pair were seen. The overseer rushed out, disappearing in the darkness, trembling that such a tale should reach the ears of the director, who had cautioned him to be prudent. Then followed a frightful row, mingled with laughter, hootings and reproaches.

"You folks are nice ones to talk against your neighbors."

"Ah! she does well to speak!" resumed Levaque. "Here's a hussy who talked about my wife. Yes, and they told me you said so."

But la Pierronne, herself again, with a scornful air, feeling herself the prettiest and the richest, replied:

"I have said what I have said. Let me alone, will you? What business have you with my affairs, jealous fools; angry with us because we put money in the savings' bank. Go! go! No matter what you say, my husband knows well why M. Dansaert was at our house."

And, in truth, Pierron grew enraged and defended his wife. The quarrel took a new turn, and they said he had sold himself, called him a spy and the dog of the company; they accused him of shutting himself up to enjoy the good bits with which the chiefs paid him for his treachery.

He, in replying, pretended that Maheu had threatened him, slipping a paper under his door with a skull and cross-bones upon it. And this ended inevitably by a fight among the men, similar to all the quarrels of the women, since hunger had roused the mildest. Maheu and Levaque pounced upon Pierron with their fists. They had to be separated. Blood streamed from the nose

of her son-in-law when la Brule, in her turn, came back from the wash-house. Matters being explained, she only said:

"That pig there dishonors me."

The street was empty, not a shadow fell on the whiteness of the snow; and the alley, to which the silence of death had returned, starved with hunger in the intense cold.

"And the doctor?" asked Maheu, shutting the door again.

"Not come," replied la Maheu, still standing at the window.

"Have the little ones come in?"

"No, they hav'n't."

Maheu resumed his heavy tramping from one wall to the other, with the look of a stunned ox. Stiff on his chair old Bonnemort had not even raised his head. Alzire also said nothing, trying not to tremble, to spare their suffering; but in spite of her fortitude, she shook at times so violently that the shivering of her meagre little frame was heard against the blanket; whilst, with her large opened eyes, she watched on the ceiling the pale reflection of the gardens, all white, which lighted the room with the brilliancy of moonlight. The last agony had now arrived; the house was empty, and destitution complete. The mattress cases had followed the wool to the broker's; then the sheets had gone, the clothes, everything that could be sold. One evening they had sold the grandfather's pocket-handkerchief for two sous. Tears fell as they parted with each article of the poor household, and the mother still lamented the day she carried off, in her petticoat the pasteboard box, the old gift of her husband, as one would carry off a child to get rid of it under a door. They were stripped of everything at this hour; they had nothing more to sell but their skins, so scarred though that nobody would have wanted them. Nor did they even take the trouble to seek further; they knew there was nothing, that it was the end of all; they need not hope even for a candle, or a bit of bread, or a potatoe; and they awaited death; they were only sorry for the children.

"Here he comes at last," said la Maheu.

A dark form had just passed the window. The door

opened. But it was not Doctor Vanderhaghen; they recognized the new Cure, the Abbe Ranvier, whose fiery eyes glittered in the darkness like the eyes of a cat. He did not seem surprised to come upon this house of the dead, without light, without fire, without bread; already he had visited three other houses in the vicinity, he went from family to family, picking up willing men, like Dansaert with his gendarmes; immediately he explained himself in his feverish priestly voice:

"Why did you not come to mass on Sunday, my children? You are wrong; the church alone can save you. . . . Now promise me to come next Sunday."

Maheu, after looking at him, resumed his heavy tramp without a word. It was la Maheu who replied:

"To mass, M. le Cure—what for? Isn't the good God making game of us? Look, what has that little one there done to Him, shaking with fever? We had not enough misery, He must make her ill; when I can't even give her a cup of warm tisane."

Then, standing, the priest spoke at length. He dwelt on the strike, its wretchedness, its bitterness aggravated by hunger, with the ardor of a missionary preaching to savages for the glory of his religion. He said that the church was with the poor, that she alone could one day make justice triumphant, in bringing down the wrath of God on the iniquities of the rich. And the day was coming, for the rich had taken the place of God, even governing without Him in their impious usurpation of power. But if the workmen wished the equitable division of the goods of the earth, they ought to place themselves in the hands of the priests, as at the death of Jesus the little ones and the humble ones grouped themselves round the apostles. What strength the pope would have, what an army would be at the disposal of the clergy, when they had the command of the innumerable multitude of workmen! In a day the world would be purged of the wicked, the unworthy masters would be driven out, it would be, in short, the true reign of God, each one recompensed according to his merits, the law of labor insuring universal happiness. La Maheu, who listened to him, thought she was hearing Etienne in the autumn evenings, when he

announced to them the end of their troubles. Only, she always distrusted the Soutanes.

"It's all very well, what you tell us there, M. le Cure," she said at last. "But it must be that you no longer agree with the peasants, that you come back to the workmen at this hour. . . . All our other Cures dined with the administration, and threatened us with the devil as soon as we asked for bread."

He commenced again, he spoke of the deplorable misunderstanding between the church and the people. In veiled phrases, he now struck at the clergy of the cities, at the bishops, at the high clergy, enervated with luxury, gorged with power, joining hands with the liberal peasantry, in their imbecile blindness, without seeing that it was this peasantry which was dispossessing them of worldly power. Deliverance would come from the country priests, all would one day rise to re-establish the reign of Christ, with the aid of the wretched; and he seemed to be already at their heads; he straightened his meagre form as if chief of the revolutionary bands of the gospel, his eyes filled with such a light that they illuminated the dark room. He was carried away by his enthusiasm into the use of mysterious words; for a long time the poor people had ceased to comprehend him.

"It didn't need so much talk," growled Maheu, abruptly. "You would have done better to commence by bringing us a loaf of bread."

"Come to mass on Sunday," cried the priest. "God will provide for all."

And he went away. He entered at the Levaques' to catechise them in their turn, so wrapped up in his dream of the final triumph of the church, having such scorn for the actual facts, that he went thus through the alley without alms, with empty hands, through this army dying with hunger, like a poor simpleton who looked upon suffering as the goad to salvation. Maheu had renewed his heavy march. Nothing was heard but this regular vibration, which shook the flag-stones. There was a sound like a pulley eaten by rust; the old Bonnemort spat into the cold hearth. Then the cadence of the steps re-commenced. Alzire, drowsy with

fever, became delirious, talking low, laughing, believing that it was warm and that she was playing in the sun.

"D—n it!" murmured la Maheu, after touching her cheeks. "She is burning now. I don't wait for that pig any longer. Those thieves have stopped him from coming."

She spoke of the doctor of the company. Nevertheless, she uttered a joyful exclamation at seeing the door open again. But her arms fell again. She remained upright, with sombre look.

"Good-evening," said Etienne, in a low voice, as soon as he had carefully shut the door again.

He often arrived at the dead of night. La Maheu, since the second day, had learned his retreat. But they kept the secret. Nobody in the alley knew exactly what had become of the young man. This enveloped him in a kind of mystery. They still believed in him. Mysterious rumors were afloat; he would reappear with an army, with chests full of gold; and it was always the religious expectation of a miracle, the ideal reality, the brusque entry into the city of justice he had promised them. Some said they had seen him in a carriage, in company with three gentlemen, on the road to Marchiennes. Others affirmed that he had been in England for two days. In the end, however, distrust commenced. The jokers accused him of hiding himself in a cave, where Moquette kept him warm: for this liaison had done him injury. It was, in the midst of his popularity, a gradual disaffection, the deafness springing from desperation, and the numbers of the dissatisfied were increasing.

"What beastly weather!" he continued, still standing. "And yet nothing new, always worse and worse? I was told that little Negrel had gone to Belgium to engage workmen. Ah! in God's name, we are lost if it be true!"

A shivering fit had seized him on entering this icy and dark room, where his eyes could only gradually discover the unfortunate creatures whom he guessed were there. He experienced a vague repugnance, that uneasiness of the workman who has left his class, sharpened by study, moved by ambition. What a nausea from the suffering, and the odor, and the bodies

crowded together, and the pity which choked his throat! He came to tell them of his discouragement, and the sight of this agony in such misery upset him to such a degree that he sought for words to counsel submission. But with vehemence Maheu had planted himself before him:

"Belgians! they wouldn't dare, the fools! Let them bring down the Belgians, if they want us to destroy the shafts."

Then with embarrassment Etienne explained that they could not stir, that the soldiers who guarded the shafts would protect the descent of the Belgian workmen. And Maheu clenched his fists more enraged, irritated above all as he said, at having these bayonets in the back. The coal men were no longer then masters at home? They were treated as galley slaves, conducted to their work, gun in hand! He loved his pit; it grieved him not to have gone down it for two months. Thus he flushed at the thought of the injury with which he was threatened in attempting the introduction of strangers. Then, suddenly, the recollection that he had been discharged returned to him, breaking his heart.

"I don't know why I grieve," murmured he. "I don't belong to their barracks any more. . . . When they have driven me from here, I can die on the road."

"Nonsense!" said Etienne. "If you choose they will take you back to-morrow. Good workmen are not sent away."

He interrupted himself, astonished to hear Alzire laughing softly in the delirium of fever. He had only as yet made out the stiff form of Pere Bonnemort, and this gaiety of the sick child frightened him. It was too much this time, if the little ones died of it. With trembling voice, he came to a decision.

"Let's see—this cannot continue."

"We are all fools—it would be better to surrender."

La Maheu, motionless and silent thus far, burst out all at once, screaming in his face, and swearing like a man.

"What is that you say? It's *you* who say that, good God."

He wished to give reasons, but she would not let him speak.

"In God's name, don't repeat it! or woman as I am I'll strike you in the face. . . . Then, we have starved for two months; I have sold my furniture; my children have fallen sick; and nothing has been gained and injustice recommences. Ah! do you see, when I think of that, my blood chokes me! No! no! I'll burn all, I'll kill all now, rather than surrender. Maheu had resumed his walk; she pointed to him, in the darkness, with a menacing gesture."

"Listen to this, if my man returns to the shaft, it is I who will wait for him over there and spit in his face, and treat him as a coward!"

Etienne could not see her, but he felt a heat like that of a barking dog, and he had drawn back in the face of this rage which was his work. He found her so changed that he did not recognize her former wisdom, reproaching his violence, saying that one ought not to desire any one's death; and now refusing to hear reason and speaking of killing everybody. Here she was talking politics, wanting to sweep out with one stroke the government and the peasantry, calling for the republic and the guillotine, to rid the earth of these rich robbers, fattening on the labor, the hunger-slain.

"Yes, with my ten fingers, I'd strangle them. . . . Perhaps they have had enough! our turn has come; you said so yourself. . . . When I think that the father, grandfather, great grandfather, and all before them, have suffered what we have suffered, and that our sons, and our sons' sons will suffer it again, it maks me crazy —I'd take a knife if I were a man. We didn't do enough the other day. We ought to have torn down Montson to the ground, even to the last brick. And, don't you know? I've but one regret—that I didn't let the old man strangle la Piolaine's daughter; they don't mind that *my* little ones are strangled by hunger!"

Her words fell, in the night, like the blows of an axe. The closed horizon could not re open; the unattainable ideal turned to poison in this brain, crazed by suffering.

"You misunderstood me," at last Etienne was able to say, retreating. "We ought to arrive at some understanding with the company; I know that the mines

suffer much; doubtless they will consent to some arrangement."

"No, not at all!" she screamed.

And, at this instant, Lenore and Henri came in, with empty hands. A gentleman had given them two sous, though, but as they were always fighting together—the sister kicking the little brother, the two sous had fallen in the snow; and Jeanlin, who was accompanying them, had searched for them with them, but they had not found them.

"Where is Jeanlin?"

"He's gone off, mamma, he said he had something to do."

Etienne listened, broken-hearted. Formerly she threatened to kill them if they ever asked alms. And to-day, she herself sent them on the roads; she spoke of their all going, the ten thousand coal men of Montson, taking the staves and wallets from the poor old men, and foraging through the terrified country.

Then the agony increased in the dark room. The brats had come in hungry, they wanted to eat; why weren't they eating? they began to moan, dragged themselves on the ground, and finished by throwing themselves on the legs of their dying sister, who groaned faintly. Beside herself, the mother cuffed them in the darkness. Then, as they cried louder, asking for bread, she burst into tears, sank on the floor, seizing them and the sick child in one tight embrace; and for a long time her tears flowed, in a nervous excitement which left her softened, exhausted, muttering twenty times the same phrase, begging for death. "My God, why don't you take us? My God, in pity, take us and end it!" The grandfather continued motionless like an old tree shorn by the rain and the wind, while the father continued his walk from the chimney to the door, without turning his head.

But the door opened again, and this time is was Doctor Vanderhaghen.

"The devil," said he, "a candle would not ruin your eyesight. . . . Be quick, I am in a hurry."

He grumbled as usual, tired out with work. Fortunately he had matches, and the father had to light six, one at a time, and hold them while he examined the

patient. Unwound from her blanket, she shivered under this flickering light, looking like a poor little wretched bird agonizing in the snow, so thin that her hump only was seen. She smiled nevertheless, the wandering smile of the dying, with her eyes wide open, while her poor hand clutched her hollow breast. And, as the mother cried still louder, asking if it were reasonable to take, before her, the only child that helped her in the household, the doctor grew angry.

"There! she's going. . . . She has died of hunger, your d—d brat. And she is not the only one; I have seen another next door. You all call me, and I can do nothing; it is meat that you want."

Maheu, with burnt fingers, had thrown away the match; darkness fell again on the little corpse, still warm. The doctor had hurried off, Etienne heard nothing in the dark room but the sobs of la Maheu, who kept repeating her mournful and ceaseless prayer for death.

"My God! it's my turn; take me! My God! take my man; in pity take the others and end it."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Since nine o'clock on that Sunday Jouvarine remained alone in the saloon of l'Avantage in his usual place with his head against the wall. More than one coal man did not know where to find two sous for a drink; never had the place had fewer customers. So Mme. Rasseneur, stationed at the counter, was sullenly silent, while Rasseneur, standing in front of the chimney, seemed to be watching with an air of reflection the black coal smoke. Suddenly, in the dull silence of the overheated room, three little sharp knocks at one of the window panes made Jouvarine turn his head. He rose, recognizing the signal of which Etienne had several times made use to call him, when he saw him from the outside smoking his cigarette, seated at an empty table. But before the machinist reached the door, Rasseneur had opened it; and, recognizing the man who was there, in the light from the window, he said to him:

"Are you afraid that I shall betray you? We can talk better inside than outside." Etienne entered. But he refused the drink which Mme. Rasseneur politely offered him. The tavern-keeper added:

"A long time ago I guessed where you were hiding. If I was a spy, as your friends say, I could have sent the gendarmes to you eight days ago."

"There is no need to defend yourself," replied the young man. "I know that is not in your line. Without sharing the same ideas, we may esteem each other nevertheless."

And silence reigned again. Jouvarine had reseated himself with his back against the wall, his eyes lost in the smoke of his cigarette, but his feverish fingers moved uneasily as he rubbed them along his knees seeking the warm Polish nap of the trousers which he had not put on that evening, and he felt that something was missing, not knowing exactly what it was.

Seated at the other side of the table, Etienne said at last:

"To-morrow work will be resumed at Voreux. The Belgians have arrived with little Negrel."

"Yes, I saw them pass," said Rasseneur, still standing. "Provided we don't kill ourselves yet!"

Then, raising his voice, "No, you see I don't want to renew our dispute. It can only end badly if you continue so obstinate. . . . See! your story is precisely that of your International. I saw Pluchart the other day at Lille, where I had business. His machine is out of order apparently.

He gave details. The Association, after having won over the whole of the workmen to an enthusiasm in the propaganda, which made the peasantry still shudder, was now devoured and weakened more and more day by day by the petty internal dissensions prompted by vanity and ambition. Since the triumph of the anarchists in driving out their predecessors, the evolutionists, everything was breaking up, the original aim, the reform in the scale of wages, was lost in party bickerings, and the official lists became disorganized from hatred of discipline. And even now might be predicted the final

overthrow of this levy *en masse*, which for a moment, had threatened to blow away the rotten old gentry.

"Pluchart is sick of it," continued Rasseneur. "He has no more voice, but he speaks nevertheless, and he wishes to go to Paris to speak. . . . And he repeated to me three times that the game was up with our strike. Etienne, with his eyes on the ground, let him go on without interruption. The evening previous he had talked with some comrades, and he felt a breath of bitterness and suspicion—those harbingers of unpopularity announcing defeat. He remained gloomy. He would not own his discouragement before a man who had predicted that the mob would howl at him in his turn on the day when a mistake had to be avenged.

"Without a doubt the strike is broken up. I know it as well as Pluchart," said he, at last. "But that was anticipated. We accepted this strike unwillingly. We did not expect to conquer the company by it. . . . But that is the way, we intoxicate ourselves; we begin to hope this and that, and when things go wrong we forget that we ought to have expected it; we lament and we dispute as under a misfortune sent by Heaven."

"Well, then," replied Rasseneur, "if you believe the cause lost, why don't you make your comrades listen to reason?"

The young man looked at him fixedly.

"Listen—this is enough. . . . You have your ideas, I have mine. I came in here to show you that I esteem you notwithstanding. But I still hold that if we die of want and suffering our famished bodies will do more for the people's cause than your prudent logic. Ah! if one of these hogs of soldiers could only put a ball in my heart, how glorious it would be to end thus!"

His eyes had moistened in this cry, where the secret desired by the conquered was betrayed, seeking the refuge which would end his torment forever.

"Well said!" exclaimed the hard voice of Madame Rasseneur, with the scorn of all her radical opinions in the look she cast upon her husband.

Jouvarine, his eyes in a cloud and groping with his hands nervously, did not seem to have heard a word. His blonde, girlish face, thin nose, small pointed teeth, grew savage in a mystic reverie, traversed by bloody

visions, and he commenced to dream aloud. He replied to a word of Rasseneur's about the International, caught in the midst of the conversation.

"They are all cowards! It needed but one man to make their machine the terrible instrument of destruction. But the will is wanting. Nobody will do it, and that is why the revolution will fail again."

He continued, in a tone of disgust, to deplore the imbecility of men, while the two others were troubled by these revelations of the somnambulist and made to the darkness.

In Russia nothing was going on. He was in despair at the news he had received the night before. His old comrades were all becoming politicians; the famous Nihilists who made Europe tremble, the priests, the peasants, the merchants had not a thought beyond national liberty, and seemed to think that the killing of the despot would free the world; and the moment he spoke to them of mowing down this old race like a ripe harvest, the moment he pronounced the word republic, he felt they could not understand him; they were made uneasy, and classed him thenceforth with those princes who had missed fire in the revolutionary universe.

His patriotic heart struggled notwithstanding; it was with mournful bitterness that he repeated his favorite word: "Stupidity! . . . With their stupidity they will never get out of it!"

Then, still lowering his voice he related in bitter words his old dream of paternity. He had only renounced his rank of fortune to join the workmen, in the hope of thus at last establishing the new society of general labor. All the sous in his pockets had long ago been transferred to the gamins of the alley; he had treated the coalmen with the tenderness of a brother, smiling at their distrust, and conquering them by his quiet air of a steady workman little given to talking. But, decidedly, the fusion did not take place; he remained a stranger to them, with his disdain of all bonds. And he was especially exasperated, since the morning, by reading a piece of news going the rounds of the papers. His voice changed, his eyes glittered, fixed themselves on Etienne, and he addressed him directly: "Do you understand that? The workmen hat-

ters of Marseilles, who have gained the great sum of a hundred thousand francs, immediately bought houses declaring that they were going to live without doing anything! Yes, that's your idea, all of you French workmen—to unearth a treasure and then devour it alone in a corner of egotism and idleness. What matters your crying out against the rich; courage fails you to give to the poor the money that fortune sends you. You will never be worthy of happiness so long as you keep anything for yourselves, and your hatred of the peasantry springs only from your wrathful desire to be in their place."

Rasseneur began to laugh; the idea that the two Marseilles workmen ought to have given up that big sum seemed ridiculous to him. But Jouvarine grew pale; his disturbed face became frightful in one of those religious phrensies which exterminate nations. He cried: "You will all be cut down and thrown on the refuse heap. He will be born—he who will annihilate your race of cowards and triflers. And, look! you see my hands; if my hands could do so, they would take the earth thus and break it all into such little pieces that you would be buried under them."

"Well said!" repeated Madame Rasseneur, with her air of polite conviction.

Silence followed. Then Etienne spoke of the workmen of the Bolinage; he questioned Jouvarine on the measures that had been taken at Voreux. But the machinist, again preoccupied, hardly answered; only knew that cartridges were to be distributed among the soldiers guarding the shafts; and the nervous movement of his fingers over his knees increased to such a degree that he finally became conscious of what they were seeking—the soft nap and fur of the familiar rabbit skin.

"Where is Pologne?" asked he.

The tavern-keeper laughed again, looking at his wife. After a little embarrassment he unbent his brows. "Pologne? She is at the fire." Since her adventure with Jeanlin, the fat rabbit, wounded doubtless, had only borne dead rabbits, and not to feed a useless mouth they had decided on that very day to serve her up with potatoes.

"Yes, you ate one of her thighs this evening. . . . And you licked your finers after it!"

Jouvarine had not understood at first. Then he grew very pale, nausea contracted his chin; whilst in spite of his stoicism two large tears swelled his eyelids. But there was not time to notice his emotion; the door was rudely opened, and Cheval appeared, pushing Catherine before him. For three hours he had been running through the taverns of Montson, soaking himself with beer and swaggering. The idea had come to him to go to l'Aventure to show the old people that he was not afraid. He entered, saying to his mistress:

"D——n it! I say you shall drink a glass in there; I'll break the jaw of the first one who scowls at me!"

At the sight of Etienne Catherine turned white. When Cheval perceived him he said, with a malicious sneer:

"Madame Rasseneur, two glasses! We will drink in honor of the resumption of labor."

Like a woman, who refuses beer to no one, she poured it out without a word. All were silent; neither the tavern-keeper nor the two others had stirred from their places.

"I know some who have said that I was a spy," resumed Cheval arrogantly, "and I am waiting for them to say it to my face, so that we may explain ourselves at last."

No one replied; the men turned their heads, staring vacantly at the walls.

"There are idlers, and those who are not idlers," continued he, louder; "as for me, I've nothing to hide. I've left the dirty barracks at Deneulin, and go down to-morrow to Voreux with twelve Belgians placed under my charge because they like me, and if this displeases any one, let me know, and we will talk it over."

Then, as his threats were received with the same contemptuous silence, he grew angry with Catherine.

"D——n it! will you drink! Drink with me to the confusion of all the hogs who refuse to work."

She touched her glass to his, but with such a trembling hand that the slight tinkling of the two glasses was heard.

He, meanwhile, had drawn from his pocket a handful

of silver change, which he spread out with the ostentation of a drunkard, saying that it was by the sweat of his brow that he had earned it, and defying the sluggards to show as much as ten sous. The manner of his comrades exasperated him, and at last he became grossly insulting.

"It's at night, then, the toads go out? The gendarmes must be asleep, that we meet with thieves?"

Etienne had risen calm and resolute.

"Listen! You astonish me! . . . Yes, you are a spy! Your money still smells of treachery, and it disgusts me to touch your traitorous skin; but no matter. I'm your man; for a long time it has been necessary that one of us should make an end of the other."

Cheval clenched his fists.

"Come along, then; you wanted something to stir you up, you coward! I want you alone, and now I'll make you pay for the dirty tricks that have been played upon me!"

With supplicating gesture, Catherine advanced between them. But they had not the trouble of pushing her back. She felt the necessity of the battle, and slowly drew back herself. She stood mutely against a table, so paralyzed with anguish that she no longer shivered, with her large eyes fixed on these two men who were about killing each other for her.

Madame Rasseneur simply carried away the glasses belonging to her counter, for fear they should be broken, when she reseated herself on the little bench, without showing any unbecoming curiosity. But two old comrades could not be allowed to throttle each other thus. Rasseneur tried to intervene, and Jouvarine had to take him by the shoulder and bring him back to the table, saying:

"It is none of your business. There is one too many. The strongest must live."

Already, without waiting for the attack, Cheval struck into the air with his closed fists. He was the taller, ill-formed, aiming at the face with furious blows from both arms, one after the other, as if manœuvering with a pair of sabers. And he continued to talk. He was posing for the gallery, with a stream of execrations which excited him.

"Ah! you d—d villain, I'll have your nose. It's your nose that I want to mash. Give me your jaw, then, that I may make a bouilli for the hogs with it, and we'll see then if the women will run after you any more!"

Mute, with clenched teeth, Etienne drew up his small figure, playing the scientific game, the chest and face covered by his two fists; and he watched, then struck out in terribly sharp and well-aimed blows. At first, little harm was done. The wind-mill knocks of the one, the calm waiting of the other, prolonged the struggle. A chair was upset; their large shoes crushed the white sand sprinkled on the floor. They soon were out of breath; their hoarse breathing became audible, and their faces reddened, as if from an internal brazier, whose flames could be seen through their eyes.

"Hit!" screamed Cheval; "down with your carcass!"

In truth, his fist, flung slopingly, like a flail, had crunched the shoulder of his adversary. He repressed a cry of pain. There was nothing but the faint noise of the crushing of the muscles. And he replied by a straight blow, full on the breast, which would have broken it in if the other had not sprung aside in his constant leaps like a goat. Nevertheless, the blow struck him on the left side so forcibly that he reeled with suspended breath. Enraged to find his arms weakening from pain, he roared like a beast, and aimed at the stomach, to split it open, with his heel.

"I'll split you into bits," cried he, his voice almost suffocated.

Etienne avoided the blow, so indignant at this infraction of the laws of the ring that he broke silence:

"Hold your tongue, brute! and put down your feet, or I'll mash you to pieces with a chair!"

Then the fight grew more serious. Rasseneur, disgusted, would again have intervened but for the severe look of his wife which restrained him; hadn't two customers a right to settle an affair at their house? So he only placed himself before the chimney, for he feared to see them fall into the fire. Jouvarine, with his quiet air, had rolled up a cigarette, which, however, he forgot to light. Catherine remained motionless against the wall; her hands only in unconscious movement twisting themselves and tearing out pieces of her dress. All

her effort was to utter no cry; not to kill one of them by showing a preference; and she was so bewildered besides that she no longer knew which she liked best or whose death she awaited.

Cheval was exhausted, bathed in perspiration, striking at hazard. In spite of his wrath Etienne continued to guard himself, parrying nearly all the blows; though some grazed him. His ear was split, a nail tore off a strip of his neck and, with such a smarting, that he swore in his turn in giving one of his terrible straightforward blows. Once more Cheval saved his chest by a jump, but he had stooped, the fist reached his face, crushed his nose and drove in his eye. Instantly a stream of blood poured from his nostrils, the eye inflamed, swelled up and turned blue. The miserable wretch, blinded by this red flood, dizzy from his stunned brain, was striking the air wildly with his arms, when another blow, full in the breast at last finished him. There was a frightful crash; he fell on his back with a dull sound like a bag of sand. Etienne waited. "Get up. If you want any more, we'll begin again."

Without replying, Cheval, after a few seconds of stupefaction, moved himself on the ground and stretched his limbs. He gathered himself up with difficulty and remained an instant on his knees, like a ball, with his right hand unseen in his pocket, then, when on foot, he roared again with savage fury.

But Catherine had seen; and in spite of herself, by the great cry which sprung from her heart, and astonished her like the avowal of a preference of which she was herself unconscious, she warned the young man.

"Take care! he has his knife!"

Etienne only had time to parry the first thrust with his arm. His clothing was cut by the thick blade—one of those blades with a brass ferrule fixed in a wooden handle. He seized Cheval's arm; a frightful struggle commenced, for he felt that he was lost if he let go of that arm, while the other shook him to free himself and strike. The weapon was lowered gradually; the stiff limbs grew weary; twice Etienne had felt the cold steel against his flesh; he must make a supreme effort; and he clenched the wrist with such a grasp that the

knife slipped from the open hand. Both had fallen on the floor; it was he who picked it up, brandishing it in his turn. He held Cheval on his face, under his knee; he threatened to cut his throat.

"Ah! traitor, your time has come!"

A horrible voice within deafened him. It pervaded his whole body, thundering in his head like the strokes of a hammer, a sudden rage for murder, a thirst for blood. Never had the crisis affected him thus. Nevertheless, he was not drunk. And he fought against the hereditary curse with the shivering desperation of a passionate lover fighting against temptation on the brink of crime. He conquered himself at last; he threw the knife behind him, stammering hoarsely:

"Get up! be off!"

This time Rasseneur rushed forward, but without risking himself between them, in the fear of receiving a heavy blow. He did not want anybody to be assassinated at his house. He was so angry that his wife, standing at the counter, told him that he always cried out too soon. Jouvarine, who had narrowly escaped receiving the knife in his legs, decided on lighting his cigarette. That was the end then? Catherine looked stupidly at the two men, still alive.

"Be off!" repeated Etienne; "be off or I'll finish you."

Cheval got up; with the back of his hand wiped the blood, which continued to flow from his nose, and, with his jaw covered with bloody stains, and his eye crushed, he went off, dragging his legs after him, enraged at his defeat. Mechanically, Catherine followed him. Then, straightening himself, his hatred burst forth in a stream of filthiness.

"Ah! no; ah! no; since it is him you want, let him take care of you, vile hussy. And if you value your skin, don't show yourself at my house again."

He slammed the door violently. A profound silence pervaded the room, broken only by the slight crackling of the coal-cinders. On the floor there only remained the overturned chair and a spattering of blood, soaking, by drops, into the sanded floor.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

When they had left Rasseneur's, Etienne and Catherine walked in silence. The thaw was beginning—a cold, slow thaw which blackened the snow without melting it. In the livid sky one could see the full moon behind heavy clouds, like dark rags, which a tempestuous wind waved furiously on high. And on the earth not a breath stirred; nothing was heard but the droppings from the roofs, whence white flakes fell softly.

Etienne, embarrassed by this woman forced upon him, could find nothing to say. The idea of taking and hiding her with him at Requillart seemed absurd to him. He had spoken at first of conducting her to the alley to her parent's house; but she refused, with a terrified air. No, no; anything rather than return to those whom she had left so shamefully! And neither spoke again. They wandered on through roads which were changing into muddy streams. At first, they had descended toward Voreux, when they turned to the right and passed between the dump and the canal.

"You must sleep somewhere," said he, at last. "If I had even a room, I would be willing to take you. But he suddenly became timid. Their past appeared; their large hopes of old, and the refined bashfulness which had kept them apart. Did he really like her, that he was thus troubled and his heart warming afresh with an unknown desire? The recollection of the box on the ear which she had given him at Gaston-Marie excited him now, instead of filling him with bitterness. And to his surprise, the idea of taking her to Requillart seemed quite natural to him already.

"Come, decide; where do you want me to take you? You hate me a good deal then, that you refuse to come with me?" She walked slowly, with the painful slipping of her sabots in the ruts; and without raising her head, she murmured: "I have trouble enough; my God! don't make me any more. What good would that do us—that which you ask now when I have a lover and you, yourself have a girl."

She was speaking of Moquette. She believed he was with this girl, as was the report for a fortnight past; and when he swore that it was not so, she shook her head, remembering the evening she had seen them exchanging kisses under a street-lamp in Montson.

"Isn't all this nonsense a pity?" said he in a low voice, and stopping. "We would have understood each other so well!"

She shivered slightly, and replied:

"Go—regret nothing, you don't lose much. If you knew how I am worn out! I shall never reach mature years!

"My poor little creature," said Etienne, filled with pity.

They were below the dump, hidden in the shade of the immense piles. A cloud, black as ink, was just passing over the moon; they could not even see each other's faces, and, their breaths intermingled, their lips sought each other for the kiss for which they had been longing for months past. But suddenly the moon re-appeared, they saw above them, above the white rocks, the sentry from Voreux, erect and facing them! And without having exchanged the kiss, bashfulness separated them; the old bashfulness mixed with anger, vague repugnance and strong attraction. They wearily resumed their walk, plodding through the mud ankle deep.

"It's decided, you won't?" asked Etienne.

"No," said she. "You, after Cheval, eh? and after you, another. . . . No, that disgusts me."

They were silent, walking a hundred steps without exchanging a word.

"Do you know where you're going, at least?" he resumed. "I can't leave you out doors on such a night."

She replied simply: "I am going back again. Cheval is my man after all, and I have no business anywhere else."

"But he'll beat you to death!"

Silence fell again. She shrugged her shoulders resignedly. He would beat her, and when tired of beating her he would stop; was not even that better than wandering about the roads like a beggar? Besides she was accustomed to slaps; she said, to console herself that among ten women, eight fared no better than her-

self. If her lover married her some day, it would still be a kind act on his part. Etienne and Catherine had mechanically taken the road toward Montson, and as they approached it, their intervals of silence lengthened. It seemed as if they had never been friends. He found no means of convincing her, in spite of the heavy grief he experienced in seeing her return to the other one. His heart swelled that he had nothing better to offer her than a life of wretchedness and flight from pursuit —a night perhaps without a morrow, if a soldier's bullet cracked his skull. Perhaps, after all, it was better to bear the suffering of the present, without risking more. And he reconducted her to her lover's with drooping head, and made no remonstrance, when, on the highway, she stopped him at the corner of the Chautiers, at fifty metres from the Piquette coffee-house, saying:

"Don't come any further. If he saw you he would be still more savage."

The church clock was striking eleven. La Piquette was closed, but there was light under the door.

"Good-bye," she said; "don't stay here, I beg of you; it makes me afraid."

She had given him her hand; he kept it, and painfully and slowly she withdrew it to leave him. Without turning her head she went in by the little door with her latch-key. But he did not withdraw, remaining standing in the same place, his eyes fixed in anxiety to know what would take place. He bent his ear; he feared to hear the groans of a beaten woman. The house remained dark and silent; a window on the first story alone was lighted, and, as it opened and he recognized the slight form leaning out, he advanced.

Catherine then whispered very low:

"He hasn't come back. I'm going to bed. . . . I beg you to leave!"

Etienne went away. The thaw increased; a stream ran from the roofs, dampness streamed from the walls, the palisades, from all the crowded buildings of this industrial suburb, lost in this gloomy night. He returned at first towards Requillart, ill from fatigue and sadness, seized with a longing to disappear undergound and annihilate himself there. Then the thought of the Voreux returned to him; he thought of the Belgian

workmen who were coming down; of his comrades of the alley, exasperated against the soldiers, resolved not to tolerate strangers in their mine. And again he traversed the canal, amid the flakes of melting snow. As he neared the dump the moon shone out clearly. He raised his eyes, looked at the sky, where the clouds were hurrying past, spurred on by the wind above; but they whitened and thinned into pale mist as they filed across the face of the moon, following each other so rapidly that the orb, veiled for a moment at times, increasingly reappeared in its limpid beauty.

Engrossed with this pure light, Etienne was bending his head, when a spectacle at the summit of the terrace arrested him. The sentry, stiff with cold, was walking now; taking twenty-five steps towards Marchiennes, and then turning towards Montson. The white sparkle of his bayonet could be seen above this black shadow, clearly defined against the pale sky. And that which interested the young man was that behind the hut which sheltered Bonnemort in stormy nights, there was a moving shadow, a crouching beast on the watch, in whom he immediately recognized Jeanlin, with his long, thin, bony form. The sentry could not see him; the little rascal was certainly preparing some trick, for he hated the soldiers and asked when they would be rid of those murderers who came with guns to kill everybody. For a moment Etienne hesitated about calling to him to stop his nonsense. The moon was obscured; he had seen him gather himself up ready to spring, but the moon shone out and the child remained crouching. At each turn the sentry advanced as far as the hut and then went back again. Suddenly, as a cloud cast its shadow, Jeanlin leaped upon the shoulders of the soldier, with the tremendous spring of a wild-cat, and clutching him with his claws, drove his open knife into his throat. The horse-hair collar resisted; he had to grasp the handle with both hands and hang on it the whole weight of his body. He had often thus bled chickens which he caught behind the farms; it was so rapidly done, that a single stifled cry only broke on the night, while the gun fell with a metallic sound. Already the white moon was shining brilliantly. Immovable from stupor, Etienne still looked on. His call had

died away in his breast. Above, the dump was empty, not another shadow fell from the flying clouds. He ran up and found Jeanlin on his hands and knees before the corpse, fallen back with outstretched arms. In the snow, under the clear light, the red pantaloons and gray capote were clearly defined. Not a drop of blood had flowed; the knife was still buried in the throat up to the handle. Furious and unreasoning with a blow of his fist he struck the child beside the body.

"Why did you do that?" stammered he, bewildered.

Jeanlin drew himself together, dragged himself on his hands, with a cat-like curve of his meagre form, and his large ears, his green eyes, and his projecting jaws trembled and flamed from the shock of the heavy blow.

"In God's name, why did you do that!"

"I don't know. . . . I wanted to."

This was his only answer. For three days he had had the wish. It tormented him; his head ached so there behind his ears, thinking of it night and day. Were they of any consequence, these pigs of soldiers, who came here to trouble the coalmen in their homes? From the violent speeches in the forest, the cries of devastation and death flung across the mines, five or six words had impressed themselves upon him, which he repeated like a gamin playing at revolution. And he knew nothing more; nobody had urged him; alone the idea came to him like his desire to steal onions in a field.

Etienne, shocked at this precocity of crime in the childish brain, with a kick drove him away as he would a senseless brute. He trembled lest the guard at Voreux had heard the strangling cry of the sentry, and cast an anxious look towards the mine each time that the moon shone out. But nothing stirred, and he crouched down, felt the hands becoming icy cold, and listened for the heart, silent under the capote. Nothing of the knife was seen but the bone handle, where the gallant device—the simple word "Love"—was engraved in black letters. His eyes went from the throat to the face, and suddenly he recognized the little soldier; it was Jules, the recruit, with whom he had chatted one morning. A deep pity seized him in face of these mild blonde features, covered with reddish stains; the large

blue eyes, widely opened, turned to the sky with that fixed look with which he had seen him scanning the horizon in search of his far-off country. Where then was that Plogof of which he spoke? Over there, over there. The sea moaned in the distance on this stormy night. Perhaps this wind, so high above, whistled over that land. Two women were on foot, the mother, the sister, holding their caps which they had taken off, looking out also, as if they might be able to see what the young soldier was doing at this hour beyond the leagues that separated them. They would always be waiting for him now. How horrible to have him killing himself thus among poor devils, for the sake of the rich!

But this body must be removed out of sight; Etienne's first thought was to throw it into the canal, but the certainty of discovery prevented him. Then his anxiety became extreme; time pressed; what should he do? A sudden inspiration came to him; if he could carry the body as far as Requillart, he could bury it forever.

"Come here," he said to Jeanlin.

But the child was suspicious.

"No, you want to beat me. And, besides, I have something to do. Good-night."

And in truth he had arranged a rendezvous with Bebert and Lydie in a hiding-place, a hole made under the wood-pile at Voreux. It was a good large place to sleep in all night if they threw stones at the Belgians when they were coming down.

"Listen," exclaimed Etienne. "If you don't come here I'll call the soldiers and they'll cut off your head." And as Jeanlin decided to come, he wound his handkerchief tightly round the soldier's neck, without withdrawing the knife, to prevent the flow of blood.

The snow was melting; on the ground there was neither a red spot nor the trampling of a struggle.

"Take him by the legs."

Jeanlin took the legs, Etienne carried the shoulders, after fastening the gun at his back; and the two slowly descended the embankment, trying not to move the stones. Happily, the moon was veiled again. But, as they reached the bottom and were passing along the canal, she shone out clearly, and it was a miracle if the

guard did not see them. Without a word they hurried on, hindered by the shaking about of the corpse, and obliged to rest it on the ground every hundred metres. As they were turning the corner of the little Requillart street a noise startled them; they had only time to throw themselves behind a wall to avoid the patrol. Further on a man surprised them, but he was drunk, and cursed them as he passed on. They arrived at last at the old shaft, covered with perspiration, and so exhausted now that their teeth chattered. Etienne knew well that it would not be easy to take down the soldier by the rungs of the ladder. It was a terrible task, and twenty times he despaired of it. In the first place it was necessary that Jeanlin, from above, should let the corpse slide down, whilst he, hanging from the brushwood, accompanied it, to help in jumping over the two first landing places where the rungs were broken. Then, at each ladder, the manœuver had to be repeated, going down first and receiving it in his arms; and thus over thirty ladders, two hundred and ten metres, he bore the burden. The gun knocked against his back; he would not let the child get the bit of candle which he had saved so carefully. What for? light would bother them in this narrow way.

Nevertheless, when they had finally arrived out of breath at the entry room, he sent the child for the candle; while he seated himself near the body, his heart beating violently. Jeanlin returned with the light and it only remained to find a distant hole. Etienne consulted him, for the child had searched through these old works even to the cliffs where the men did not pass.

They set out again; they dragged the body nearly a kilometer over winding galleries in ruins, threatening to give way at any moment. The roof grew lower, they found themselves on their knees, flattened under a fallen rock, which was sustained by half-broken posts. It made a kind of long box, where they laid the little soldier as in a coffin; they placed the gun at his side; then, with heavy blows with their heels, they finished the breaking up of the wood, at the risk of burying themselves there also. All at once, the rock split, and they had hardly time to scramble out on their elbows and knees. When Etienne looked round (unable to

resist), the falling of the roof continued, slowly crushing the body by its enormous weight. And nothing remained, nothing but the heavy mass of earth.

Jeanlin, returning home to the corner of his rogue's cavern, stretched himself on the hay, muttering, worn out with fatigue:

"The brats must wait for me; I'll sleep for an hour."

He was asleep instantly, whilst Etienne, seated on the wood, blew out the candle of which but a little piece remained. He also was worn out, but he was not sleepy; painful thoughts, like a nightmare, racked his brain. One became fixed there, torturing, wearying him with a question he could not answer: why had he not struck Cheval when he had him under his knife? And why had that child just stabbed a soldier whose name he did not even know? His revolutionary creeds were all in confusion—the courage to kill, the right to kill. Was he then a coward? Such disgust at the shedding of blood tortured him with frightful doubt. Near him, on the hay, the boy commenced to snore, like the snoring of a satiated man, sleeping off his drunkenness, and it disgusted and irritated him to know him there, to hear him there, like a stunned and senseless brute.

All at once, he shivered; fear came over him. A slight shaking, a faint sob seemed to rise from the depths of the earth. The image of the little soldier lying over there with his gun, under the rocks, flashed through his brain and made his hair stand on end. It was folly; he fought against it; all the mine seemed full of voices; he had to relight the candle, and only grew calmer when he saw the empty galleries in this pale light. For a quarter of an hour longer Etienne continued the struggle, reflecting, pondering, always torn by the same conflict, his eyes fixed on the burning candle. But he shrivelled up when the candle went out, and all was darkness again. A shivering seized him; he would have touched Jeanlin to prevent his snoring so loud. The presence of the child became unbearable to him, he fled, tormented by a want of air, hurrying by the galleries, as if he had heard a ghost whispering behind him. Above, amidst the ruins of Requillart, he could at last breathe freely. Since he did not dare to kill, it was for him to die; and this idea of death, which had already

occurred to him, sprung up anew, fastening itself like a last hope. To die; to die for the revolution; that would end all, settle all his affairs, good or bad, and keep him from thinking any more. If the comrades attacked the Borains, he would be in the first ranks and have a good chance of a fatal blow. It was with a firm step that he returned to wander about Voreux. The clock at Montson had struck two; a loud noise of voices came from the overseers' room, where the guard at the mine were quartered. The disappearance of the sentry had astounded the men; they had gone to awaken the captain, and at last, after an examination of the place, they concluded that he had deserted. And, watching in the shadow, Etienne remembered the republican captain of whom the little soldier had spoken to him. Who knew if he could not be won over to the people? the troops would raise the butts of their muskets in the air, and that might be the signal for the massacre of the peasantry. Another dream took possession of him; he no longer thought of dying, he spent hours, his feet in the mud, the drizzling rain of the thaw on his shoulders, fevered with the hope of a still possible victory. Until five o'clock, he awaited the Borains. Then he found that the company had shrewdly made them sleep at Voreux. The descent commenced; the day was breaking, and the few strikers of the alley of the Deux-Cent-Quarante, posted as scouts, still hesitated to warn their comrades. It was he who gave them notice of the news, and they set off at a run, while he remained behind the dump on the tow-path. Six o'clock struck; the leaden sky paled, then was lightened by a ruddy orb, when the Abbe Ranvier came out from a path, with his cassock raised on his thin legs; every Monday he went to say early mass at the chapel of a convent on the other side of the mine.

"Good-morning, my friend," he cried with a loud voice, after having scanned the young man with his fiery eyes. But Etienne did not reply. In the distance between the trussels of Voreux, he had just seen a woman pass, and he became uneasy and anxious, for he thought he had recognized Catherine. Since midnight Catherine had been exposed to the thaw on the roads. Cheval, on entering, finding her lying down, had

brought her to her feet with a box on the ear. He commanded her to go out of the door instantly, if she did not wish to leave by the window; and weeping, hardly dressed, with legs bruised by kicks, she found herself outside. This brutal separation stunned her, and she had to sit down on a mile-stone in front of the house, looking at the front of the house, hoping that he would recall her; for it was not possible—he was watching her, he would tell her to come up again when he saw her trembling thus, abandoned, without a soul to take her in. At length, at the end of two hours, she came to a decision, perishing with cold like a dog thrown out into the street. She left Montson, retraced her steps, not daring either to call from the pavement or to knock at the door. At last she went off on the paved highway with the vague idea of returning to the alley, to her parents. But when she arrived there such shame took possession of her that she ran the length of the gardens from fear of being seen by someone in spite of their heavy sleep behind the closed blinds. And she wandered about, trembling at the slightest noise, believing that they were going to take her up as a bad woman and conduct her to that bad house at Marchiennes, the horror of which had haunted her like a nightmare for months. Twice she stumbled against the Voreux, frightened at the loud voices of the guard, ran off out of breath, now and then looking back to see that she was not pursued. The Requillart lane was always full of drunken men; she returned there, notwithstanding, in the unconscious hope of finding him whom she had repulsed a few hours before. If he were there he would defend her; and it was he, perhaps, that she sought in bewilderment through the darkness, without knowing herself what anguish it was that thus actuated her.

Cheval was to go down to Voreux at four o'clock. This thought brought Catherine back towards the mine. She would see him, but she knew it would be useless to speak to him; all was finished between them. There was no work going on at Jean-Bart, and Cheval had told her that he would strangle her if she recommenced work at Voreux, where he feared she would compromise him. Then, what was to be done? Go elsewhere, starve

with hunger, give up under the cuffs of all the men passing by? She dragged herself along, staggering in the ruts, her legs shaking and covered with mud. The thaw now rolled through the roads in a muddy stream; she was almost drowned in it, walking on always, not daring to look for a stone to sit down upon. Daylight came, and she had just recognized Cheval's back as he turned to enter the mine, when she perceived Lydie and Bebert putting their noses out of their hiding-place under the wood-pile. They had stayed there in vain, without daring to return home, from the moment Jeanlin gave the order to wait for him, and, while the latter slept at Requillart in the heavy stupor arising from the murder, the two children had their arms round each other to keep warm. The wind passed between the sticks of chestnut and oak, clashing as in the center of a wood-cutter's hut. Lydie did not dare to speak aloud of her sufferings, like a beaten little woman, any more than Bebert had the courage to complain of the cuffs he received from the captain. But at last the latter abused them too much, cuffed harder, risked breaking their bones in foolish raids, and then refused them any share in the spoils; and their hearts swelled in revolt. They had ended by embracing each other, in spite of his prohibition, willing to receive the box on the ear from an invisible hand with which he menaced them; they continued kissing each other for a long time without thinking of anything else, concentrating in this caress all their long-restrained love, all that they had endured of martyrdom and suffering. During the whole night they had thus kept themselves warm, so happy at the bottom of this hole that they could not remember ever having been more so, even at St. Barbe, where they ate fritters and drank wine.

A bugle call made Catherine shiver. She raised herself up and saw the guard at Voreux taking their arms. Etienne arrived running. Bebert and Lydie, with one spring, jumped out of their hiding place; and over there, in the growing daylight a band of men and women were coming down the alley with excited and angry gestures.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THEY had just barricaded all the openings to the Voreux; and the twenty-five soldiers, barred the only door remaining free, that which led to the receiver's office, by the narrow staircase on which the overseers' room and the waiting room opened. The captain had ranged them in two files against the brick wall, so that they could not be attacked from behind. At first the band of miners, which had come down the alley, remained at a distance. They numbered thirty at the most; they consulted with violent and confused words. La Maheu, the first on the ground, with uncombed hair under a handkerchief knotted in haste, holding Estelle still asleep in her arms, repeating in a feverish voice, "Let no one go in, and let no one go out. We must crush them all in there!"

Maheu approved, just as the pere Moque arrived from Requillart. They wished to prevent him from passing. But he disputed the point; he said his horses eat their oats all the same and did not care for the revolution; besides, there was a dead horse and they were expecting him to take it away. Etienne relieved the old groom, and the soldiers allowed him to ascend to the shaft. A quarter of an hour later, as the band of strikers, gradually grown larger, became threatening, a large door opened on the ground floor; men appeared carrying the dead animal, a wretched looking bundle still tied up with ropes, which they abandoned in the midst of the melting masses of snow. The surprise was such that they did not prevent them from re-entering and barricading the door again. All had recognized the horse, with his head bent and stiff against his flank; whispers flew round.

"It's Trompette, isn't it? It's Trompette."

It was Trompette, indeed. Since his descent he could never become acclimatized. He remained dull, without interest in the work, as if tortured with a longing for the light. In vain did Bataille, the senior of the mine, kindly rub against his sides and bite his neck to impart to him a little of the patience acquired by his

ten years in the depths. These caresses increased his melancholy, his skin shivered under the confidences of the comrade grown old in the darkness, and the two, when they met and snorted together, seemed to be lamenting, the old one that he could not remember, the young one that he could not forget. At the stable, with neighboring mangers, they ate with drooping heads, whispering through their nostrils, exchanging their constant dream of daylight, of visions of green herbage, of white roads, of yellow lights without end. Then, one morning, when Trompette lay dying on his litter, Bataille began to smell him despairingly with short snifflings resembling sobs. He felt himself growing cold. The mine had robbed him of his last joy, this friend fallen from above, redolent of sweet odors, recalling to him his youth in the open air. And he broke his tether neighing with fright on the night that he perceived the other moved no more.

Moque had not failed to give notice to the head overseer eight days ago. But a sick horse was not worth thinking about in such times as these! The administration did not much like changing horses. Now, at least he must be taken out. The groom had spent an hour with two men the evening before tying up Trompette. Bataille was harnassed to carry him to the shaft. Slowly the old horse pulled, dragging the dead comrade through such a narrow gallery that he had to tug at it at the risk of scratching him; and, with a look of exhaustion, harassed, shaking his head, he listened to the long dragging of that mass awaited at the knacker's.

In the shaft room they forgot him as soon as they had unharnessed him; with his mournful eye he watched the preparations for mounting, the carcass pushed on crossbars above the water sump, the cord attached under the cage. At last the loaders gave the signal for flesh freight; he raised his neck to see him leave, at first slowly, then immediately lost in darkness, swept away forever above this black hole, then he remained with his neck stretched out, the wandering memory of the animal perhaps reminding him of the things up there, of the mill of his youth on the banks of the Scarpe, of the large lamp traversing the air. But it was ended; the comrade would see nothing more; he

himself would be tied up in a pitiful bundle on the day when he went up there again. His feet began to tremble, the strong air which came from the far-off country stifled him; and he seemed as if intoxicated when he returned heavily to the stable.

On the flagging the strikers remained gloomily before Trompette's corpse. A woman said in an undertone, "One man more—we can go down if we choose."

But another crowd was coming from the alley, and Levaque, who marched at the head, followed by la Levaque and Bouteloup, cried:

"Death to the Borains! No strangers here! To the death! To the death!"

All were rushing on, Etienne must stop them. He had approached the captain, a tall, slight-looking young man, hardly twenty-eight years old, with an air of desperate resolution; and he explained to him the state of affairs, endeavoring to win him over, and watching the effect of his words. Why risk a useless massacre? Was not justice on the side of the miners? They were all brothers, and ought to understand one another? At the word republic the captain made a nervous gesture. With military stiffness he said abruptly:

"Leave! Do not force me to do my duty."

Three times Etienne renewed his explanations. His comrades at his back were grumbling. The rumor ran that M. Hennebeau was at the mine, and there was a talk of putting him down by the neck to see if he would bring down his coal himself. But the rumor was false; only Megrel and Danseart were there, both showing themselves for an instant at a window of the receiver's room; the superintendent kept in the background, disheartened, since his adventure with la Pierronne; whilst the engineer boldly scanned the crowd with his bright little eyes, smiling with the scoffing contempt with which he looked on men and things. Threatening shouts arose, and they disappeared; and in their place, only the blonde face of Jouvarine was visible. He had just been at work, and he came there to have a glance when he could leave the engine for a few seconds. With an air of calmness, mute, with the fixed idea set in the depths of his clear eyes, he had not given up for a single day

the plan he had laid from the commencement of the strike.

"Leave!" repeated the captain, in loud tones. "I have nothing to hear; I am ordered to guard the shaft; I will guard it. And don't push against my men, or I'll make you draw back."

In spite of the firmness of his voice, he paled with increasing anxiety at the sight of the constantly swelling crowd of miners. He was to be relieved at noon, and, fearing that he could not hold out till then, he had just sent a boy from the mines to Montson, asking for reinforcements.

Shouts replied to him:

"Death to the strangers! Death to the Borains! We are the masters here."

Etienne retreated in despair. It was the end; nothing remained but to fight and to die. And he ceased to restrain his comrades; the band pressed on as far as the little troop. They numbered nearly four hundred already; the neighboring alleys were emptying themselves, the men arriving at racing speed. All uttered the same cry, Maheu and Levaque repeating furiously to the soldiers:

"Be off! we have nothing against you; be off!"

"This does not concern you," said la Maheu, "Let us settle our own affairs."

And behind her, la Levaque added more violently:

"Must we cut you to get past? We beg you to break up your camp."

Even the shrill voice of Lydie, who, with Bebert, had forced herself into the thickest of the crowd, was heard, saying in a sharp tone:

"Look at the fools!"

Catherine, a few steps off, looked and listened as if stupefied by this fresh violence, in the midst of which she had fallen. Had she not suffered too much already? What fault had she committed that misfortune left her no rest? Even last evening she knew nothing of the wrath of the strikers. She thought that when one already had her share of blows, it was useless to seek for more; and at this hour her heart swelled with a desire to hate something. She remembered what Etienne had told her formerly in the evenings; she tried to hear what

he was saying now to the soldiers. He spoke to them as comrades, he reminded them that they also were of the people, that they ought to join with them against those who took advantage of their wretchedness.

But in the crowd there was a sudden movement, and an old woman struggled forward. It was Brule, frightfully thin, neck and arms uncovered, running in such haste that the flying locks of gray hair blinded her.

"Ah! my God, I'm here," she stammered, out of breath. "That traitor Pierron had me shut up in the cellar." And without waiting she attacked the troops, her black mouth filled with imprecations.

"Mob of rascals! mob of sots! who lick the boots of your superiors, you've courage only against the poor!"

Then the others joined her in a stream of insults. A few still cried; "Long live the soldiers! to the shaft with the officer!" But soon there was but one cry: "Down with the red pantaloons!"

The men who had listened impassively, with faces dumb and motionless, to the appeals to fraternity, the friendly attempts at seduction, preserved the same passive stiffness under this hail of insults. Behind them the captain had drawn his sword, and as the crowd pressed them more and more, threatening to crush them against the wall, he commanded them to charge bayonets. They obeyed; a double row of steel points were lowered before the breasts of the strikers.

"Ah! the devils," roared old Brule, drawing back.

Already all were returning, in exalted defiance of death. Women rushed on with the men, la Maheu and la Levaque saying:

"Do kill us! do kill us, then! We want our rights."

At the risk of cutting himself, Levaque had seized with both hands a cluster of bayonets, three bayonets, which he shook and dragged towards him, to snatch them away; he twisted them, with strength doubled by his anger, while Bouteloup, at one side, weary of following this comrade, looked on calmly.

"Here!" said Maheu. "Here, if you're good fellows!" and he opened his vest, pushing aside his shirt, showing his naked breast, the flesh hairy and tatooed with coal. He pushed against the points, he compelled them to draw back, terrible with his firmness and bravery.

One of them pricked his chest; he rejoiced at it and tried to have it pierce deeper so as to hear his ribs crack.

"Cowards, you dare not. . . . There are ten thousand behind us. Yes, you can kill us, there will be ten thousand more to kill still."

The position of the soldiers was becoming critical, for they had been strictly forbidden by their captain to use their arms only in the last extremity. And how were those enraged creatures there to be prevented from spitting themselves? On the other side, the space constantly diminished, they found themselves now driven against the wall without the possibility of retreating any more. Their little squad, a mere handful of men, in front of the swelling tide of the miners, held their own notwithstanding, executing with coolness the brief orders issued by the captain. He, with clear eyes and lips nervously pressed together, had but one fear, that of seeing them exasperated at last by the insults. Already, a young sergeant, a lean little fellow, whose mustache of four hairs bristled, worked his eyelids in an uneasy manner. Near him an old soldier, tanned like leather by twenty campaigns, had turned pale when he saw his bayonet twisted like a straw. Another, a recruit doubtless, fresh from labor, turned red every time he heard them called rascals and debauchees. And the violence did not cease, extended fists, abominable words, peltings, menaces, and accusations were flung full in the face. It needed all the strength of discipline to hold them thus, with mute faces, in the haughty and sad silence of military orders. A collision appeared unavoidable, when the overseer, Richomme, was suddenly seen to come out behind the troops, violently moving he spoke aloud:

"My God, what a stupid end this is! We must not permit such nonsense."

He threw himself between the bayonets and the miners.

"Comrades, listen to me. . . . You know that I am an old workman, and that I have never ceased to be one of you. Well, in God's name, I promise you that if you are not treated justly, it is I who will tell the chiefs the truth. . . . But this is too much, it does no

good slinging bad words at these worthy folks, and wanting to have a hole made in one's body."

They listened, they hesitated, unfortunately, the sharp profile of little Negrel reappeared. Doubtless he feared that he would be accused of sending an overseer instead of risking himself; and he tried to speak. But his voice was lost in the midst of such a frightful tumult that he had to leave the window, after having merely shrugged his shoulders. From that time it was in vain that Richomme entreated them in his name, repeating that among comrades such things should be passed over; he was pushed back, he was suspected. But he was determined; he remained in the midst of them repeating:

"In God's name! they may break my head, but I won't let you go, so long as you are such fools."

Etienne, whom he begged to aid him in making them listen to reason, felt his impotence. It was too late, they now numbered more than five hundred. And there were not only the maddened ones collected to drive out the Borains; there were those drawn by curiosity, jokers who amused themselves watching the conflict. In the middle of the group at a little distance Zacharie and Philomêne looked on as at a play, so quiet that they had brought the two children, Achille and Desiree. Another company arrived from Requillart with Mouquet and la Mouquette; he went immediately to his friend Zacharie, tapping him on the shoulder with a malicious laugh, whilst she, with much energy, threw herself into the foremost rank of the rioters. Meanwhile the captain turned unceasingly toward the Montson road. The reinforcements asked for did not arrive; his twenty-five men could hold out no longer. At length he thought he would startle the crowd and he gave the command to load the guns. The soldiers obeyed the order, but the excitement increased, a fresh tumult arose of bragging and mockery. "Look at these lazy creatures! they are going off to the target," sneered the women, la Brule, la Levaque and the others.

La Maheu, her breast covered by the little body of Estelle, who had waked up and was crying, approached so near that the sergeant asked her what she was there for, and with that poor little brat.

"What business is it of yours?" she replied. "Fire, if you dare."

The men shook their heads contemptuously. No one thought of firing on them.

"They have no balls in their cartridges," said Levaque.

"Are we Cossacks?" cried Maheu, exasperated. "My God! we don't fire on Frenchmen.

Others exclaimed that when they made the campaign in the Crimea they were not afraid of lead. And all continued to push against the guns. If a discharge had taken place at this moment it would have mowed down the crowd. In the first rank la Mouquette was choking herself with fury, thinking that the red pantaloons wished to fire on the women. She had spit out at them all the most injurious and the basest insults she could possibly think of, and then proceeding to an action so beastly outrageous that a storm of laughter followed. All the jokers as well as the madmen now hooted at the soldiers as if they saw them covered with filth. Catherine only, on one side standing on the old wood, remained mute, the blood rising to her throat, filled with the hatred whose rising heat she felt. But a hustling took place. To calm the excitement of the soldiers the captain decided to take some prisoners. With a leap Mouquette escaped by throwing herself between the legs of her comrades. Three miners, Levaque and two others, were seized in the group of the most violent and kept in sight at the back of the overseers' room.

From above Megrel and Danseart cried to the captain to come in again, to shut himself up with them; but he would not. He knew that these buildings, the doors without locks, would be carried by assault, and that he would then have the mortification of being disarmed. Already his little troop grumbled impatiently; they could not beat a retreat before these wretches in sabots. Once more the twenty-five, pressed against the wall, with loaded guns faced the mob. At first there was a backward movement, an uneasy silence. The strikers were astonished at this display of strength. Then a loud cry rose, demanding the prisoners and their immediate liberation. Some voices exclaimed that they were being strangled in there. And without any concerted plan,

moved by one impulse, by the same thirst for revenge, all ran to a neighboring pile of bricks, brick for which the marly soil furnished the clay, and which were baked on the spot. The children carried them one by one, the women filled their skirts with them. Soon each one had munitions at his feet, and the battle of stones commenced. It was Brule who landed the first. She broke the bricks across her thin knee, and with her right hand and left she threw the two pieces. La Levaque shrugged her shoulders, so large, so soft; she had to approach to take part in the fray, in spite of the entreaties of Bouteloup, who was drawing her back in the hope of getting her away, now that the husband was invisible.

All was excitement. Mouquette, longing for blood, weary of breaking bricks on her fat legs, ended by flinging them whole. The gamins themselves joined the fight. Bebert showed Lydie how to throw them under the elbow. It was a hail-storm, the hail-stones larger than fists, and the heavy crashing was heard afar. Suddenly, in the midst of these furies, Catherine was seen, her two arms raised in the air, also brandishing pieces of brick, flinging them with all the strength of her little arms. She could not tell why, but she was stifled, she longed to kill the whole world. Wouldn't it soon be ended, this life of wretchedness? She had had enough of it, of being cuffed and driven out by her man, of roaming about thus, like a dog lost in the muddy roads, without even being able to ask her father for a dinner, who had a way of swallowing his tongue like herself. And it was never better that she could remember. So she broke bricks and threw them before her with the sole idea of making a sweep of everything, her eyes so blinded with blood that she did not even see whose jaws she cracked.

Etienne, who remained in front of the soldiers, narrowly escaped having his skull split in two; his ear swelled, he turned and shivered on finding that the brick was flung by the nervous hands of Catherine; and at the risk of being killed he did not move off, but looked at her. Many others thus forgot themselves there, in the excitement of the fight with arms swinging. Moquet marked the blows with light cries, as if he were witnessing a game at a public house.

"Oh! that one was well aimed! that other has no chance!" He pushed Zacharie with his elbow, who was quarreling with Philomêne, because he had boxed Achille and Desiree, refusing to take them on his back that they might see. There was a crowd of spectators gathered in the distance along the road as far as the dump. And at the top of the hill, at the entrance of the valley, old Bonnemort had just appeared, dragging himself with a cane, motionless now, straight against the leaden colored sky. As soon as the first bricks were thrown the overseer, Richomme, had planted himself again between the soldiers and the miners. He entreated the one, he exhorted the other, regardless of danger, and in such despair that large tears ran from his eyes. His words could not be heard in the tumult, they could only see the trembling of his large gray mustaches. A moment he opened his arms; doubtless it was a menace to his comrades that he would not stir, that he would await a blow there if they continued to stone the troop.

But the hail of bricks grew thicker, the men following the example of the women.

La Maheu suddenly perceived that Maheu remained behind. His hands were empty, he was looking on, very pale. Then she grew enraged with him:

"Say, what's the matter with you? . . . Are you a coward? Are you going to let them take your comrades to prison? . . . Ah! if I hadn't this child, you would see!"

Estelle, who was clinging round her neck and roaring, prevented her from joining Brule and the others. And as Maheu did not appear to hear her, with her foot she pushed some bricks against his legs.

"In God's name, will you take that? Must I spit in your face before everyone to give you courage?"

Then, reddening, he broke the bricks and flung them. She urged him on, stunned him, uttering death cries behind him, suffocating the little one against her throat in her clenched arms; he kept advancing and soon found himself facing the guns. Under this shower of stones, the little troop was disappearing. Fortunately, nearly all struck too high; the wall was shattered by them. What was to be done? The idea of going in

again, of turning his back, flushed the captain's pale face for an instant; but it was no longer possible; they would be cut to pieces at the slightest movement. A brick had just struck the visor of his kepi; drops of blood ran from his forehead. Several of his men were already wounded, and he felt they were getting beyond his control from the ungovernable instinct of personal defense when the orders of the chief are no longer obeyed. The little sergeant had uttered a cry to God! his right shoulder half disjointed, the flesh bruised by a heavy crash like the blow of the beetle in a laundry. Three times already the recruit had been scratched; his right hand was bleeding, a bruise tortured his right knee. Were they to remain in this position any longer? Near him the old Cheveonne was biting his lips in a last struggle for patience, when a stone rebounded and struck him in the stomach; his tanned cheeks turned green, his gun shook and was stretched out at the end of his thin arms. Twice the captain was on the point of ordering them to fire. Anguish choked him; the internal combat of a few seconds was confusing his ideas of duty; all his creeds as a man and as a soldier. The hail of bricks redoubled, and he was opening his mouth to give the order to "Fire!" when the guns were discharged themselves—three shots at first, then five, then the roll of a volley, then a single shot, a long time after in the utter silence. A stupor followed; they had fired, the gaping crowd remained motionless, not yet believing it. But piercing screams arose, whilst the trumpet sounded the order to cease firing. A crazy panic followed, a race like that of cattle fired upon, lost in the flight through the mud.

Bebert and Lydie had fallen, one on the top of the other, at the first three shots; the little girl struck in the face, the little boy under the left shoulder. She, thunderstruck, did not move again; but he, stirring, siezed her with both hands in the convulsions of death, as if he wished to embrace her again as he had embraced her at the bottom of the dark hiding-place, where they had just passed their last night. And Jeanlin, just arrived at a run from Requillart bloated with sleep, jumping in the midst of the smoke, saw him embrace his little wife and die.

The other five shots had laid low Brule and the overseer, Richomme, struck in the back at the moment he was supplicating his comrades, he had fallen on his knees; and slipping on his hip, he gave the death rattle on the ground, his eyes filled with the tears he had shed. The old woman, with open throat had been stricken down all stiff and cracking like a fagot of dead wood, her last oath strangled by the spouting blood. But then the firing of the volley swept the ground, mowing down, at a hundred paces, the group of curiosity seekers who were laughing at the battle. A ball entered Mouquet's mouth, knocking him over, shattered, at the feet of Zacharie and Philomêne, whose two brats were covered with red drops. At the same instant Moquette received two balls in her stomach. She had seen the soldiers shoulder arms; she had thrown herself, by the instinctive movement of a good girl, before Catherine, calling out to her to take care, and she uttered a great cry, stretched on her back, overthrown by the shock. Etienne ran to her and wished to raise her and carry her away, but with a gesture she said that she was finished. Then there was a rattling in her throat, without her ceasing to smile at both of them, as if happy to see them together now that she was going away.

All seemed ended, the tempest of the balls had spent itself in the distance as far as the fronts of the alley, when the last shot was fired, alone after the others.

Maheu, struck full in the heart, turned round and fell with his face in a pool of water, black with coal. Stupefied, la Maheu stooped down:

"Ah! my old man, get up. It's nothing, tell me." Her hands encumbered by Estelle, she had to put her under her arm to turn her husband's head.

"Do speak! Where are you hurt?" His eyes were glassy and vacant, the mouth foaming with a bloody froth. She understood he was dead. Then she remained seated in the dirt, her child under her arm like a bundle, looking at her old man with an air of stupefaction.

The mine was free. With a nervous gesture, the captain had taken off and then replaced his kepi cut by a stone, and he maintained his pale stiffness in facing

the disaster of his life; whilst his men, with dumb faces, reloaded their guns. The terrified faces of Megrel and Danseart appeared at the window of the receiver's room. Jouvarine was behind them, his forehead crossed by a large wrinkle, as if the bar of his fixed idea had menacingly stamped itself there. On the other side of the horizon, on the edge of the plain, Bonnemort had not stirred, supported by one hand on his cane, the other raised to his eyebrows to see better below, the throttling of his people. The wounded moaned, the dead grew cold in the watery mud of the thaw, in puddles here and there black as ink from the coal which reappeared under the fragments soiled by the snow. And among these corpses of men, all small, with a look of lean misery, lay the carcass of Trompette, a heap of dead flesh, immense and pitiful. Etienne had not been killed. He was still waiting when a ringing voice made him turn his head. It was the Abbe Ranvier, returning from saying mass, and who, with both arms in the air, with prophetic fury, invoked the wrath of God on the assassins. He announced the era of justice, the approaching extermination of the peasantry by fire from heaven, since they filled up the measure of their sins by massacering the laborers and the disinherited of this world.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE firing at Montson had reverberated at Paris with a formidable echo. For four days all the opposition journals were indignant at it, displaying on the first sheet all its atrocities; twenty-five wounded, fourteen dead, of whom two were children and three women; and there were prisoners also. Levaque had become a sort of hero; they credited with a reply to the police magistrate of antique simplicity. The empire, struck at thus boldly by these few balls, which the logic of facts alone had drawn from the guns, affected the calmness of the all-powerful, without taking any notice of the grave nature of its wound. It was only an unfortunate collision, something lost over there in that black country, so far off from the Parisian pave which ruled opinion.

It would soon be forgotten, the company had received official orders to stifle the matter and to end the strike, whose irritating length endangered society. Therefore, on Wednesday morning, three of the managers were seen to disembark at Montson. The little town, sick at heart, not having dared thus far to rejoice aloud at the massacre, drew breath and tasted the joy of safety.

And now the day was fine, the sun clear, one of those first warm days of February which bring the lilacs into bloom. All the blinds of the owner's house had been taken down, the vast building seemed to revive; and good news issued from it; it was said that these gentlemen, affected by the catastrophe, hurried here to open their paternal arms to those who had not been slaughtered in the alley. Now that the blow had been given, a little harder doubtless than they had wished, they displayed great activity in their role as saviours, they took tardy and excellent measures. In the first place they dismissed the Borains, making a great deal of this extreme concession to their workmen. Then they put an end to the occupation of the mines by the military, which the crushed strikers no longer threatened; and it was they also who insured silence on the subject of the disappearance of the sentry of Voreux; the country had been ransacked without finding either his body or his gun; it was decided to write him down deserter; though they ended by suspecting a crime.

In all things they endeavored to extenuate the past, to soften its gravity, uneasy now from fear of the morrow, thinking it dangerous to acknowledge the irresistible savageness of a mob set loose across the rotten timber work of the old world. And besides, this work of pacification did not prevent a profitable management of affairs purely administrative; for Deneulin had been seen to return to the owner's house, where he met M. Hennebeau. Negotiations were resumed for the purchase of Vandame; it was even said that he was going to accept the absurd offers of these gentlemen, being accused and threatened with complete ruin. But that which especially excited the country was the large yellow handbills which the managers had pasted in great numbers on the walls. They contained these few lines in very large letters:

"Workmen of Montson, we do not wish that the errors, of which you have seen the sad consequences during the last few days, should deprive steady and willing workmen of the means of existence. On Monday morning, therefore, we will re-open all the mines, and when work is resumed we will carefully and kindly examine the situations which may require amelioration. In short, we will do all that it is just and possible to do." In the course of one morning, the ten thousand coalmen of Montson defiled before these handbills. Not one spoke, many shook their heads, others went off, with their slow step, without the moving of a feature in their faces.

Thus far, the alley of the Deux-Cents-Quarante had persisted in their savage resistance. It seemed as if the blood of the comrades which had reddened the mud of the mines had barred the road to the others. Hardly a dozen had gone down again; Pierron, and the hypocrites of his stamp, at whom they looked gloomily, going and returning, without a gesture or a menace. Thus the handbill posted on the church was received with gloomy distrust; nothing was said of the discharges sent in; did the company refuse to take those men back? and the fear of reprisals, the fraternal idea of protesting against the dismissal of the most compromised, made them headstrong again. It was equivocal; they must see; they would return to the shafts when these gentlemen were good enough to explain themselves frankly.

The low houses were crushed in gloomy silence; even hunger was nothing now; all could die, since death by violence had passed over the roofs. But one house among the others, that of the Maheus, remained darker and more silent than all in the depth of its mourning. Since she had accompanied her husband to the cemetery, la Maheu had not opened her mouth. Life went on around her without any notice. After the battle she had allowed Etienne to bring Catherine home with them, muddy, half dead; and, as she undressed her, she imagined for an instant that it was her daughter coming back to her wounded. But she did not speak to Catherine any more than she did to Etienne. He again slept with Jeanlin, at the risk of being arrested, seized with such a repugnance at the idea of returning to the

darkness of Requillart that he preferred a prison. A shiver came over him, a horror of night after all these deaths, an unacknowledged fear of the little soldier sleeping over there under the rocks. Besides, he came to dream of the prison as a refuge in the midst of the torment of his defeat; but he was unmolested, and he dragged on through long, miserable hours, not knowing what to do with himself.

At times only la Maheu looked at them both, him and her daughter, with an air of bitterness, as if asking what they were doing at her house. Life had been resumed; all snored together, Bonnemort alone ocupying the old bed of the two brats who slept with Catherine, now that poor Alzire was no longer there to drive her hump into her big sister's sides. And it was above all when the mother went to lie down at night that she felt the void in the house in the coldness of a bed become so large. In vain she took Estelle to fill up the vacancy; nothing could do it, and she cried silently for hours together. Then the days ran on again as formerly; never any bread, without, however, having the chance of starving; bits picked up here and there, which did the wretched creatures the ill turn of keeping them alive. Her life had not changed, but she was without her husband.

On the afternoon of the fifth day, Etienne, driven to desperation by the sight of this silent woman, preferred to go out, and walked slowly through the paved street of the alley. This inaction which weighed upon him urged him to incessant walking, his arms swinging, his head empty, tortured by the same thought. He had been going and coming in this manner for half an hour, when he became aware, through an increased feeling of uneasiness, that the comrades were coming to the doors to look at him. The last shred of his popularity had been blown away at the catastrophe of Voreux; he could no longer pass at this hour without encountering hostile looks. He raised his head, threatening men were there, and women, drawing aside the little window curtains, and under the still unspoken accusations under the restrained wrath of these large eyes, grown larger with hunger and tears, he became awkward and forgot how to walk. And still, behind him, the silent

wrath increased. Such a fear possessed him of hearing the whole alley rush out to proclaim his misery, that he re-entered, shuddering.

But at the Maheus, the scene which awaited him completed his overthrow. Old Bonnemort was there, a fixture in his chair since the two neighbors had been obliged to bring him in on the day of the butchery, having found him on the ground, his cane in pieces, struck down like an old tree by a thunder-bolt. And while Lenore and Henri, to cheat their hunger, scraped with a stunning noise an old saucepan, in which cabbages had been boiled the previous evening, la Maheu, standing up, after having placed Estelle on the table, was threatening with her fist, Catherine, very pale:

"Repeat that! Repeat what you have just been saying!"

Catherine had expressed her intention of returning to the Voreux. The idea of not earning her bread, of being thus tolerated at her mother's like a beast, encumbering and useless, became each day more intolerable to her; and but for the fear of receiving a severe blow from Cheval if she found him at the mine, she would have gone down there on Tuesday. She replied, stammeringly:

"What do you want? We can't live without doing anything. We should have bread at least."

La Maheu interrupted her:

"Listen! the first of you that works I'll strangle. Ah! no, it would be too much to kill the father and then continue to work the children! That's enough, I'd rather see you all carried out between four planks like him who has gone already."

And furiously her long silence broke in a torrent of words. Much they would gain from Catherine's earnings! hardly thirty sous, to which might be added twenty sous if the chiefs should be good enough to find employment for that little brigand Jeanlin, who only came in now in the evening to go to bed. Fifty sous, and seven mouths to feed! The brats were not yet good for anything but to swallow soup. As to the grandfather, he must have cracked something in his brain when he fell, for he seemed imbecile; or perhaps he

had been thus affected from seeing the soldiers fire on his comrades.

"Isn't it so, old man? they've finished you at last. Your fist may be heavy still, but you're broken to pieces."

Bonnemort looked at her with his dim eyes, without appearing to understand. He remained for hours at a time staring vacantly, only retaining sufficient intelligence to spit into a plate filled with ashes, placed at his side for the sake of cleanliness.

"And they have not settled about his pension!" she continued, "and I'm certain they'll refuse it on account of our sentiments. No! I tell you we've had enough of such people."

"Nevertheless," Catherine ventured to say, "they promise on the handbill. . . ."

"Will you hold your tongue, with your handbill! It's only a little more bird-lime to catch us and eat us up. They can be very mild now that they've put holes through us."

"But then, mamma, where shall we go? They won't keep us in the alley, you may be sure."

La Maheu gesticulated frightfully. Where would they go? She couldn't tell, she avoided thinking of it, it made her crazy. They would go away somewhere, anywhere. And as the scraping of the saucepan was becoming unbearable, she fell upon Lenore and Henri and cuffed them. The row was heightened by the falling of Estelle, who had dragged herself on all fours along the table. The mother silenced her with a slap: what a blessing if the fall had killed her! She spoke of Alzire, and wished the others could be as lucky. Then suddenly she broke into heavy sobs, leaning her head against the wall. Etienne, standing, had not dared to intervene; he was of no account now in the house; even the children withdrew from him with distrust. Thus he had an air of embarrassment. But the tears of this unfortunate mother touched his heart and he murmured:

"Come, come, cheer up! We'll try and get out of this."

She did not appear to hear him; she was now lamenting in a low and continuous strain:

"Ah! misery, is it possible? We still managed to live before these horrors. We ate dry bread, but we were all together. . . . And what has happened now? My God! what have we done now, that we should be in such sorrow, some underground, and the others hoping nothing but to be there? It's very true we were harnessed like horses to our work, and there was but little justice in the distribution of the blows we received as we went on swelling the fortunes of the rich without a hope of ever tasting any enjoyment ourselves! There is no pleasure in life when hope has gone. . . . Yes, it could not be endured any longer, we had to breathe a little. But if we had known! Is it possible that we have made ourselves so wretched just because we wanted justice!"

Sighs swelled her heart, her voice was suffocated in immeasurable sadness.

Then, there are always wicked people there to promise you that matters can be arranged if you will only take the trouble. . . . We grow hot-headed; we suffer so much from things as they are, that we ask for that which has no existence. I dreamed already like a beast; I saw before me a life of good-fellowship with all the world; I had sailed away in the air, I give you my word! . . . in the clouds! And we break our backs and fall back in the mud! It wasn't true; there was nothing over there of the things we imagined we saw. What *was* there was increased wretchedness, ah! as much of it as we wanted, and gun shots into the bargain!

Etienne listened to this lament, and each tear seemed to sting him with remorse. He knew not what to say to quiet la Maheu, all bruised by her terrible fall from the pinnacle of her ideal. She had returned to the center of the room, she now looked at him; and then went on fiercely.

"And you, do you also speak of returning to the mine after having tricked us all in? I reproach you with nothing. Only, if I were in your place, I would have died of grief for having brought so much sorrow on my comrades."

He wished to reply, then he raised his shoulders despairingly; why give explanations which, in her grief, she would not understand; and, overpowered by suffer-

ing, he went away, resuming outside his straggling walk. On again reaching the alley, he found that the people seemed to be waiting for him. The men at the doors, the women at the windows. As soon as he appeared, grumblings ran round; the crowd increased. A whisper, growing with the gossip of the last four days, culminated in universal execration. Fists were thrust toward him, mothers shewed him to their children, with a contemptuous gesture, the old men spat on the ground when looking at him. It was the sudden change on the morrow of defeat, the reverse side of the medal of popularity, an execration aggravated by all the sufferings endured in vain. Hunger and death were charged to him.

Zacharie, who was arriving at his mother's with Philoméne, stumbled against Etienne as he was going out, and he sneered maliciously.

"See! he grows fat; the flesh of other people must be nourishing, then!"

La Levaque was already at her door with Bouteloup. She was speaking of Bebert, her gamin, killed by a ball. She cried:

"Yes; there are cowards who cause children to be massacred. Let him go, then, and look for mine underground, if he wants to return him to me."

She forgot her imprisoned husband. The menage did not stop, as Bouteloup remained there. Notwithstanding, the idea returned to her; she continued in a shrill voice:

"Be off! only rogues walk about when honest men are in the shade."

Etienne, to avoid her, had run against la Pierronne, who had hastened across the gardens. She had welcomed as a deliverance the death of her mother, whose violences threatened to have them hanged; and she had little regret for Pierron's little girl, that street-walker Lydie, a good riddance. But she joined the neighbors with the idea of making peace.

"And my mother, say, and the little girl! We saw you, you were hiding yourself behind them, when they swallowed the lead in your place."

What was to be done? Strangle la Pierronne and the others, and fight the whole alley? For an instant

Etienne felt like it. The blood rushed to his head; he thought of his comrades now as brute beasts. It irritated him to see them idiots and barbarians to such a degree as to charge upon him the logic of circumstances. His inability to subdue them again and convince them filled him with sadness, and he only hastened his steps, as if deaf to their imprecations. Soon it became a flight, each house hooting at him as he passed, pressing on his heels, every one cursing him with voices growing gradually like thunder in the outbreak of their hate. It was he who had been working against them, the assassin, the sole cause of their misfortunes. He came out of the alley pale, worn, running, with this hooting crowd at his back. At last, on the road, many fell back, but some obstinately followed him with their imprecations. When at the foot of the hill, before L'Avantage, he encountered another group coming out of the Voreux.

Old Mouque and Cheval were there. Since the death of his daughter, Mouquette, and of his son, Mouquet, the old man continued his work as groom, taciturn, without a word either of regret or of complaint. Suddenly, seeing Etienne pass, he shook with fury; tears gushed from his eyes, and a storm of invective burst from his mouth, black and bleeding from the habit of chewing.

"You dirty fellow! You hog! . . . Wait, you've got to pay me for my poor little brats; you shall do it now!"

He picked up a brick, broke it, and flung the two pieces at him.

"Yes, yes! let us clean him!" cried Cheval, sneeringly, much excited and delighted with this vengeance. "Every one in his turn. . . . Now you're fastened to the wall, you dirty fellow!"

And he also pelted at Etienne with the stones. A savage clamor arose; all took bricks, broke them, threw them to disembowel him, as they had wished to disembowel the soldiers.

It was against him that the battle was now recommencing. Stunned, he ran no longer; he faced them trying to avoid the pieces of brick, seeking words to soothe them. He recollected some passages from his old

speeches, so warmly applauded formerly; he repeated the words with which he had intoxicated them at the time when he held them in his hand like a flock of sheep; but his power was dead; stones were the only replies his phrases continued to receive, and he had just been wounded in the left arm; he was drawing back in great peril when he found himself beaten against the front of l'Avantage.

At that instant Rasseneur had appeared at the door.

"Come in," he simply said.

Etienne hesitated; it choked him to take refuge there, to be saved by his rival.

"Do come in, I'm going to speak to them."

He resigned himself; he hid himself at the back of the saloon, trembling and ashamed, while the tavern-keeper blocked up the door with his large shoulders.

"Look here, my friends, be reasonable. . . . You know well that *I* have never deceived you. I have always been in favor of peace, and if you had listened to me you would assuredly not have been where you are now." Wriggling from his shoulders downwards, he went on at length, he allowed the stream of his eloquence to flow with the soothing mildness of lukewarm water. And all his former success was returning to him; without an effort his popularity was regained, naturally, just as if the comrades had not hooted at him as a coward a month ago; voices applauded him; very well; they agreed with him; that was the way to speak; a thunder of applause broke or burst forth.

At the back of the room Etienne was sinking; his heart overwhelmed with bitterness. He recalled to mind Rasseneur's prediction in the forest when threatening him with the ingratitude of the mob. What imbecile brutality! What shameful forgetfulness of services rendered! It was a blind force constantly devouring itself. And beneath his anger at seeing these brutes ruin their cause, there was the despair of his own fall, the tragic ending of his ambition. What! was this the end already? He remembered having heard under the brushwood three thousand breasts beating to the echo of his own. On that day he held his popularity in his two hands; these people belonged to him; he felt himself their master. Foolish dreams

intoxicated him at that time. Montson at his feet, Paris over there, a deputy, perhaps, terrifying the bourgeois by a speech, the first speech made by a workman at the tribunal of a parliament. And it was ended, nothing remained but the pieces on the ground; his people had just rewarded him with a shower of bricks!

Rasseneur raised his voice:

"Violence has never been successful; the world cannot be re-made in a day. Those who promised you to change everything at a blow are jesters or rogues!"

"Bravo! bravo!" cried the crowd.

Who, then, was to blame? and this question which Etienne asked himself completely overwhelmed him. Could they really be laid at his door—these misfortunes from which he himself was bleeding, the misery of some, the throttling of others, these women, these children, lean from hunger and without bread? One evening, before these disasters, he had had a sad vision like this. But he was already in motion, and he found himself carried on by his comrades. Besides, he had never directed them; it was they who led him; who forced him to do things which otherwise he never would have done without the impetus of this crowd galloping behind him. After each outbreak he had remained stupefied at the results, for he had neither foreseen nor desired them. Could he have expected, for instance, that his faithful followers of the alley would stone him one day? These madmen lied when they accused him of having promised them a life of eating and idleness. They had dreamed these things; he had not even wished for the strike. And in this justification, in the reasons with which he tried to combat his remorse, was stirring the dim or faint uneasiness of not having shown himself equal to his task, this doubt of the half educated which always hampered him. But he, that his strength had deserted him; he had even less courage than his comrades; he was afraid of them; of this enormous mass, blind and irresistible, passing over like one of nature's elements, sweeping all before it, in defiance of rules and theories. Repugnance separated him still farther from them—the discomforts of which his more

refined tastes made him sensible—the gradual ascent of his whole being toward a superior class.

At this moment the voice of Rasseneur was lost in the midst of enthusiastic vociferations.

"Long live Rasseneur! he's the man for us! Bravo! bravo!"

The tavernkeeper shut the door again, while the band dispersed, and the two men silently looked at each other. Both raised their shoulders; they ended by drinking a glass together.

In the evening of the same day there was a grand dinner at Piolaine in honor of the betrothal of Megrel and Cecile. For three days past the Gregoires had been waxing the dining-room floor and dusting the drawing-room. Melanie reigned in the kitchen, watching the roast meats, stirring the gravies, whose odor ascended even to the garrets. It had been decided that Francis, the coachman, should help Honorine in waiting. The gardener's wife was to wash the dishes, the gardener would open the door. Never had the large, patriarchal and substantial-looking house seen such a gala day.

Everything went on delightfully. Madame Hennebeau behaved charmingly toward Cecile, and smiled at Megrel when the notary of Montson gallantly proposed to drink to the happiness of the future household. M. Hennebeau was also very amiable, and his air of gaiety was much remarked; it was said that, restored to favor by the administration, he was about to be made an officer of the Legion of Honor in consequence of the energetic manner in which he had put down the strike. They avoided speaking of the recent occurrences, but there was an air of triumph amid the general festivity; the dinner assumed the appearance of an official celebration of a victory. At last that trouble was over, and they could begin again to eat and sleep in peace.

An allusion was discreetly made to the dead, whose blood had hardly yet been soaked up by the mud of the Voreux; it was a salutary lesson, and all were touched when the Gregoires added that it was now the duty of each to go and staunch the wounds in the alley. They had resumed their benevolent placidity, pardoning their brave miners, seeing them already at the bottom of the mines setting a good example of secular resignation.

The notables of Montson, who trembled no longer, agreed that something ought to be done to improve the pay department. At the second course, the victory was completed when M. Hennebeau announced that he had received from the bishop a formal promise to remove the Abbe Ranvier; a person with such dangerous views could not be retained in the center of an industrial community; all the people in the neighborhood commented with much heat on the history of this priest who had spoken of the soldiers as assassins. And as the dessert came on, the notary resolutely took up the role of a free thinker. Deneulin was there with his two daughters. In the midst of this gaiety, he endeavored to conceal the melancholy induced by his ruined condition. Only that morning he had put his signature to the sale of his concession of Vandame to the company. Cornered, throttled, he had submitted to the exactions of the managers, abandoning to them, at a low figure, the prey he had watched for so long, and not even receiving enough from them to pay his creditors. He had even at the last moment, as a happy chance, their offer to retain him as an engineer of the division, resigned to superintend thus simply, as a paid employe, this mine where he had sunk his fortune. It was the knell of the small enterprise of individuals, the approaching disappearance of patrons, eaten up one by one by the hungry ogre of capital. drowned in the rising flood of large companies. He alone was paying the costs of the strike; he felt well enough that they were drinking to his misfortune, when toasting M. Hennebeau's rosette; and it was only the sight of Lucie's and Jeanne's charming appearance in their refreshened toilettes, gay with laughter, like pretty hoydens scornful of money—that consoled him a little. When they passed into the drawing-room, M. Hennebeau drew his cousin aside and congratulated him on his decision.

"What would you have? Your sole error has been in risking at Vandame the million of your stock of Montson. It was a terrible calamity you drew upon yourself, and now it has melted into this dog's work, while my capital, which has not stirred from my drawer, still supports me comfortably without work, as it will support the children of my grandchildren."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

On Sunday, Etienne escaped from the alley as soon as night fell. A clear sky, spangled with stars, lighted the earth with the bluish shade of twilight. He went down toward the canal, he slowly followed the bank in going toward Marchiennes.

It was his favorite promenade, a turfed path of two leagues, running in a straight line without a turn, without a declivity, the length of this regular stream, which spread itself out like a gigantic ingot of melted lead.

He never met anybody. But this day he was vexed on seeing a man coming toward him. And under the pale light of the stars the two solitary pedestrians only recognized each other when face to face.

"Ah! it's you," murmured Etienne.

Jouvarine nodded without answering. For an instant they remained motionless; then side by side they set off again toward Marchiennes. Each seemed to pursue his reflections as if far off from the other.

"Have you read in the journal of Pluchart's success in Paris?" at last asked Etienne. "They were awaiting him on the sidewalk, they gave him an ovation on leaving the meeting at Montmartre. . . . Oh! he is launched now, in spite of his coldness. He will go where he pleases henceforth." The machinist shrugged his shoulders. He had a contempt for fine speakers, lively fellows who went into politics, as they would take to the bar, to make themselves an income by dint of fine phrases.

Etienne was now deep in Darwin. He had read some fragments of his, epitomized and diluted, in a five cent volume; and from this reading, imperfectly understood, he formed a revolutionary idea of the combat for existence, the lean ones eating the fat ones, the strong people devouring the weak peasantry. But Jouvarine grew angry, and dilated on the stupidity of the socialists who accept Darwin, that apostle of scientific inequality, whose famous selection was only good for aristocratic philosophers. But his comrade was obstinate;

he wished to reason, and he expressed his doubts by an hypothesis: the old society no longer existed, even the crumbs had been swept away; well, was it not to be feared that the new world would sprout up slowly spoiled by the same wrongs, some sick, the others in good health; some, more skillful, more intelligent, fattening on everything; the others, imbecile and idle, returning to slavery? Then, before this vision of perpetual misery, the machinist cried savagely that if justice was not possible with man, man must disappear. As many as were the rotten societies, as many should be the massacres until the extermination of the last being. And silence fell again.

For a long time, with lowered head, Jouvarine walked along the soft grass which gave no sound to his steps, so absorbed that he followed the extreme edge of the water with the tranquil security of a sleeping man, dreaming the whole length of the roofs. Then, without cause, he shivered as if he had stumbled against a ghost. His eyes were raised, his face appeared, and he said quietly to his companion:

"Did I ever tell you how she died?"

"Who?"

"My wife, over there in Russia."

Etienne moved vaguely, astonished at the shaking of his voice, at this sudden need of sympathy from a man of such an habitually impassive nature, in his stoic separation from others and from himself. He only knew that his wife was a mistress and that they had hung her in Moscow.

"The affair had not succeeded," continued Jouvarine, his eyes lost at present on the white running of the canal between the bluish colonnades of the tall trees. "We had been fourteen days at the bottom of a hole, undermining a railway; and it was not an imperial train, it was a train of travelers which was blown up. Then they arrested Annouchka. She used to bring us bread every evening, disguised as a peasant. It was she also who had applied the match, for a man might have been remarked. I watched the trial, lost in the crowd, at the tribunal. I went to the square the last day. . . ."

His voice faltered; a fit of coughing seized him, as if he were strangling.

"Twice I felt like crying out and jumping over the heads to rejoin her. But what good would it do? A man less was a soldier less; and I well understood that she was saying no to me, when her large, fixed eyes encountered mine."

He coughed again.

"On that day it rained; the awkward creatures could not make an end of it under the beating rain. They had taken twenty minutes to hang four others; the rope broke, they could not finish the fourth. . . . And Annouchka remained standing, waiting. She could not see me, she was seeking me in the crowd.

I mounted a mile-stone and she saw me; from that moment our eyes never left each other. When she was dead she was still looking at me. I waved my hat and I went away."

He again became silent. The snow-white water of the canal rolled on to the infinite; both men walked with the same deadened step as each again fell into his isolation. At the bottom of the horizon the pale water seemed to spread out on the sky with a small spot of light.

"It was our punishment," resumed Jouvarine slowly. "We were guilty of loving each other. . . . Yes, it is best that she is dead; her blood brought forth some heroes, and I am no longer cowardly at heart. . . . Ah! I have no one, parents, wife or friend! no one whose hand would even tremble the day when it will be necessary for me to take the life of others or give my own."

Etienne paused, shivering under the fresh night. He did not dispute him, he simply said:

"We have gone very far, do you not think we had better turn back?"

They slowly returned toward the Voreux, and he added, at the end of some steps.

"Have you seen the new bills."

He meant the great yellow placards which the company had stuck up that morning. It was becoming more frank and more conciliating; it promised to take back even the discharged miners if they would again

descend the following day. All would be pardoned; they would even forget that which was done by the leaders themselves.

"Yes, I have seen it," responded the machinest.

"Well! what do you think of it?"

"I think that it is over. . . . The people will go down again. You are all too cowardly."

Etienne generously excused his comrades; they were brave men, perhaps, but when one is dying of hunger he is without strength. Step by step they were returning to the Voreux; and before the black mass of the mine, he continued, he swore never to descend again, but he would pardon those who should go down. Then, as a report had been spread that the carpenters had not had time to repair the tubbing, he desired to know about it. Was that true? had the weight of the rocks against the lining of the shaft, a piece of carpenter work, pushed them out so much that a cage had rubbed against the sides the length of more than five metres? Jouvarine again became very cool, responding briefly. He had worked the day before; the cage did rub, that was true; the engineers were even obliged to double the power to pass through that place. But all the chiefs received these observations with the same irritated sentence: It was coal that they wished now; they would make repairs better later on.

"But don't you see that it will burst?" said Etienne. "What a situation they will be in!"

With his eyes fixed upon that mine indistinct in the shadows, Jouvarine concluded tranquilly:

"If that bursts, the comrades will be killed, whom you counsel to again descend."

The clock in Montson was striking nine, and his companion having said that he was going to enter the house and go to bed, he added, without even holding out his hand:

"Well! good bye; I am going away."

"What! you are going away?"

"Yes. I have asked for my livret to be given back; I am going somewhere else."

Etienne, stupefied, filled with emotion, looked at him. After a walk of two hours, he had said that, and with a voice so calm, when the very announcement

of that sudden separation wrung his heart. They knew each other, though they were scarcely ever together; and the idea of seeing him no longer seemed sad.

"You are going away; and where are you going?"

"I do not know."

"But you will return?"

"No, I think not."

They became silent. They remained for a moment face to face, without finding other words to say.

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye."

As Etienne went up the alley, Jouvarine turned his back and returned along the border of the canal; and then, alone now, he walked on and on with head down, so drowned in the shadows that he himself was but a shadow moving along in the night. At times he paused, counting the hours striking in the distance. When midnight sounded, he suddenly left the canal and directed his steps toward the Voreux.

At that moment the mine was deserted; he only met an overseer, whose eyes were half closed with fatigue. At two o'clock they were obliged to fire up again for the resume of work. At first he went up to take from the bottom of a closet a vest which he pretended to have forgotten. A wimble and an auger, a little but very strong saw, a hammer and a pair of shears were rolled in that vest. Then he started forth, but instead of going out by the waiting room he went toward the opening which led to the ladder. And with his vest under his arm, he descended softly, without a lamp, measuring the depth by counting the ladders. He knew that the cage rubbed, at three hundred and seventy-four metres, against the fourth passage of the lower tubbing. When he had counted fifty-four ladders he groped with his hand, he felt the bulging of the pieces of wood. It was there.

Then, with the address and sang-froid of a good workman, who, for a long time, has meditated over his work, he started at his labor. He at once began sawing a panel of eighty centimetres in the place partitioned off for the ladders, so as to communicate with the extraction compartment. And, with the assistance of matches quickly lit and extinguished he was able to

notice the state of the tubbing and the recent repairs which had been made.

Between Calais and Valenciennes the sinking of mine shafts met with some unheard of difficulties, in traversing the masses of water under the ground in immense sheets on a level with the lowest valley. Only the construction of the tubbings, of the carpenter work in pieces joined together like the staves of a cask, succeeded in retaining the tributary streams so as to separate the shafts in the midst of lakes of uncertain depth and obscurity, which beat against the walls. At the Voreux they had been compelled to establish two tubbings: that of the superior level in the falling sand and the white clay which was near the cretaceous ground, cracked in all parts, filled with water like a sponge; then that of the inferior level, directly above the coal regions, in the midst of a yellow sand as fine as meal, running with a liquid fluidity; and it was there that the torrent was found, that subterranean sea, the terror of the coal men of the North,—a sea with its tempests and its wrecks, an unknown and fathomless sea rolling its black billows more than three hundred metres from the sun. Ordinarily the tubbing held well under the enormous pressure. They feared little but the sinking of the neighboring ground, shaken by the continued work of the old galleries of exploration which were now filled up. In that descent of the rocks sometimes breaks were produced, slowly spreading themselves out as far as the carpenter work, which they at length weakened by pushing it into the interior of the shaft; and the great danger was there, a threatened cave-in, an inundation, the mine filled up by an avalanche of the ground and a deluge of water.

Jouvarine, in the opening made by himself, ascertained a very grave deformation of the fifth passage of the tubbing. The pieces of wood bulged out beyond the frames; several even had come out of their joints. Abundant filtrations fell from the joints across some tarred filterers with which the shaft was lined. And the carpenters, pressed for time, had been forced to content themselves with placing at the angles some stays of iron with such carelessness that all the screws

were not tight. A considerable movement was evidently produced behind, in the sand of the Torrent.

Then, with his wimble, he commenced to loosen the screws from the pieces of iron in a manner so that a last push would destroy all. It was a work of foolish temerity, during which he was in danger twenty times to be thrown head over heels, making the fall of a hundred and twenty-five metres which still separated him from the bottom. He had been obliged to grasp the timbers from which the cages hung, and, suspended above vacant space, he traveled the length of the cross-beams, which were placed short distances apart. He slipped along, turning round, simply propped up by an elbow or knee in tranquil scorn of death. A breath would have precipitated him. Three times without even a shiver he caught himself in the act of falling. At first he felt with his hand, then he worked, only lighting a match when he was lost amid sticky beams. When the screws were loosened he even attacked the pieces of tubbing, and his peril grew still greater. He found the principal piece which held the others. He was excited over it. He bored holes in it, sawed it, made it thin, so that it lost its resistance, while through the holes and cracks the water, which escaped in small streams, blinded and soaked him with its icy rain. Two matches were extinguished. Everything streamed with water. It was night, a profound darkness without an end of shadows.

From that moment passion carried him away. The breath of the invisible intoxicated him, the black horror of that hole beaten by the storm threw him into a fury for destruction. He became infuriated by chance against the tubbing, beating where he could with blows of the wimble, and hacking it with the shears, taken with a wish to immediately break it open over his head. And he was as ferocious as if he was plunging the knife into the skin of a human being whom he abhorred. He would end by killing it, that bad beast of a Voreux, with its jaws always open, which had swallowed up so much human flesh. The scraping of his tools went on, he stretched himself out on his small back, he crept along, descending and remounting, still holding on as

by a miracle, in a continued shaking, from the flight of nocturnal birds across the carpenter-work of the tower.

But he calmed himself, angry at his violence. Could he not do these things coldly? Without haste he took a breath and re-entered the opening to the ladders, where he stopped up the hole by again putting in place the panel he had sawed away. It was enough; he did not wish to give the alarm by a havoc too great, which they would have attempted to repair at once. The beast had its wound in its stomach, and by night they would see if it still lived; and he could make the sign of the cross; the frightened world would know that it did not die an easy death. He took the time to methodically roll up the tools in his vest and then again slowly ascended the ladders. Then he thought of going out of the mine without being seen, the idea of changing his clothing never occurring to him. The clock struck three. He remained planted upon the road; he was waiting.

At the same hour, Etienne, who had not slept, became uneasy at a slight noise heard in the thick darkness of his chamber. He distinguished the slight breathing of the children, the snores of Bonnemort and la Maheu; while beside him Jeanlin blew out one prolonged note like a flute. Without doubt he had been dreaming, and he sank back on the pillow as the noise again commenced. It was the creaking of a bed, the suppressed efforts of a person to rise. Then he imagined that Catherine was ill.

"Say, is that you? What's the matter?" he asked, in a low voice.

No one responded, only the snores of the others continued. For ten minutes nothing stirred. Then the cracking again began. And this time, certain that he was not dreaming, he crossed the room, holding out his hands in the darkness to feel the bed in front of him. His surprise was great when he encountered the young girl sitting up, holding her breath, awake and on the watch.

"Well! why didn't you answer? What are you doing?"

At length she said in a low voice:

"I am getting up."

"You're getting up. at this hour?"

"Yes, I'm going back to work in the mine.

Very much agitated, Etienne seated himself on the edge of the mattress, while Catherine excitedly explained her reasons. She suffered more from living thus in idleness, on seeing thrown upon her a continued look of reproach; she would rather run the risk of being kicked down there by Cheval; and if her mother did not wish her money, when she brought it to her, why! she was large enough to use a part of it in making the soup herself.

"Go way now, I'm going to dress. And don't say anything, if you wish to be good to me."

But he remained beside her, and suddenly she, throwing her arm around his neck, began to cry very softly:

"Go back to bed," murmured she. "I cannot light the candle, for that would wake mamma. It is late, so leave me."

He no longer listened; he pressed her to him, his heart drowned in an immense sadness. A wish for peace, a wish to be happy, filled his thoughts; and he saw himself married in a neat little house, without other ambition than to live and die there both together. Bread would content them; and even if they had only enough for one, that piece should be for her. What good was all else? Did life hold more?

She, however, unwound his arms.

"I beg of you, leave me!"

Then, in a burst of his heart, he said in her ear:

"Wait; I will go with you."

He was astonished at having said that. He had sworn not to again descend; from whence came that sudden decision; he had thought he would not consider it an instant. Now there was in him such a calm, such a complete recovery from his doubts, when he had been so obstinate; a man saved by chance, who had found at last the strange door to his pain. So he refused to listen to her when she became alarmed, comprehending that he was doing this for her, thinking of the bad words with which they spoke of him at the mine. He mocked at all; the bills promised pardon, and that sufficed.

"I wish to work; it is my idea. . . . Dress yourself and don't make any noise."

They dressed themselves in the darkness, with a thousand precautions not to wake anyone. She had secretly prepared the night before her mining clothing; in the closet he found a vest and pair of pants; and they did not even wash themselves for fear of shaking the floor. Everyone still slept, but it was necessary to pass by the little room in which the mother slept. When they started out, in their great fear, they knocked against a chair. She awoke, she called out in a half sleep:

"What's that?"

Catherine, trembling, paused and pressed Etienne's hand tight.

"It's me, don't be frightened," said the latter. "I'm warm, I'm going out for some air."

"All right."

And la Maheu went to sleep again. Catherine no longer dared breathe. At last she descended to the room below; she divided a sandwich which she had saved from a loaf given her by a woman in Montson. Then he softly shut the door behind them and they went away.

Jouvarine was standing outside, near l'Avantage at an angle of the road. For a half hour he had watched the coal men who were returning to work, a number of shadows, passing on with the dull sound of the marching of troops. He counted them as the butchers count their beasts on their entrance to the abattoir; and he was surprised at their number; he had not imagined, even in his pessimism, that the number of cowards would be so great. The line stretched out; he was very cold, his teeth pressed together, his eyes clear.

But he started. Among those men who were going toward the mine, and of whom he could not distinguish the faces, he recognized one by his walk. He advanced and stopped him.

"Where are you going?"

Etienne, overwhelmed instead of replying, stammered:

"Haven't you started yet?" Then he owned up he was returning to the mine. Without doubt he had sworn; but it was not life to wait with arms folded for things to arrive in a hundred years perhaps; and then some things had decided him.

Jouvarine listened to him, shivering. He caught him by the shoulder and turned him towards the alley.

"Go home, I wish it, do you understand!"

But Catherine had approached; he recognized her also. Etienne protested, declared that he would allow no one to be the judge of his conduct. And the eyes of the engineer turned to the young girl as to a comrade, while he recoiled a step with a gesture of sudden abandon, as a man who comprehended. When there was a woman in the heart of a man, the man was finished, he could die. Perhaps he saw in a rapid vision, at Moscow, his mistress who was hung—that last link broken which had rendered him free as to the life of others or his own. He again became cool, and said simply:

"Go."

Uneasy, Etienne stood still, trying to say a kind word so as not to separate thus.

"Then you are still going away?"

"Yes."

"Well! give me your hand, old fellow. A pleasant journey to you and don't think hard of me."

The other held out an ice-cold hand. No friend, no woman.

"Good-bye forever this time."

"Yes, good-bye."

And Jouvarine, motionless in the shadows, followed with a glance Etienne and Catherine, who entered the Voreux.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

At four o'clock the descent commenced. Danseart, installed in person in the receiver's office, in the lamp room, wrote down the name of each workman as he presented himself, and ordered him a lamp. He took them all, without a word, according to the promise made in the handbills. Nevertheless, when he perceived Etienne and Catherine at the wicket gate, he started, reddened, and his mouth opened to refuse their names; then he contented himself with a triumphant chuckle. "Ah! ah! the strongest of the strong was floored now! The company was worth something still

since the terrible wrestler of Montson returned to ask bread from them." Silently, Etienne took his lamp and went up to the shaft with the pusher. But it was there, in the receiving room, that Catherine feared the sharp words of the comrades. The moment she entered, she perceived Cheval, among twenty others, waiting until a cage should be free. He advanced furiously toward her, when the sight of Etienne stopped him. Then he affected to sneer, shrugging his shoulders violently. He was well rid of her; the gentleman was quite welcome to her now; and while thus expressing his contempt, he trembled with jealousy, and his eyes sparkled. The other comrades had not moved; mute, with their eyes on the ground, oppressed with gloom, they contented themselves with a side glance at the last comers; then, as if themselves ashamed of being there, beaten into silence, they resumed their fixed look at the mouth of the shaft, their lamps in their hands, shivering under their linen blouses in the strong currents of air from the large room.

At last the cage was lowered on the bolts, and the order given to embark. Etienne and Catherine crowded into a car which Pierron and two others had already entered. At the side, in another car, Cheval was saying aloud to old Mouque that the managers were very wrong not to take advantage of the opportunity of ridding the mines of the blackguards who were destroying them; but the old groom, already gone back to the resignation of his dog's life, no longer troubled by the death of his children, replied only by a careless conciliatory gesture.

The cage unhooked, they entered the darkness. No one spoke. Suddenly, at two-thirds of the descent, there was a terrible shaking. The irons cracked, the men were thrown against each other.

"My God!" groaned Etienne, "do they want to crush us. We'll all stay here, with their d——d tubbing. And they still say they have repaired it!"

Nevertheless the cage had broken through the obstacle. Now it was passing through such a violent storm of rain that the workmen listened uneasily to the rushing water. Leaks had then broken out between the joints!

Pierron, when questioned as one who had been making the descent for several days past, would give no sign of the fear he felt, as it might be considered an attack on the managers; and he replied:

"Oh! there's no danger! It's always like this. No doubt they have not had time to finish their mending."

The torrent poured on their heads; they arrived at the bottom, at the last hook, under a veritable water-spout. Not one overseer had thought of going up the ladders to look after it. The pump would suffice; the repairers would visit the joints the next night.

In the galleries, the reorganization of labor brought many evils. Before allowing the diggers to resume work in the timber-yards, the engineer had decided that during the first five days all the men should be put to certain work of strengthening of urgent necessity. Breaking in was threatened everywhere; the roads had suffered to such a degree, that the woodwork had to be repaired for the length of several hundred kilometres. Gangs were therefore formed below of ten men, each under the direction of an overseer; then they were set to work at the place most endangered. When the descent was finished, it was found that some three hundred odd miners had come down, about half the number working when the mine was in full force.

Cheval just made up the gang of which Etienne and Catherine formed a part; and this was not by chance; he had at first placed himself behind his comrades, and then he forced himself on the overseer's notice. This gang had gone to clear away at the end of the north gallery of nearly three kilometres, a cave-in which blocked up a road in the Dix-Huit-Ponces Vein. They attacked the falling stones with pick-axe and shovel. Etienne, Cheval and five others cleared away, whilst Catherine, with two boys of sixteen, rolled away the earth to the inclined plane. Words were rare, the overseer did not leave them. Nevertheless, the girl's two lovers were on the point of boxing each other on her account. Though muttering that he wanted no more of the vile creature, the old one still watched and slyly hustled her so much that the new one threatened to give him a dance if he did not leave her alone. They ate each other with their eyes, and had to be separated.

Towards five o'clock Dansaert came along, giving a glance at the work. He seemed to be in an execrable temper, and grew angry with the overseer; nothing went on right; the woodwork ought to be strengthened; what the devil did they mean by such work? And he went off saying that he would return with the engineer. He had been awaiting Megrel since morning, without knowing the cause of his delay.

Another hour passed. The overseer had stopped the clearing away to put all his men at propping the roof. Even the girl and the two boys were no longer rolling, they were preparing and bringing the woodwork. At the back of this gallery the gang seemed to be at a relay station, lost at the extremity of the mine, cut off henceforth, from communication with the other works. Strange noises were heard three or four times, distant galloping made the laborers turn their heads: what was it then? one would think that the roads were being deserted, the comrades rushing up already at racing speed? But the noise died away in profound silence; they went on with the wedging of the wood, stunned by the loud blows of the hammers. At last they resumed the clearing away, the rolling recommenced.

From the first trip Catherine returned in a fright, saying there was no longer anyone at the inclined plane.

"I called, but no one answered. They've all gone away."

The panic was such that the ten men threw down their tools to rush off. The idea of being abandoned thus, alone at the bottom of the mine, so far from the shaftroom, froze their blood. They had only kept their lamp; they ran single file, the men, the children, the girl; the overseer himself losing his head, screaming for help, more and more terrified at the silence in this wilderness of galleries without end. What had happened that they did not meet with a single soul? What accident could have carried off their comrades thus? Their terror was aggravated by the uncertainty of the danger, by the threatening which they felt without understanding it.

At last, as they approached the shaftroom, a torrent reached them. They were immediately up to their

knees in water, and they could no longer run; they waded painfully through the water, with the thought that a minute's delay would be death to them.

"My God!" cried Etienne, "the tubbing has given way! I said truly that we would stay here!"

Since the descent Pierron had noticed, with great uneasiness, the increasing deluge falling from the shaft. While continuing the loading of the cars with two others he raised his head, his face bathed in perspiration, his ears buzzing with the rumbling of the tempest overhead. But he trembled above all when he perceived that under him the water-pump, ten metres deep, was filling up; already the water was spouting from the ceiling, running over the flagging, and it proved that the pump was no longer sufficient to exhaust the leakage. He heard it working laboriously with a weary rattle. Then he informed Dansaert, who swore with anger as he replied that they must await the engineer. Twice again he returned to the charge, without drawing from him any other reply than an exasperated shrug of his shoulders. Well, the water was rising, what could he do?

Mouque appeared with Bataille, taking him to his drudgery, and he had to hold him with both hands; the sleepy old horse had suddenly reared, his head stretched out towards the shaft, neighing furiously.

"What's the matter, Philosopher? What troubles you? . . . Ah! it's because it rains. Come, that doesn't concern you."

But the animal shuddered all over; he had to drag him forcibly to the work.

Almost at the same instant as Mouque and Bataille disappeared at the end of the gallery a crash was heard, followed by the prolonged rumbling of a fall. It was a piece of the tubbing, which had been detached, falling from a distance of a hundred and eighty metres and rebounding against the walls. Pierron and the carmen had saved themselves, the oak plank only crushed an empty car. At the same time a considerable body of water, a spouting wave from a broken dike, rushed in.

Dansaert wished to go up to see, but while he was speaking a second piece rolled out; and, terrified by the threatened catastrophe, he hesitated no longer. He gave

the order to ascend, and sent off overseers to warn the men at the works.

Then a frightful hustling commenced. From each gallery there streamed a file of workmen to rush into the cages. They crushed each other; they were killing each other in their eagerness to get up at once. Some who had thought of taking the ladder-opening came down again, crying out that the passage was already blocked up. And this was the dread of all, after each departure of a cage: that one had passed, but who could say that the next one would, in the midst of the obstacles with which the shaft was obstructed? Up above, the overflow continued. They heard a series of heavy detonations, the splitting of the woodwork breaking away in the rumbling and constantly increasing shower. One cage soon became useless, broken in, no longer sliding between the ropes—broken, no doubt. The other rubbed in such a manner that the cable would certainly break. And there were still about a hundred men to come out, all shouting, clutching each other, covered with blood, drowning. Two were killed by the falling of the planks. A third, who had clutched the cage, fell back again fifty metres and disappeared in the water-sump.

Dansaert, nevertheless, tried to keep order. Armed with a pick, he threatened to break the head of the first person who failed to obey; and he wished to range them in file, crying out that the loaders would go out the last, after having packed up their comrades. They did not listen to him. He had prevented Pierron, pale and cowardly, from passing on among the first. At each departure, he pushed him aside with a cuff. But his own teeth were chattering. A minute more and he would be lost; everything was caving in above; it was an overflowing flood, a murderous rain of planks. A few workmen remained, when, crazed by fear, he jumped into a car, letting Pierron jump in behind him. The cage ascended.

Just at this moment the gang of Etienne and Cheval came out into the shaft-room. They saw the cage disappear, they rushed forward; but they had to draw back from the final breaking up of the tubbing; the shaft was blocked up, the cage would not come down

again. Catherine was sobbing. Cheval was choking himself shrieking out oaths. They were twenty in number. Would those hogs of chiefs adandon them thus? The father Mouque, who had brought back Bataille, without haste, still held him by the bridle, both stupefied, the old man and the animal, by the rapid rising of the flood. The water already reached the waist. Etienne, mute, with clenched teeth, supported Catherine in his arms. And all shouted with uplifted faces, all foolishly striving to look at the shaft, this blocked-up hole which spit out a flood and from whence help could come to them no more. On disembarking above, Dansaert perceived Megrel running there. By some fatality, Madame Hennebeau had that morning detained him to look for one of the catalogues for the purchase of the trousseau. It was ten o'clock.

"Well, what has happened?" cried he from afar.

"The mine is lost," replied the superintendent.

And he related the catastrophe stammeringly, while the incredulous engineer shrugged his shoulders. Nonsense! Could a tubbing be demolished like that? They must be exaggerating; it must be looked into.

"There is nobody remaining down there, is there?"

Dansaert was uneasy; no, nobody; he hoped so, at least; nevertheless the workmen might have been delayed.

"But, you dog!" cried Megrel, "why did you leave them? Do we desert our men?"

Instantly he gave orders to count the lamps. In the morning three hundred and twenty-two had been given out, and but two hundred and fifty-five could be found, but several workmen confessed that theirs had remained down there, fallen from their hands in the hustling of the panic. They endeavored to call the roll. It was impossible to fix the exact number. Some miners had gone off, others did not hear their names any longer. None seemed to agree as to the number of the missing comrades. There might be twenty, perhaps forty.

One thing alone was certain to the engineer, there were men at the bottom. They heard their shouting amidst the noise of the waters rushing across the broken beams when they leaned over the opening of the shaft.

Megrel's first care was to send the information to M. Hennebeau, and to try to close the mine. But it was already too late. The coalmen who had raced to the alley of Deux-Cent-Quarante, as if chased by the crashing of the tubbing, had terrified the families, and bands of women, old men and children came running down, shaken by screams and sobs. They had to be driven back. A cordon of guards was charged to look after them, for they would have interfered with the work. Many workmen who had come from the shaft remained there stupefied, without wishing to go and change their clothing, held by a fascination of fear in front of that frightful hole in which they had been so near remaining. The mothers, the wives, hung around them, begging them, questioning them, demanding the names. Was this one down there? and that one? and that other? They did not know, they stammered. They shivered and made foolish gestures, gestures which told of a horrible vision always before them. The crowd augmented rapidly. A lamentation went up in the roads. And there outside, seated in the shed belonging to Bonnemort, was a man, Jouvarine, who did not keep himself at a distance, but who looked on.

"The names! the names!" cried the women in voices choked with tears.

Megrel appeared an instant, saying:

"As soon as we find out the names we will let you know. But no one is lost, every one will be saved. I am going down."

Then mute with anguish, the crowd waited. In reality; with a quiet bravery the engineer got ready to descend. He unbolted the cage, gave the order to put it in place at the end of the cable; and as he feared that the water would extinguish his lamp, he attached another under the bottom of the cage.

Some trembling overseers, with white facesand discomposed, assisted in these preparations.

"You can descend with me, Dansaert," said Megrel in a brave voice.

Then when he saw them all without courage, when he saw the superintendent staggering, drunk with fear, he broke out with a gesture of scorn.

"No, you bother me. . . . I would rather be alone."

He had already stepped into the straight basket which balanced itself at the end of the cable, and holding in one hand a lamp, pressing with the other the signal cord, he himself cried to the engineer:

"Slowly."

The engine started. Megrel disappeared in the abyss, from which continually arose the howls of the miserable people. At the top no one stirred. He ascertained the good condition of the upper tubbing. Suspended in empty space, he turned round and lit up the walls: the leakages between the joints were so abundant that his lamp was not sufficient. But, at three hundred metres, when he arrived at the lower tubbing, just as he expected, a sudden stream put out his lamp. From this distance he no longer had any light, except the hanging-lamp which preceded him into the darkness. And, in spite of his temerity, he shivered and grew pale in the face of the horror of the disaster. A few pieces of wood alone remained; the others had given way with their supports behind; an enormous cavity yawned; the yellow sand, as fine as meal, ran in considerable masses; while the water of the torrent of that subterranean sea, with its tempests and its wrecks, unknown, was flowing in like a mill-dam. He still descended, lost in the midst of this chaos, which increased constantly, beaten about and turned round and round under the waterspout, so badly lit up by the small lamp going down below him that he believed he distinguished some streets, some squares of destroyed cities, afar off in the sport of the great moving shadows. Work was no longer possible. He only cherished one hope—that of being able to save the imperiled men. In a measure, as he descended, he heard the shouts grow louder. But he was obliged to pause; an insuperable obstacle barred the shaft—a heap of timbers, parts of the guides, pieces broken from the ladders entangled with broken pieces of the pump. It would take eight days to clear away the passage. And, after examining it for a long time, his heart almost burst at abandoning these miserable people, whose screams had suddenly ceased. The flood had filled

their mouths, and they had hastened to go further up the roads before the rapid rise of the water.

Then Megrel drew the signal cord to be taken up. But he paused again, stupefied at that sudden catastrophe of which he could not comprehend the cause. He wished to take notice of it; he examined the pieces of tubbing which still held. At a distance some rents, some cuts in the wood, surprised him. As his lamp was flickering, drenched by the water, he desired to touch these places with his fingers, and he very surely felt the notches of a saw, the blows of a wimble; it was all the abominable work of destruction. Evidently some one had desired that catastrophe. He was dumbfounded; the other pieces were cracking, falling down with their supports in a terrible slide, which threatened even to carry him with them. The courage to go down there, the thought of the man who had done that, running such risks, froze him with a holy horror of the wickedness, as if, mingled with the shadows, the man were still there, monstrous on account of his unparalleled act. He cried out, he shook the signal with a furious hand; it seemed a long time, for he perceived, a hundred metres higher, that the upper tubbing was also commencing to give way; the joints were opening and beginning to stream with water. It was now only a question of hours; the shaft would be finished by becoming flooded and then fall to pieces.

At the top M. Hennebeau anxiously awaited Megrel.

"Well! what is it?" he asked. But the engineer, strangled, could not speak. He had failed.

"It is not possible; that cannot be. Have you examined?"

With a defiant look he nodded his head, yes. He refused to explain in the presence of some overseers who were listening; he led his uncle a short distance off, and, very low in his ear, he at length whispered: The boards were filled with holes and sawed; the mine had been bled at its throat and had given the death rattle. Becoming pale, the director also lowered his voice in an instinctive wish to be silent upon the monstrosity of the great crime. It was useless to tremble before the ten thousand workmen of Montson; later on they would see. And both continued to whisper, startled that a man

had found the courage to descend, to suspend himself in the midst of that space, to risk his life twenty times in that frightful work. They did not even comprehend such foolish bravery in destruction; they refused to believe in spite of the evidence, as one doubts those tales of celebrated escapes of prisoners disappearing from windows at thirty metres from the ground.

When M. Hennebeau again approached the overseer, a nervous twitching drew up his face. He gave a desparing gesture and then ordered that the mine be cleared at once. It was the mournful departure after a burial, a mute abandonment with backward glances upon that great body of bricks, empty and still standing, which nothing could save.

And when the director and engineer last of all descended to the receiver's office the crowd gathered around them, obstinately repeating:

"The names! the names! tell us the names."

Poor la Maheu was there, among the wives and mothers. She remembered the noise in the night, her daughter and lodger gone off together; they were surely at the bottom; and after having cried that it served them right, that they deserved to remain there, the heartless ones, the cowards, she ran forward and placed herself in the first row shivering with agony. However, she dared no longer doubt; the discussion which was raised around her about the names convinced her. Yes, yes, Catherine was there, Etienne also—a comrade had seen them. But they no longer agreed as to the others. Coming out one of the first, Zacharie, in spite of his mocking nature, had with tears in his eyes embraced his wife and mother; and standing near the latter he trembled with her, showing for his sister an until then unknown tenderness, refusing to believe her down there, even though all the chiefs should officially affirm it.

"The names! the names! please tell us the names!"

Megrel, unnerved, said in a high key to the overseer:

"Make them be silent. We do not know their names."

Two hours had already passed. In the first fright no one had thought of the other shaft at the old mine of Requillart. M. Hennebeau was saying that they would

try the tubbing on that side, when a rumor ran round that five workmen had just escaped drowning by coming up by the rotten steps of the old unused ladders; and they named old Moque, which caused surprise, for no one had believed him at the bottom. But the tale of the five redoubled their fears; thirteen workmen had not been able to follow them, wild, walled in by the cave-in; and it was no longer possible to go to them, for there was already ten metres of water in Requillart. They knew all the names now; the air was filled with the groans of the stricken people.

"Make them be silent," said Megrel, furious. "And send them all back. Yes, yes, a hundred metres. There is danger; be quiet, be quiet."

He wished to fight against the miserable people. They imagined other trials; they were trying to conceal the dead; and the overseers were obliged to explain to them that the shaft would fill the entire mine. That thought made them mute with fear; and they finally allowed themselves to be pushed back step by step; but they were compelled to double the guards who held them back; for in spite of themselves, as if drawn forward, they always came back. A thousand persons pushed each other on the road; they had run from all the alleys, even from Montson. And the man on the hill, the blond man with the face of a girl, smoking his cigarette to render him patient, never took his large clear eyes from the mine.

Then the waiting commenced. It was noon, no one had eaten, and no one went away. In the smoky sky of a dirty gray slowly passed the dark clouds. A great dog, behind the hedge in Rasseneur's yard, constantly barked, irritated no doubt by the hot breaths of the crowd. And that crowd little by little sunk back into the neighboring grounds, making a circle around the mine at a hundred metres. In the center of that great ring the Voreux arose. No life, no sound, a desert; windows and doors remained open, showing the abandoned interior; a forgotten cat scented the warning in that solitude and jumped from a stairway and disappeared. Without doubt the fires of the boilers were scarcely extinguished, for the high brick chimney threw out some slight smoke upon the dark clouds; while the

vane in the tower, wrenched by the wind, gave a small shrill cry, the only melancholy voice in those vast buildings, which were dying.

At two o'clock no one had stirred. M. Hennebeau, Megrel and the other engineers ran around, making a group of overcoats and black hats before the people; they no longer delayed, their limbs nearly exhausted with fatigue, feverish, anxious, sick at heart, wishing to assist, but powerless in such a disaster, they only spoke occasional words in a low voice, as if at a death-bed.

The upper tubbing would give way in the end. Sudden reverberations were heard, jerking noises of heavy falls, succeeded by long silence. It was the ever widening wound; the breaking up commenced below was mounting to the surface. Megrel was seized with nervous impatience; he wished to see, and he had already advanced alone into this frightful cavity, when he was taken by the shoulders and drawn back. What was the good of it? He could prevent nothing. Nevertheless, an old miner, escaping the vigilance of the guard, had run to the waiting room; but he reappeared calmly; he had gone to look for his sabots.

Three o'clock struck. Nothing yet. A shower had soaked the crowd without moving them a step. Rasseneur's dog had recommenced to bark. And it was only at twenty minutes past three that a first shock made the ground tremble. The Voreux shuddered at it, firm and upright. But a second shock followed immediately, and a long cry issued from the open mouths; the tarred screening-shed, after tottering twice, had just fallen with a terrible crash. Under the enormous pressure, the planks broke up and struck against each other with such power that sparks flew out. From this moment the ground did not cease trembling, the shocks succeeded each other, subterranean sinkings with the rumbling of a volcano in a state of eruption. In the distance, the dog no longer barked, he howled an appeal, as if he would announce the oscillations whose approach he felt; and the women, the children, all these people looking on, could hardly restrain a cry of distress at each shock. In less than ten minutes the slated roof of the belfry gave way, the receiver's room and the engine-room fell

in, making a considerable breach. Then the noises ceased, the caving-in stopped; there was profound silence, and all was motionless. For an hour the Voreux remained thus, attacked, bombarded as if by an army of barbarians. Cries were no longer heard, the widened circle of spectators looked on silently shuddering.

Under the beams piled up by the wreck could be distinguished the broken and twisted hoppers. But especially at the receiver's office the debris accumulated in the midst of a shower of bricks and portions of the walls which fell in the rubbish. The high ironwork which held the drums had given way, and was already half buried under the ruins; a cage had remained hung at the end of a twisted cable, which swung to and fro; then there was a mixture of cars, flagging and ladders. By chance the lamp room had remained intact, showing on the left its clear rows of little lamps. And at the end of that destroyed room one could see the engine, squarely placed upon its massive stonework; the metals shining, the great steel arms having the appearance of indestructible muscles; the enormous crank standing up in the air resembling the powerless knee of a giant sleeping and tranquil in its strength.

M. Hennebeau, at the end of that hour of respite, calmed a little, and felt a new-born hope. The movement of the ground would terminate, they would then have a chance to save the engine and the rest of the buildings. But he always resisted when they approached to talk with him, he wished to wait a half-hour more. The waiting became insupportable; hope redoubled the agony; every heart beat furiously. A dark cloud enlarged upon the horizon, hastening the twilight, and a sinister day closed upon that waif of the tempests of the earth. They had been there for seven hours without moving, without eating; in such a nightmare that no one was longer conscious of the others nor of himself.

Suddenly, when the engineers decided to advance, a powerful convulsion of the earth made them flee. Subterranean detonations broke out like a monstrous artillery cannonading the abyss. On the surface the last remaining structures were thrown down and broken to

pieces. First a sort of whirlwind carried away the debris of the screening shed and the receiver's office. The boiler rooms burst open and at last disappeared. Then, in the square tower, the hoisting engine rattled and fell upon its face like a man cut down by a bullet. And they then saw a frightful spectacle; the engine was wrenched from its massive foundation; its arms were quartered as if striving against death; it fell off with its crank, its giant knee loosened as if by a lever; it expired crushed, swallowed up. Only the chimney, thirty metres high, still remained standing, trembling like a death in a hurricane. They thought it would crumble and fly into powder; but all at once it sank down like a stone swallowed up by the earth, suddenly melting down like a colossal cierge; and nothing was left, not even the point of the lightning-rod. It was finished; that horrid beast, crouching in that hollow stuffed with human flesh, no longer breathed its great, long breath. The entire Voreux had sank into the abyss.

The yelling crowd saved themselves. Women ran with hands held over their eyes. In fear, the men disappeared away like a heap of dry leaves blown by the wind. They did not wish to scream, but they did scream, with arms beating the air, before that immense hole, which constantly grew larger, that crater of a sleeping volcano, fifteen metres deep, extending out on the canal road for forty metres at the least. The whole square of the mine followed the buildings—the gigantic tressles; the tramways, with their rails; a complete train of cars, three wagons, without counting the stock of timber—a huge load of cut trees, which were swallowed up like straws. At the bottom, they could no longer distinguish anything but a confusion of rubbish, iron, bricks, plaster in horrible piles, entangled, dirty in the fierce wrath of the catastrophe. The chasm extended. Some deep cracks were made in boards away off in the distance across the fields. A flying piece of wood went as far as Rasseneur's, and cracked the front of the house. Was even the alley to be destroyed? Where would they flee for shelter at the end of this abominable day, under that cloud of lead, which also seemed to hide the people?

Megrel cried out with grief. M. Hennebeau was weeping. The disaster was not complete, a barge at the bridge broke in pieces, and the canal was quickly thrown into a boiling sheet, in one of the fissures. It disappeared; it fell like a cataract into a bottomless ravine. The mine drank up that river, the inundation would now flood the galleries for years. Soon the crater filled itself; a lake of muddy water occupied the place where was lately the Voreux, like those lakes under which sleep horrible villages. A terrified silence fell; nothing was longer heard but the sound of that water, rolling on in the bowels of the earth.

Then, on that shaking ground, Jouvarine arose. In the distance he had recognized la Maheu and Zacharie, their faces bloody, in front of the sinking which perhaps pressed upon the heads of the miserable people who were agonizing at the bottom. He threw away his last cigarette and started off without a look behind in the night now becoming dark. In the distance, his shadow diminished, and was lost in the darkness. He went on, with his tranquil air, to exterminate wherever dynamite could be found to blow up cities and men. It would be he, doubtless, when the expiring peasantry should hear beneath them an explosion of the pavement at each step.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

On the night which followed the destruction of the Voreux, M. Hennebeau started for Paris, wishing to give personal information to the managers before the newspapers even could publish the news. When he returned the next day, he was to be found very calm, very pale, with the look of an upright superintendent. He had evidently relieved himself from responsibility; his favor did not appear to have diminished; on the contrary, the decree naming him an officer of the Legion of Honor was signed twenty-four hours after. But, if the director remained safe, the company had just received a terrible blow. It was not the loss of a few millions, it was the wound in the flank, the dumb and ceaseless dread of the morrow, after the choking up of one of

their shafts. They were so stricken that once more they felt the need of silence. What was the good of stirring up this horrible matter? Why, if the villain should be discovered, make a martyr whose frightful heroism would kindle other brains and give birth to a brood of incendiaries and assassins. Besides, they had no suspicion of the real culprit; they settled down to a belief in a host of accomplices, unable to admit that a single man could have had the audacity and the strength for such a task; and it was just that thought that absorbed them, that thought of an ever growing menace around their mines.

The director had been ordered to organize a vast system of secret surveillance, then quietly to dismiss, one by one, any dangerous men suspected of complicity in the crime. They contented themselves with this mode of purging, from high considerations of political prudence. There was but one immediate dismissal, that of Dansaert, the superintendent. Since the scandal at la Pierronne's, he had become unbearable. And the pretext was found in his conduct at the time of the catastrophe, his cowardice as a captain deserting his men. Besides, it was a discreet concession to the miners, who hated him. Nevertheless, rumors were afloat among the public, and the owners had sent a note in rectification to a journal, denying a version mentioning a barrel of powder, lighted by the strikers. Already, after a rapid investigation, the report of the government engineer announced the natural breaking up of the tubbing, occasioned by the piling up of the earth as the cause; and the company had preferred to accept in silence the blame for want of care. With the Parisian press, after the third day, the falling in of the mine had taken its place in the general news; nothing was talked of but the dying workmen underground, and the published dispatches were eagerly read every morning. Even at Montson, the peasantry paled and became speechless even at the word Voreux. A vague rumor was floating about which even the boldest trembled to whisper. The whole country around was filled with pity for the victims; walking parties to the destroyed mine were organized, families hurried there to

see the dreadful ruins, pressing down so heavily on the heads of the wretched men entombed.

Deneulin, appointed engineer of the division, had come into office in the midst of the great disaster, and his first care had been to force the canal back to its bed, for this torrent of water spreading over the bottom of the mine aggravated the damage every hour. Great labor was required; he had immediately placed a hundred workmen at the construction of a dike. Twice the impetuosity of the stream had carried away the first dams. Now, pumps had been fixed; it was a hard fight, a violent struggle for repossession, step by step, of this corner of earth.

But the salvation of the buried miners was still more engrossing. Megrel was again entrusted to make another supreme effort, and arms were not wanting him; all the coalmen rushed to offer themselves in a burst of fraternity. They forgot the strike, they did not trouble themselves about the pay; they asked for nothing, they only asked to risk their lives when comrades were in peril. They were all there with their implements, shivering, waiting to be told at what point to begin. Many, ill from fright after the accident, agitated by nervous trembling, bathed in cold perspiration, possessed by incessant nightmares, got up notwithstanding, and seemed among the most courageous of those battling with the earth as if they had a revenge to take. Only there was some embarassment when the utility of this work was questioned; what was to be done? how were they to get down? on what side were they to attack the stones?

It was Megrel's opinion that not one of the unfortunate men survived; the fifteen had certainly perished, either drowned or asphyxiated; but in these mining catastrophes the rule was always to consider the immured men at the bottom as living, and he reasoned on this principle. The first question which he asked himself was to know where they could have taken refuge. The overseers, the old miners, when consulted by him, agreed on this point; their comrades, after the flooding had certainly ascended from gallery to gallery, as far as the highest boards, so that they ought now to be gathered at the end of one of the superior roads.

This, besides, agreed with the information given by old Mouque, whose confused recital would even make one believe that the widening of the leak had separated the band into little groups, scattering the fugitives on the road at each level. Then the opinions of the overseers were divided in the discussion of the attempts which might be made. As the roads nearest to the surface were at a distance of one hundred and eighty metres, it would not be feasible to sink a shaft. The only entrance remaining was through Requillart, the only point at which it could be approached. Unfortunately the old mine, also inundated, no longer communicated with the Voreux, and nothing remained free above the level of the waters but certain fragments of the galleries belonging to the first shaft-room. The draining would take years; the best advice, therefore, was to visit these galleries carefully to see if they were not in the vicinity of the submerged roads, at the end of which they suspected the imprisoned miners might be found.

Before arriving at this logical conclusion, there had been much discussion of a number of impracticable suggestions. Megrel then shook the dust from the archives, and, when he had found the old plans of the two mines, studied them and determined at what points the researches should be made. Gradually, this hunt excited him; he, in his turn, was seized with a fever of self-devotion, in spite of his ironical indifference toward men and things. The first difficulties were encountered in descending at Requillart. They had to clear away the mouth of the shaft, cut down the sorb tree, raze the plantains and hawthorns; and they had besides to repair the ladders. Then the groping about commenced. The engineer, having gone down with ten workmen, made them knock with their picks against certain rocks which he designated; and in profound silence, each holding his ear to the stone, listening to see if no distant stroke responded. But in vain all the practicable galleries were traversed; no echo came. The difficulty increased. Where should they cut away the bed? Toward whom should they go, when nobody appeared to be there? But they persisted obstinately in the search, with ever increasing anxiety.

Since the first day, la Maheu had come in the morning to Requillart. Seated in front of the shaft, on a beam, she never stirred till night. When a man came out again, she got up, questioning him with her eyes, "Nothing?—no, nothing!" And she would re-seat herself, still waiting, without a word, her face hard and inflexible. Jeanlin, also, seeing that his retreat was being invaded, wandered around with the frightened look of a beast of prey whose ravages are about to be disclosed by the terrier. He thought of the little soldier lying under the stones, fearing that his sound sleep might be disturbed. But this part of the mine was invaded by the waters; and, besides, the search was directed more to the left, in the west gallery.

At first Philomêne used to come also, to accompany Zacharie, who was one of the exploring party; then she became weary of taking cold unnecessarily and without any result; she remained in the alley, dragging on her days in listless idleness, and coughing from morning till night. Zacharie, on the contrary, could not be said to live; he would have eaten the ground to recover his sister. He cried out in the night; he saw her; he heard her, attenuated by hunger, splitting her throat in calling for help. Twice he had wished to dig without orders, saying that he felt that was the place. The engineer would not allow him to go down any more, and he would not leave the shaft from which they had driven him; he could not even sit down and wait near his mother, impelled by a desire for ceaseless action.

At the end of three days Megrel in despair had resolved to abandon everything that evening. At noon, after lunch, when he had returned with his men to undertake a last effort, he was surprised to see Zacharie come from the mine, very red, gesticulating, and crying:

"She is there! she has answered me! Come on, come on, now!"

He had slipped upon the ladders, in spite of the guard, and he swore that they had knocked, there below, in the first road of the vein Guillaume.

"But we have already passed twice where you say," said Megrel, incredulous. "But at any rate we will go and see."

La Maheu, shivering, had risen, and it was necessary to use force to prevent her from descending. She stood waiting, at the edge of the shaft, looking down into the darkness of that hole.

Below, Megrel himself struck three blows, wide apart; then he applied his ear to the coal, commanding the workmen to be silent. Not a sound did he hear; he shook his head; evidently the poor boy was dreaming. Furious, Zacharie knocked; and he again heard, his eyes shone, his limbs trembled with joy. Then the other workmen tried their experience, one after the other; they all became animated by plainly hearing the distant response. The engineer was astonished; he again stuck his ear to the coal, and he ended by hearing a slight sound, a rythmical rolling, very distinct, the known cadence of the miners' call when they beat against the coal, in any danger. The coal transmitted the sounds with the clearness of crystal, though very distant. An overseer who was there estimated that a block of at least fifty metres separated them from their companions. But it seemed as though they were already able to take their comrades' hands; they at once became cheerful. Megrel immediately commenced the work of approach.

When Zacharie, at the top, returned to la Maheu, they embraced each other.

"You needn't hold up your heads yet," said la Pierronne cruelly, who had come there out of curiosity. "If Catherine is not there, that would make you all the more unhappy."

It was true, Catherine was not there, perhaps.

"Leave me alone, will you!" cried Zacharie, in a rage. "She is there; I know it."

La Maheu had again seated herself, mute, firm and motionless. And she again began her weary waiting.

As soon as the story was circulated in Montson a new crowd of people arrived. They could see nothing, but they remained there all the same. It was even necessary to hold the most curious at a distance. Below they worked day and night. For fear of meeting with some obstacle the engineer had opened in the vein three lower galleries, and then worked them all toward the point where he supposed the miners to be shut up. A single miner worked to break away the coal upon the

straight front of the long narrow slit. They relieved each other every two hours, and the coal with which they filled the baskets was taken out by the hands of a chain of men which extended itself in proportion as the hole increased. The work at first went on very rapidly. They took away six metres in one day.

Zacharie had been put among the workmen who were set at clearing away. It was a post of honor for which they disputed with each other. And he became angry when they wished to relieve him, after his two hours of regulated work. He stole the turn of his comrades; he refused to lay down his pick. His tunnel was soon in advance of the two others; he struck against the coal with a blow so terrible that they heard his heavy breathing coming from the opening like the blast of some interior forge. When he came out, muddy and black, drunk with fatigue, he fell on the ground and they were obliged to wrap him up. Then, staggering off again, he once more replunged into the opening and then commenced at once with the great heavy blows and the stifled breath, a victorious fight with death. The worst was that the coal was becoming hard; twice he broke his pick, exasperated at not being able to advance so rapidly as before. He also suffered from the heat, a heat which increased with each metre that he advanced, almost unbearable at the bottom of that small hole, where the air could not circulate. A hand ventilator worked well, but the circulation was badly kept up; three miners fainted from the heat and were almost strangled by asphyxia.

Megrel lived at the bottom, with his workmen; they sent his meals down to him; he sometimes slept two hours, upon a straw couch, covered with a cloak. That which kept up his courage was the supplications of the miserable people there below, the answers growing more and more distinct when they beat upon the rock to let them know they were hastening to their assistance. Now it sounded very distinct, with a musical clearness like the striking of a hammer on sonorous glasses. They were guided by him and they went on toward that clear sound as they would march to the cannon in battle.

Each time that a digger was relieved, Megrel descended and tapped, then held down his ear, and each time, up

to the present, the response had come, rapid and urgent. Not a doubt remained to him now, they were advancing in the right direction; but what fatal slowness! They would never arrive quickly enough. At first, in two days they had dug through thirteen metres; but on the third day they had only done five; then on the fourth, four; the coal was so firm, wedged in so strong, that now they could scarcely dig out two metres. The ninth day, after superhuman efforts, they had advanced thirty-two, metres and they calculated that they still had twenty before them.

For the prisoners, it was the twelfth day which had commenced, a dozen twenty-four hours without bread, without fire in those icy shadows. That terrible thought wet their eyelashes, and stiffened their arms to the work. It seemed impossible that Christians could live longer; the distant blows had been growing weaker since the day before; they trembled at each instant that they should hear them stop.

Regularly la Maheu came to seat herself at the mouth of the shaft. She carried Estelle in her arms, for the child could not remain alone from morning until night. From hour to hour she was informed of the work below; she followed their toils; she experienced their hopes and their fears. It was, amid the groups stationed there and as far as Montson, an expectant waiting with endless comments on the least circumstance. The hearts of the entire country beat there under the earth.

The ninth day, at lunch time, Zacharie did not reply when they called him to be relieved. He acted as though he was crazy, and at last ended by swearing at them. At the moment Megrel, who had gone out for an instant, was not there to make him obey, and there was only with him an overseer and three miners. Without doubt Zacharie, badly lighted, furious at the wavering light which retarded his work, had committed the imprudence of opening his lamp. They had been given strict orders on that point, for the fire-damp was great there. The gas remained in enormous quantity in these straight openings, deprived of ventilation. Suddenly a blast of thunder broke out. A stream of fire came from the slit as if from the mouth of a cannon

charged with grape shot. Everything flamed. The air was kindled as if from powder from one side of the galleries to the other. The torrent of flame carried away the overseer, and three workmen ascended the shaft, flashing out into the open day like an eruption which cracked the rocks and the debris of the works. The curious ones fled. La Maheu arose and pressed to her breast frightened Estelle.

When Megrel and the workmen returned a terrible rage shook them. They beat the ground with their heels, as if a hard-hearted mother had by chance killed her children in the imbecile caprices of her cruelty. They had devoted themselves to go to the assistance of their comrades, and now they had only left there more men. At the end of three long hours of efforts and dangers, when they had penetrated at last into the galleries, the removal of the victims was sorrowful. Neither the overseers nor the workmen were dead, but they were terribly wounded, while they could smell their broiled flesh; they had swallowed the fire, the burns were even in their throats; and they moaned continually, praying that they would put an end to their sufferings by killing them. Of the three miners one was the man who during the strike had crushed the engine with one blow of the hammer; the two others still kept the marks on their hands where they had cut themselves in throwing bricks at the soldiers. The crowd, all pale and shivering, uncovered their heads as they were carried past them.

Standing, la Maheu waited. The body of Zacharie at length appeared. The clothing was burned, the body was but a black piece of coal, unrecognizable. Crushed in the explosion, the head was no longer there. And when they had placed this frightful remnant of the young man on a litter, la Maheu followed them with a mechanical step, her eyelids burning, and without a tear. She held the slumbering Estelle in her arms, and with hair flying in the wind she went off. At the alley, Philomene was stupefied; her eyes changed into fountains which at once relieved her. But the mother had already returned with the same step to Requillart; she had accompanied her son, she now returned there to wait for her daughter.

Three days more passed away. They had resumed the work in the midst of unheard of difficulties. The galleries to the approach were happily not filled up from the explosion of fire-damp, only the air burned there, vitiated to such a degree, that it was necessary to put in other ventilators. Now every twenty minutes the miners were relieved. They had advanced within two metres of their comrades. Meanwhile they worked on with chilled hearts, digging hard as if out of vengeance, for the sounds had ceased, the answer no longer sounded its little clear cadence. They had been working for twelve days, it was now fifteen days after the catastrophe, and since morning a silence of death had fallen.

The new accident had increased the curiosity of the Montson people; the wealthy persons organized excursions with such ardor that the Gregoires decided to follow the fashion. They made up a party; it was arranged that they should go to the Voreux in their carriage, while Madame Hennebeau, with Lucie and Jeanne, would join them there. Deneulin would take them to visit the ruins, then they would all go back together by way of Requillart, where Megrel would inform them how he was getting along and if there was any hope. Then in the evening they would all dine together.

When about three o'clock the Gregoires and their daughter Cecile arrived before the sinking mine they found Madame Hennebeau had reached the spot before them, in a navy-blue toilet and sheltered from the sun of February by a lace parasol. The sky was pale and the day had the warmth of spring. Just then M. Hennebeau and Deneulin came up and she listened with a distrait ear to the explanations which the latter was giving her upon the efforts which they had been compelled to make to dam up the canal. Jeanne, who always carried her sketch book with her, had started to draw, enthusiastic over the horror of the subject; while Lucie, seated beside her on the debris of a wagon, also gave some exclamations of satisfaction, finding it "epatant." The dike, still incomplete, left numerous pieces of the wreck, from which the floods of scum rolled up, falling in a cascade in the enormous hole of the swallowed shaft. However, the crater was becoming empty; the

water drunk up by the earth displayed the frightful wreck at the bottom. Under the azure sky of that beautiful day, it was a sink; the ruins of a city swallowed up and lost in the mud.

"And persons put themselves out to see this!" cried M. Gregoire, disenchanted.

Cecile, very gay, happy at breathing the pure air, joked and laughed, while Madame Hennebeau gave a look of repugnance, murmuring:

"It is a fact—there is nothing pretty about this."

The two engineers laughed. They tried to interest the visitors, taking them to walk, and explaining the working of the pumps and the manœuvre of the plugging which stopped up the pile. But the ladies became uneasy. They shivered when they knew that the pumps must be operated for years—six, seven years, perhaps—before the shaft could be reconstructed, and before they had exhausted all the water in the mine. No, they liked better to think of other things—those cave-ins were only fit to give them horrible dreams.

"Let us go," said Madame Hennebeau, turning toward her carriage.

Jeanne and Lucie cried out, "What! so soon!" And the sketch was not finished! They would remain; their father would bring them to the dinner, in the evening. M. Hennebeau got in the carriage with his wife, for he also wished to question Megrel. From one moment to the other they expected to hear that the galleries were connected.

"Very well! go on before," said M. Gregoire. "We will follow you; we wish to make a five-minute visit in the alley. Go on, go on; we will be at Requillart as soon as you."

He had already made Madame Gregoire and Cecile seat themselves in the carriage, and, while the other vehicle went along the canal-road, theirs slowly ascended the hill.

It was a thought of charity with which they wished to complete the excursion. The death of Zacharie had filled them with pity for the Maheu family, of whom so many had been killed. They did not feel for the father—that robber, that killer of soldiers—who it had been necessary to beat down like a wolf. Only the

mother touched them; that poor woman who had just lost her son after having lost her husband, and whose daughter was perhaps only a corpse under the earth; without counting the infirm grandfather, the boy lamed by a cave-in, and the little girl who died from hunger and cold during the strike. Of course that family had in part merited their unhappiness by their detestable spirit; but they wished to show the largeness of their charity, their desire for forgetfulness and reconciliation, and they themselves were carrying them alms. Two bundles, carefully wrapped up, were in a basket in the carriage.

An old woman told them where the Maheu's house was, number sixteen on the second row. But when the Gregoires got down with their bundles they knocked in vain, and at last they knocked on the door with their fists but received no response, the house sadly reëchoed like a place empty from death, cold and dark, abandoned for a long time.

"There is no one here," said Cecile, disappointed. "Is it not too bad after all the trouble we have taken?"

Suddenly the next door opened and la Levaque appeared.

"Oh! Monsieur and Madame, a thousand pardons! Excuse me, mademoiselle! . . . It is the neighbor that you wish. She is not here; she is at Requillart."

In a flood of words she told them the tale, explaining that she had aided her as much as she could by keeping Lenore and Henri to permit the mother to go to the old mine. She glanced at the bundles and she now spoke of the poor girl who had become a widow, to show off her own misery, her eyes glistening with covetousness. Then with a hesitating air she murmured:

"I've got the key. If Monsieur and Madame will enter; the grandfather is there."

The Gregoires, stupefied, looked at her. How! the grand-father was there! but no one had replied. Was he asleep? And when la Levaque opened the door what they saw made them pause at the threshold.

Bonnemort was there alone, his eyes fixed and large, riveted upon a chair before the cold chimney. Around him, the room appeared larger, without the clock and the furniture, of varnished pine which had formerly

enlivened it; there only remained on the damp walls the portraits of the Emperor and Empress whose red lips smiled with an official benevolence. The old man did not stir, his eyes red, never moving under the light which came in from the open door; with an imbecile air he acted as though he had not even seen these people enter. At his feet was a plate filled with cinders into which he spat.

"Do not pay any atttention to him, if he is not polite," said la Levaque, obligingly. "Something's wrong with him. He has been like this for half a month."

But a convulsion agitated Bonnemort, a deep rattling seemed to come from his stomach; and he again spat in the plate, and his spittle turned the cinders into coal black mud; then he again became motionless. He no longer moved except to spit.

Troubled, filled with disgust, the Gregoires tried meanwhile to find some amiable and encouraging words.

"Well, my good man," said the father, "you have the rheumatism, have you not?"

The old man, his eyes turned to the wall, did not move his head. And heavy silence again fell.

"They should make you a little tisane," added the mother.

He kept his mute silence.

"Say, papa," murmured Cecile, "they only said he was infirm. They did not tell us this."

She interrupted herself, very much embarrassed. After having placed upon the table a pot-au-feu and two bottles of wine, she untied the other package and took from it an enormous pair of shoes. This was the gift intended for the grandfather, and she remained with the shoes in her hand, confused, looking at the feet of the poor man who would never walk again.

"They came a little late, did they not?" my good man," resumed M. Gregoire, "to enliven the situation. That is always the case."

Bonnemort did not hear, did not respond, while his frightful looking face was as hard and cold as a stone.

Then Cecile silently placed the shoes against the wall, but as she set them down the nails made a noise.

"He will not say, thank you," cried la Levaque, who

had cast a look of profound envy on the shoes. "It's like giving a pair of spectacles to a duck, saving your respect."

She continued; she was working to draw the Gregoires into her house, thinking they would be moved to pity there. At last she found a pretense; she spoke to them of Lenore and Henri, who were very pretty, good darlings; and so intelligent, telling their ages, and whatever else was asked them. They could tell all that monsieur and madame wanted to know.

"Will you come for an instant, my girl?" said the father, happy at going out.

"Yes; I will come," she replied.

Cecile remained alone with Bonnemost; trembling and fascinated, she thought she remembered that old man; where had she met with that square face, pale and spotted with coal? and suddenly she remembered. She recalled the crowd of furious people who had pressed around her; she felt the cold hands which had clasped her throat. She had again found the man; she looked at his hands placed on his knees; the hands of a workman, crooked and with all the strength in the fingers. Little by little old Bonnemort had appeared to awaken, and he perceived her; he examined her also with his stupid air. A flame mounted to his cheeks; a nervous shock drew up his mouth, from which ran a stream of black saliva. Attracted, both remained, the one before the other; she flourishing, fat and fresh from long idleness, and from the good living of her race; he, dropsical, and with the disagreeable ugliness of a foundered beast, wrecked by a hundred years, from father to son, of toil and hunger.

At the end of ten minutes when the Gregoires, surprised at not seeing Cecile, returned to the Maheus' house, they gave a terrible scream. Upon the floor lay their daughter, her face blue, strangled. On her throat the enormous thumb had left the red imprint of a giant's thumb. Bonnemort, after staggering upon his dead limb, had fallen beside her without being able to rise again. His hands were still clutched, he looked at the people with a vacant stare. In his fall he had broken his plate, the cinders were scattered around, while the great shoes still leaned against the wall.

It was never possible to establish the exact facts. Why had Cecile approached; how Bonnemort, confined to his chair, had been able to take her by the throat. Evidently, when he had held her he became maddened, always pressing, stifling her cries, struggling with her until the last rattle. Not a sound, not a cry had traversed the thin partition of the neighboring house. It was believed to have been from a sudden freak of madness, an inexplainable temptation to murder in the pressure of that girl's white throat. Such a savage frenzy in that old, infirm man, who had lived a good man, an obedient beast opposed to the new ideas. What unknown rancor, slowly heated up, had mounted to the head? The horror had ended with unconsciousness. It was the crime of an idiot.

Meanwhile, the Gregoires on their knees, wept and choked with grief, their adored girl, that child who had been so long desired, whom they had watched as she slept, whom they had never thought anything good enough for! It was the end even of their life; what good was it to live now that they must live without her?

La Levaque, hopeless, cried:

"Ah! the old villain, why did he do that?" And la Maheu would only return in the evening! Hadn't she better go now and find her?

Overcome, the father and mother did not respond.

"Well! it would be better, at any rate. . . . I will go."

But before going out la Levaque caught sight of the shoes. All the alley was aroused; some curious ones were already running at the terrible news. Perhaps some one would steal them. And then there was no longer a man at the Maheus to wear them. Softly she carried them off. They would do well for Bouteloup.

At Requillart the Hennebeaus, with Megrel, had waited a long time for the Gregoires. The young man had come up from the mine and given the news; they hoped to communicate that very evening with the prisoners; but they would certainly only meet with their corpses, for the silence of death continued. Behind the engineer la Maheu seated upon a beam was listening with pale face when la Levaque arrived to tell her

of the old man's blow. She gave a gesture of impatience and irritation. However she was obliged to follow her.

Madame Hennebeau swooned away. What an abomination! Poor Cecile who only that day had been so gay, so lively. M. Hennebeau took his fainting wife into old Moque's house. With awkward hands he brought her to, troubled by the odor of musk which came from the opened dress. And when, streaming with tears, she clasped in her arms Megrel who was shocked by the death which cut short his marriage; the husband watched them lament together, free from anxiety. This unhappiness would arrange everything; he preferred to keep his nephew in the fear of his coachman.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Below the shaft, the unfortunate men shouted with terror. The water had now reached their stomachs. The noise of the torrent stunned them, the last falls of the tubbing made them think it the final crash of the world; and that which completed their terror was the neighing of the horses shut up in the stable, the death cry, terrible, never-to-be-forgotten, of a strangled animal.

Mouque had freed Bataille. The old horse was there, trembling, with eyes dilated and fixed on that ever rising water. The shaft-room was rapidly filling, the swelling of the greenish stream could be seen by the red light of the three lamps still burning under the roof. Suddenly, when he felt the icy flood on his skin, he burst away at a furious galop, engulfed himself and was lost to sight at the end of one of the galleries. Then it was sauve-qui-peut, the men following the animal.

"The game is up here!" cried Mouque. "We must try by Requillart."

This thought, that they might be able to get out by the old mine in the vicinity, if they arrived there before the passage was cut off, filled them now. The twenty

hustled together in single file, holding their lamps above their heads that the water might not extinguish them.

Fortunately, the gallery had a slight though imperceptible ascent. They proceeded two hundred metres, fighting against the flood, but without being overcome. Slumbering creeds re-awakened in their lost souls; they invoked the earth. It was the earth which was avenging itself, pouring out thus the blood of the vein, because one of its arteries had been cut. An old man was stammering forgotten prayers, twirling his thumbs to appease the evil spirits of the mine.

But, at the first flagging, discord broke out. The groom wished to turn to the left; others swore that it would be shorter to turn to the right. A minute was lost.

"Well! leave your skin there; what do I care!" Cheval exclaimed, brutally. "I'm going that way."

He went to the right; his comrades followed him. The others continued to run behind old Mouque, who had grown up at the bottom of Requillart. Nevertheless, he hesitated himself, not knowing which way to turn. They were losing their heads; the old ones no longer recognized the roads, the skein becoming confused before them. At each division of the roads, uncertainty stopped them short, but, nevertheless, they must decide.

Etienne was the last to run, delayed by Catherine, paralyzed by fear and fatigue. He would have turned to the right with Cheval, for he thought it the right road, but, willing to remain at the bottom, he had drawn back, glad to be freed from the presence of the man he execrated. Besides, the separation continued. Other comrades had drawn off. Six only now followed old Mouque.

"Hang on to my neck, I'll carry you," said Etienne to the young girl, seeing her grow weaker.

"No, leave me," she murmured, "I can do no more; I'd rather die at once."

They had stopped, and he was raising her in spite of her resistance, when the gallery was suddenly blocked up, an enormous heap falling in and separating them from the others. The flood already washed rocks, and crumblings were heard on all sides. Thus driven back

they had to retrace their steps. Then they knew no longer on what side they were walking. It was finished; they must abandon the idea of ascending by Requillart. Their only hope was to retreat before the flood, to reach the upper levels, whence perhaps they would come to deliver them if the waters abated.

Etienne at last recognized the Guillaume vein.

"Good!" said he, "I know where we are. My God! we were in the right road. . . . Listen! let us go straight on, we'll climb up by the chimney.

The waves beat their breasts; they walked very slowly. As long as they had light they would not despair; and they extinguished one of the lamps to economize the oil, with the intention of emptying it into the others. About thirty metres separated them from the chimney when a noise behind them made them turn. Could it it be that their comrades, barred in their turn, were returning? A tremendous blast rumbled in the distance; they could not understand this tempest approaching them in a splashing foam. And they cried out in fright when they saw a gigantic whitish mass issue from the darkness and struggle to reach them between the narrow woodwork which was crushing it.

It was Bataille. On setting out from the shaft room he had galloped through the entire length of the galleries. He seemed to know his way in this subterranean city, which he had inhabited for twelve years, and he saw clearly in the midst of the eternal night in which he had lived. He galloped and galloped, lowering his head and gathering up his feet, scraping through the narrow places which his large frame filled up. The roads succeed each other, the levels opened their forks without any hesitation from him. Where was he going? Over there, perhaps, to the vision of his youth, to the mill where he was born, on the banks of the Scarpe, to the dim recollection of the sun burning in the sky like a large lamp. He wished to live, the memory of the animal was awakening; the longing to breathe once more the air of the plains urged him straight on until he could find the opening under the warm sky, in the light. His patience of old gave way in revolt; this mine was murdering him after blinding him. The water which chased him, whipped his flanks, and clung

to his back. But the further he penetrated the narrower seemed the galleries, the roof lower, the walls closing in. He galloped on, all the same, his skin excoriated, leaving strips of his flesh hanging on the wood-work. On all sides the mine seemed to be shutting him tightly in, to capture and strangle him. When Etienne and Catherine, as he drew near them, suddenly perceived that he was perishing between the rocks. He had reached the end; he had broken both front legs. With a last effort he dragged himself a few metres; but his flanks could pass no longer, they were enveloped, garotted by the earth. And this bleeding head stretched out, still seeking a crevice with his large, troubled eyes. The water came upon him rapidly, he began to neigh, with a prolonged horrible rattle, the same which had been heard already at the death of the other horses in the stable. It was a frightful death agony, this old animal, broken to pieces, unable to stir, struggling in these depths far from daylight. His cry of distress never ceased, the water floated his mane and made him hoarser, with his mouth stretched wide open There was a groan, the rumbling noise of a tun filling up. Then, profound silence followed.

"Ah! my God! take me away," sobbed Catherine. "Ah! my God! I'm afraid; I don't want to die. . . . Take me away! take me away!"

She had seen the death. The caving in of the shaft, the inundated mine, nothing had struck her with such overpowering terror as this shriek of the dying Bataille. And she heard it still, her ears were buzzing with it, all her flesh shivered with agony.

"Take me away! take me away!"

Etienne seized her and carried her away. But it was a long time before they could reach the chimney, which they ascended. He had to help her, for she had no longer strength enough to cling to the timber. Three times he feared that she was slipping from him, that she was falling into the deep sea whose tide was roaring behind them. Nevertheless they could breath for a few moments when they found the first road still free. The water reappeared, they must hoist themselves up again. And for hours together, this ascent continued, the stream chasing them form level

to level, forcing them always upward. At the sixth a respite inspired them with hope, it seemed to them that the water remained stationery.

But a stronger rise took place, they had to clamber up to the seventh, then to the eighth. But one remained, and when they had reached it they watched anxiously each centimetre of the water's rise. If it did not stop then they must die like the old horse, crushed to the roof, their throats filled by the flood.

Crashing reverberations were heard every moment. The whole mine was shaken. At the end of the galleries, the air, driven back, was collected, compressed, resulting in formidable explosions amid the shivered rocks and falling earth. It was the terrifying confusion of internal convulsions, a small sample of the old battle when the deluges visited the earth, beating down the mountains under the plains.

And Catherine, shaken, bewildered by this continual sinking, wringing her hands, stammered unceasingly the same words:

"I don't want to die. . . . I don't want to die."

To reassure her, Etienne swore that the water rose no higher. Their flight had now lasted fully six hours; they would soon come to their assistance. And he said six hours without knowing, for the exact lapse of time had escaped them. In realty a whole day had passed already in their ascent across the Guillanme vein. Wet, tottering, they rested themselves. She undressed without shame so as to spread out her garments, then she put on again the pants and blouse, which dried completely on her. As her feet were bare, he forced her to put on his sabots. They could wait now, they had lowered the wick of the lamp, retaining but a feeble light. But pains in the stomach racked them; they perceived that they would die of hunger. Thus far they had been unconscious of existence. At the moment of the catastrophe they had not yet breakfasted, and they had just found their slices of bread and butter swollen with water—changed into soup at the bottom of their pockets. She had to be angry to make him eat his share, and as soon as she had finished she fell asleep from weariness, on the cold ground. He, unable to close his eyelids, kept watch over her, his forehead

between his hands, his eyes fixed. How many hours passed thus? He could not tell. What he did know was that before him, through the hole of the chimney, he saw the black wave reappearing, and moving the beast whose back swelled up unceasingly to reach them. At first there was but a thin line, a supple serpent stretching itself out; then this was enlarged with a spine, leaping up alive, rampant; and soon they were reached, the feet of the sleeping girl in the water. Filled with anxiety, he yet hesitated to awaken her. Was it not cruel to take her from this repose, this blissful annihilation which perhaps was rocking her in a dream of pure air and sunlight. Besides, to what part could they flee? He looked about, and remembered that the inclined plane, established in this part of the vein, was connected according to the plan with the upper shaft room. That was an outlet; he allowed her to sleep on, as long as it was possible, watching the gaining flood, waiting for it to drive them away. At length he gently lifted her up, and she shivered slightly.

"Ah! my God! it is true! . . . This begins again."

She rose, crying to again meet approaching death.

"No, calm yourself," murmured he. "We can go on further, I swear it."

To reach the inclined plane, they were compelled to walk stooping; again the water reached to their shoulders. The ascent again commenced, more dangerous, by that way entirely wooded for over fifty metres. First he tightened the cable; they fastened down at the bottom one of the cars, for if the other had descended during their ascent it would have crushed them. Finally they took the risks, not daring to make use of that cable which they feared and clinging with their nails. He climbing behind her, protected her head when she slipped, with bleeding hands. Suddenly they struck against some beams which obstructed the plane. Some earth had also fallen, a cave-in prevented them from going higher. By chance, a door opened there and they passed into a road.

Before them the rays of a lamp amazed them. A man angrily cried:

"Some more fools as crazy as me! . . . Great

heavens! get out of here. I don't want to see you others die."

They recognized Cheval. He had been blocked there by a cave-in which had filled up the inclined plane; and the two comrades who had set out with him had been left on the road with their heads split open by the fall of rocks. He, with a wounded shoulder, had crawled along beside them to take their lamps and steal their sandwiches. As he jumped back, a last shock behind him had filled up the gallery.

He immediately thought that he would be compelled to share his provisions with there comrades who had arrived. No, he would kill them first. Then as he recognized them his rage passed away and he laughed a wicked laugh.

"Ah! it's you Catherine! so you have come back here to find your man. That was right."

He affected not to notice Etienne. who agitated by this meeting, made a gesture as if to protect the girl who drew closer to his side. However he must accept the situation, he simply said to the comrade, as though they had left each other good friends, an hour before.

"Have you seen the bottom? We cannot get through the drifts.

Cheval still laughed.

"Indeed! so the drifts have fallen too, then we are between two walls, a regular mouse-trap. . . . But if you're a good swimmer you might go back by the plane."

In reality the water was ascending, they heard it washing in the tunnel between the timbering. The retreat was already cut off. And they were right, it was a mouse trap at the end of a gallery, which the sinking had obstructed before and behind. By chance all three were walled in together.

"Then you are going to remain?" said Cheval, jeeringly. "Go on, you'd be doing better to leave me in peace, for I don't want to speak to you. . . . But there is room here for two men. We will soon see which will die the first, at least we will see who will suffer the most."

The young man said:

"If we knock, perhaps they will hear."

"I am tired of knocking; . . . but take that stone, try and see if you will be more successful."

Etienne gathered up the pieces of stone which the other had already broken up, and struck against the vein, the call of the miners, the prolonged roll with which the workmen in peril signaled their presence. Then he pressed his ear down to listen. After twenty failures he grew desperate; not one sound responded.

During this time Cheval coolly arranged to set up housekeeping. At first he ranged his three lamps against the wall; one was burning, the two others would serve them later on. Then he placed upon a piece of wood the two sandwiches which he still had; it was the buffet; he could get along with that for two days if he was reasonable. He turned around and said:

"You know, Catherine, half of this is for you when you are too hungry."

The young girl did not reply. It increased her unhappiness still more to find herself with these two men.

The frightful life commenced, neither Cheval nor Etienne opening his mouth, seated upon the ground some steps apart. Upon the suggestion of the former the latter extinguished his lamp, a useless luxury; then they again fell into silence. Catharine was seated near the young man, uneasy at the glances which her old lover threw upon her. The hours slowly passed by; they heard the little murmur of the still rising water; while from time to time profound shocks and distant falls announced the last caving-in of the mine. When the lamp was empty and it was necessary to open another to light it, the fear of fire damp excited them for an instant; but they would rather have been blown up at once than remain in the darkness; but nothing exploded, there was no fire damp. They again stretched themselves out and the hours dragged on.

A sound startled Etienne and Catherine who raised their heads. Cheval had decided to eat; he cut a sandwich in half and he chewed it for a long time so as not to be in a hurry about swallowing it all. They, whom hunger was torturing, watched him eagerly.

"Then you don't want it?" said he to the girl, with his provoking air. "You're wrong."

She lowered her head, fearing to yield, her stomach

torn with such cramps that tears fell from her eyelashes. But he knew what she was after; she wanted him to take her back again now that he saw her near another. And she did not want to again make these men attack each other in that narrow cave in which they were suffering so now. "My God! couldn't they at least die friendly!"

Etienne would have died helplessly, rather than beg Cheval for a mouthful of bread. Silence again fell. The monotonous moments which passed, one by one, without hope, seemed prolonged into centuries. It had only been one day since they were all there shut up. The two lamps had gone out, and they had lit the third. Cheval cut into another sandwich, and he growled:

"Come on now, fool!"

Catherine shivered. To leave her free to decide, Etienne turned around. Then, when she did not stir, he said to her, in a low voice:

"Go, my child."

The tears which had been choking her then fell fast. She wept on, not even finding the strength to raise herself, no longer knowing if she was hungry, suffering from a grief which had invaded her entire body. He walked back and forth, vainly beating the call of the miners, enraged at that life which he was forced to live there, close to a rival whom he hated. Not even space to die apart. As soon as he took ten steps he was forced to return and knock against that man.

Another day was ending, and Cheval approached Catherine to offer her the half of the sandwich. She ate the mouthfuls slowly, and he made her pay for each with a caress.

Etienne, shivering, had placed his face against the wood so as not to see. But suddenly he returned with a bound, furious.

"Great God! will you leave her alone?"

"Is this any of your business?" said Cheval. "She is my woman, isn't she?"

And *par bravade* he rubbed her mouth with his red mustache, continuing:

"Leave us alone, will you?"

But Etienne, his teeth pressed together, cried:

"If you don't let her be I'll strangle you."

The other quickly arose, for he comprehended by the sound of the voice that the comrade was going to end it. Death there seemed too slow, it was necessary that at once one of the two yielded his place. It was the old battle commenced again under the ground where they would soon sleep side by side; and they had so little space they could not brandish their fists with-bruising them.

"This time I'll finish you," growled Cheval.

Etienne at this became crazy. It was as if a stream of blood came up from his veins and flooded his eyes with a red flame. He was filled with an irresistible wish to kill, a physical wish, the excitation of a mucus which produces a violent fit of coughing. It was beyond the power of his will and under the controlling influence of the hereditary wrong. He had seen a piece of slate sticking from the wall and he seized it and broke it off, a very large and very heavy piece. Then with both hands he brought it down on Cheval's head.

The latter had not the time to jump back. He fell, his face crushed and his skull broken. His brains splashed the ceiling of the gallery and a purplish jet ran from the wound. There was soon a pool in which the smoky rays of the lamp were reflected. Darkness prevailed in the vault, the body seemed, upon the ground, a black spot in a heap of rubbish.

Stooping over, with his eyes enlarged, Etienne looked at him. It was over; he had killed him. Confusedly all his strifes returned to him, that useless combat against the poison which slept in his muscles, the alcohol slowly accumulated by his race. However, he was only drunk from hunger, the old-time drunkenness of his parents had ended. His hair stood on end at the horror of that murder; but in spite of the revolt of his education, a cheerful sensation made his heart beat, the animal joy of an appetite at last satisfied. His pride at length arose, the pride of the stronger. Suddenly the little soldier appeared to him, his throat stuck with a knife, killed by a child. He also had killed.

But Catherine screamed:

"My God! He is dead!"

"Do you regret him?" asked Etienne fiercely.

She choked and stammered. Then staggering, she threw herself in his arms.

"Ah! kill me too! Ah! we will both die!"

With an embrace she caught him by the shoulders, and he also clasped her, and then they hoped that they would die. But death was in no haste, they loosened their arms. Then, while she covered her eyes, he dragged the miserable wretch and threw him down the incline, in order to get him out of the narrow place in which they still were compelled to live. Life would be impossible with that corpse under their feet. Both were appalled when they heard him plunge in the midst of the seething scum. The water had then already filled that hole, and they perceived that it was extending into the gallery.

Then came a new waiting. They lit the last lamp. it was wasted in clearing the water, the regular stubborn rise of which did not pause. First the water came to their ankles, then to their knees, the road ascended, they took refuge at the top, which gave them a respite of some hours. But the flood overtook them, coming up as far as their waists. Motionless, their backs pressed against the rock, they watched it grow higher and higher. When it reached their mouths it would be all over. The lamp which they had hung up, lighted the coal in little yellow waves; it grew dimmer; they could no longer distinguish more than a half circle, constantly diminishing as if eaten by the shadow which seemed to enlarge with the flood; and suddenly the shades fell; the lamp was extinguished after sputtering its last drop of oil. It was complete and absolute darkness, such darkness as above ground they slept in without ever opening their eyes to the light.

"Great God!" cried Étienne.

Catherine, as if she had felt the shadows seize her, sheltered herself against him. She repeated the miners saying in a low voice.

"Death blew out the lamp." Then at that warning, a flow of life revived them. He violently set to work to break the schist with the wire of the lamp, while she aidded him with her nails. They made in that manner a sort of raised ledge, and when they had both raised themselves up upon it, they sat down, swinging their

limbs, their backs bent, for the arch forced them to lower their heads. Now the water chilled only their heels; but they still felt the cold which pierced their limbs, their knees in fixed position, without relaxation. The uneven ledge became so soaked with a sticky dampness that they were compelled to hold on as long as possible, to keep them from sliding off. It was the end, which they now waited for, reduced to that niche, where they dared not risk a movement, weakened, famished, no longer having either bread or light; and they suffered especially from the darkness, which prevented them from seeing death approach. A great silence reigned in the mine, filled with water no longer forced. They now had below them only the feeling of that water, spreading out at the bottom of the galleries its silent flow."

The hours followed each other, all equally black, without their knowing the exact time becoming more and more mixed in their calculations. Their tortures which should have lengthened the minutes, carried them on rapidly. They thought they had been shut up two days and a night, when in reality the third day was already finished. All hope of assistance had left them, no one knew them to be there, no one sought to come there and hunger would finish them if they were not drowned. A last time; they thought to beat the call; but the stone had remained below. At any rate, who would hear them?

Catherine, resigned, had leaned her weary head against the vein when she heard a sound.

"Listen!" stammered she.

At first Etienne believed she was speaking of the little noise of the water which was always rising. He lied, wishing to calm her.

"It's me that you hear. I'm moving my legs."

"No, no, not that. It's there below; listen."

And she stuck her ear close to the coal. He understood and did as she did. A waiting of some seconds oppressed them. Then, very far off, very weak, they heard three blows wide apart. But they still doubted their ear, it was perhaps the cracking of the coal. And they did not know what to beat a reply with.

Etienne had an idea.

"You have on your sabots. Put out your feet and beat with your heels." She beat the call of the miners; and they listened, again distinguishing the three blows in the distance. Twenty times they renewed it, and twenty times the blow replied. They wept; they embraced each other, at the risk of losing their balance. Their comrades were at least there; they had arrived. It was an outburst of joy and love which carried away the torments of waiting, the agony of the calls which for so long a time were useless, as if their deliverers had only to split the rock with their fingers to rescue them.

"Well!" cried she, gaily; "it was luck that I laid my head back."

"Oh, you've ears!" said he. "As for me, I heard nothing."

From this moment they took turns, one of them always listening, ready to answer at the slightest signal. They soon heard the blows of the pick; the work was coming nearer; they were opening a gallery. Not a sound escaped them. But their joy fell. In spite of their laughing to deceive each other, despair gradually took possession of them again. At first they were profuse in suggestions. They were evidently coming from Requillart, the gallery doubtless descended into the vein. Perhaps several of them would be opened, for there were three men at the work. Then they spoke less, and at last they were silent, when they began to calculate what an enormous mass separated them from their comrades. Mute, they continued their reflections. They counted the days and days a workman would take to pierce through such a block. They could never reach them in time; they would be dead twenty times over. And gloomy, not daring to exchange another word in this increased anguish, they only replied to the calls by a movement of their sabots, hopeless, and only mechanically telling the others that they still lived.

One day, two days passed. For six days they had been at the bottom. The water, stopped at their knees, neither rose nor fell; and their legs seemed to be paralyzed in this icy bath. For an hour they could easily draw them out; but the position then became so inconvenient, that they were taken with frightful cramps

and obliged to put their heels down again. Every ten minutes, with a sprain of the loins, they remounted the slippery rock. The fractures of coal pierced their backs, and they had, at the nape of the neck, constant and intense pain from keeping always bent to avoid knocking their heads against the roof.

And the suffocation increased. The air, driven back by the water, was compressed into the kind of bell in which they found themselves enclosed. Their voices, muffled, appeared to come from afar. Buzzing in the ear commenced, they heard the sharp ringing of the tocsin, the galoping of a herd under an unceasing shower of hail.

At first, Catherine suffered terribly from hunger. She carried her poor shriveled hands to her throat, her breathing was hollow and deep, with a continual heart-rending moan, as if her stomach was being torn out with pincers. Etienne, suffering from the same torture, was tottering feverishly in the darkness, when, near him his fingers came in contact with a piece of wood, half rotten, which his nails crumbled. He gave a handful to the girl, who swallowed it greedily. During the two days they lived on this worm-eaten wood, they devoured the whole of it, in despair, when they had finished it, skinning themselves in trying to make incisions in other pieces still solid, and whose fibres resisted. Their torture increased, they were enraged that they could not masticate the linen of their garments. A leather belt round his waist relieved them a little. He bit off little pieces, she chewed them slowly, and finally swallowed them. This occupied their jaws, and made them believe they were eating. Then, when the belt was finished, they returned to the linen, sucking it for hours together.

But soon these violent crises passed off. Hunger became only a deep, dumb pain, the swooning away as it were, slow and steady, of their faculties, mental and physical.

Without a doubt they would have succumbed if they had not had water, as much of it as they wanted. They simply stooped and drank it from the hollow of the hand, and that twenty times over, burning as they were

with such a thirst that all this water seemed unable to quench.

On the seventh day, Catherine was stooping to drink when she struck her hand against some floating body before her.

"Look! what's that."

Etienne groped about in the darkness.

"I don't understand. One would think it was the covering of a ventilating door."

She drank, but as she was reaching for a second mouthful the body again struck her hand. She uttered a terrible cry.

"It's him; my God!"

"Who?"

"Him; you know! I felt his mustache."

It was the corpse of Cheval, which had ascended the inclined plane, washed up to them by the water. Etienne again stretched out his arm and also felt the mustache, the broken nose, and a feeling of repugnance and fear passed over him, filling him with a horrible nausea. Catherine spat out the water which was in her mouth. She believed she was drinking blood; that all that deep water before her was now the blood of that man.

"Hold on," said Etienne, "I am going to send him back again."

He gave the corpse a kick and it went off. But they soon felt it again beating against their limbs.

"Great heavens! send it away."

But the third time Eitenne was obliged to give it up, the stream always brought it back. Cheval did not wish to leave them, he wished to be with them, against them. It was a frightful companion, who finished by poisoning the air. During the whole day they did not drink, struggling, wishing to die; but the next day their sufferings decided them. They turned away the body to get each mouthful they drank, but they could scarcely turn their heads before he was once more between them, obstinate in his jealousy. Until the end he would be there, even though dead he kept them apart.

Another and still another day passed by. Etienne at each swell of the water received a slight knock from the man he had killed, the simple jostling of a neighbor who

makes known his presence. He trembled continually, seeing always before him that crushed face with its red mustache. Then he no longer remembered that if he had not killed him the other would have been the murderer Catherine now shook with tears after which she would sink into unconsciousness. She ended by falling into a state of somnolence. He would awaken her, she would stammer a few words, and then fall off to sleep again without ever once raising her eyelids; and for fear she would slip off and be drowned he passed an arm around her. He was now compelled to reply to the comrades. The blows of the picks were approaching and he could hear them behind his back. But his strength was so diminished that he had lost all courage to knock. They knew they were there, why fatigue himself more? It no longer interested him to know whether they were able to come on. In the terror of his watch, for some hours he had forgotten what he was watching for.

They were comforted a little at least. The water lowered and the corpse of Cheval floated off. For nine days they had been working to deliver them, and they heard for the first time the steps in the gallery, when a shock threw them on the ground. They threw themselves into each other's arms, not comprehending and believing that a catastrophe was approaching. Nothing moved now, the sounds of the picks had ceased.

In the corner where they had seated themselves, side by side, Catherine laughed slightly.

"It must be good outside. Come, let's go out of here."

Etienne at first struggled against insanity. But the contagion shook his more evenly balanced head, he lost all sense of reality. Their senses were leaving them, especially Catherine, who feverish, was tormented with a desire for speech and gestures. The sounds in her ears had become those of running water and the singing of birds; and she smelt a strong perfume of crushed herbs, and she saw clearly great yellow spots flying before her eyes so large that she believed herself outside, near the canal, in the wheat fields under a beautiful day of sunshine.

"It's warm now. . . . Take me, let's remain together, oh! always, always.

He pressed her to him and she continued with the bantering tone of a happy girl:

"You've been foolish to wait so long, I always wanted you but you wouldn't understand."

Her gaiety had infected him also, and he said in his turn:

"Yes, but you hit me once, on both cheeks."

"It was because I loved," she murmured. "I knew that one day or other we would be together."

A shiver passed over him; he wished to hasten that dream, then he murmured the thought which he had formerly had.

"Nothing is ever finished; a little happiness, and then it will again commence."

"But you will keep me now?"

And half fainting she slipped. She was so weak that her voice died away. Frightened, he clasped her to his heart.

"Are you suffering?"

She straightened up, astonished.

"No, not at all. . . . Why?"

But that question awakened him from his dream.

She peered into the shadows, she caught his hands and cried in a new burst of tears:

"My God! my God! but it is dark!"

It was no longer the wheat fields, nor the odor of herbs, nor the song of the larks, nor the great yellow sun; it was the sunken and inundated mine, the disagreeable night and the mournful drooping of that cave in which they had existed all these days. The perversion of her senses aggravated the horror now. She was re-taken with the superstition of her childhood. She saw the Black Man, the old miner who returned to the mine to wring the necks of bad girls.

"Listen! did you hear?"

"No, nothing; I heard nothing."

"If it's the Black Man, you know. . . . Oh! there he is! . . . The earth has given all her blood to avenge the cutting of her arteries; and he is there, look! he's blacker than the night! . . . Oh! I'm afraid! Oh! I'm afraid!"

She became silent, shivering. Then in a very low voice, she continued:

"No, it's the other."

"What other?"

"The one who is with us." . . . The image of Cheval haunted her, and she spoke of him confusedly, she related their dog-like existence, the only day when he had been good to her, at Jean-Bart; the other days of harsh words and kicks, when he almost killed her with caresses immediately after a blow.

"I say that he's coming, he will still keep us from being together! . . . His jealousy is coming back. Oh! take me, keep me, keep me yourself."

She threw herself upon him, she found his mouth and firmly placed hers upon it. The shadows cleared away, she again laughed a loving laugh. He shudderingly clasped her to him.

Hours passed. Etienne sat always in the same corner, upon the ground, with Catherine motionless upon his knee. For a long time he believed she slept; then he touched her, she was very cold, she was dead. How ever he did not move for fear of awakening her Plans for the future returned at intervals, but they were so vague that they seemed to pass before his face like a sleeping breath. He grew weaker, there only remained to him the strength for a feeble gesture, a slow movement of the hand to assure himself that she was still there like a sleeping child, in her very stiffness. Everything was annihilated, even the lapse of time. Something was knocking at his side, blows of which the violence approached closer to him; but he was too weak to go and respond, filled with a great weariness; and at present he knew nothing, he only dreamed that she was walking before him and that he heard the light knocking of her sabots. Two days passed on, she had not moved, he touched her with his mechanical gesture, reassured to feel her so quiet.

Etienne experienced a shock. Voices were heard, and rocks rolled to his feet. When he perceived a lamp, he wept, his blinking yes, followed the rays, never leaving it, in an ecstacy before that reddening light which scarcely pierced the shadows. But some comrades carried him away, he let them put between his closed teeth

some spoonfuls of bouillon. It was only in the gallery of Requillart that he recognized some one, the engineer Megrel standing before him; and these two men who had scorned each other, the rebellious workman, the sceptical chief threw themselves on each others neck sobbing in the deep throbbing of all the humanity which was in them. It was a sad scene, the misery of generations, the excess of grief which made life give way.

At the top, la Maheu threw herself beside Catherine's body, emiting one scream after the other, in great cries, long and incessant.

Several corpses had already been brought up and placed on the ground. Cheval whom they thought had been crushed under a cave-in, a boy and two miners in like manner crushed, their brains gone from their heads, their stomachs filled with water. Some women in the crowd losing their reason, tore their clothing and scratched their faces. When they at length brought him out, after becoming habituated to the lamps and having been fed a little, Etienne appeared greatly emaciated, and his hair was white; they were struck dumb, and shuddered in the presence of that old man. La Maheu stopped screaming to stupidly look at him with great staring eyes.

CHAPTER XL.

It was four o'clock in the morning. The cool April night grew warmer with the approach of day. The stars were paling in the clear sky as the light of the early dawn purpled the east. And the black country, still drowsy, but faintly stirred with the vague sounds which precede the reveille.

Etienne, with long strides, was following the Vandame road. He had just passed six weeks at Montson in a hospital bed. Still pale and very thin, he had felt himself strong enough to leave, and he left. The company, still uneasy about their mines, and going on with their dismissals in their policy of prudence, had given him notice that they could not keep him; they also

offered him a gratuity of a hundred francs with the paternal advice to give up work in the mines as being henceforth too hard for him. He had refused the hundred francs. A letter in reply from Pluchart, containing money for the journey, had already arrived, calling him to Paris. It was the realization of his dream. On leaving the hospital the evening before he had slept at Bon-Joyeux at the widow Desiree's. He had risen very early, with but one wish left, to say adieu to his old comrades before taking the eight o'clock train for Marchiennes.

For an instant, Etienne stopped on the road now bathed in the rosy dawn. It was good to breathe this air so pure with the early spring. It was a glorious morning. Slowly the day grew, the life of the earth rose with the sun. He resumed his walk, leaning heavily on his dog-wood stick, looking at the plain in the distance emerging from the vapors of the night. He had seen no one recently; la Maheude had come once to the hospital, but had doubtless been unable to return. But he knew that all the alley of the Deux-Cent-Quarante went down to Jean-Bart now, and that she herself must have resumed work there. Gradually the deserted roads were filling, coalmen were continually passing near Etienne, with pale, silent faces. It was said that the company was taking advantage of their victory. After a strike of two months and a half, beaten by hunger, when they had returned to the mines, they had been obliged to accept the timbering tariff, a disguised reduction of wages, odious to them now from being stained with the blood of their comrades. An hour of work was stolen from them, they made them give the lie to their oath of resistance, and this enforced perjury stuck in their throats like gall. Work was resumed everywhere, at Miron, at Madeleine, at Crevecœur, at Victoire. Everywhere, through the morning mist along the roads veiled in darkness, the army tramped, files of men with their noses to the ground like cattle going to the slaughter house. They shivered under their thin linen garments, they crossed their arms, wiggled their loins, swelled out their backs, deformed by the sandwich lodged between the shirt and the blouse. And in this return en masse, in these

mute dark spectres, without a laugh, without a side look, one felt that the teeth were shut in anger, the heart swelling with hatred, the only submission being that of dire necessity.

Their numbers kept increasing as Etienne drew nearer the mine. Nearly all walked alone; those who came in groups followed each other in file, tired and weary, weary of themselves and of each other. He perceived one very old man whose eyes sparkled like coals under a livid brow. Further on a young man whispered the restrained whisper of the tempest. Many had their sabots in their hands, and the soft noise of their large woollen stockings was hardly heard. It was an endless stream, an overflow, a forced march of a beaten army, with drooping heads, dumbly possessed with a longing to resume the fight and avenge themselves.

When Etienne arrived at last, Jean-Bart was emerging from the shadows, the lamps hanging from the tressels burned in the rising dawn. Above the dark buildings an escapement raised itself like a white aigrette delicately tinted with carmine. He took the screening-shed staircase to reach the receiver's room.

The descent commenced; workmen came up from the waiting-room. For a moment, he remained motionless in this hubbub and bustle. The rolling of the cars shook the flagging; the drums turned, unwound the cables, in the midst of the clatter of the speaking-trumpet, the ringing of bells, the blows of the club on the signal block; and he found the monster again swallowing his ration of human flesh, the cages emerging, replunging, gulping down loads of men without a stop, with the easy swallow of a voracious giant. Since his accident, he had a nervous horror of the mine. Those cages, plunging down, down, seemed to be taking his life with them. He felt the dizziness of a fall. He had to turn his head; the shaft made him sick. But in the vast room, still dark, where the exhausted lamps were dying out, he perceived no friendly face. The miners who were waiting there, with bare feet, lamp in hand, looked at him with their large, troubled eyes, then bent their brows, drawing back in shame. They, no doubt, knew him, and no longer felt any bitterness toward him. They seemed, on the contrary, to fear him, red-

dening at the thought that he would reproach them as cowards. This attitude made his heart swell. He excused these miserable creatures for having stoned him. He began again to dream of changing them into heroes, of directing the people, that force of nature which was preying upon itself.

A cage let out some men; the squad disappeared, and when the others arrived he perceived one of the lieutenants of the strike, a brave man, who had sworn to die.

"You too!" murmured he, heart-broken.

The other paled, his lip trembled; then, with a gesture of excuse:

"What else? I've got a wife."

Now, in the new group which were filling the waiting-room, they recognized each other:

"You, too! and you and you!"

And all, shivering, stammered, with a stifled voice:

"I've got a mother. . . . I've got children. . . . They must have bread."

The cage did not reappear; they were waiting for it, and suffering so much from their defeat that they avoided glancing at each other and obstinately looked dow the shaft.

"And la Maheu?" asked Etienne.

They did not reply. One made a sign that she intended to come. Others raised their arms, trembling with pity: Ah! the poor woman! What misery! The silence continued, and when the comrades held out their hands to say adieu they were strongly affected. All felt the same silent rage at having yielded, the feverish hope of retaliation. The cage was there, they embarked, and were again swallowed up.

Pierron had appeared with an open lamp; an overseer fixed it in his cap. For eight days he had been chief of the shaft-room, and the workmen turned aside, for these honors rendered them furious. The sight of Etienne embarrassed him; he approached, however, and became reassured when the young man announced to him his departure. He talked with him, speaking of his wife who now kept the saloon, Progres, thanks to the assistance of all those gentlemen who had been so good to them. But, he interrupted himself, he was furious against old Mouque, whom he accused of not having

sent up the rubbish from the stable at the regular hour. The old man listened and shrugged his shoulders. Then before descending, angry at that reprimand, he also gave his hand to Etienne, with the same long clasp as the others, hot with rage, feeling already the future rebellions. And that old hand, which trembled in pressing his own, that old man who pardoned him for his dead children, choked him with such emotion that he watched him disappear down the shaft without saying a word to him.

"La Maheu isn't coming this morning, then?" said he to Pierron, after a pause.

The latter pretended not to have understood, for he did not wish to talk with him. Then, when he went away under the pretense of giving an order, he finally said:

"What? la Maheu! . . . There she is."

La Maheu, in blouse and pants, her head in a beguin, had arrived from the waiting-room lamp in hand. It was a charitable exception that the company took pity upon her miserable condition, and had allowed her to descend at the age of forty years, and as it would have been difficult for her to roll again they set her to working a little ventilator which they had set up in the north gallery, in that hell-like region under la Tartaret where the air was bad. For ten hours, with bent back, she turned her wheel at the end of a hot opening, her skin parched by a high degree of heat, and for this toil she earned thirty sous.

When Etienne perceived her, pitiful, in her man's clothing he could not find words to tell her that he was going away, and that he wished to say adieu.

She looked at him without seeming to hear. At length she said in a friendly tone:

"Well! it surprises you to see me, don't it? Yes, it's true I threatened to strangle the first of my family who went down again, and here I'm doing it myself. I ought to strangle myself, oughtn't I? Well, I would do it if I hadn't the old man and little one's at home.

And she continued in a low and weary voice. She did not excuse herself, she simply related facts, that they were starving and that she had thus decided, so that they would not drive them from the alley.

"How is the old man?" asked Etienne.

"He is always very quiet and good now. But his head is completely gone. . . . They have not even tried him for that affair, you know! They wanted to put him in the asylum, but I didn't want it, I was afraid they'd end him there. His act has done us a great deal of harm, all the same, for he has never got his pension; one of those gentlemen, told me it would be wrong for them to give him one now.

"Does Jeanlin work?"

"Yes, the gentlemen have found him outside work. He earns twenty sous. . . . Oh! I don't complain, the chief have shown themselves to be very good. The boys twenty sous and my thirty, that makes fifty sous. . . . There are six of us to be fed. Estelle eats now and the worst is that we'll have to wait four or five years before Lenore and Henri are old enough to go down in the mine."

Etienne could not restrain a sad gesture.

"They, too."

The wan cheeks of la Mahue reddened while a flame seemed to light up her eyes. But she shrugged her shoulders as if under the burden of destiny.

"Certainly, they're after the others. . . . They haven't all lost their lives yet, it's their turn now."

She became silent, some wheelers, sending their cars along pushed them out of the way. Through the great dusty windows the daylight entered, paling the lanterns, clearing up the room with a sad light, and the shaking of the machinery continued while the cables wound and unwound, and the cages continued to swallow up the men.

"Come on, come on, hurry up!" cried Pierron. "Get in, we'll never be through to-day."

La Maheu, whom he was looking at, did not stir. She had already allowed three cages to pass; she resumed as if awakening from a dream and remembering the first words of Etienne:

"Then you are leaving?"

"Yes, this morning."

"You are right; it's better to be somewhere else if you can. I'm glad to have seen you, because you'll at least know that I have nothing in my heart against you.

At one time I could have killed you after all those deaths. But one always reflects don't they? And they find out in the end that it's the fault of no one. . . . No, no; it's not your fault; it's the fault of every one."

Now she spoke tranquilly of the death of her poor man, and of Zacharie and Catherine, and only when she pronounced the name of Alzire the tears filled her eyes. The calm of a reasonable woman had returned to her; she very wisely judged things. It would not bring the owners luck to have killed her people. Surely they would be punished one day for all they had done. They need not even concern themselves about it, the battle would fight itself alone, the soldiers would fire upon the owners just as they had fired upon the workmen. And, in her calm resignation, in that hereditary discipline, which had again become a part of her, one thought was fixed, the certainty that injustice could not last longer, and that if there was no longer one good God another would come up to avenge the miserable people.

She was speaking very low, with defiant looks around her. Then, when Pierron approached, she added, in a high voice:

"Well, if you are going, you must go to our house for your things. . . . There are two shirts, three handkerchiefs and an old pair of pants."

Etienne, with a gesture, refused these few things which had been refused by the second-hand dealers.

"No, I don't want the bother of them, they'll do for the children. . . . I will fix myself at Paris."

Two more cages had descended, and Pierron had decided to call la Maheu.

"Say now, there, we're waiting for you. Are you nearly through talking?"

But she turned her back. What had he to do with her? That descent didn't concern him. The men at the shaft hated him enough already. And she became obstinate; with her lamp between her fingers she was freezing in the currents of air, in spite of the mildness of the season.

Neither Etienne nor the woman could find another word to say. They remained face to face, with hearts bursting when they would have wished to say something.

Finally, to break the silence, she said:

"Levaque's in prison yet, and Philomêne's gone off."

"How, gone off?"

"Gone off with a miner from Pas-de-Calais. I was afraid she'd leave me the two children, but no, she took them with her. . . . Well; she spits blood all the time and looks as if she was dying."

That was all; they spoke no more. A cage was waiting for her and in a rage they called and threatened to fine her. Then she decided to go. She pressed his hand. Very pale, he still looked at her, so wretched, with her livid face, her discolored hair flying from the blue beguin, and her body deformed under the linen pants and blouse. And in the last pressure of that hand, he again found like his comrades, a long, silent wish for the day when their life would commence. He comprehended perfectly that she had, in the depth of her eyes, a tranquil belief. . . . Soon would come the great blow.

"Will you come on?" cried Pierron.

Pushed and shoved, la Maheu found herself at the bottom of a car with four others. They drew the signal cord to sound "a la viande;" the cage was unfastened and fell into the darkness; and nothing was heard but the rapid flight of the cable.

Then Etienne left the mine. Below in the screening shed, he perceived a being seated upon the ground, his limbs stretched out in the midst of a thick bed of coal. It was Jeanlin who was employed in sorting the coal. He was knocking a block of coal with a hammer to remove the schist; and such a cloud of fine powder arose that the young man would never have recognized him, had not the child raised his monkey-like face with its big ears and greenish eyes. He laughed, then broke the block with a last blow, and disappeared in the thick dust which arose.

Outside, Etienne followed the road for a moment lost in thought. All sorts of ideas came up in his mind. But he felt the open air, the free sky, and he breathed freely. The sun appeared in a glorious horizon. It was an awakening of cheerfulness in the entire country. A flood of gold rolled from the east to the west over the immense sea of the plain. The warmth of life was

gaining, expanding in an atmosphere of youth, where vibrated the sighs of the earth, the song of birds and the murmurs of the water. It was good to live. The old world was going to live through another spring.

And penetrated by that hope Etienne slackened his walk, his eyes lost at the right and left in the joy of a new season. He thought of himself; he felt strong, matured by that hard life at the bottom of the mine. His education was finished; he was going away armed like a soldier who enlisted for the revolution, starting out to war against society, which he had seen and which he condemned. The joy of going to find Pluchart, to be like Pluchart a leader listened to, suggested speeches of which he arranged the sentences. He meditated on enlarging his programme, the higher alliance which he had formed above his class threw him into a still greater hatred of the aristocracy. These workmen the smell of whose misery still possessed him, made him experience a wish to raise them to glory, to set them up as the only great ones; the only sinless ones, in whom all the nobleness and strength of humanity had been placed. Imagination carried him away; he saw himself already at the tribune; he would enter with the people on the triumph of his ideas, if the people would not destroy him.

High above him the song of a lark made him look at the sky. Little red clouds, the last vapors of the night passed on in the limpid blue; and the vague forms of Jouvarine and Rasseneur appeared to him. Decidedly all was weakened when each one adhered to his own ideas. Thus, that famous "International" which would have been able to renovate the world, died of powerlessness after seeing her formidable army divide itself and break into personal quarrels. Was Darwin then right? Was the world but a battle field, the strong devouring the weak, for the beauty and continuation of peace? That question troubled him; so much so that he decided, from that time forward, to be a man content with science.

But a sudden idea dissipated his doubts and enchanted him, that of expounding his theory the first time that he spoke. If it was necessary that one class be destroyed, was it not the people, active, still fresh, who should devour the aristocracy worn out with luxury?

New blood would form a new society. And in the expectation of an invasion of barbarians regenerating the old decayed nations, he again established his implicit faith in an approaching revolution, the true one, that of the workmen; a conflagration which would fire the close of the century with the regal splendor of the rising sun, at which he was now looking.

He continued to walk, dreaming, striking with his cane the pebbles on the road; and when he cast his eyes around him, he recognized the neighborhood. Exactly at the Fourche-aux-Bœufs, he remembered that he had there taken the command of the mob on the morning of the terrible race across the mines.

To-day brutal, fatal, ill-paid labor recommenced. Under the earth over there, at seven hundred metres' distance, he seemed to hear the dull, regular and continuous blows; it was his comrades whom he had just seen go down, his black comrades hammering again in their silent anger. Without a doubt they were vanquished; it had cost them their money and their dead; but Paris would not forget the firing at Voreux, the blood of the empire would also flow through this incurable wound; and if the industrial crisis was drawing to its close, and if the factories were re-opened one by one, war was still none the less certain, unless real peace should henceforth be attainable. The coalmen had counted their numbers, they had tried their strength, and with their cry for justice had aroused the workmen of France throughout the entire country. Therefore, their defeat reassured no one. The peasanty of Montson, troubled with a dumb fear of a morrow of strikes, looked behind them to see if their time had not come notwithstanding. At the end there was this profound silence. They comprehended that the revolution would rise again, to-morrow, perhaps, with a general strike, the agreement of all the workmen in saving funds, enabling them to hold out for months while still having bread to eat. This time it was a shock given to decaying society; they had heard the cracking under their feet; they would feel other shocks, and still others, until the old rotten edifice, tottering, shaking, would be swallowed up like the Voreux sinking into an abyss.

Etienne took the Joiselle road on the left, and he

remembered that there he had prevented the mob from going to Gaston-Marie. In the distance, in the clear sunlight, he saw the towers of several mines, Miron upon the right, Madeleine and Crevecœur side by side. Work had been resumed everywhere, the blows of the picks which he thought he heard at the bottom of the earth, now beat from one side of the plain to the other. Everywhere, under the fields, the roads, the villages, which smiled in the light, was in progress the hidden work of underground galley slaves, so crushed beneath an enormous mass of rocks that it was only necessary to know they were below to distinguish their great sad sighs. He thought now that violence had not hastened things perhaps. Cut cables, torn up rails, broken lamps —what useless work. Was it worth while to run three miles in the midst of a band of marauders?

Vaguely he suspected that right some day might prove still more terrible. His reason was maturing. He had thrown off his bitterness. Yes, with her good sense, la Maheu had well said that this would be the right course. To band together quietly, know each other, meet together in societies when the laws permitted it. Then, on the day when they felt their strength, when they found themselves numbering millions against the few thousand drones, seize the power and be the masters. Ah! what a re-awakening of truth and justice! The loathsome crouching God would be instantly demolished, the monstrous idol, hidden in the depths of his tabernacle in that far off unknown region where the wretched feed him with their flesh without having ever seen him.

But Etienne left the road to Vandame, and started off on the turn-pike. At the right he perceived Montson which was fast disappearing. In front he saw the shades of the Voreux, the abominable pit where three pumps were constantly worked. Then against the horizon were the other mines, Victoire, Saint-Thomas, and Feutry-Cantel ; while towards the north arose the high furnaces and the coke fires, smoking in the clear morning air. If he did not wish to miss the eight o'clock train he must hurry, for he had still six kilometres to go.

And under his feet the heavy blows of the pick con-

tinued. His comrades were all there; he heard them following him at each stride. Under that field of beets, was not that la Maheu, working with bent back, whose whisper came up so hoarsely, accompanied by the rumbling of the ventilator? To the left, to the right, further on, he thought he recognized others beneath the wheat, the hedges, the young trees. Now, in the clear sky, the April sun shone forth in all his glory, warming the brooding earth. New life was sprouting forth everywhere; the buds were bursting into green leaves, and the fields trembled beneath the growing herbs. On all sides the grain was swelling, stretching out, cracking the soil, pushing on in search of heat and light. An overflow of sap ran whisperingly, and the bursting of the buds climaxed in a fond kiss.

Again and again, more and more distinctly, as if they had drawn near the soil, the comrades were knocking, under the flaming rays of the orb of day, in this youthful morning; this was the task at which the country was laboring. Men were sprouting; a black avenging army, still germinating in the furrows, was swelling for the harvests of the next century, and its springing growth would soon startle the earth.

THE END.