

She remained there till the carriage came to fetch her at dinner time.

“Well,” asked her Mother, when they were seated at table, “how is our dear old Curé?”

“He is very pale and thin, dear Mamma.”

“It is quite true,” said Bertha, who was waiting at table, and who liked putting in a word, “our good Curé has passed through terrible trials, all this long and dreadful winter, he has deprived himself of fire, so necessary at his great age, and drank nothing but water.”

“And why, for heaven’s sake?”

“The snow preventing all communication with the town, stopped work in the village, and to crown this misfortune the potatoes were frozen. Our dear old priest’s heart bled at the sight of so much misery; he transferred his bed from his own room, which was the largest in the house, to his little study, and then hired a stove, which was lighted early in the morning, and round which everyone was free to warm themselves; knowing very well that no one in the village had enough to eat, he had some good soup made, and all were made welcome to it morning and evening. His provision of wood was exhausted, his wine, also, for he had sold it; still his resources were not sufficient; and deprived himself to feed others.”

“Mamma,” said Martha, “I understand now why the beautiful ivory crucifix is no longer in its place in our dear Curé’s study, and why instead of his old silver snuff-box, that he is so fond of, he uses an ugly wooden one.”

“The worthy man has sold everything, his three silver spoons and forks, and his silver goblet; he eats with a wooden spoon like the poorest of his parishoners,” added the serving woman.