

CHAPTER I

THE HARMAS

THIS is what I wished for, *hoc erat in votis*: a bit of land, oh, not so very large, but fenced in, to avoid the drawbacks of a public way; an abandoned, barren, sun-scorched bit of land, favoured by thistles and by Wasps and Bees. Here, without fear of being troubled by the passers-by, I could consult the *Ammophila* and the *Sphex*¹ and engage in that difficult conversation whose questions and answers have experiment for their language; here, without distant expeditions that take up my time, without tiring rambles that strain my nerves, I could contrive my plans of attack, lay my ambushes and watch their effects at every hour of the day. *Hoc erat in votis*. Yes, this was my wish, my dream, always cherished, always vanishing into the mists of the future.

And it is no easy matter to acquire a labo-

¹Two species of Digger or Hunting Wasps. Cf. *Insect Life*, by J. H. Fabre, translated by the author of *Made-moiselle Mori*: chaps. vi to xii and xvi.—*Translator's Note*.