

snow, and packs of wolves had crossed the Rhine on the ice.

I ought to have gone home directly after supper; my father used to wait for me; but my curiosity to hear the news of the Great Turk, of America, and of all the countries in the world, was too great; I stayed sometimes till past ten; even now I can see myself in my corner on the left of the old clock, the walnut wardrobe and the door of Maitre Jean's sleeping-room on the right, and the large inn table in front of me under the little dark windows.

Maitre Jean is reading, Mother Catherine, a little woman with pink cheeks, her ears covered with a white hood, is spinning, and Nicole, too, with her cap like a bug at the back of her head. Poor Nicole was as red as a carrot, freckled all over, with white eyelashes. Yes, I see it all—the spinning-wheels hum, the old clock ticks, from time to time it rattles, down go the weights, it strikes, and then goes on ticking. Maitre Jean in his arm-chair, his iron spectacles on his nose—like me now—with his red ears and his large rough whiskers, attends to nothing but his paper; sometimes he turns round, and lifting his spectacles up, says—

"Here is news from America. General Washington has beaten the English. Did you observe that, Chauvel?"

"Yes, Maitre Jean," says the baker, "these Americans only began their rebellion three or four years ago. They would not pay the quantity of taxes that the English were increasing daily, as is one often elsewhere, and their cause is flourishing."

Then he would smile for a second without opening his lips, and Maitre Jean would go on reading.

Then Frederick II. would be mentioned—that old Prussian fox, who wanted to begin his tricks again.

"Old beggar," Maitre Jean would mutter; "had it not been for M. de Soubise, he would not get his back up. We owe Rossbach to this great fool."

"Yes, said Chauvel, "and that is why His Majesty has granted him a pension of fifteen hundred thousand livres."

Then after looking at one another in silence, Maitre Jean repeated—

"Fifteen hundred thousand livres to that idiot! and they cannot spare a sou to mend the royal road between Saverne and Phalsbourg. Thousands of country people are obliged to go a league out of their road to cross from Alsace into Lorraine, and bread, meat, and wine get dearer and dearer."

When Maitre Jean became very excited, Catherine would jump up and listen in the passage; then he became quiet, for my grandfather knew what that meant. It was necessary to be careful, for informers prowled about everywhere, and if they had heard our way of thinking about princes and lords, we should have heard of it again.

Chauvel and his little daughter used to go home early, but I would stay behind to the last minute. Maitre Jean, in folding the Gazette, would see me and cry out—

"What, Michel! what are you doing there? do you understand all this?"

Then, without waiting for an answer— "Come, be off; to-morrow morning there will be work to be done. It is market-day, and the forge-fire will be alight early—be off, Michel, be off!"

It then would occur to me the wolves sometimes came down into the village, and I would run and light a torch in the kitchen. The little window looking into the yard was as black as ink, I could hear the northeast wind sighing out of doors. I shivered while Nicole opened the door for me.

I almost lost my breath when I found myself outside at night, seeing the white road winding between the old cottages buried in snow, and hearing the wind blow, and sometimes the wolves howling and answering one another in the fields. I used to run till I lost breath, my hair stood on end, and I jumped over the heaps of snow and manure like a kid. The old roofs of thatch, the windows beneath stopped up with straw, with frost hanging to it, the small doors barricaded, all looked frightful by the light of my torch—everything seemed dead. But as I ran along I could see at the end of the lanes certain shadows come and go, and this sight terrified me so that when I got to our hut I threw myself against the door as if I was lost.

My poor father was there by the fire in his old patched linen pantaloons, and would say— "My child, you come home too late; they are all asleep; have you been hearing the newspaper read?"

"Yes, father—take this."

I would give him the bread Maitre Jean always gave me after supper. He took it, and said, "Go to bed, my child, and do not come home again so late, there are so many wolves about now."

I lay down by the side of my brothers in a great box full of leaves, with an old coverlid over it.

The others were fast asleep; they had been begging in the villages and on the high roads all day. I used to remain awake a long time listening to the wind, and sometimes a dull noise, in the midst of the silence. It was wolves attacking a stable; they would spring eight or ten feet high at the window, and fall back to the snow; suddenly a sharp cry or two would be heard, and all the pack was gone; they had taken a dog and were devouring him.

At other times I would shiver at hearing them blow and scratch under our door. Father used to get up and light a straw torch at the hearth, and the hungry brutes went further on.

I have always thought the winters were longer than in these days, and much more severe. Snow was often two and three feet deep; it lay until April, on account of the great woods which have since been cleared, and of the numerous pools which the seigneurs and nobles allowed to remain full in the valleys,

that they might not be obliged to crop the land every year. It was less trouble. But this quantity of water, these woods and marshes, kept the country damp, and chilled the air.

Now, where every bit of land is cut up, cultivated, and sown, the sun penetrates everywhere, and spring comes earlier—at least I think so. But whatever may have been the cause, all old people will tell you that cold weather came sooner and lasted longer, and that every year packs of wolves would attack stables and carry off the watch-dogs, even out of the farmyards.

IV.

I was sent to school during the winter. It is from this period that I date my existence. The man who knows nothing, and is without means of instruction, goes through the world like a beast of burden; he works for others, he helps to increase the wealth of others, and when he becomes weak and worn out, they get rid of him.

My father called me every morning as soon as it was light; my brothers and sisters were still asleep. I dressed without noise, and I left with my little bag, my feet in my sabots, a waggoner's large cap drawn over my ears, and my log of wood under my arm. Winter was just beginning, and it was cold. I shut the door carefully, and I set off breathing on my fingers.

How all comes back to me, after so many years! the up and down path, the leafless old trees by the side of the road, the wintry stillness in the forest, and Lutzelbourg at the bottom of the valley, with its pointed church spire, its weathercock against the grey sky, the little graveyard at the foot of it, the tombstones buried in snow; the old houses, the river, Father Sirvins's mill splashing the stream as it flows along. Is it possible that what happens in infancy remains always fixed in one's recollection, while the rest is so soon obliterated?

I was almost always first at school. There were no boys in the room. The mother of M. le Curé Christopher, a very little, bent, and shrivelled-up woman, her red linen petticoat up to the middle of her back, in the Asiatic fashion, her cap like a pad on the nape of her neck, Madame Madeleine, lively as a mouse, had already lighted the fire. I put my log of wood down by the stove, and my sabots under it, to dry them. I see it all now; the white-washed beams, the rows of little benches, the large black table against the wall between the two windows; at the end of the room the curé's desk in a little alcove, and above it a large crucifix.

Every boy swept out the schoolroom in turn, but I used to begin while waiting for the others. They came from Hullenhausen, the Barriques, and even from Chévrois. It was there I made the acquaintance of all my old comrades; Louis Frossard, the mayor's son—he died young, during the Revolution; Abbe Clement, who was killed by a grape-shot at Valmy—he was already lieutenant in '92; Dominique Caussu, who set up later as cabinet-maker, at Saverne; François Meyer, master tailor in the 6th Hussars—in 1820 he left the service, said to be rich, but I cannot say it for a fact; Antoine Thomas, who commanded a battalion of the Old Guard. What a number of times he came to see me after 1815! We used to repeat our old stories together. I gave him the best bedroom upstairs; Jacques Messier, chief surveyor of rivers and forests; Hubert Perrin, postmaster at Héming; and fifty others, who would never have been anything but for the Revolution.

Before '89 the cobbler's son remained a cobbler, the woodcutter's son a woodcutter; there was no chance of a rise. After thirty or forty years, there you were in the same place, doing the same thing, perhaps thinner, perhaps fatter, that was all. But now one's courage and sense can raise one; one need never despair; the son of a poor peasant, if blessed with courage and ability, may rise to rule France.

Let us, then, praise the Lord for having lightened our darkness, and let us be glad in this happy change.

To return to my old comrades at school. They are now all gone. Last year we were but two, Joseph Broussoussu, a baker at Poalsbourg, and myself. When I went there to buy a straw hat in the spring, fat Broussoussu would know my voice again, and come, drawing one leg after him, calling out—

"Ha! that's Michel Bastien!"

It was absolutely necessary to go into the back shop and help him to drink a bottle of his old Burgundy, and at the end Broussoussu never failed to say as we parted at the door—

"I say, Michel, listen—when I get my passport you will have to get the visa for your own—ha! ha! ha!"

How he laughed!

Poor Broussoussu! Last autumn they buried him, and for all he used to tell me, I don't intend to apply for my passport just yet. This story has to be finished first, and then I must make up another, just to take up my time. There is no hurry—there is always time enough to go for good.

Well, it was at M. Christopher's that I first knew all these old friends, and many more whose names may occur to me later. As eight struck they came in one after the other, crying, "Good morning, good morning, Mr. Christopher."

If he was not there they called out all the same; they crowded laughing round the stove. But the moment they heard the long strides of the curé in the passage, they were all still. Every one seated himself on the bench, his slate on his knees and his nose bent over it, scarcely breathing, for, to tell the truth, M. Christopher liked neither noise nor disputes. I have seen him more than once when up at class the boys would elbow one another, quietly get up, take them up from their bench by the collar, and throw them outside the door like kittens. They did not care to begin again, and

they shook in their shoes if he looked hard at them.

The curé came in; at the door he looked to see if everything was in order. You could hear the fire burning—nothing stirred! Then he stood up at his desk and cried, "Go on!" and we all together began to sing, B. A. BA. That went on for some time; at last he called out, "Halt!" and all was silent.

Then he would call on us all in turn, "Jacques, Michel, Nicolas, come here!" We went up to him cap in hand.

"Who created you, and placed you in this world?"

"God!"

"Why did God create you and place you in this world?"

"To worship Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and so to obtain eternal life."

(To be Continued.)

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