

The big pot on the fire, too, he sang and chattered over that, extracting from its depths the watery-looking stuff, which, served up in a little basin, with a large spoon and cheerful devotion, constituted Marie's chief nourishment.

Soup is to a French peasant what tea is to our English poor. A little coffee when it can be afforded is always a treat, but tea is still regarded as a sort of medicine, chiefly resorted to by the gentry.

Poor Marie never looked for anything more than the bread soup, and Pierre was thankful when each week he sold birds enough to keep the little household alive.

And then came a day when Sister Cécile did not trot by the little house, but stopped to speak to Pierre on some trivial matter, and, stopping, chanced to hear a moan from that inner doorway.

'Thy aunt, the widow Turgot, ill—afflicted? but thou shouldst have told us sooner,' cried the brisk little soul. Without further parley she brushed by Pierre and the birds, and making straight for Marie's bed, laid a cool hand on her head and gently chid her too. 'Thou shouldst have sent to ask at least our prayers; but stay, thou art faint with pain, poor soul!'

And out of Sister Cécile's capacious sleeve came—of all treasures—a bottle of red wine! Wine may not be moved in France without 'a permit,' but the most important little official in the world would hesitate to interfere with a Sister of Charity, much less to inspect the possible contents of her wide grey sleeves. Who was he, to cheat the poor and hinder a pious duty! So many a poor soul was refreshed by the contents of that sleeve.

Good Sister Cécile often came to Marie, and as often sent other bright-faced visitors to cheer her, or at least to let her moan to them instead of to the unfeeling mud walls of her cage.

English girls came sometimes. 'These foreigners have good hearts,' Sister Cécile would say, and so when her messengers were worn out or pressed with business, she would commission one of these to visit Widow Marie at the bird-fancier's. And, despite

their reading the words of comfort in a somewhat indifferent French accent, they were welcome at the bedside, and the few flowers and the simple dainty in the little basket were a refreshment to the sufferer.

Sometimes, seeing unmistakable signs of deep poverty in the poor dwelling, they would press a little money on Pierre, a half-franc, a few sous, but the little Parrot's voice would be raised at this. 'No, ladies, no,' he would cry, his hands clasped behind him for fear of temptation; 'no, in verity, no! I have two hands, and neither kith nor kin but Marie there. I can maintain her; the little she needs is a trifle which I gladly furnish!' It was almost impossible to force the money on the little chattering man, but as poor Marie grew weaker, and the ladies thought Pierre's resistance less marked, they took to leaving occasional little gifts of coin on the window-ledge.

After a while Pierre actually gathered them up quite eagerly, poor fellow. There were no more protestations. Surely he needed this little help badly enough.

Just as the sun was at its hottest, and the grapes outside the house were almost visibly changing colour, one autumn morning poor Marie sighed her last sigh and died.

As the watchers by the bedside prepared the poor worn body for its last rest, a little white packet slipped from beneath the pillow. They took it to Pierre. He did not seem surprised.

His poor eyes were red now, as well as his rough locks.

'Open it, read,' he said shortly. And some one read these words written on the paper, which enfolded a golden piece of twenty francs: '*To be given to some poor creature afflicted with the same grievous malady from which I suffer.*'

'It was her thought,' said the little man; 'it pleased her.' He winked away a tear. 'Only she was afraid she should not live to see the piece of gold complete. Yesterday morning she had only nineteen francs and a few sous. But I knew the end was near, so I cut some bunches of my grapes and took them across to the lady at the corner house. She has a good heart, and knows our circum-