Gustave Flaubert: Bouvard and Pécuchet. A Tragi-comic Novel of Bourgeois Life

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CHAPTER II
Experiments in Agriculture

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How happy they felt when they awoke next morning! Bouvard smoked a pipe, and Pécuchet took a pinch of snuff, which they declared to be the best they had ever had in their whole lives. Then they went to the window to observe the landscape.

In front of them lay the fields, with a barn and the church-bell at the right and a screen of poplars at the left.

Two princi alks, forming a cross, divided the garden into four parts. The vegetables contained in wide beds, where, at different spots, arose dwarf cypresses and trees cut in distaff fashion. On one side, an arbour just touched an artificial hillock; while, on the other, the espaliers were supported against a wall; and at the end, a railed opening gave a glimpse of the country outside. Beyond the wall there was an orchard, and, next to a hedge of elm trees, a thicket; and behind the railed opening there was a narrow road.

They were gazing on this spectacle together, when a man, with hair turning grey, and wearing a black overcoat, appeared walking along the pathway, striking with his cane all the bars of the railed fence. The old servant informed them that this was M. Vaucorbeil, a doctor of some reputation in the district. She mentioned that the other people of note were the Comte de Faverges, formerly a deputy, and an extensive owner of land and cattle; M. Foureau, who

sold wood, plaster, all sorts of things; M. Marescot, the notary; the Abbé Jeufroy; and the widow Bordin, who lived on her private income. The old woman added that, as for herself, they called her Germaine, on account of the late Germain, her husband. She used to go out as a charwoman, but would be very glad to enter into the gentlemen's service. They accepted her offer, and then went out to take a look at their farm, which was situated over a thousand yards away.

When they entered the farmyard, Maître Gouy, the farmer, was shouting at a servant-boy, while his wife, on a stool, kept pressed between her legs a turkey-hen, which she was stuffing with balls of flour.

The man had a low forehead, a thin nose, a downward look, and broad shoulders. The woman was very fair-haired, with her cheek-bones speckled with bran, and that air of simplicity which may be seen in the faces of peasants on the windows of churches.

In the kitchen, bundles of hemp hung from the ceiling.  Three old guns stood in a row over the upper part of the chimney-piece. A dresser loaded with flowered crockery occupied the space in the middle of the wall; and the window-panes with their green bottle-glass threw over the tin and copper utensils a sickly lustre.

The two Parisians wished to inspect the property, which they had seen only once—and that a mere passing glance. Maître Gouy and his wife escorted them, and then began a litany of complaints.

All the appointments, from the carthouse to the boilery, stood in need of repair. It would be necessary to erect an additional store for the cheese, to put fresh iron on the railings, to raise the boundaries, to deepen the ponds, and to plant anew a considerable number of apple trees in the three enclosures.

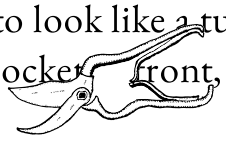
Then they went to look at the lands under cultivation. Maître Gouy ran them down, saying that they ate up too much manure; cartage was expensive; it was impossible to get rid of stones; and the bad grass poisoned the meadows. This depreciation of his land lessened the pleasure experienced by Bouvard in walking over it.

They came back by the hollow path under an avenue of beech trees. On this side the house revealed its front and its courtyard. It was painted white, with a coating of yellow. The carthouse and the storehouse, the bakehouse and the

woodshed, made, by means of a return, two lower wings. The kitchen communicated with a little hall. Next came the vestibule, a second hall larger than the other, and the drawing-room. The four rooms on the first floor opened on the corridor facing the courtyard. Pécuchet selected one of them for his collections. The last was to be the library; and, on opening some of the presses, they found a few ancient volumes, but they had no fancy for reading the titles of them. The most urgent matter was the garden.

Bouvard, while passing close to the row of elm trees, discovered under their branches a plaster figure of a woman. With two fingers she held wide her petticoat, with her knees bent and her head over her shoulder, as if she were afraid of being surprised.

“I beg your pardon! Don't inconvenience yourself!”—and this pleasantry amused them so much that they kept repeating it twenty times a day for three months.

Meanwhile, the people of Chavignolles were desirous to make their acquaintance. Persons came to look at them through the railed fence. They stopped up the openings with boards. This thwarted the inhabitants. To protect himself from the sun Bouvard wore on his head a handkerchief, fastened so as to look like a turban. Pécuchet wore his cap, and he had a big apron with a pocket in front, in which a pair of pruning-shears, his silk handkerchief,  and his snuff-box jostled against one another. Bare-armed, side by side, they dug, weeded, and pruned, imposing tasks on each other, and eating their meals as quickly as ever they could, taking care, however, to drink their coffee on the hillock, in order to enjoy the view.

If they happened to come across a snail, they pounced on it and crushed it, making grimaces with the corners of their mouths, as if they were cracking nuts. They never went out without their grafting implements, and they used to cut the worms in two with such force that the iron of the implement would sink three inches deep. To get rid of caterpillars, they struck the trees furiously with switches.

Bouvard planted a peony in the middle of the grass plot  , and tomatoes so that they would hang down like chandeliers under the arch of the arbour.

Pécuchet had a large pit dug in front of the kitchen, and divided it into three parts, where he could manufacture composts which would grow a heap of things, whose detritus would again bring other crops, providing in this way

other manures to a limitless extent; and he fell into reveries on the edge of the pit, seeing in the future mountains of fruits, floods of flowers, and avalanches of vegetables. But the horse-dung, so necessary for the beds, was not to be had, inasmuch as the farmers did not sell it, and the innkeepers refused to supply it. At last, after many searches, in spite of the entreaties of Bouvard, and flinging aside all shamefacedness, he made up his mind to go for the dung himself.

It was in the midst of this occupation that Madame Bordin accosted him one day on the high-road. When she had complimented him, she inquired about his friend. This woman's black eyes, very small and very brilliant, her high complexion, and her assurance (she even had a little moustache) intimidated Pécuchet. He replied curtly, and turned his back on her—an impoliteness of which Bouvard disapproved.

Then the bad weather came on, with frost and snow. They installed themselves in the kitchen, and went in for trellis-work, or else kept going from one room to another, chatted by the chimney corner, or watched the rain coming down.

Since the middle of Lent they had awaited the approach of spring, and each morning repeated: “Everything is starting out!” But the season was late, and they consoled their impatience by saying: “Everything is going to start out!”

At length they were able to gather the green peas. The asparagus gave a good crop; and the vine was promising.

Since they were able to work together at gardening, they must needs succeed at agriculture; and they were seized with an ambition to cultivate the farm. With common sense and study of the subject, they would get through it beyond a doubt.

But they should first see how others carried on operations, and so they drew up a letter in which they begged of M. de Faverges to do them the honour of allowing them to visit the lands which he cultivated.

The count made an appointment immediately to meet them.

After an hour's walking, they reached the side of a hill overlooking the valley of the Orne. The river wound its way to the bottom of the valley. Blocks of red sandstone stood here and there, and in the distance larger masses of stone formed, as it were, a cliff overhanging fields of ripe corn. On the opposite hill the verdure was so abundant that it hid the house from view. Trees divided it into unequal squares, outlining themselves amid the grass by more sombre

lines. Suddenly the entire estate came into view. The tiled roofs showed where the farm stood. To the right rose the château with its white façade, and beyond it was a wood. A lawn descended to the river, into which a row of plane trees cast their shadows.

The two friends entered a field of lucern, which people were spreading. Women wearing straw hats, with cotton handkerchiefs round their heads, and paper shades, were lifting with rakes the hay which lay on the ground, while at the end of the plain, near the stacks, bundles were being rapidly flung into a long cart, yoked to three horses.

The count advanced, followed by his manager. He was dressed in dimity; and his stiff figure and mutton-chop whiskers gave him at the same time the air of a magistrate and a dandy. Even when he was speaking, his features did not appear to move.

As soon as they had exchanged some opening courtesies, he explained his system with regard to fodder: the swathes should be turned without scattering them; the ricks should be conical, and the bundles made immediately on the spot, and then piled together by tens. As for the English rake, the meadow was too uneven for such an implement.

A little girl, with her stockingless feet in old shoes, and showing her skin through the rents in her dress, was supplying the women with cider, which she poured out of a jug supported against her hip. The count asked where this child came from, but nobody could tell. The women who were making the hay had picked her up to wait on them during the harvesting. He shrugged his shoulders, and just as he was moving away from the spot, he gave vent to some complaints as to the immorality of our country districts.

Bouvard eulogised his lucern field.

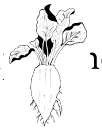
It was fairly good, in spite of the ravages of the *cuscute*.

The future agriculturists opened their eyes wide at the word “cuscute”.

On account of the number of his cattle, he resorted to artificial meadowing; besides, it went well before the other crops—a thing that did not always happen in the case of fodder.

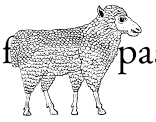
“This at least appears to me incontestable.”

“Oh! incontestable,” replied Bouvard and Pécuchet in one breath. They were on the borders of a field which had been carefully thinned. A horse, which was being led by hand, was dragging along a large box, mounted on three wheels. Seven ploughshares below were opening in parallel lines small furrows, in which the grain fell through pipes descending to the ground.

“Here,” said the count, “I sow turni  ıe turnip is the basis of my quadrennial system of cultivation.”

And he was proceeding to deliver a lecture on the drill-plough when a servant came to look for him, and told him that he was wanted at the château. His manager took his place—a man with a forbidding countenance and obsequious manners.

He conducted “these gentlemen” to another field, where fourteen harvesters, with bare breasts and legs apart, were cutting down rye. The steels whistled in the chaff, which came pouring straight down. Each of them described in front of him a large semicircle, and, all in a line, they advanced at the same time. The two Parisians admired their arms, and felt smitten with an almost religious veneration for the opulence of the soil. Then they proceeded to inspect some of the ploughed lands. The twilight was falling, and the crows swooped down into the ridges.

As they proceeded they met a flock of  pasturing here and there, and they could hear their continual browsing. The shepherd, seated on the stump of a tree, was knitting a woollen stocking, with his dog beside him.

The manager assisted Bouvard and Pécuchet to jump over a wooden fence, and they passed close to two orchards, where cows were ruminating under the apple trees.

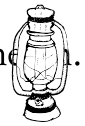
All the farm-buildings were contiguous and occupied the three sides of the yard. Work was carried on there mechanically by means of a turbine moved by a stream which had been turned aside for the purpose. Leathern bands stretched from one roof to the other, and in the midst of dung an iron pump performed its operations.

The manager drew their attention to little openings in the sheepfolds nearly on a level with the floor, and ingenious doors in the pigsties which could shut of their own accord.

The barn was vaulted like a cathedral, with brick arches resting on stone walls.

In order to amuse the gentlemen, a servant-girl threw a handful of oats before the hens. The shaft of the press appeared to them enormously big. Next they went up to the pigeon-house. The dairy especially astonished them. By turning cocks in the corners, you could get enough water to flood the flagstones, and, as you entered, a sense of grateful coolness came upon you as a surprise. Brown jars, ranged close to the barred opening in the wall, were full to the brim of milk, while the cream was contained in earthen pans of less depth. Then came rolls of butter, like fragments of a column of copper, and froth overflowed from the tin pails which had just been placed on the ground.

But the gem of the farm was the ox-stall. It was divided into two sections by wooden bars standing upright their full length, one portion being reserved for the cattle, and the other for persons who attended on them. You could scarcely see there, as all the loopholes were closed up. The oxen were eating, with little chains attached to them, and their bodies exhaled a heat which was kept down by the low ceiling. But someone let in the light, and suddenly a thin stream of water flowed into the little channel which was beside the racks. Lowings were heard, and the horns of the cattle made a rattling noise like sticks. All the oxen thrust their muzzles between the bars, and proceeded to drink slowly.



The big teams made their way into the farmyard, and the foals began to neigh. On the ground floor two or three lanterns flashed and then disappeared. The workpeople were passing, dragging their wooden shoes over the pebbles, and the bell was ringing for supper.

The two visitors took their departure.

All they had seen delighted them, and their resolution was taken. After that evening, they took out of their library the four volumes of *La Maison Rustique*, went through Gasperin's course of lectures, and subscribed to an agricultural journal.

In order to be able to attend the fairs more conveniently, they purchased a car, which Bouvard used to drive.

Dressed in blue blouses, with large-brimmed hats, gaiters up to their knees, and horse-dealers' cudgels in their hands, they prowled around cattle, asked questions of labourers, and did not fail to attend at all the agricultural gatherings.

Soon they wearied Maître Gouy with their advice, and especially by their depreciation of his system of fallowing. But the farmer stuck to his routine. He asked to be allowed a quarter, putting forward as a reason the heavy falls of hail. As for the farm-dues, he never furnished any of them. His wife raised an outcry at even the most legitimate claims. At length Bouvard declared his intention not to renew the lease.

Thenceforth Maître Gouy economised the manures, allowed weeds to grow up, ruined the soil; and he took himself off with a fierce air, which showed that he was meditating some scheme of revenge.

Bouvard had calculated that 20,000 francs, that is to say, more than four times the rent of the farm, would be enough to start with. His notary sent the amount from Paris.

The property which they had undertaken to cultivate comprised fifteen hectares of grounds and meadows, twenty-three of arable land, and five of waste land, situated on a hillock covered with stones, and known by the name of La Butte.

They procured all the indispensable requirements for the purpose: four horses, a dozen cows, six hogs, one hundred and sixty sheep, and for the household two carters, two women, a shepherd, and in addition a big dog.

In order to get cash at once, they sold their fodder. The price was paid to them directly, and the gold napoleons counted over a chest of oats appeared to them more glittering than any others, more rare and valuable.

In the month of November they brewed cider. It was Bouvard that whipped the horse, while Pécuchet on the trough shovelled off the strained apples. They panted while pressing the screw, drew the juice off into the vat, looked after the bung-holes, with heavy wooden shoes on their feet; and in all this they found a huge diversion.

Starting with the principle that you cannot have too much corn, they got rid of about half of their artificial meadows; and, as they had not rich pasturing, they made use of oil-cakes, which they put into the ground without pounding, with the result that the crop was a wretched one.

The following year they sowed the ground very thickly. Storms broke out, and the ears of corn were scattered.

Nevertheless, they set their hearts on the cheese, and undertook to clear away the stones from La Butte. A hamper carried away the stones. The whole year, from morn to eve, in sunshine or in rain, the everlasting hamper was seen, with the same man and the same horse, toiling up the hill, coming down, and going up again. Sometimes Bouvard walked in the rear, making a halt half-way up the hill to dry the sweat off his forehead.

As they had confidence in nobody, they treated the animals themselves, giving them purgatives and clysters.

Serious irregularities occurred in the household. The girl in the poultry-yard became *enceinte*. Then they took married servants; but the place soon swarmed with children, cousins, male and female, uncles, and sisters-in-law. A horde of people lived at their expense; and they resolved to sleep in the farm-house successively.

But when evening came they felt depressed, for the filthiness of the room was offensive to them; and besides, Germaine, who brought in the meals, grumbled at every journey. They were preyed upon in all sorts of ways. The threshers in the barn stuffed corn into the pitchers out of which they drank. Pécuchet caught one of them in the act, and exclaimed, while pushing him out by the shoulders:

“Wretch! You are a disgrace to the village that gave you birth!”

His presence inspired no respect. Moreover, he was plagued with the garden. All his time would not have sufficed to keep it in order. Bouvard was occupied with the farm. They took counsel and decided on this arrangement.

The first point was to have good hotbeds. Pécuchet got one made of brick. He painted the frames himself; and, being afraid of too much sunlight, he smeared over all the bell-glasses with chalk. He took care to cut off the tops of the leaves for slips. Next he devoted attention to the layers. He attempted many sorts of grafting—flute-graft, crown-graft, shield-graft, herbaceous grafting, and whip-grafting. With what care he adjusted the two libers! how he tightened the ligatures! and what a heap of ointment it took to cover them again!

Twice a day he took his watering-pot and swung it over the plants as if he would have shed incense over them. In proportion as they became green under the water, which fell in a thin shower, it seemed to him as if he

were quenching his own thirst and reviving along with them. Then, yielding to a feeling of intoxication, he snatched off the rose of the watering-pot, and poured out the liquid copiously from the open neck.

At the end of the elm hedge, near the female figure in plaster, stood a kind of log hut. Pécuchet locked up his implements there, and spent delightful hours there picking the berries, writing labels, and putting his little pots in order. He sat down to rest himself on a box at the door of the hut, and then planned fresh improvements.

He had put two clumps of geraniums at the end of the front steps. Between the cypresses and the distaff-shaped trees he had planted sunflowers; and as the plots were covered with buttercups, and all the walks with fresh sand, the garden was quite dazzling in its abundance of yellow hues.

But the bed swarmed with larvæ. In spite of the dead leaves placed there to heat the plants, under the painted frames and the whitened bell-glasses, only a stunted crop made its appearance.

He failed with the broccoli, the mad-apples, the turnips  , and the watercress, which he had tried to raise in a tub. After the thaw all the artichokes were ruined. The cabbages gave him some consolation. One of them especially excited his hopes. It expanded and shut up quickly, but ended by becoming prodigious and absolutely uneatable. No matter—Pécuchet was content with being the possessor of a monstrosity!

Then he tried his hand at what he regarded as the *summum* of art—the growing of melons.

He sowed many varieties of seed in plates filled with vegetable mould, which he deposited in the soil of the bed. Then he raised another bed, and when it had put forth its virgin buddings he transplanted the best of them, putting bell-glasses over them. He made all the cuttings in accordance with the precepts of *The Good Gardener*. He treated the flowers tenderly; he let the fruits grow in a tangle, and then selected one on either arm, removed the others, and, as soon as they were as large as nuts, he slipped a little board around their rind to prevent them from rotting by contact with dung. He heated them, gave them air, swept off the mist from the bell-glasses with his pocket-handkerchief, and, if he saw lowering clouds, he quickly brought out straw mattings to protect them.

He did not sleep at night on account of them. Many times he even got up out of bed, and, putting on his boots without stockings, shivering in his shirt, he traversed the entire garden to throw his own counterpane over his hotbed frames.

The melons ripened. Bouvard grinned when he saw the first of them. The second was no better; neither was the third. For each of them Pécuchet found a fresh excuse, down to the very last, which he threw out of the window, declaring that he could not understand it at all.

The fact was, he had planted some things beside others of a different species; and so the sweet melons got mixed up with the kitchen-garden melons, the big Portugal with the Grand Mogul variety; and this anarchy was completed by the proximity of the tomatoes—the result being abominable hybrids that had the taste of pumpkins.

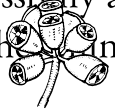
Then Pécuchet devoted his attention to the flowers. He wrote to Dumouchel to get shrubs with seeds for him, purchased a stock of heath soil, and set to work resolutely.

But he planted passion-flowers in the shade and pansies in the sun, covered the hyacinths with dung, watered the lilies near their blossoms, tried to stimulate the fuchsias with glue, and actually roasted a pomegranate by exposing it to the heat of the kitchen fire.

When the weather got cold, he screened the eglantines under domes of strong paper which had been lubricated with a candle. They looked like sugarloaves held up by sticks.

The dahlias had enormous props; and between these straight lines could be seen the winding branches of a Sophora Japonica, which remained motionless, without either perishing or growing.

However, since even the rarest trees flourish in the gardens of the capital, they must needs grow successfully at Chavignolles; and Pécuchet provided himself with the Indian lilac, the Chinese rose, and the eucalyptus, then in the beginning of its fame.



But all his experiments failed; and at each successive failure he was vastly astonished.

Bouvard, like him, met with obstacles. They held many consultations, opened a book, then passed on to another, and did not know what to resolve upon when there was so much divergence of opinion.

Thus, Puvis recommends marl, while the Roret Manual is opposed to it. As for plaster, in spite of the example of Franklin, Riefel and M. Rigaud did not appear to be in raptures about it.

According to Bouvard, fallow lands were a Gothic prejudice. However, Leclerc has noted cases in which they are almost indispensable. Gasparin mentions a native of Lyons who cultivated cereals in the same field for half a century: this upsets the theory as to the variation of crops. Tull extols tillage to the prejudice of rich pasture; and there is Major Beetson, who by means of tillage would abolish pasture altogether.

In order to understand the indications of the weath  died the clouds according to the classification of Luke Howard. They contemplated those which spread out like manes, those which resemble islands, and those which might be taken for mountains of snow—trying to distinguish the nimbus from the cirrus and the stratus from the cumulus. The shapes had altered even before they had discovered the names.

The barometer deceived them; the thermometer taught them nothing; and they had recourse to the device invented in the time of Louis XIV. by a priest from Touraine. A leech in a glass bottle was to rise up in the event of rain, to stick to the bottom in settled weather, and to move about if a storm were threatening. But nearly always the atmosphere contradicted the leech. Three others were put in along with it. The entire four behaved differently.

After many reflections, Bouvard realised that he had made a mistake. His property required cultivation on a large scale, the concentrated system, and he risked all the disposable capital that he had left—thirty thousand francs.

Stimulated by Pécuchet, he began to rave about pasture. In the pit for composts were heaped up branches of trees, blood, guts, feathers—everything that he could find. He used Belgian cordial, Swiss wash, lye, red herrings, wrack, rags; sent for guano, tried to manufacture it himself; and, pushing his principles to the farthest point, he would not suffer even urine or other refuse to be lost. Into his farmyard were carried carcasses of animals, with which he manured his lands. Their cut-up carrion strewed the fields. Bouvard smiled in the midst of this stench. A pump fixed to a dung-cart spattered the liquid manure over the crops. To those who assumed an air of disgust, he used to say, “But 'tis gold! 'tis gold!” And he was sorry that he had not still more manures. Happy the land where natural grottoes are found full of the excrements of birds!

The colza was thin; the oats only middling; and the corn sold very badly on account of its smell. A curious circumstance was that La Butte, with the stones cleared away from it at last, yielded less than before.

He deemed it advisable to renew his material. He bought a Guillaume scarifier, a Valcourt weeder, an English drill-machine, and the great swing-plough of Mathieu de Dombasle, but the ploughboy disparaged it.

“Do you learn to use it!”

“Well, do you show me!”

He made an attempt to show, but blundered, and the peasants sneered. He could never make them obey the command of the bell. He was incessantly bawling after them, rushing from one place to another, taking down observations in a note-book, making appointments and forgetting all about them—and his head was boiling over with industrial speculations.

He got the notion into  head of cultivating the poppy for the purpose of getting opium from it , and above all the milk-vetch, which he intended to sell under the name of “family coffee”.

Finally, in order to fatten his oxen the more quickly, he blooded them for an entire fortnight.

He killed none of his pigs, and gorged them with salted oats. The pigsty soon became too narrow. The animals obstructed the farmyard, broke down the fences, and went gnawing at everything.

In the hot weather twenty-five sheep began to get spoiled, and shortly afterwards died. The same week three bulls perished owing to Bouvard's blood-lettings. In order to destroy the maggots, he thought of shutting up the fowls in a hencoop on rollers, which two men had to push along behind the plough—a thing which had only the effect of breaking the claws of the fowls.

He manufactured beer with germander-leaves, and gave it to the harvesters as cider. The children cried, the women moaned, and the men raged. They all threatened to go, and Bouvard gave way to them.

However, to convince them of the harmlessness of his beverage, he swallowed several bottles of it in their presence; then he got cramps, but concealed his pains under a playful exterior. He even got the mixture sent to his own

residence. He drank some of it with Pécuchet in the evening, and both of them tried to persuade themselves that it was good. Besides, it was necessary not to let it go to waste. Bouvard's colic having got worse, Germaine went for the doctor.

He was a grave-looking man, with a round forehead, and he began by frightening his patient. He thought the gentleman's attack of cholerine must be connected with the beer which people were talking about in the country. He desired to know what it was composed of, and found fault with it in scientific terms with shruggings of the shoulders. Pécuchet, who had supplied the recipe for it, was mortified.

In spite of pernicious limings, stinted redressings, and unseasonable weedings, Bouvard had in front of him, in the following year, a splendid crop of wheat. He thought of drying it by fermentation, in the Dutch fashion, on the Clap-Meyer system: that is to say, he got it thrown down all of a heap and piled up in stacks, which would be overturned as soon as the damp escaped from them, and then exposed to the open air—after which Bouvard went off without the least uneasiness.

Next day, while they were at dinner, they heard under the beech trees the beating of a drum. Germaine ran out to kn at was the matter, but the man was by this time some distance away.  Almost at the same moment the church-bell rang violently.

Bouvard and Pécuchet felt alarmed, and, impatient to learn what had happened, they rushed bareheaded along the Chavignolles road. An old woman passed them. She knew nothing about it. They stopped a little boy, who replied:

“I believe it's a fire!”

And the drum continued beating and the bell ringing more loudly than before. At length they reached the nearest houses in the village. The grocer, some yards away, exclaimed:

“The fire is at your place!”

Pécuchet stepped out in double-quick time; and he said to Bouvard, who trotted by his side with equal speed: “One, two! one, two!”—counting his steps regularly, like the chasseurs of Vincennes.

The road which they took was a continuously uphill one; the sloping ground hid the horizon from their view. They reached a height close to La Butte, and at a single glance the disaster was revealed to them.

All the stacks, here and there, were flaming like volcanoes in the midst of the plain, stripped bare in the evening stillness. Around the biggest of them there were about three hundred persons, perhaps; and under the command of M. Foureau, the mayor, in a tricoloured scarf, youngsters, with poles and crooks, were dragging down the straw from the top in order to save the rest of it.

Bouvard, in his eagerness, was near knocking down Madame Bordin, who happened to be there. Then, seeing one of his servant-boys, he loaded him with insults for not having given him warning. The servant-boy, on the contrary, through excess of zeal, had at first rushed to the house, then to the church, next to where Monsieur himself was staying, and had returned by the other road.

Bouvard lost his head. His entire household gathered round him, all talking together, and he forbade them to knock down the stacks, begged of them to give him some help, called for water, and asked where were the firemen.

“We've got to get them first!” exclaimed the mayor.

“That's your fault!” replied Bouvard.

He flew into a passion, and made use of improper language, and everyone wondered at the patience of M. Foureau, who, all the same, was a surly individual, as might be seen from his big lips and bulldog jaw.

The heat of the stacks became so great that nobody could come close to them any longer. Under the devouring flames the straw writhed with a crackling sound, and the grains of corn lashed one's face as if they were buckshot. Then the stack fell in a huge burning pile to the ground, and a shower of sparks flew out of it, while fiery waves floated above the red mass, which presented in its alternations of colour parts rosy as vermilion and others like clotted blood. The night had come, the wind was swelling; from time to time, a flake of fire passed across the black sky.

Bouvard viewed the conflagration with tears in his eyes, which were veiled by his moist lids, and his whole face was swollen with grief. Madame Bordin, while playing with the fringes of her green shawl, called him “Poor Monsieur!”

and tried to console him. Since nothing could be done, he ought to do himself justice.

Pécuchet did not weep. Very pale, or rather livid, with open mouth, and hair stuck together with cold sweat, he stood apart, brooding. But the curé who had suddenly arrived on the scene, murmured, in a wheedling tone:

“Ah! really, what a misfortune! It is very annoying. Be sure that I enter into your feelings.”

The others did not affect any  They chatted and smiled, with hands spread out before the flame. An old man picked out burning straws to light his pipe with; and one blackguard cried out that it was very funny.

“Yes, 'tis nice fun!” retorted Bouvard, who had just overheard him.

The fire abated, the burning piles subsided, and an hour later only ashes remained, making round, black marks on the plain. Then all withdrew. Madame Bordin and the Abbé Jeufroy led MM. Bouvard and Pécuchet back to their abode.

On the way the widow addressed very polite reproaches to her neighbour on his unsociableness, and the ecclesiastic expressed his great surprise at not having up to the present known such a distinguished parishioner of his.

When they were alone together, they inquired into the cause of the conflagration, and, in place of recognising, like the rest of the world, that the moist straw had taken fire of its own accord, they suspected that it was a case of revenge. It proceeded, no doubt, from Maître Gouy, or perhaps from the mole-catcher. Six months before Bouvard had refused to accept his services, and even maintained, before a circle of listeners, that his trade was a baneful one, and that the government ought to prohibit it. Since that time the man prowled about the locality. He wore his beard full-grown, and appeared to them frightful-looking, especially in the evening, when he presented himself ou  rmyard, shaking his long pole garnished with hanging moles.

The damage done was considerable, and in order to know their exact position, Pécuchet for eight days worked at Bouvard's books, which he pronounced to be “a veritable labyrinth.” After he had compared the day-book, the correspondence, and the ledger covered with pencil-notes and discharges, he

realised the truth: no goods to sell, no funds to get in, and in the cash-box zero. The capital showed a deficit of thirty-three thousand francs.

Bouvard would not believe it, and more than twenty times they went over the accounts. They always arrived at the same conclusion. Two years more of such farming, and their fortune would be spent on it! The only remedy was to sell out.

To do that, it was necessary to consult a notary. The step was a disagreeable one: Pécuchet took it on himself.

In M. Marescot's opinion, it was better not to put up any posters. He would speak about the farm to respectable clients, and would let them make proposals. “Very well,” said Bouvard, “we have time before us.” He intended to get a tenant; then they would see. “We shall not be more unlucky than before; only now we are forced to practise economy!”

Pécuchet was disgusted with gardening, and a few days later he remarked:

"We ought to give ourselves u  xclusively to tree culture—not for pleasure, but as a speculation. A pear which is the product of three soils is sometimes sold in the capital for five or six francs. Gardeners make out of apricots twenty-five thousand livres in the year! At St. Petersburg, during the winter, grapes are sold at a napoleon per grape. It is a beautiful industry, you must admit! And what does it cost? Attention, manuring, and a fresh touch of the pruning-knife."

It excited Bouvard's imagination so much that they sought immediately in their books for a nomenclature for purchasable plants, and, having selected names which appeared to them wonderful, they applied to a nurseryman from Falaise, who busied himself in supplying them with three hundred stalks for which he had not found a sale. They got a lock-smith for the props, an iron-worker for the fasteners, and a carpenter for the rests. The forms of the trees were designed beforehand. Pieces of lath on the wall represented candelabra. Two posts at the ends of the plat-bands supported steel threads in a horizontal position; and in the orchard, hoops indicated the structure of vases, cone-shaped switches that of pyramids, so well that, in arriving in the midst of them, you imagined you saw pieces of some unknown machinery or the framework of a pyrotechnic apparatus.

The holes having been dug, they cut the ends of all the roots, good or bad, and buried them in a compost.  Six months later the plants were dead. Fresh orders to the nurseryman, and fresh plantings in still deeper holes. But the rain softening the soil, the grafts buried themselves in the ground of their own accord, and the trees sprouted out.

When spring had come, Pécuchet set about the pruning of pear trees. He did not cut down the shoots, spared the superfluous side branches, and, persisting in trying to lay the “duchesses” out in a square when they ought to go in a string on one side, he broke them or tore them down invariably. As for the peach trees, he got mixed up with over-mother branches, under-mother branches, and second-under-mother branches. The empty and the full always presented themselves when they were not wanted, and it was impossible to obtain on an espalier a perfect rectangle, with six branches to the right and six to the left, not including the two principal ones, the whole forming a fine bit of herringbone work.

Bouvard tried to manage the apricot trees, but they rebelled. He lowered their stems nearly to a level with the ground; none of them shot up again. The cherry trees, in which he had made notches, produced gum. 

At first, they cut very long, which destroyed the principal buds, and then very short, which led to excessive branching; and they often hesitated, not knowing how to distinguish between buds of trees and buds of flowers. They were delighted to have flowers, but when they recognised their mistake, they tore off three fourths of them to strengthen the remainder.

Incessantly they kept talking about “sap” and “cambium”, “paling up”, “breaking down” and “blinding of an eye”. In the middle of their dining-room they had in a frame the list of their young growths, as if they were pupils, with a number which was repeated in the garden on a little piece of wood, at the foot of the tree. Out of bed at dawn, they kept working till nightfall with their twigs carried in their belts. In the cold mornings of spring, Bouvard wore his knitted vest under his blouse, and Pécuchet his old frock-coat under his packcloth wrapper; and the people passing by the open fence heard them coughing in the damp atmosphere.

Sometimes Pécuchet drew forth his manual from his pocket, and he studied a paragraph of it standing up with his grafting-tool near him in the attitude of the gardener who decorated the frontispiece of the book. This resemblance flattered him exceedingly, and made him entertain more esteem for the author.

Bouvard was continually perched on a high ladder before the pyramids. One day he was seized with dizziness, and, not daring to come down farther, he called on Pécuchet to come to his aid.

At length pears made their appearance, and there were plums in the orchard. Then they made use of all the devices which had been recommended to them against the birds. But the bits of glass made dazzling reflections, the clapper of the wind-mill woke them during the night, and the sparrows perched on the lay figure. They made a second, and even a third, varying the dress, but without any useful result.

However, they could hope for some fruit. Pécuchet had just given an intimation of the fact to Bouvard, when suddenly the thunder resounded and the rain fell—a heavy and violent downpour. The wind at intervals shook the entire surface of the espalier. The props gave way one after the other, and the unfortunate distaff-shaped trees, while swaying under the storm, dashed their pears against one another.

Pécuchet, surprised by the shower, had taken refuge in the hut. Bouvard stuck to the kitchen. They saw splinters of wood, branches, and slates whirling in front of them; and the sailors' wives who, on the sea-shore ten leagues away, were gazing out at the sea, had not eyes more wistful or hearts more anxious. Then, suddenly, the supports and wooden bars of espaliers facing one another, together with the rail-work, toppled down into the garden beds.

What a picture when they went to inspect the scene! The cherries and plums covered the grass, amid the dissolving hailstones. The Passe Colmars were destroyed, as well as the Besi des Vétérans and the Triomphes de Jordoigne. There was barely left amongst the apples even a few Bon Papas; and a dozen Tetons de Venus, the entire crop of peaches, rolled into the pools of water by the side of the box trees, which had been torn up by the roots.

After dinner, at which they ate very little, Pécuchet said softly:

“We should do well to see after the farm, lest anything has happened to it.”

“Bah! only to find fresh causes of sadness.”

“Perhaps so; for we are not exactly lucky.”

And they made complaints against Providence and against nature.

Bouvard, with his elbows on the table, spoke in little whispers; and as all their troubles began to subside, their former agricultural projects came back to their recollection, especially the starch manufacture and the invention of a new sort of cheese.

Pécuchet drew a loud breath; and while he crammed several pinches of snuff into his nostrils, he reflected that, if fate had so willed it, he might now be a member of an agricultural society, might be delivering brilliant lectures, and might be referred to as an authority in the newspapers. Bouvard cast a gloomy look around him.

“Faith! I'm anxious to get rid of all this, in order that we may settle down somewhere else!”

“Just as you like,” said Pécuchet; and the next moment: “The authors recommend us to suppress every direct passage. In this way the sap is counteracted, and the tree necessarily suffers thereby. In order to be in good health, it would be necessary for it to have no fruit! However, those which we prune and which we never manure produce them not so big, it is true, but more luscious. I require them to give me a reason for this! And not only each kind demands its particular attentions, but still more each individual tree, according to climate, temperature, and a heap of things! Where, then, is the rule? and what hope have we of any success or profit?”

Bouvard replied to him, “You will see in Gasparin that the profit cannot exceed the tenth of the capital. Therefore, we should be doing better by investing this capital in a banking-house. At the end of fifteen years, by the accumulation of interest, we'd have it doubled, without having our constitutions ground down.” Pécuchet hung down his head.

“Arboriculture may be a humbug!”

“Like agriculture!” replied Bouvard.

Then they blamed themselves for having been too ambitious, and they resolved to husband thenceforth their labour and their money. An occasional pruning would suffice for the orchard. The counter-espaliers were forbidden, and dead or fallen trees should not be replaced; but he was going to do a nasty job—nothing less than to destroy all the others which remained standing. How was he to set about the work?

Pécuchet measured the distance using his mathematical case.

Bouvard gave him advice. They arrived at no satisfactory result. Fortunately, they discovered amongst a collection of books Boitard's work entitled *L'Architecte des Jardins*.

The author divides them into a great number of styles. First there is the melancholy and romantic style, which is distinguished by immortelles, ruins, tombs, and “a votive offering to the Virgin, indicating the place where a lord has fallen under the blade of an assassin.” The terrible style is composed of overhanging rocks, shattered trees, burning huts; the exotic style, by planting Peruvian torch-thistles, “in order to arouse memories in a colonist or a traveller.” The grave style should, like Ermenonville, offer a temple to philosophy. The majestic style is characterised by obelisks and triumphal arches; the mysterious style by moss and by grottoes; while a lake is appropriate to the dreamy style. There is even the fantastic style, of which the most beautiful specimen might have been lately seen in a garden at Würtemberg—for there might have been met successively a wild boar, a hermit, several sepulchres, and a barque detaching itself from the shore of its own accord, in order to lead you into a boudoir where water-spouts lave you when you are settling yourself down upon a sofa.

Before this horizon of marvels, Bouvard and Pécuchet experienced a kind of bedazzlement. The fantastic style appeared to them reserved for princes. The temple to philosophy would be cumbersome. The votive offering of the Madonna would have no signification, having regard to the lack of assassins, and—so much the worse for the colonists and the travellers—the American plants would cost too much. But the rocks were possible, as well as the shattered trees, the immortelles, and the moss; and in their enthusiasm for new ideas, after many experiments, with the assistance of a single man-servant, and for a trifling sum, they made for themselves a residence which had no analogy to it in the entire department.

The elm hedge, open here and there, allowed the light of day to fall on the thicket, which was full of winding paths in the fashion of a labyrinth. They had conceived the idea of making in the espalier wall an archway, through which the prospect could be seen. As the arch could not remain suspended, the result was an enormous breach and a fall of wreckage to the ground.

They had sacrificed the asparagus in order to build on the spot an Etruscan tomb, that is to say, a quadrilateral figure in dark plaster, six feet in height, and looking like a dog-hole. Four little pine trees at the corners flanked the

monument, which was to be surmounted by an urn and enriched by an inscription.

In the other part of the kitchen garden, a kind of Rialto p[illegible]cted over a basin, presenting on its margin encrusted shells of mussels.  The soil drank up the water—no matter! they would contrive a glass bottom which would keep it back.

The hut had been transformed into a rustic summer-house with the aid of coloured glass.

At the top of the hillock, six trees, cut square, supported a tin head-piece with the edges turned up, and the whole was meant to signify a Chinese pagoda.

They had gone to the banks of the Orne to select granite, and had broken it, marked the pieces with numbers, and carried them back themselves in a cart, then had joined the fragments together with cement, placing them one above the other in a mass; and in the middle of the grass arose a rock resembling a gigantic potato.

Something further was needed to complete the harmony. They pulled down the largest linden tree they had (however, it was three quarters dead), and laid it down the entire length of the garden, in such a way that one would imagine it had been carried thither by a torrent or levelled to the ground by a thunderstorm.

The task finished, Bouvard, who was on the steps, cried from a distance:

“Here! you can see best!”—“See best!” was repeated in the air.

Pécuchet answered:

“I am going there!”—“Going there!”

“Hold on! 'Tis an echo!”—“Echo!”

The linden tree had hitherto prevented it from being produced, and it was assisted by the pagoda, as it faced the barn, whose gables rose above the row of trees. In order to try the effect of the echo, they amused themselves by giving vent to comical phrases: Bouvard yelled out language of a blackguard description.

He had been several times at Falaise, under the pretence of going there to receive money, and he always came back with little parcels, which he locked up in the chest of drawers. Pécuchet started one morning to repair to Bretteville, and returned very late with a basket, which he hid under his bed. Next day, when he awoke, Bouvard was surprised. The first two yew trees of the principal walk, which the day before were still spherical, had the appearance of peacocks, and a horn with two porcelain knobs represented the beak and the eyes. Pécuchet had risen at dawn, and trembling lest he should be discovered, he had cut the two trees according to the measurement given in the written instructions sent him by Dumouchel.

For six months the others behind the two above mentioned assumed the forms of pyramids, cubes, cylinders, stags, or armchairs; but there was nothing equal to the peacocks. Bouvard acknowledged it with many eulogies.

Under pretext of having forgotten his spade  , he drew his comrade into the labyrinth, for he had profited by Pécuchet's absence to do, himself too, something sublime.

The gate leading into the fields was covered over with a coating of plaster, under which were ranged in beautiful order five or six bowls of pipes, representing Abd-el-Kader, negroes, naked women, horses' feet, and death's-heads.

“Do you understand my impatience?”

“I rather think so!”

And in their emotion they embraced each other.

Like all artists, they felt the need of being applauded, and Bouvard thought of giving a great dinner.

“Take care!” said Pécuchet, “you are going to plunge into entertainments. It is a whirlpool!”

The matter, however, was decided. Since they had come to live in the country, they had kept themselves isolated. Everybody, through eagerness to make their acquaintance, accepted their invitation, except the Count de Faverges, who had been summoned to the capital by business. They fell back on M. Hurel, his factotum.

Beljambe, the innkeeper, formerly a *chef* at Lisieux, was to cook certain dishes; Germaine had engaged the services of the poultry-wench; and Marianne, Madame Bordin's servant-girl, would also come. Since four o'clock the range was wide open; and the two proprietors, full of impatience, awaited their guests.

Hurel stopped under the beech row to adjust his frock-coat. Then the curé stepped forward, arrayed in a new cassock, and, a second later, M. Foureau, in a velvet waistcoat. The doctor gave his arm to his wife, who walked with some difficulty, assisting herself with her parasol. A stream of red ribbons fluttered behind them—it was the cap of Madame Bordin, who was dressed in a lovely robe of shot silk. The gold chain of her watch dangled over her breast, and rings glittered on both her hands, which were partly covered with black mittens. Finally appeared the notary, with a Panama hat on his head, and an eyeglass—for the professional practitioner had not stifled in him the man of the world. The drawing-room floor was waxed so that one could not stand upright there. The eight Utrecht armchairs had their backs to the wall; a round table in the centre supported the liqueur case; and above the mantelpiece could be seen the portrait of Père Bouvard. The shades, reappearing in the imperfect light, made the mouth grin and the eyes squint, and a slight mouldiness on the cheek-bones seemed to produce the illusion of real whiskers. The guests traced a resemblance between him and his son, and Madame Bordin added, glancing at Bouvard, that he must have been a very fine man. After an hour's waiting, Pécuchet announced that they might pass into the dining-room.

The white calico curtains with red borders were, like those of the drawing-room, completely drawn before the windows, and the sun's rays passing across them, flung a brilliant light on the wainscotings, the only ornament of which was a barometer.

Bouvard placed the two ladies beside him, while Pécuchet had the mayor on his left and the curé on his right.

They began with the oysters. They had the taste of mud. Bouvard was annoyed, and was prodigal of excuses, and Pécuchet got up in order to go into the kitchen and make a scene with Beljambe.

During the whole of the first course, which consisted of a brill with a vol-au-vent and stewed pigeons, the conversation turned on the mode of manufacturing cider; after which they discussed what meats were digestible or indigestible. Naturally, the doctor was consulted. He looked at matters

sceptically, like a man who had dived into the depths of science, and yet did not brook the slightest contradiction.

At the same time, with the sirloin of beef, Burgundy was supplied. It was muddy. Bouvard, attributing this accident to the rinsing of the bottles, got them to try three others without more success; then he poured out some St. Julien, manifestly not long enough in bottle, and all the guests were mute. Hurel smiled without discontinuing; the heavy steps of the waiters resounded over the flooring.

Madame Vaucorbeil, who was dumpy and waddling in her gait (she was near her confinement), had maintained absolute silence. Bouvard, not knowing what to talk to her about, spoke of the theatre at Caen.

“My wife never goes to the play,” interposed the doctor.

M. Marescot observed that, when he lived in Paris, he used to go only to the Italian operas.

“For my part,” said Bouvard, “I liked to pay for a seat in the pit sometimes at the Vaudeville to hear farces.”

Foureau asked Madame Bordin whether she liked farces.

“That depends on what kind they are,” she said.

The mayor rallied her. She made sharp rejoinders to his pleasantries. Then she mentioned a recipe for preparing gherkins. However, her talents for housekeeping were well known, and she had a little farm, which was admirably looked after.

Foureau asked Bouvard, “Is it your intention to sell yours?”

“Upon my word, up to this I don't know what to do exactly.”

“What! not even the Escalles piece?” interposed the notary. “That would suit you, Madame Bordin.”

The widow replied in an affected manner:

“The demands of M. Bouvard would be too high.”

“Perhaps someone could soften him.”

“I will not try.”

“Bah! if you embraced him?”

“Let us try, all the same,” said Bouvard.

And he kissed her on both cheeks, amid the plaudits of the guests.

Almost immediately after this incident, they uncorked the champagne, whose detonations caused an additional sense of enjoyment. Pécuchet made a sign; the curtains opened, and the garden showed itself.

In the twilight it looked dreadful. The rockery, like a mountain, covered the entire grass plot; the tomb formed a cube in the midst of spinaches, the Venetian bridge a circumflex accent over the kidney-beans, and the summer-house beyond a big black spot, for they had burned its straw roof to make it more poetic. The yew trees, shaped like stags or armchairs, succeeded to the tree that seemed thunder-stricken, extending transversely from the elm row to the arbour, where tomatoes hung like stalactites. Here and there a sunflower showed its yellow disk. The Chinese pa  da, painted red, seemed a lighthouse on the hillock. The peacocks' beaks , struck by the sun, reflected back the rays, and behind the railed gate, now freed from its boards, a perfectly flat landscape bounded the horizon.

In the face of their guests' astonishment Bouvard and Pécuchet experienced a veritable delight.

Madame Bordin admired the peacocks above all; but the tomb was not appreciated, nor the cot in flames, nor the wall in ruins. Then each in turn passed over the bridge. In order to fill the basin, Bouvard and Pécuchet had been carrying water in carts all the morning. It had escaped between the foundation stones, which were imperfectly joined together, and covered them over again with lime.

While they were walking about, the guests indulged in criticism.

“In your place that's what I'd have done.”—"The green peas are late. “—"Candidly, this corner is not all right.”—“With such pruning you'll never get fruit.”

Bouvard was obliged to answer that he did not care a jot for fruit.

As they walked past the hedge of trees, he said with a sly air:

“Ah! here's a lady that puts us out of countenance: a thousand excuses!”

It was a well-seasoned joke; everyone knew “the lady in plaster”.

Finally, after many turns in the labyrinth, they arrived in front of the gate with the pipes. Looks of amazement were exchanged. Bouvard observed the faces of his guests, and, impatient to learn what was their opinion, asked:

“What do you say to it?”

Madame Bordin burst out laughing. All the others followed her example, after their respective ways—the curé giving a sort of cluck like a hen, Hurel coughing, the doctor mourning over it, while his wife had a nervous spasm, and Foureau, an unceremonious type of man, breaking an Abd-el-Kader and putting it into his pocket as a souvenir.

When they had left the tree-hedge, Bouvard, to astonish the company with the echo, exclaimed with all his strength:

“Servant, ladies!”

Nothing! No echo. This was owing to the repairs made in the barn, the gable and the roof having been demolished.

The coffee was served on the hillock; and the gentlemen were about to begin a game of ball, when they saw in front of them, behind the railed fence, a man staring at them.

He was lean and sunburnt, with a pair of red trousers in rags, a blue waistcoat, no shirt, his black beard cut like a brush. He articulated, in a hoarse voice: “Give me a glass of wine!”

The mayor and the Abbé Jeufroy had at once recognised him. He had formerly been a joiner at Chavignolles.

“Come, Gorju! take yourself off,” said M. Foureau. “You ought not to be asking for alms.”

“I! Alms!” cried the exasperated man. “I served seven years in the wars in Africa. I've only just got up out of a hospital. Good God! must I turn cutthroat?”

His anger subsided of its own accord, and, with his two fists on his hips, he surveyed the assembled guests with a melancholy and defiant air. The fatigue of bivouacs, absinthe, and fever, an entire existence of wretchedness and debauchery, stood revealed in his dull eyes. His white lips quivered, exposing the gums. The vast sky, empurpled, enveloped him in a blood-red light; and his obstinacy in remaining there caused a species of terror.

Bouvard, to have done with him, went to look for the remnants of a bottle. The vagabond swallowed the wine greedily, then disappeared amongst the oats, gesticulating as he went.

After this, blame was attached by those present to Bouvard. Such kindnesses encouraged disorder. But Bouvard, irritated at the ill-success of his garden, took up the defence of the people. They all began talking at the same time.

Foureau extolled the government. Hurel saw nothing in the world but landed property. The Abbé Jeufroy complained of the fact that it did not protect religion. Pécuchet attacked the taxes. Madame Bordin exclaimed at intervals, “As for me, I detest the Republic.” And the doctor declared himself in favour of progress: “For, indeed, gentlemen, we have need of reforms.”

“Possibly,” said Foureau; “but all these ideas are injurious to business.”

“I laugh at business!” cried Pécuchet.

Vaucorbeil went on: “At least let us make allowance for abilities.”

Bouvard would not go so far.

“That is your opinion,” replied the doctor; “there's an end of you, then! Good evening. And I wish you a deluge in order to sail in your basin!”

“And I, too, am going,” said M. Foureau the next moment; and, pointing to the pocket where the Abd-el-Kader was, “If I feel the want of another, I'll come back.”

The curé, before departing, timidly confided to Pécuchet that he did not think this imitation of a tomb in the midst of vegetables quite decorous. Hurel, as he withdrew, made a low bow to the company. M. Marescot had disappeared after dessert.

Madame Bordin again went over her recipe for gherkins, promised a second for plums with brandy, and made three turns in the large walk; but, passing close to the linden tree, the end of her dress got caught, and they heard her murmuring: “My God! what a piece of idiocy this tree is!”

At midnight the two hosts, beneath the arbour, gave vent to their resentment.

No doubt one might find fault with two or three little details here and there in the dinner; and yet the guests had gorged themselves like ogres, showing that it was not so bad. But, as for the garden, so much depreciation sprang from the blackest jealousy. And both of them, lashing themselves into a rage, went on: “Ha! water is needed in the basin, is it? Patience! they may see even a swan and fishes in it!”

“They scarcely noticed the pagoda.”

“To pretend that the ruins are not proper is an imbecile's view.”

“And the tomb objectionable! Why objectionable? Hasn't a man the right to erect one in his own demesne? I even intend to be buried in it!”

“Don't talk like that!” said Pécuchet.

Then they passed the guests in review.

“The doctor seems to me a nice snob!”

“Did you notice the sneer of M. Marescot before the portrait?”

“What a low fellow the mayor is! When you dine in a house, hang it! you should show some respect towards the curios.”

“Madame Bordin!” said Bouvard.

“Ah! that one's a schemer. Don't annoy me by talking about her.”

Disgusted with society, they resolved to see nobody anymore, but live exclusively by themselves and for themselves.

And they spent days in the wine-cellar, picking the tartar off the bottles, re-varnished all the furniture, enamelled the rooms; and each evening, as they watched the wood burning, they discussed the best system of fuel.

Through economy they tried to smoke hams, and attempted to do the washing themselves. Germaine, whom they inconvenienced, used to shrug her shoulders. When the time came for making preserves she got angry, and they took up their station in the bakehouse. It was a disused wash-house, where there was, under the faggots, a big, old-fashioned tub, excellently fitted for their projects, the ambition having seized them to manufacture preserves.

Fourteen glass bottles were filled with tomatoes and green peas. They coated the stoppers with quicklime and cheese, attached to the rims silk cords, and then plunged them into boiling water. It evaporated; they poured in cold water; the difference of temperature caused the bowls to burst. Only three of them were saved. Then they procured old sardine boxes, put veal cutlets into them, and plunged them into a vessel of boiling water. They came out as round as balloons. The cold flattened them out afterwards. To continue their experiments, they shut up in other boxes eggs, chiccory, lobsters, a hotchpotch of fish, and a soup!—and they applauded themselves like M. Appert, “on having fixed the seasons.” Such discoveries, according to Pécuchet, carried him beyond the exploits of conquerors.

They improved upon Madame Bordin's pickles by spicing the vinegar with pepper; and their brandy plums were very much superior. By the process of steeping ratafia, they obtained raspberry and absinthe.

With honey and angelica in a cask of Bagnolles, they tried to make Malaga wine; and they likewise undertook the manufacture of champagne! The bottles of Châblis diluted with water must burst of themselves. Then he no longer was doubtful of success.

Their studies widening, they came to suspect frauds in all articles of food. They cavilled with the baker on the colour of his bread; they made the grocer their enemy by maintaining that he adulterated his chocolate. They went to Falaise for a jujube, and, even under the apothecary's own eyes, they submitted his paste to the test of water. It assumed the appearance of a piece of bacon, which indicated gelatine.

After this triumph, their pride rose to a high pitch. They bought up the stock of a bankrupt distiller, and soon there arrived in the house sieves, barrels, funnels, skimmers, filters, and scales, without counting a bowl of wood with a ball attached and a Moreshead still, which required a reflecting-furnace with a basket funnel. They learned how sugar is clarified, and the different kinds of boilings, the large and the small system of boiling twice over, the blowing systém, the methods of making up in balls, the reduction of sugar to a viscous

state, and the making of burnt sugar. But they longed to use the still; and they broached the fine liqueurs, beginning with the aniseed cordial. The liquid nearly always drew away the materials with it, or rather they stuck together at the bottom; at other times they were mistaken as to the amount of the ingredients. Around them shone great copper pans; egg-shaped vessels projected their narrow openings; saucepans hung from the walls. Frequently one of them culled herbs on the table, while the other made the ball swing in the suspended bowl. They stirred the ladles; they tasted the mashes.

Bouvard, always in a perspiration, had no garment on save his shirt and his trousers, drawn up to the pit of his stomach by his short braces; but, giddy as a bird, he would forget the opening in the centre of the cucurbit, or would make the fire too strong.

Pécuchet kept muttering calculations, motionless in his long blouse, a kind of child's smock-frock with sleeves; and they looked upon themselves as very serious people engaged in very useful occupations.

At length they dreamed of a cream which would surpass all others. They would put into it coriander as in Kummel, kirsch as in Maraschino, hyssop as in Chartreuse, anise-seed as in Vespetro cordial, and sweet calamus as in Krambambuly;  and it would be coloured red with sandalwood. But under what name should they introduce it for commercial purposes?—for they would want a name easy to retain and yet fanciful. Having turned the matter over a long time, they determined that it should be called “Bouvarine”.

About the end of autumn stains appeared in the three glass bowls containing the preserves. The tomatoes and green peas were rotten. That must have been due to the way they had stopped up the vessels. Then the problem of stoppage tormented them. In order to try the new methods, they required money; and the farm had eaten up their resources.

Many times tenants had offered themselves; but Bouvard would not have them. His principal farm-servant carried on the cultivation according to his directions, with a risky economy, to such an extent that the crops diminished and everything was imperilled; and they were talking about their embarrassments when Maître Gouy entered the laboratory, escorted by his wife, who remained timidly in the background.

Thanks to all the dressings they had got, the lands were improved, and he had come to take up the farm again. He ran it down. In spite of all their toils, the

profits were uncertain; in short, if he wanted it, that was because of his love for the country, and his regret for such good masters. They dismissed him coldly. He came back the same evening.

Pécuchet had preached at Bouvard; they were on the point of giving way. Gouy asked for a reduction of rent; and when the others protested, he began to bellow rather than speak, invoking the name of God, enumerating his labours, and extolling his merits. When they called on him to state his terms, he hung down his head instead of answering. Then his wife, seated near the door, with a big basket on her knees, made similar protestations, screeching in a sharp voice, like a hen that has been hurt.

At last the lease was agreed on, the rent being fixed at three thousand francs a year—a third less than it had been formerly.

Before they had separated, Maître Gouy offered to buy up the stock, and the bargaining was renewed.

The valuation of the chattels occupied fifteen days. Bouvard was dying of fatigue. He let everything go for a sum so contemptible that Gouy at first opened his eyes wide, and exclaiming, “Agreed!” slapped his palm.

After which the proprietors, following the old custom, proposed that they should take a “nip” at the house, and Pécuchet opened a bottle of his Malaga, less through generosity than in the hope of eliciting eulogies on the wine.

But the husbandman said, with a sour look, “It's like liquorice syrup”. And his wife, “in order to get rid of the taste”, asked for a glass of brandy.

A graver matter engaged their attention. All the ingredients of the “Bouvarine” were now collected. They heaped them together in the cucurbit, with the alcohol, lighted the fire, and waited. However, Pécuchet, annoyed by the misadventure about the Malaga, took the tin boxes out of the cupboard and pulled the lid off the first, then off the second, and then off the third. He angrily flung them down, and called out to Bouvard. The latter had fastened the cock of the worm in order to try the effect on the preserves.

The disillusion was complete. The slices of veal were like boiled boot-soles; a muddy fluid had taken the place of the lobster; the fish-stew was unrecognisable; mushroom growths had sprouted over the soup, and an intolerable smell tainted the laboratory.

Suddenly, with the noise of a bombshell, the still burst into twenty pieces, which jumped up to the ceiling, smashing the pots, flattening out the skimmers and shattering the glasses.  The coal was scattered about, the furnace was demolished, and next day Germaine found a spatula in the yard.

The force of the steam had broken the instrument to such an extent that the cucurbit was pinned to the head of the still.

Pécuchet immediately found himself squatted behind the vat, and Bouvard lay like one who had fallen over a stool. For ten minutes they remained in this posture, not daring to venture on a single movement, pale with terror, in the midst of broken glass. When they were able to recover the power of speech, they asked themselves what was the cause of so many misfortunes, and of the last above all? And they could understand nothing about the matter except that they were near being killed. Pécuchet finished with these words:

“It is, perhaps, because we do not know chemistry!”

Gustave Flaubert (1821—1880): Bouvard and Pécuchet. A Tragi-comic Novel of Bourgeois Life. Volume IX, Simon P. Magee, Chicago 1904. — The Project Guttenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25014/25014-h/25014-h.htm#Page_26. Release date: April 7, 2008. Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1. Produced by Thierry Alberto, Henry Craig and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net