THE

ADVENTURES
OF
NONO

JEAN GRAVE

1901

Working translation by
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2013

[Revised translation forthcoming]

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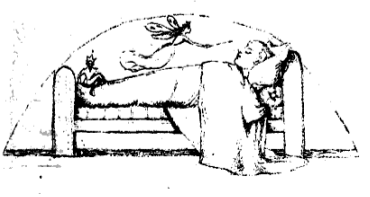
NONO



I

DESIRE

Nono is a little boy, nine years old, intelligent, noisy, but not a bad devil. Like all children, he certainly has some moments of high spirits and rowdiness, when he enrages his parents; some instants when his little, rapidly growing, being pours itself out in leaps and cries of joy, not always choosing the favorable moment to give them free rein, expending his energies in mischief, without concerning himself whether his parents are in a mood to bear it.

But what spoils his natural goodness a bit is a persistent stubbornness that he has no means to correct. Obstinate, not like a mule, nor like two goats, but rather like ten thousand hogs.

When he has once got it into his head that he does not want to do something, that's the end of it; there is no longer any means of making him do it: reprimands, blows, arguments, sweet words, promises, nothing can move him. By himself, he recognizes that it is wrong, especially when he has been made to understand that if he cannot be agreeable to others, the others will do nothing to please him.

I do not mean that Nono was beaten; that is a means that parents use often enough against stubborn children; for it is easier to give a slap than a reason, and too often parents have recourse to that means. If they were obliged to give the reason for their orders, they would be forced to admit that they have none, other than their simple caprice, and no other right than being the strongest. When one is in a bad mood, it is a relief to be able to take it out on someone who can't respond.

But Nono's parents, if not entirely immune to this failing—if, at times, they have had a somewhat ready hand—have not, however, abused this means of reprimand too much, and have sometimes gone to the trouble of reasoning with the dogged little one, making him understand that we can only reasonably

expect people to be kind to us only on the condition that we are the same to them in this regard.

Nono recognized that he was wrong to persist in his refusal, but he considered it a point of honor not to go back on what he had said — especially when it was a refusal to accomplish a thing that someone had asked him to do. — For him to return to better feelings, it was best to leave him to sulk in his corner, and wait for reflection to lead to more sociable sentiments.

If parents are, often enough, in a bad mood, children, on their part, also have their disagreeable moments. Among parents, there are household cares and worries about work; in the workshop, the boss has been unjust, and we have not been able to say bluntly to him what we think, so we return to the house in a bad mood, and it is the wife and kids who are on the receiving end.

When they are in this unfortunate state of mind, sometimes parents, without realizing it, give their orders in a very imperative tone. Nono is often hurt by this tone, even when he is most disposed to do what they ask him; then he balks, but he obeys.

Very often, too, when he does not always understand the necessity of an order, — after all, at nine years old, we cannot know as much as our parents, — a word of explanation would be enough, but the parents are too used to believing that children should obey without argument, and because, very often, they don't know how to make themselves understood, they imagine that the children have no understanding, so they do not take the trouble to explain. "A child should obey his parents without argument," and that dispenses with all explanation.

And there many opportunities for scolding and friction, as you see.

Many books have been written to teach children that they should be wise and obedient; but, sadly, it is parents who have written them, and we have forgotten to recommend to parents that they only ask children things within reach of their age and their reason; it happens that most fathers and mothers do not know their job as parents at all.

Let us hope that a few can be written to teach them to be reasonable with regard to their children. Perhaps one of the children who reads this at this moment will remember, when he grows up, the things that seemed most unjust to they in the conduct of their parents towards them, and they will sit themselves down to write that book—unless they finds it better to point them out in succession. But in that case, I am not very certain that he would not be more prudent to try to make a story of it. The least that he could do would be to treat as cheeky, a heartless child who dares criticize the conduct of his parents. The story would be much more amusing to write than the stupidities that we are given as compositions at school, the parents would be rather amused by it, and if they were not too stupid, they would perhaps grasp the lesson without hitting the ceiling.

From the child's side, it is another story: it is very hard to leave the book you hold to go in search of four cents worth of butter or a quart of potatoes; just as you get to the most interesting passage: at the moment when the heroes of

the book come to be taken by brigands, or at the point of being shipwrecked; you do not want to abandon them in such a critical position. Or else you are playing an exciting game of hide and seek with your friends; mother is very unwelcome when she disturbs you, to send you off for two cents worth of salt, or to make you come in to wash the crockery. Also, it happened that Nono did not always promptly execute the orders received, and made them repeat them many times, before performing them, not without murmuring and dragging his feet heavily on the ground as a sign of his discontent. Alas! no one is perfect, and good little children — like parents without flaws — exist only in the books we make them read in order to teach them how to be well-behaved.

It also happened sometimes that our young hero would fight with his big brother Alexandre — who was generally called Titi — and with his sister Cendrine. His brother Titi was much older than him, but scarcely more reasonably; so, sometimes they would argue like cats and dogs.

Cendrine was only one year older than him; she also teased at times. But as Nono was the youngest, his sister was required to yield to the fancies of *monsieur*—a necessity of which she was not particularly convinced, and to which she was even less inclined to submit.

One would begin by squabbling a bit; the other snatches the toys, and then, my faith! fists enter the game, until a few slaps, impartially distributed, come to make peace between the belligerents.

There was also another little brother, Paulo, but he was so young, barely a year old, that it was hardly possible to quarrel with him, and they were, on the contrary, very glad to have him, for he never finished his porridge or cake; with him there were always some crumbs to catch.

But, all told, Nono's parents loved their children; their faults reflected prejudices, habits that they had found already established, that they picked up with the education they had been given, and not from their character, which was instead inclined to kindness.

Nono, if he was headstrong, was not a real devil, he loved his parents and, — especially when he had something to ask of them — knows to find some caresses which never fail to have their effect and have, more than once, made his father chuckle inside, and then, to make an impression, he frowns.

Besides the dreadful quarter-hours of which we have spoken, there are plenty of good moments in the house, and the squalls are soon forgotten, for nobody bears all ill will.

At the moment when we meet the family, Nono has just shown exemplary good behavior. — He had long desired that his father buy him a book of stories, with good pictures! — his marks for the school-week are excellent; he has acquitted himself promptly, and without complaint, — inwardly only, so as not to lose the habit — of the errands that he has been asked to do; also, his father has promised to go with him next day — since it will be Sunday — and take him to visit the shops, where he can choose an object that pleases him. — Not too expensive, for Nono's parents are workers, and the rich spend much of their

money trivially, but the workers almost never have more to spend than their children require. But this time his father wants to do things up, and he promises to spend at least forty cents on Nono!

So Nono, with a heart full of hope, goes to bed promising himself mountains and marvel for tomorrow. As his mother tucks him into bed:

"Tell me, mother, how much would it cost, a storybook, like the one that Charles lent me, with fine pictures?"

The question is perhaps not in perfect in syntax, but as a child of nine is not expected to speak as well as an academician, if you don't mind, we will write as our hero speaks.

"Father," says his mother, "your boy wants to know how much it will cost for a storybook, with nice colored images?"

"I don't know. Three or four francs, at least."

"Mother," says Nono, throwing his arms around her neck, and pulling her close to kiss her, "I have five cents in my piggy-bank, I will give them to Father to buy me one, if you will add what I lack. Try to convince Father?"

"You know how to ask nicely, but will you always be so well-behaved?"

"I promise," says the little rascal, and redoubled his kissing.

—"You promise, you promise. You are not stingy with promises, but you do not always keep them, your promises!"

"I will mother, I will be good, I will do my errands."

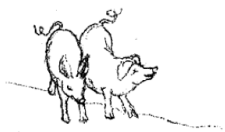
"Go on, sleep! We will do this tomorrow. I will ask your father."

And thereupon, two big kisses on the eyes, with a recommendation not to wiggle too much, so as not to throw off the bedclothes.

And Nono, his nose stuffed under the covers, is thinking about all the books he has seen, asking himself which he should prefer. He wants one with engravings, beautiful colored pictures. His imagination retraces a whole ocean of volumes, among which he does not know where his preference should lie.

His reverie little by little becomes lively and animated: *Donkeyskin*, *Don Quixote*, *Ali Baba*, *Red Riding Hood*, and *The Blue Bird* dance a frenzied saraband around him. It is in the midst of a multitude of fairies, genii, elves, enchanters, gnomes, goblins, fabulous birds, and fantastic flowers that he falls asleep, losing the sense of reality.

His mother is exposed to the fury of the fairy Carabosse; his father held prisoner by the enchanter Abracadabra and forced to make, for Nono, a book in which the character, in the illustrations, speak and move. His sister Cendrine his brother Titi are changed into small pink pigs by the fairy Melusine, and he, Nono, is charged with guarding them, to lead them to the acorns and prevent them from escaping or be changed himself into a bat.



II

FIRST ADVENTURES

When Nono awoke, it was broad daylight. But, surprisingly, instead of being in his bed he was lying on a lawn thick, filled with flowers raising their petals over the green grass.

The sun lit up that place, making the floral colors gleam, shimmering off the variegated wings of the countless insects that fluttering in its golden rays, or bustling among the blades of grass. The sky, of a deep blue, was cloudless.

Nono had risen on his elbow, and, eyes wide with astonishment, he looked around him, not remembering ever having visited this place.

The air was sweet and mild; a thousand perfumes escaped from the half-open petals of the thousand and one wildflowers that carpeted the ground. In the trees, in the bushes, and in the undergrowth, a multitude of birds gave out the most varied chirpings.

Some, taking their flight, crossed the space in a nimble flight, chasing each other to earth with angry chirruping, competing, in play, over some grain, defending themselves with open beak and wings, standing up on their claws, to grab the disputed seed, mutually stealing their prey from one another several times, until at last one of their number, with more nimble movement and a more rapid flight, came to put an end to the dispute by flying away with the object of the litigation, thus reconciling the adversaries in a common disappointment.

The security with which they seemed to play in this hedged plot, the tranquil flight of those who sought their feed, all demonstrated that they must live there in total security, having never been hunted by humans, or by any other harmful beings.

In order to learn better where he was, Nono raised himself up in bed. When he seemed to be wide awake, he got up, sniffing the air with delight; but a hunger pang reminded him of the good soup that his mother made to warm him up every morning, and he looked all around him, to see if he could find some traces of his house, or even the little pigs that he remembered being charged to look after in his dream.

But there was no trace of habitation or human beings in this charming place. And while trying to find someone, Nono asked himself how he came to be alone in an unknown country.

Was he still dreaming? What had become of his parents? Besides, his ideas were far from being clear. Because he was doubtless still half-awake; but the sorcerers and enchanters still vaguely haunted his imagination, and he was not far from believing that some evil genie or wicked fairy had carried him far from home, far from his parents, after undergoing some metamorphosis to them and to himself. And he felt all over his body, to make sure that he had not been changed into a monkey or some equally ugly animal.

But, no, he was just the same as always, and dressed in his usual clothes.

"Let's see," he said to himself. "I slept well last night in my parents' home. How is it that I have awakened in an unknown country? Are there really fairies who can carry you off like that, without you even knowing it?" If it was one of those who carried him off, it would not be slow to show itself, he imagined.

And he looked around him, but no one showed themselves.

Nono was a brave little boy, who was only afraid of the dark, in which case he would sing as loud as he could to give himself courage. He was in a situation which could have worried him. The unexplained absence of his parents would, under any other circumstance, certainly have alarmed him. But he was, at that moment, in a state of mind that made him accept that absence as something, if not natural, at least more or less plausible. So, far from being frightened by finding no answer to his misgiving, he set out to find some road which would lead him to an inhabited location.

Although young, he already possessed a certain degree of reasoning power. He said to himself that such a pretty place must certainly attract visitors and that he would have no great way to go to find either a habitation, or some ramblers.

A path lay before him, and he followed it on a whim. While walking, he put his hand in his pocket without thinking, and found there a little pocket knife that his uncle had given him to sharpen his pencils at school. That discovery gave him the idea of cutting a stick from one of the copses along the road; the urge was no sooner formulated than he went to work. He soon had a walking stick with which he could search the sand while walking, twirl it in the air, or decapitate the tall grass on the edges of the path.

He walked like this for a while, without any idea where the path he followed would lead. He must have awakened very late in the morning, for the sun was soon high in the sky, and its rays, although screened by the foliage, continued to heat the atmosphere. Thirst began to gnaw at him, and Nono looked around him for some fruit to slake his thirst and stave off his hunger.

But there was nothing but the trees of the forest, until, crossing a clearing, his attention was drawn by a thrilling scene: a little finch, whose chirping announced its distress, stood on a branch, trying to hide. Its body was shaken by a convulsive trembling, its eyes fixed on a kestrel that, after having soared a moment in the air, began to descend in tighter and tighter spirals, to pounce on the poor, distraught creature.

Quick as thought, Nono raised his cane, and as the kestrel was about to reach its prey, with a sharp blow he struck it down, broken, to the earth.

Fear had so paralyzed the finch that it had fallen to the ground, its body troubled by little shivers. Nono picked it up, fluttering, took it gently in his hands and cradled it.

Little by little the young bird recovered from its fright and, by a plaintive cooing, made it clear to its savior that it wanted to reclaim its freedom.

Nono opened his hand, and the bird flapped its wings before taking flight; then, joyous, it rose into the air, trumpeting to its savior, as a farewell, a song of buoyant joy.

This interlude had made our thirsty traveler forget the thirst that drove him; but when he had seen the bird disappear, he felt the itch a little more strongly. So he resumed his walk, continuing to seek with a worried eye some fruit on a tree branch, and especially to see if, across the grass, he could not find some fresh spring where he could satisfy his thirst with a long drink.

But nothing presented itself to his disappointed gaze, except an insect caught by one leg entangled in the twigs of a shrub, spreading its black belly to the sun, and struggling desperately to hang on without managing to regain its balance and get out of its perilous position.

Already visibly fatigued, its efforts became less vigorous and more infrequent. Above, a great titmouse sharpened its beak on the branch which supported it, preparing to swoop down on its certain prey.

Nono rushed to the shrub, making the titmouse fly off, and carefully detached the insect, which he found to be a fine garden beetle, with elytrons of a beautiful gilt green, with metallic glints.

The rescuer returned the insect to earth, where, passing its legs in front of its antennae, it seemed to make a gesture of thanks before disappearing into the grass. And Nono resumed his walk.

At the corner of a small path veering to the left of the one he followed, he found his finch perched on one of the trees beside the road. The bird, which seemed to await him, flew off in the direction of the new path.

Nono left the track he had followed and made his way down the one followed by the bird. But it began to flap its wings, rose twittering, and stationed itself in a tree farther along, seeming again to await its rescuer.

“Are you afraid of me?” asked Nono, speaking perhaps as much to himself as to the bird.

As if it understood, the bird came to flutter around him; always mistrustful, it lit for an instant on his shoulder, only to take flight again, and go to land farther on.

Nono knew nothing of where he was, so he followed the animal, as indifferent to one road as to another. They arrived in this way at a clearing, at the end of which a heap of reddish rocks was piled, covered with lichens, moss and heather.

On one side of the rock pile, bubbled a little spring of bright, clear water, which descended in little cascades, down a terraced flank, to fall, at the foot of the rocks, into a sort of natural basin formed by the rock that it had hollowed out and from which it escaped in a limpid stream that wound across the clearing to lose itself beneath the trees. A magnificent birch tree, with silver bark, which had taken root in a fissure in the rock, shaded the place with its delicate foliage, hanging down a bit like the hair of a weeping naiad.

Nono ran to the fountain, where he knelt to slake his thirst, greedily drawing in water with his hands. It seemed so delicious to him that he found it the best of all drinks.

"All the same," thought Nono, "without the finch, I would not have come here. It was to follow it that I left the first path." And he searched for it to thank it, but the bird had disappeared.

Nono bent down again at the spring to drink that fresh water again. Finally satiated, he was going to rise, when he saw a poor bee that struggled in the middle of the basis, and that, despite all its efforts, the current was going to carry away and submerge in its eddies. With his stick, which he still had with him, Nono lifted the bee from the water and gingerly placed it on the moss, where the sun could dry it, lingering to see what it would do, despite the stomach pangs which proved his hunger had not subsided.

For a moment, the insect dragged itself clumsily over the moss, its body heavy with moisture, its wings injured by the contact with the water, having trouble staying on its feet. Then, when it had regain its freedom of movement a bit, it began to wave its legs behind its wings in order to dry them. Finally, when it was strong enough on its own, it took wing and launched itself, buzzing, into the air.

But, what a strange thing! It seemed to the astonished child that the buzzing took the form of language! He seemed to understand that the insect said to him: "You were thirsty, and the bird that you saved has led you to this where you could quench your thirst, and where I would have drowned without your help. Follow me, and I will guide you to a place where you can eat your fill."

Nono knew very well that insects do not talk; but he had read so many story books where the animals are made to talk, recited so many fables at school where not only the animals speak, but also the tiniest insects, even plants and rocks make speeches that many human beings would have been incapable of making, and of the wisdom of which very few people would have been able to understand,—when these discourses were considered to be wise—which was not always the case.

Thus our hungry child was not unduly surprised, not to hear the bee speak—he was not sure that it had made this little speech, convinced instead that it was the fruit of his imagination—but, he liked to think that it could have made it. So he followed the bee completely reassured. Besides, the flight of the insect allowed him to follow without tiring.

So they crossed the woods that began beyond the rocks, and came to a rural valley, filled with wildflowers. All the varieties that, elsewhere, flower at different times, were found there, together, in full bloom.

Poppies spread their bright red petals, and cornflowers of a beautiful, darker blue stood beside them, while the broom married its flowers of a soft golden yellow to the deep violet of the bluebells, and the carmine of the digitalis. Elsewhere, the daisies spread their golden disk, surrounded by white petals, and the pink carnations lent a more subtle note.

Thyme, fennel, mint, perfumed the air with their balsamic scents, while in the grass, and under the bushes, bloomed violets and primroses of all kinds, and the lily of the valley opened its sweet-scented bells; the narcissus, daffodils and hyacinths formed a variegated carpet of the most diverse colors, while the honeysuckle rose up to storm the trees, in the branches of which it clung, displaying its honey-scented flowers.

Nono stood amazed, without asking how it could be that all these flowers were blooming at the same time. At the age of nine, we are not required to have a gardener's knowledge, and it did not shock him more to seem them there, growing before his eyes, than to read it in the work of a popular novelist.

Our little friend had never seen so many flowers together; it was not that he was not tempted to gather a bouquet for his mother, but the fear of seeing some gruff gardener or some equally surly guardian, prevented him from taking them in hand and fleeing shamelessly. And then, it must also be said, hunger above all, spurred him and made him hurry to find a place where he could satisfy it.

But the bee, which had seen Nono stop, came buzzing louder for a moment beside him, and our hungry boy resumed his walk unconsciously, guided by the flight of the insect which directed him to the edge of the wood, towards a large tree around which flew a great number of other bees that advanced towards the newcomer.

But as soon as they recognized it, they ceased their warlike buzzing, for a softer voice, seeming to welcome it, and scolded it for having left them to worry during its long absence.

Nono examined them curiously, seeing them rub their antennae against each other, signals that they repeated to the new companions who came constantly from the hive, and when all had communicated what they had learned, they went to buzz around Nono, seeming to regard him curiously, without seeking to do him any harm. But the boy, who knew how painful their stings are, prudently beat a retreat.

The bees continued their flight around him, and sometimes they stopped to rub their antennae against those of a comrade, seeming to exchange some reflection, then, at a given moment, they all flew back towards the tree that housed the hive, while some, returning toward the traveler, flew again then towards the hive, seeming to invite him to follow.

But Nono took care to understand things, and recalled the stories of those who, by being too reckless, had paid with horrible suffering for carelessly approaching too close to the habitation of these touchy insects. What's more, among this moving flood of insects, all alike, of the same color, he longer recognized the one he had saved from the water. He seemed to be, this time, totally lost and abandoned, and he slumped down, completely discouraged, on a tree trunk lying on the ground, anxiously asking himself what would become of him.

III

WE LEARN BY TRAVELING

The reflections of our little friend were not cheerful: In what country was he? Would he find something to eat? Was he doomed to die of hunger, or, like a new Robinson Crusoe, would he be forced to make the best of his life, far from every companion?

Robinson, in his shipwreck, had been able to save weapons, tools, and provisions. He had landed on an island stocked with game and edible fruits. In his walk Nono had seen nothing edible, apart from some little birds. As for weapons or tools, he possessed on a little stick, incapable of felling trees, sawing planks, or catching a blackbird in flight.

And he always returned to the starting point of his thoughts: Why was he there all alone? Where were his parents, his brothers, and his sister? Certainly, there was something incomprehensible about his situation.

Completely absorbed in his reflections, Nono perceived nothing of what was going on around him, when he was struck by a loud and prolonger buzzing, produced by a bee that was hovering around him, in order to attract his attention.

And—a new surprise for Nono—this buzzing, which was at first confused and indistinct, gradually took the form of language and became intelligible.

"Calm yourself," he seemed to hear it say, "we will not abandon you. Come with my sisters. Come that I may present you to our mother, and we will ease your distress."

And raised his head, Nono recognized his protégée, which made some signs, which this time he understood immediately. The bee indicated that he should rise and follow it.

He obeyed immediately, rose and followed his guide, who directed him towards the tree which housed the hive. But as they approached it, the old trunk lost its shape; its contours softened, its appearance was transformed, and when Nono had taken only a few steps, there appeared before him a magnificent palace, situated on a large terrace which one reached by a wide staircase with marble banisters.

An elegant colonnade, forming the vestibule, surrounded the monument, where the crowd of noisy, bustling bees thronged, some occupying themselves with airing the various parts of the palace, and others with transporting the spoils that they had brought from the fields; still others worked to restore the walls of the palace, fashioning the rooms according to the needs to which they were destined.

But stranger still, these bees were no longer simple insects: s the trunk was transformed into a palace, the bees also grew, transformed into human beings, though still recalling their original form, preserving the diaphanous wings that allowed them to flit through space.

The bee that led Nono underwent the same transformation. And with her fluttering beside him, Nono climbed the steps of the monumental staircase. They arrived before a lady seated in the vestibule in a magnificent high-backed chair. Around her bustled the mass of bees that were not called to other labors, bringing him cushions on which to prop himself, some excellent, fragrant food, and sweet-smelling drink.

Her face was marked with a very great gentleness. She gazed at Nono with an expression full of kindness, gesturing for him to approach.

And as Nono did not dare come closer:

“Do I scare you, my child?” she said in a suave et melodious voice.

Nono had heard from his father that the kings, queens, emperors and empresses were made of the same stuff as other mortals, and differed from them only in costume; but at school he learned so much of their acts and their power, attributing to them so much influence on events, on the destinies of the nations, that he could not imagine that they were not made of some superior essence. And as he had also heard that the bees were governed by a queen, he did not doubt for a single instant that he was face to face with that redoubtable person.

“Oh! no, Madame Queen,” he hastened to answer.

“Who told you that I was queen?” asked the lady, smiling.

“Oh! Madame, it shows,” said the child, growing bolder.

“Ah! And what signs have you see?”

“Because I see all the other bees rush around you and serve you, and because of the golden crown you have on your head.”

“Child! Come now!,” said the lady, laughing out loud this time. “This is my hair that you take for a crown. As for the bees that you see so eager to serve me, they are, you must understand, neither slaves, nor ladies of the court, nor servants. They are devoted daughters who take care of their mother, whom they love.”

Nono, quite abashed, remembered the bee which had led him had indeed spoken of "our mother", and as he saw her standing beside him with a mocking smile, he became as red as a peony. But he found the strength to say, to excuse himself, that it was at school that he had heard that the bees were governed by a queen.

“My child” said the lady, “becoming serious again, while continuing to smile good-naturedly, your teacher is ignorant. He talks about things he doesn’t know. While studying our hives, humans have judged our custom according to their own.

The first who was able to penetrate the secrets of our life, seeing the bees take special care of one of their number, striving to spare her any further work and fatigue, concluded that this one was a privileged figure, as useless as a king, that the others owed her obedience, and that it was her will that ruled the hive. They published that. It was too similar to what happens among you, for them not to have accepted it as truth. The partisans of authority took it as an argument in their favor, and it continued to be taught in school that the bees were ruled by a queen.

However, that is not have it is among us. Each of us fulfills the function inherent in their nature, but there is no queen, and there is no duty imposed. Some make honey, and others care for the young. If the needs of the hive demand it, some of the inhabitants can even change functions, but without anyone ordering it, only because they feel that it is the general good that demands us.

As for me, I am not a queen, but simply a mother, responsible for providing the eggs which will create workers for our Republic, futures mothers for new swarms; and if the other bees pamper, care for, and indulge me, it is simply because I accomplish a work that they cannot do, having no sex, and that its accomplishment prevents me from concerning myself with any other chore. I admit that I am a Mother Gigogne, but we know no queens here.”

Nono listened, dumbfounded, to this little lesson in natural history, which overturned all his acquired notions. But deep down, as he was a bit mischievous, and held a slight grudge against his teacher, who had sometimes reprimanded or punished him without good cause, he formulated the intention of catching him red-handed, in his turn, in his ignorance, when it came time to speak of royalty among the bees. And a naughty smile passed across the corners of his lips.

“Behave, imp,” said the mother bee, and patting his cheek, she continued: “Remember the good and evil done to you, but never be unjust.”

“But I’m keeping you here, making speeches that doubtless seem very tiresome to you, and your friend reminds me that you are very hungry, and I have very little time to myself, so I must return to my work. Sit at that table, which my daughters have set for you, and satisfy your appetite.

Indeed, the emotions that Nono felt had at first made him forget his hunger, but for some moments, his hungry eyes could not tear themselves from a table that a group of bees had stocked with honeycombs set on fig leaves, exciting the appetite of our hungry young man with their sweet perfume, which tickled his nostrils.

Without making her repeat herself, he sat down and tasted the honey. In a wax cup molded for him, the bees had distilled the sweet nectar they collect from the calyx of flowers. Nono was rapt, and feasted with delight.

He had already largely finished the honey and drawn from the cup. His hunger had died down a bit, and he no longer found so much pleasure in eating the honey, or drinking the nectar, beginning to find them too sweet.

In the hive, the bees had disappeared, without him noticing it, his attention being drawn at that moment by a swarming which came from the woods across from him. It sparkled in the sun, with glints of gold. And it advanced towards Nono who was very intrigued, being unable to distinguish anything.

As it continued to advance, he eventually sorted out a swarm of beings. Haunted by his reading, he did not doubt for a single instant that it was an army of marching knights. He even already some distinctly some warriors in golden cuirasses, helmets topped with horns and crests, the reflections from their emerald bucklers shining in the sun. it was only because they were far away that they seemed so small.

But when they came closer, Nono had to admit that he had been, once again, led astray by his imagination. He had before him some simple golden beetles.

And as they advanced, he saw them stand up on their feet, no longer seeing anything but their all-black bellies. Farewell to the brilliant warriors, fine cuirasses, sparkling bucklers! Standing on their feet, they grew and grew, until they became as large as penny dolls, but, cruel deception, it seemed to Nono that it was a crowd of Lilliputian undertakers in front of him.

A dozen of them marched two by two, carrying on each shoulder a twig, cut from the surrounding undergrowth, forming a litter on which rested a large une large paulownia leaf, which they had gathered at the edges, attaching them with thorns to form a sort of basket. Some of these baskets were full of fragrant, succulent strawberries from the forest, and others containing raspberries with a more acidic scent.

Behind each litter walked a group of beetles from which others detached themselves from time to time, to relieve the tired porters.

They all came in a procession towards Nono, seated on the tree trunk into which his chair had been transformed. The table had disappeared.

When the procession arrived before him, the beetles ranged themselves in a semicircle, the holders of stretchers slightly ahead.

One of them broke away from the group and climbed on Nono's knee. Once there, it gave a salute, rising up on its two front paws, with the back paws in the air, and, and with its hind legs, vigorously rubbing its elytra, made a sound which was hardly harmonious, but Nono enjoyed very much, for here is what he thought he heard:

"Young child, I am the one you rescued when I was in danger. Without realizing it, you've practiced the great law of universal solidarity, which decrees that all beings help one another. We cannot, like the bees, give you a treat, fruit of our labor, but here are some excellent strawberries and raspberries, picked for you. I hope that they will please you, and complement the rustic meal offered by our sisters."

And at a signal, the porters came and laid their burdens at the feet of the one for whom they were destined.

But before going on, a see a smile of disbelief pass over the lips of my young readers; I hear them murmur that my orator has chosen an odd position to give his speech. You do not see your schoolmaster delivering his lesson walking on his hands, or your headmaster, at the distribution of the prizes, giving his rant standing on his head, with his feet in the air.

But, my dear children, the mother bee has taught us, we must never judge things solely by our own standards, and believe that what we do must serve as a rule for the universe. And if many of our speakers, political or otherwise, were forced to make their harangues thus, perhaps it would make some ideas descend into their heads, that their clumsiness doubtless prevents from showing there when standing up, their speech is so empty and hollow.

At the sight of these appetizing fruits, Nono felt his mouth water. But he had begun to learn, and he realized that, before sitting down like a glutton, he should thank the beetles for their generous gift.

“Mr. Beetle, you and your comrades are really too kind, and I am delighted with your present; it is with great pleasure that I will eat these strawberries which seem to me to be excellent. But, in truth, I do not deserve so much, you exaggerate the service that I have done you. You were aught in a tangle of branches, seeing you in trouble, I freed you without any trouble to myself. You see that the action was nothing very meritorious, and I am ashamed to be so undeserving of your praise.”

“Oh!” said the beetle, “if we measure service by the trouble it costs, yours is of minimal importance. But since it is my life that I owe, it is worthy of my consideration. But a service is not measured that way. What is important is the manner in which it is given, the spontaneity and good grace that accompanies it.

“So take these fruits with as good as heart as we offer it to you, and you will please us.”

And the beetle, waving its antennae it the form of a salute, prepared to descend from the podium that it had chosen.

“In that case, thank you,” said Nono, “you see, I use the permission.”

And the beetle having left his knee, Nono stooped, took up one of the baskets, and having quickly devoured its contents in two bits, took up a second.

The beetles, seeing him eating, returned to their insect forms and took off towards the woods.

And Nono, who watched them go, felt a little pang, thinking that we would still find himself alone. He saw them disappear beneath the foliage. It seemed to him like they were old friends who left him.

IV

IN THE COUNTRY OF AUTONOMIE

The sun continued its course. If he did not want to let himself by caught by nightfall in his solitude, it was necessary that our wanderer not let himself be beaten down by sadness. He must, on the contrary, summon all his energy and get on his way again.

So, shaking his head, as a sign of his resolution and to chase away unwelcome ideas, he got up to resume his journey, but not before tying up two of the baskets of fruit, which still remained, in his handkerchief and attaching it to his wrist.

But he found that, without any noise having revealed her arrival or her presence, a tall, beautiful woman stood in front of him. Her face and her expression were as sweet as that of the mother of the bees, but he sensed, under the charm of her smile, a strong will and a powerful energy.

Nono stopped in awe, looking curiously at the lady.

"You are brave, my child, and that is what I like to see in little boys. But I don't want to leave you in uncertainty any longer. It is I who, having noticed you long ago, and having heard you wish for a storybook, wanted to give you the treat of living one yourself.

I started by carrying you from your parents' home, without you being aware of it. But don't worry about them. They know where I have taken you, and will be kept current about what you do, and what you see. As to what will happen, and what you will see, that will depend on you. I will acquaint you with the situation. Whether it will bring good or ill for you will depend on how you act. So it is you who, in the end, will make your adventures, and decorate them by the way you behave.

"Madame fairy, I promise to be very good, said Nono, intimidated by this long speech, from which he only understood that he must be well-behaved and obedient.

"Well-behaved! Obedient! That is indeed what is asked of the inhabitants of the world you come from. He you will be asked, first of all, to be yourself, to be frank and honest, to always say what you think, to act in conformity with your thought, and to never do your mates anything you wouldn't want them to do to you, to be towards them as you would like them to be towards you. Anything else will go without saying.

"Perhaps I speak in language that is a bit incomprehensible at your age. But when, though ignorance and not a wicked heart, you make mistakes, I will be there to help you out.

"Have no fear, then and come. I will take you to some comrades of your own age, who will teach you, better than me, to be what you must be."

And Nono saw beside him a beautiful chariot drawn by six beautiful storks.

At a signal from the lady, speechless with admiration, he took his place beside her in the chariot, and the storks, taking flight, rose up into the air. The young voyager saw the details gradually disappear as the countryside seemed to scroll past below him, the woods becoming smaller and smaller, until the green of their foliage looked like the carpet of a meadow.

After having soared for some time, the storks began to descend back to earth. First, Nono saw some hills and rivers take shape below him, then he distinguish the trees, and then a building which at first seemed to him the size of a toy, in the middle of an immense garden that he recognized by its lawns, and its baskets of flowers in various colors. In the garden strolled a crowd of people who seemed to be amusing themselves.

The storks headed toward this garden, coming to drop off the travelers at the foot of the front steps of the building Nono had glimpsed, which was a magnificent palace.

When the chariot arrived, the people whom Nono had seen in the garden, and were little boys and girls, the oldest of which was not more than twelve years old, rushed up, and when Nono's companion got out, hastened towards her with cheers of joy:

"It is Solidaria, our friend Solidaria!" they shouted. "We looked for you without being able to make out where you had gone. You left us without warning."

"There, there," said the lady, "who was struggling to satisfy this whole crowd, which was clinging to her with the hope of catching a hug, a kiss, or a kind word; "if you throw yourselves at me this way, you will knock me down.

"There is a surprise that I kept from you: Look, I went to find you a new playmate. I count on you to inform him about our way of life, and to make it pleasant enough for him that he enjoys it here.

"But, one last recommendation," she added, turning towards Nono. "Do not stray to far from your comrades. Our enemy, Monnaïus, king of Argyrocratie, sends his emissaries prowling the woods around our little domain; his janissaries seize, to lead them off as slave, the unwary who put themselves out of reach of rescue."

Then, having given one last smile of encouragement to the children, she disappeared in a cloud, which hid her from their eyes.

The children had scattered, but some remained to examine the new arrival.

"What is you name?" asked a little girl with a cunning air about her, a young person who appeared at least eight years old.

"Nono," said our hero, intimidated to see all theses eyes trained on him.

"My name is Mab, replied the imp, "and if you want to be friends, I like your face. I will show you how we play. You see, we have fun here. No masters to punish you, or to bother you all the time, trying to make you calm down. And then, I will introduce you to my friends Hans and Biquette. They are my best friend, but there are others, and you will meet them all.

“Hans, don’t you want to be friends with the newcomer?” asked the little girl.

“Yes, certainly, very much,” said the boy, who might have been about ten, as long as he is a good guy. How old are you?” He asked Nono.

“Nine!”

“Where are you from?” asked another little girl, a blond, seven years of age.

“Oh, that Sacha, how nosy she is!” said Mab.

“So ask her why she cares!” said another.

“Here, we do not care where you come from. If you are a good comrade, that is enough.

“Let’s go and play instead.”

And taking Nono by the hand:

“We will visit the garden, if you like!”

“Yes, I would like that very much.”

You forget that it is time to pick food for our supper,” said another young lady. It was the Biquette that Mab had spoken of, who was nine years old.

“Oh, yes, I had forgotten. But you will have the time to see it tomorrow. Let’s go find our baskets.”

And the band went to a lawn where there stood a tall, vigorous-looking man. His muscular arms were bare, and the energetic features of his face, framed by a silky, black beard, exuded strength and energy. But very gentle eyes improved an expression that could have been too severe.

Surrounded by the children, he passed out little baskets and little shears appropriate for their strength. They all held out their hands, shouting: Me! me, Labor!

“So my sister Liberta will have nobody to help her today? said Labor, smiling and pointing to a you woman in a long, flowing, sea-green robe, her loose hair spilling over her shoulders.

“I went this morning,” said several boys and girls.

“Oh! I want to go!” said Biquette.

“Me too, me too,” said several others, and grabbing the little buckets that the young woman held out, they followed her to a building at the end of the lawn.

Nono watched silently, staying close to Mab and Hans, who remained close to Labor.

“Take a basket,” said Hans, nudging Nono with an elbow, “Labor! A basket for the newcomer.”

“Ah! You are the one Solidaria has taken under her protection,” said Labor. Come here, young man. I see that you have already made some friends. Do you think you will like it here?”

“Yes, I think so,” said Nono, taking the basket and shears that Labor held out to him.

“I am sure you will. Go with your friends, who are waiting. They will tell you what you need to do.”

The distribution of the baskets completed, the youngsters were divided into groups, spreading through the groves that adjoined the lawn, from which they were separated by walls supporting trellises of golden fruit, and all kinds of fruit trees.

"C'mon," said Sacha, the others have gone with Liberta, to milk the cows. I like milk, but it's no fun to be behind the cows. I am always afraid will give me a kick. It is more fun to climb the trees.

"Oh!" replied Hans, "Me, I like to work in the stables. There is no danger of the cows doing you any harm. They are good creatures, and very calm, but I was there this morning, and I don't like to do the same thing twice in a row.

Some other children joined the group with Nono, Hans and Sacha.

"What are you going to pick?" asked one of them.

"I don't know. What do you like? Hans asked Nono. You see, there are grapes, peaches, pears, plums, bananas, pineapples, gooseberries, and strawberries. The only trouble is choosing."

And with a gesture, he showed Nono the vast orchard, where were gathered not only the fruits of all latitudes, but at the same time the ripened fruit of all seasons, where trees of the same species showed all degrees of maturity, from the flower in bud to succulent ripe fruit ready to be picked.

They were at that moment at the foot of a fine cherry tree, bearing lovely "geans," black and plump.

"Oh, Cherries! It is a long time since I have eaten them," said Nono, tempted by the fruit that hung above his head.

"Well, climb. I'm going to get a stepladder."

And leaning against the tree, he laced his hands together, indicating to Nono to put his foot there, and then to climb on his shoulders.

But, alas! he was still not tall enough to reach the lowest branches, and, raised in the city, he had never learned to climb a tree.

"Hold on, and watch," said one of the children, a big boy, stocky and red-headed, who had stayed with the group. "This is how you do it."

"And, hugging the tree, he climbed like a monkey, and was soon installed between two branches, from which he was not slow to make an avalanche of fruit rain down into the apron of a comrade, a young person, six years old, who was called Pépé, because of the doll that she always carried.

Nono looked enviously at the boy in the tee.

"Wait," said Hans, "I'll be back in a minute." And he rushed to a sort of shed from which he wasted no time in bringing a light ladder, which he rested against the cherry tree.

"Now you can join Sandy.

"But do you only like cherries? Have you tasted bananas, or pineapples?"

"No, I have never seen them," said Nono, already installed in the tree, his mouth full of cherries."

"Well, I will pick some for your dinner."

Mab had attached herself to some superb bunches of gooseberries, which grew in thick bushes near the cherry tree.

"Heh!" said Sandy, "It's fun to pick your own dinner."

"Yes, it is very nice," said Nono, gobbling up a handful of cherries that he had just picked, his hand more often taking the road to his mouth than to his basket. But as the branches bent under the weight of the fruit, he could amply satisfy his gluttony and still, despite that, fill his own basket, and Sandy's as well. Sandy had long since descended, being reminded that nobody had spoken of going to gather some leaves. They were needed to decorate the fruits on the table. He left his basket with Nono to go to the vines, where he chose the best-looking leaves.

As Nono linger, grazing here and there at some red currants, Mab, who had already finished her harvesting, took him by the hand, and led him toward the place where Nono had seen Labor, and where each of the children brought back his haul, which they deposited on the law, and then arranged them in a pyramid in the baskets.

Indeed, nobody had thought to provide leaves, so Sandy was cheered by everyone when he arrived with an ample supply.

When the baskets were full, and well-adorned, the children headed for the castle that Nono had just glimpsed as the chariot descended.

Toto, with Mab, Biquette and Sacha, who had obviously taken him under their protection, walked with them.

Nono was astonished that they were left to themselves. Solidaria, Liberta, Labor, except for the brief appearances when he had only caught a glimpse of them, had disappeared without more than showing they existed.

"What is amazing," responded Hans, "is that it is like this every day. We only see them when we need them. Then, there is no need to seek them. We see them beside us, as if they sensed that we needed their help.

"And when you are not good, how are you punished? Who punishes you?"

"Nobody," said Mab. Why would you want to be anything but good, when there is nobody on your back, preventing you from having fun, or forcing you to do what does not please you?"

"Yes, but who takes care of the garden and the trees, and of the cows who give the milk we drink?

"We do! It's very nice, you see, to dig, water, and sow, especially since, if it is necessary, Labor is there to help us with his troupe of little sprites, who have only to put their hands to the hardest work to get it done effortlessly.

"But you will have plenty of time to see that, since you're going to stay with us. Here we are."

V

GLUTTONY PUNISHED

The castle that the children headed towards stood on a broad, well-sanded esplanade, cut through large lawns, some of which were planted with trees.

Under these trees those not at work harvesting fruit, or milking cows, had set some large, square tables, which, this evening, in honor of the new arrival, on been arrange end to end, but were ordinary set up apart from one another, covered with fine tablecloths, bearing plates and dishes embellished with simple designs in raw tones.

Chairs indicated the place of each guest.

The newcomers lined up their fruit in bowls of the same earthenware as the plates. There was a sample of almost all the fruits, not only apples, peaches, grapes, apricots, dates, oranges, bananas, but a host of others that Nono had never seen. Pastries of all shapes, thanks to the ingenuity of Labor, arranged in pretty bowls, alternated with the fruit. Flowers, in vases of various slender forms, added the brilliance of more vivid colors to the more subdued hues of the fruit.

Other children decanted the creamy milk in pretty stoneware jugs, with elegant shapes, in warm, harmonious tones. This flattered the eye, and a discrete perfume tickled the nostrils, making mouths water among even the least gluttonous.

When all the little ones had seen that the harvest was arranged on the tables, each seated themselves according to their tastes and preferences, sitting beside the comrade who, for the moment, attracted them the most.

Nono was among those of his new friends that we would say were the closest. Across from him were Gretchen, Fritz, Lola, Wynnie, Beppo, Pat, and Stella. It seemed that every name in the world was represented there.

And not far from him, Nono could see some little black faces, and yellow faces with slanted eyes.

All laughed, chattered, as little Mab had said, without worrying about what corner of the earth they came from.

The bowls were passed around the table, each choosing from them according to their like; some taking from all, while others stuffed themselves with the sort that was, for the moment, the object of their preference. But the

distribution was managed very cordially, the most voracious knowing that there would always be enough to fully satisfy it.

"Hey! I will serve you," said Mab, picking up a cup. "What do you prefer: peaches, or grapes?"

"No," said Hans, "here are the bananas that I picked for you."

And each put their preferred fruit on Nono's plate.

"I want to taste them all," said Nono. And he began to peel a banana, Hans having shown him that he must remove the peel.

But from the first bite, he had to stop.

"Don't you like it?" asked Hans, a bit disappointed; for he expected some exclamations of pleasure.

"Yes," said Nono, "it is not bad; however, I think it prefer the grape; and he bit into the bunch that Mab had put on his plate. Mais but after eating a few, he had to admit defeat. Setting the cluster on his plate, he pushed it away slowly, regarding with say eyes the bowls of fruit, as diverse and as appetizing as they had seemed to him, before seating himself at the table, not being able to eat his fill, and that now his bulging stomach refused to take in.

"Well! What's wrong?" said Mab and Hans, his neighbors on the right and left, seeing him stop eating and push away his plate.

"I am not hungry!" he said, in a tone that could not have been sadder if he had announced the loss of half of his family.

"You are not hungry!" said Mab, "for such beautiful fruit!"

Nono shook his head.

"Are you sick?" asked Hans.

"Are you sad?" added Mab.

Biquette and Sacha had rise and now, standing around Nono, they also asked what was wrong.

Ashamed and embarrassed, Nono eventually let slip that, already stuffed with the bees' honey, and with the raspberries and strawberries given by the beetles, his appetite had led him to stuff himself still more with cherries while he picked them. His distended stomach refused to swallow anything.

"Drink a little milk," said Sacha. "That will settle your stomach. Then you can eat that fine peach."

Nono tried to swallow a few drops, but the milk would not go down either.

Casting a last covetous look at the succulent fruit that excited his regrets, the young gourmand had to be content to watch his friends eat, while they, reassured, they went back to gobbling the fruit of their preferences, promising himself to be wiser in the future, and to moderate his appetite.

He had to tell them about his adventures with the bees and beetles, the mention he made of his meal in the woods having aroused their curiosity.

When everyone was full, they began to clear the tables, taking the table cloths back to the linen room, the dishes to the kitchen, where machines invented by Labor washed and dried plates and bowls, so that they only had to be arrange in the sideboards that adorned the kitchen, situated in a building not

far from the castle, hidden by a curtain of trees, shrubs and flowers; the tables and chairs were put away in some nearby sheds.

When all was in order, the children spread throughout the garden, discussing the games they would play. Most of the girls wanted to play mom or schoolmistress, vague memories of their games before arriving in Autonomie, the young men at leap-frog, at tag; and after discussing it well, they ended by organizing themselves in groups according to their preferences.

But, little by little, some of them broke away from the groups of which they were a part, attracted by others nearby, which seemed to suit them better; some boys let themselves be attracted by the pleasures of playing with dolls; some girls, among the most impish, hitched up their petticoats, and played fearlessly at leapfrog

Gradually the groups were mixed, others came to play at blind man's bluff, at hide and seek, at pigeon-vole, and various other games.

Nono, who had started by playing tag with Hans, Mab, Biquette and Sacha, found himself in the end in a game of blind man's bluff, with around twenty other boys and girls, and already counted among them a half-dozen friends of both sexes, named Gretchen, May, Pat, Beppo, Coralie, a pretty little mulatto from Guadeloupe, and Doudou, a solid black Congolese.

Mab and Hans were part of a group occupied with resolving some riddles that each posed in his turn. Biquette and Sacha jumped rope.

Those who were tired from playing, came and sat on the lawn, where, étendus sur les marches, they watched their fellows play.

The sun had set a moment before, darkness fell slowly, but the evening was mild, the stars lit up one by one in the heavens, as little by little the roars of the players were extinguished.

Solidaria appeared on the top of the front steps:

"My children," she said, we have a surprise today. A troupe of gymnasiarchs has just offered to show us a performance of their exercises this evening. It is a question of preparing everything to receive them well. Where do you want the show to take place? In the theater or outside?

"Outside, outside," said the children, who had rushed up, and who felt the charm of that evening.

"Well, then, to work. Here is Labor who will help you."

And the children clapped their hands with enthusiasm and jumped for joy.

VI

THE END OF THE EVENING

The children rushed to the sheds where the tools and props were kept, and there, helped by Labor, and some of his little genies, they pulled poles and canvas from it, and carried them onto the esplanade.

There they raised an immense, square tent, facing the front steps, which would serve as bleachers for the spectators.

Nono was amazed to see Labor's elves rush about; with their help, the heaviest poles were raised by half a dozen of infants without more effort than a wicker stick, and the canvas which made up the tent, despite its weight, were raised and stretched without the least visible effort.

These elves were little men, counterfeit, but very beautiful to look at, dressed in red capes, as Nono had seen in the storybooks that he had read; but agile like monkeys, strong like oxen and, despite their unfriendly expression, very merry companions at heart, sometimes loving to play practical jokes. There, among others, Dick occupied himself with the raising of a pole, having already teased one of them, who was close to him, amused himself again pulling on his cape. The elf seemed to feel nothing, but managed to hook Dick's trousers to the pole, which was raised at that moment. And Dick, suspended in the air, waved his arms and legs like a spider at the end of a line. Someone hurried to free him from the perilous position. Aside from that incident, all went well, and, in a very short time, the auditorium was improvised, with trapezes, hoops, and fixed bars. It was the fairy Electricia, another companion of Labor, who was in charge of lighting the space. And she had done so magnificently. Gigantic lamps, at the top of the pylons from which they were suspended, shed a white light, slightly bluish like a moonbeam. They saw there clear as daylight.

"Okay. That's going well," said Labor, after ascertaining the strength of ropes and trapezes bars. "Our artists can come. We are ready for them."

"And here is a snack that has been prepared for the," said Solidaria, lifting the curtain-door that hid the entrance to another tent forming an elegant lounge where the artists could stay. A small space, tastefully arranged, adorned with all sorts of flowers furnished by the garden beds of Autonomie.

"Then all is in order. Let us begin to take our places," said Labor.

"Electricia can inform the artists that their room is ready," added Solidaria.

And, followed by the children, they headed for the steps, where each took the place that suited them.

When everyone was seated and the silence was established, an invisible orchestra sounded, thus setting the stage for the arrival of artists.

Its last notes had hardly chimed when the artists appeared.

There were five of them. Four of them looked like giant frogs, dressed in yellows and greens; the fifth, the smallest, was decked out like a green tree-frog.

Lining up, facing the stairs, they greeted the assembly, opening big mouths and big, stupid eyes, which made all the little ones roar with laughter.

Then they began, on the rings, then on the trapezes, a series of turns that brought to light the grace and boldness of the performers. The little tree-from who, certainly, was the clown of the troupe, repeated the same turns, overdoing them in so comic a manner, that she garnered the largest part of the applause.

And when they had made a series of contortions and hilarious antics, mad reversals, recoveries, suspensions and drops, bold or comic, the performers to lined up again, greeting the assembly, which applauded enthusiastically.

But, instantly, their frog costumes disappeared, and they appeared dressed in sky-blue singlets whose gold embroidery and sequins made them look like pretty butterflies.

And young spectators recognized five of their comrades who had secretly prepared that surprise.

The applause redoubled when they were recognized.

Impassive, they bowed, and began on the parallel bars, composed of four rows, a series of balanced turns and flips which again aroused the enthusiastic applause of the young audience, who still clapped their hands enthusiastically after the little performers had retired to the room that had been prepared for them, and the spectacle ended.

For the duration of the exercises, the music had not stopped making itself heard, but softly, mixing its rhythm to the movements of the gymnasts.

Nono opened his eyes wide as carriage gates. “Did you see,” he said to his neighbor Hans, “the little one being so silly? What is his name?”

“It is Ahmed,” said Hans, who was no less enthusiastic. “Did you see the big one, as he hung by his heels from the ladder, upside down?”

And they all exchanged their reflections, talking endlessly and enthusiastically about the moves that had struck them most.

“There, there, that’s enough,” said Amorata, another sister of Solidaria, appearing there, “Now, we have to think about going to bed; your eyes begin to get heavy with sleep, but first I bring you news of your parents, as I have promised to give you every night.”

And at a sign that she made, a band of Labor’s gnomes brought a device, behind the group of children, while a large white canvas was stretched at the bottom of the tent, the darkness came suddenly and a luminous jet shot out of the apparatus, tracing a giant circle on the white canvas.

Nono wondered what that meant, being anxious to know whether he, a newcomer, would also have news of his family?

Eyes fixed on the circle of light, he first saw a light fog that moved and divided, to gather then in points that ended by forming a distinct image, that Nono recognized immediately.

It was the room where his family took their meals. A door, ajar, opened onto another room, where the big brother was preparing for bed.

Sitting at the table, in the first room, his father read the newspaper; his sister Cendrine, close to their father, wrote her homework; his mother, at another corner of the table, mended clothing.

At a noise from the door, she raised her head, and rising, went to open it. It was the porter, who brought a letter.

The porter seemed to want to have a little chat, but the parents, who seemed animated by a strong desire to know the contents of the letter, did nothing to detain him. As soon as he left, his mother opened the letter, and read it in a loud voice. It was Solidaria who sent news of her ward.

Cendrine, who listened attentively, expressed the desire to have fine adventures like her brother. But she was told that such adventures were not made for little girls.

"How mistaken her parents were," thought Nono to himself, seeing, among his comrades, as many girls as boys.

Titi expressed the desire to find a country where they could live without being forced to go to shut himself up twelves hours a day in a workshop.

Then the image faded, the circle of light tightened and finally disappeared, and light flooded the room again.

"Hey!" said Nono, addressing Mab, "Did you see papa and mama?"

"Yes, and also my sister May, who played with Pussy, our pretty little black and white cat."

"No, I spoke of my mother and my father."

"Ah, I forgot," said Mab, laughing. "I do not know how this is done. There is only one image on the canvas, but each of us sees the ones they love, and nothing else."

"Yes, it's an odd magic lantern," said Hans. "You have seen your parents, I have seen mine, and Mab, hers. For each of us here, it is the same, without anyone seeing what the others have seen."

Nono could not believe it, but accustomed, on this day, to see more and more extraordinary things, if he had still not lost the capacity for astonishment, he was gradually getting used to the most extraordinary things.

The little population of Autonomie climbed the porch steps. Nono followed his comrades, and they found themselves under the peristyle where a large bay opened a large bay with access to a vestibule where several other doors opened, as well as various stairs leading to the upper floors.

"Come," said Hans, "our rooms are on the first floor. There is a vacancy next to mine. You will take it."

The crowd of children dispersed up the stairs. Hans, Nono, Mab, and Biquette climbed the steps of the one that was on their right.

“You see,” said Hans, entering a room and turning a knob that turned on the lights, “this is where you can stay. My room is next door. Mab’s room is across the hall. Those of Biquette are Sacha further along, but in the same corridor.”

Nono and saw that the room, quite spacious and illuminated during the day by a large window overlooking the gardens, was stylishly furnished with a small bed and fine, bright, clean linen. In a corner was a dressing table. A wardrobe and two chairs completed the furniture.

“Hey,” said Mab arriving with three or four books that she had gone to find in her room, “we forgot to go to the library; but if you want to read before you got to sleep, here are some volumes you can choose in the meantime.”

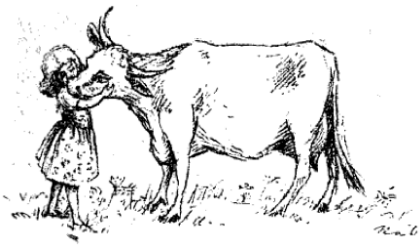
And Hans, pointing to a small jug of milk on the table near the bed, said: “Here something to drink if you're thirsty at night.”

“If the light bothers you,” said Dick, who had come in, “you have only to turn that knob.”

And, suiting the action to the word, he turned down the lights in the bedroom.

Turning the knob again, the light reappeared.

Nono, a little tired by so many emotions, thanked his friends heartily, hugged them and wished them good night; each went back to their room, and silence fell in the palace.



VII

LABOR IN AUTONOMIE

It was broad daylight, the next day, when Nono was awakened by a band of his comrades who had invaded his bedroom.

"Boo! lazybones," said Mab, mocking him. "the idler who still sleeps and the sun that dazzles him. Yoo-hoo!

"Come on! Get up," said Hans, "we came to get you to go gardening."

"No," said Mab, he promised last night to come with me and see the cows milked. I'll take him".

Nono rose briskly, put on his trousers, dressing in the blink of an eye. — the boys had turned down the blankets and sheets, fluffed the mattress and made the bed, while the little girls dusted, swept and tidied up everywhere.

When this was finished, the children led him to one of the rooms in the basement, set up as a bathroom. Two large pools took up the largest part of the room. One contained cool water, and the other lukewarm water for those sensitive to the cold. Around the room were all sorts of devices for all sorts of showers. To undress and jump into the water was the work of a moment for the whole playful band.

Then when they were dried off, they went into another large room that served as dining room where the children were having breakfast: some drinking warm milk, some chocolate, and others coffee. Biquette, who had lined up in the kitchen, came back with a full pot of hot chocolate, from which he poured a large glass for Nono.

"Here," she said, "we have prepared this for you."

"And here is a good, well-buttered pancake," said Sacha who had spent the last minute spread the butter on the very hot hotcake.

Nono thanked his friends and began to eat with gusto, while the others did the same.

When they were all fed, the group dispersed. Mab, taking Nono by the hand, led him towards the stables. But the cows had already gone out to the pasture.

Crossing the stables, Mab remarked to his companion how clean and neat they were, and how different from those they had seen in the country. Those

were always dark, dirty, and foul-smelling, the bedding looking more like manure than straw.

There was nothing like that here. There were large, spacious rooms, well lit, and paved with large stones, tightly joined and cemented together, at a slight slope to channel liquid into small channels that carried it outside.

Solid partitions, of elegantly hewn boards, separated each animal, forming a stall for it where it could move at its ease. The racks were full of hay, and a bedding of fresh straw covered the ground. A pretty marble plaque on each box gave the name of its tenant.

"You see how well our animals are treated here," remarked Mab. Here, this is the stall of my favorite; this is the one that I like to take care of." Indicating the plaque, she said: "You see, her name is Blanchette. Come now, we will find them in the field."

And exiting the barn, they opened a door to a large meadow where cows grazed and gamboled in the open air.

Some of the Autonomians were in the process of milking them.

"There is my Blanche," said Mab, running to one of the cows, which made a joyful mooing at seeing his young mistress rush up, and Mab, putting both arms around its neck, kissed it on the nose.

"See how clean she is. We are friends, the two of us. She also knows that I bring her treats."

And she drew from her pocket a handful of salt, which the beast seemed to savor with delight.

Then, grabbing a pail and stool, Mab set about milking the cow.

At the end of a minute of this exercise, she proposed to Nono to try his turn. Nono took her place, but his inexperienced fingers servant badly served his good intentions, and he was unable to extract a single drop of milk; to his great displeasure, for having seen the ease with which Mab made it pour into the pail, nothing had seemed easier to him.

However, through experiment and explanations from his friend, he managed to get a few drops. This brought transports of joy on the part of the two children, as if they had accomplished a miracle, et Nono, who had started to be discouraged, regained some enthusiasm for the task. But Mab, always restless, took his place and only stopped when the bucket was full.

Nono, who was no longer amused to be a spectator, began to pick some of the flower that covered the pasture. Having an ample harvest, and wanting to surprise his friends Mab et Sacha, who had been so thoughtful towards him, he went to sit in the shade of an enormous walnut tree, and there he began to weave, with the flowers he had picked, some pretty garlands, matching the colors in the way that seemed most harmonious.

He had finished his second garland, and was beginning a third, when, looking up, he saw Mab looking at him.

"My goodness! You've been very busy," she said. "Who are those pretty garlands for?"

“One of them is for you,” said Nono, arranging it in her hair.

“For me, this pretty garland?” said Mab, excitedly, running to admire herself in the brook which qui flowed on the edge of the field. Then, returning: “I could kiss you.” And she applied two great big kisses on his cheeks.

“This one,” said Nono, who had just finished, is for Sacha, and the other is for Biquette. And placing them around his neck, so as not to crumple them, he fetched Mab’s pail, to bring it to the dairy. Then they began looking for their two friends.

They went to the garden, and found Hans who, with some other comrades, digging up a bit of land where they were proposing to do some experiments.

They had read in a book on gardening that by grafting trees of the same species, you could make the same trunk bear different sorts of fruits, roses of different colors on the same rosebush. Desiring to learn if this was true, they wanted to make some plantings that they would graft. Nono admired the ardor with which they worked the earth, digging, furrowing, preparing the fertilizer that had been indicated to them as most suitable to the species with which they intended to experiment.

Hans did not know where to find Biquette and Sacha.

Nono and Mab went on. The found Biquette in one of the greenhouses, tending to the plants cultivated there.

At the sight of the pretty garland, she clapped her hands, jumping for joy. All her companions dropped their work to come and admire it as well, and Nono had to promise to teach them how to make some like them.

Asked where to find Sacha, Biquette assure them that they would find her in the part of the garden assigned to the culture of seeds.

Mab and Nono were quick to run there; they found Sacha, a little brush in her main, taking, with that brush, a fine yellow dust that more than one of you has doubtless noticed in flowers when they are in full bloom.

With the same brush, Sacha daubed the calyxes of different flowers with that same yellow powder.

“What are you up to?” said Mab and Nono, intrigued.

Sacha said that their teacher Botanicus had explained to them that by breeding certain plants together, they could obtain seeds different in shape and color. These are called hybrids.

And as Nono did not understand, never having opened a book of natural history, she explained to him how seeds are formed in flowers.

The yellow dust that she collected came from a little pocket called the anther, and it was collected by another part of the flower called the stigma; for most often, the two organs are in the same flower; but there are certain species where these organs or on separate stalks.

In the first case, the plant is called a hermaphrodite, in the second case, the stalks with the anthers are called male, and those that collect the powder are the females. And it is only the latter that produce the seeds.

The stigma carries the grains of yellow dust that it collects into a gland that is called the ovary, and it grows there, while the organ that has collected it also grows. This is what forms fruit, like apples and pears; the pips inside are the seeds produced by the grains of yellow powder.

In the free state it is insects that, coming to seek their food in the flowers, transport that yellow powder from one flower to another. Here, Sacha fulfilled, with her brush, the role of the insects, only instead of carrying the yellow powder, called pollen, in identical flowers, she brought it to flowers of different sorts, in order to create a new variety.

But while giving these explanations, and showing Nono, in a flower she had picked, the organs that she named, Sacha cast admiring glances at the garland that Mab wore, and the one that Nono had on his arm.

"This is for you," said Nono placing it on her head.

Sacha was no less enthusiastic than Mab and Biquette. To the friends who clocked around, Nono also promised to teach the method of their construction.

This was a real success; for eight hours, in Autonomie, no one thought of anything but making garlands. The fields, in the end, no longer furnished enough flowers, the gardens were looted a bit, and I do not know that the greenhouses would have been spared, if a new game had not provided a diversion, making the children abandon their garlands.

But with all this, lunchtime came. The tables were still set up outside on the plaza, because it was beautiful weather.

Nono, who was hungry this time, could taste not only the fruits that he liked, but a bunch of others that he did not know. And, no longer being able to eat, as if he was afraid of missing them, he stuffed in his pockets a half-dozen fruits almost like applies, whose name he did not know, but which seemed excelled, and, when they rose from the table, he ran to carry them to his room.

VIII

THE SCHOOL

Rising from the table, the children scattered on the lawn, where they organized all sorts of games. Nono, coming back down from his room, came to mingle with them. But a group of young ladies, from five to seven years old, wanted him to commence his lesson on the art of weaving flowers, and he acceded to their desire.

It is in the midst of this group that, an hour later, Hans, Mab and company came to look for him.

"We're going to school," they said to him. "Are you coming with us?"

"You'll see what fun we have," added Dick, who had joined them.

Nono, who asked nothing better than to see something new, promised his pupils to take up his lessons again on the morrow, and followed the group of students.

They entered a spacious room on the ground floor of the palace, where tables, benches and chairs were arranged; but not those big tables, long as days without bread, that clutter the whole room and that cannot be moved around. They were small, square tables that could be moved and arranged where they were wanted; for the scholars were able to gather themselves in groups.

Nono and his friends went to sit at one of those tables where they settled at their ease. Many of their comrades had already taken their places in different parts of the room.

It was Liberta who presided over the lessons, but she sought to draw questions from the children, rather than stuffing their heads full of ideas that, most of the time, they would not understand.

When everyone was seated, Liberta asked the students what they wanted to study.

"Tell us about the history of printing," cried several voices..

"No, let's do astronomy," said some others.

"Oh, no! Explain the formation of the earth to us."

"Geography is the most fun!"

"We did that yesterday" protested a few other voices.

"Well! Some problems, said a whole group of boys, ten to twelve years old.

“Anything you want,” Liberta said, smiling, “but I have to be able hear you. What shall we begin with?

“Begin with the problems if you want,” said another group, “but let’s continue with geography.”

“Yes, and then we won’t have time for astronomy”, grumbled a few malcontents.

“Nor to speak of the formation of the earth,” added others.

“Nor to tell us a nice story,” added a group of the littlest ones.

“Hey! Well, if you want,” said Liberta, “there is a means of fixing everything. If you want, we’ll dedicated the first part of our day to solving some problems, and then we will pass on to geography. And tomorrow, without fail, we will tell some stories, and then we will study the formation of the earth. As for astronomy, tonight, after dinner, it seems to me appropriate to study that under the open sky, while the stars shine.

“Yes! Yes!” shouted most of the students.

But in one corner, the group of young ones who wanted stories protested, not wanting to wait until tomorrow, wanting to leave if no one would satisfy them.

Liberta picked up a book on the table in front of her and gave it to them.

“Since you definitely want stories,” she said, “here is something to choose from. You will find the story of Gutenberg and the printing press there. You can sit in a corner, or go out in the garden, as you please, and read everything you want.”

Things thus arranged, they could begin, and silence was reestablished.

They began to study some problems. Liberta began by reading some that one of the children came to solve on the board. Then it was the students’ turn to read them, so their fellow pupils could solve them.

Nono noticed a student who always wanted to speak out of turn, shrugging his shoulders when one of those called on seemed confused, and who always wanted for find better solutions.

“Jacquot,” — that was the name of the student — “Jacquot,” said Liberta, “in your turn, give us a problem.”

Jacquot enunciated a problem where it was a question of hours, seconds, liters, and meters. It was a very complicated problem, that he was proud to have found.

It was so complicated that no one could resolve it, and the author himself, when invited to explain it, was so confused in his operations that he couldn’t untangled himself.

As he was quite vain, the other students teased him, and Liberta told him that he had better take some simpler problems and think them through, rather than take one so complicated and not understand them. Then she showed him where his problem went wrong, and why it was impossible for him to find a solution.

Jacquot, mortified, went back to his place. But he took advantage of a moment when the attention was no longer on him, to escape.

At some point, it was Nono's turn to read. And he dictated one that he recalled having done at school, where it was a question of a merchant who, having bought so many pieces of cloth, so many meters in length, for such and such a sum, asked what he would have to charge per meter to make a given profit.

"Your problem is well posed," said Solidaria, who had just appeared among the children, "but it is posed according to the selfish rules taught in the schools of a world where we only speculate with an eye to speculating on our fellows.

Here, the problem is posed differently; in your place, I would say: "Given that a man has so many pieces of cloth, that he can, from each piece, make so many garments, how many of his friends can he please, by giving one to each?"

"C'mon, my child," she added, hugging Nono, "you are perhaps still a little young to grasp the difference well, but when you are old enough to compare them, you will understand."

That ended the arithmetic lesson, and they turned, as they had agreed, to that of geography.

Liberta explained to the children what a continent was, and a cape, an island, a peninsula, an archipelago. And, by means of an apparatus similar to a magic lantern, she made a representation of what she explained to them pass before their eyes.

So that her lesson was less dry, she punctuated it with stories related to her explanations, and while she spoke, the device scrolled animated scenes of the anecdote narrated scroll across the wall.

The partisans of stories ended up deserting their corner, coming to listen to Liberta's tales.

Some others, on the contrary, that were bored or felt the need to stretch their legs, got up silently, and headed off to the gardens.

Also Liberta, knowing that he should not abuse the children's attention, even when they are interested, youth feeling the need to stir, move, and make noise, ended the session. And the children, freed, rushed to the garden, where Labor, with some who had preferred the open air, presided over the work of cultivation.

Nono was drawn to a group, near a portable forge, who worked to repair spades, pitchforks and other implements.

He saw the blue and red sparks, resembling fireworks shoot from the incandescent iron, under the blows of the hammer. And wanting to make some sparks fly himself, he began to hammer the iron, as it was explained to him how he must shape it so that his work was useable.

Evening came, but Nono, who was involved in everything, thought it was only still the middle of the day, so short had it seemed to him.

After the astronomy lesson, which took place after dinner, in an observatory set up in a tower of the castle, Amorata gave them some news of their parents, and then everyone went to bed.

But, before that, Nono's friends led him to the library, where he chose volumes whose titles and illustrations seemed to him to promise marvels.

Climbing up to his room, Nono, who had again, at dinner, stuffed some fruit from the table in his pockets, wanted to put them with those he had taken at noon; but, on opening the drawer of the cabinet where he had put them, he was not a little surprised to see in their place some horrible little goblins who grimaced at him, while those that he carried changed in his hand into equally horrible gnomes clutched at him, trying to drag him.

Nono, frightened, let out a piercing cry.

Solidaria, who was nearby, only had to make a sign to make these terrifying little apparitions disappear.

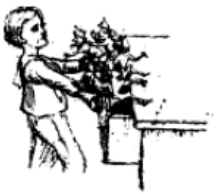
Nono was trembling all over.

"What happened to you is my fault," said Solidaria, "I should have warned you that in this country, it is not like the world that you come from. There is no need to fear ever lacking anything. This fruit that you put aside, you would never have been able to eat, since you always have, at the table, more than you need. Ce seraient des ordinaires, they would spoil for nothing.

"But here, as it is an inexcusable fault to put aside things which you cannot use yourself, when they can be used by others, to punish the greedy, they change into goblins who, if they had been more numerous, would have dragged you to the land of our enemy Monnaïus before I could have come to your aid.

For this time, you have escaped all but the fear, but don't start again."

And, having hugged Nono, she disappeared as she had come, while he, totally abashed, slipped shivering into bed, fearing to see the horrible monsters that had frightened him so much reappear.



IX

THE PROMENADE

Nono had been in Autonomie for some time, and that time seemed to have passed like a dream.

The time passed quietly; each day brought diverse labors and pleasures, which prevented the children from being bored for a single minute.

Nono now knew all his comrades by name, knew who their parents were, what they did, and what country they came from.

Most of the time, school-hours were spent in the gardens, on the lawns; but, for variety, they had long since planned a long walk in the woods that bordered the country of Autonomie. And that day had come.

On the night before, they prepared all the gear necessary for that excursion, which would be, at the same time, a lesson in natural history.

They had to carry little walking sticks, equipped with hammers, to detach bits of rocks, and little iron spades, to dig up, roots and all, the plants that they wanted to study or bring back to Autonomie... Some nets, to catch insects in flight, completed that naturalist's kit.

The supplies were packed in small bags, fit to the shoulders of the little boys who, being the strongest, were in charge of carrying the provisions of the troupe. Each had, in addition, a lunch sack, a canteen, and a cup hung at their side.

When everyone was ready, they set out, early in the morning, before the sun became too warm, and made the walk too tiring.

Initiativa, another good spirit of Autonomie, the sister of Liberta and Solidaria, led the column.

The children walked, chatter among themselves or singing ballads that Harmomia, daughter of Solidaria, had composed for them.

It was only when they had reach some less familiar paths that they began to concern themselves with finding some uncommon species to serve for the basis of the lesson when they stopped. Each went exploring along the trail, and under the bushes, taking care only to keep walking in the direction of their stopping place.

For his part, Nono discovered some splendid flowers, with the shape of a long-necked vase. He ran, breathless, to show his find to Botanicus, one of their teachers, saying:

"Look, Mr. Botanicus, at the fine flytrap I just found!" and he very carefully opened one of the flowers, which was torn, but, despite his precautions, two or three little flies, with green-gold glints, flew out.

Botunicus took the flowers, then adjusted his gold glasses on his nose, and declared:

"This is the *Aristolochia clematitis*, Birthwort, a plant of the Aristolochiaceae family, and not a common flytrap. What could make you believe that it is, is that, indeed, when that plant is is in bloom, it is designed so as to allow the entry of small insects like the ones you see imprisoned. But you see these hairs that are planted along the deck on the inside of the flower, the points of which are pointed at the bottom?

And he showed them the inside the open flower.

"Well, as long as the flower is not fertilized, the hairs that let many flies enter, prevent them from leaving. The flies, struggling, let pollen, which they have carried in from outside, fall on the stigmas of the flower. As soon as the flower is fertilized, the hairs fall and let the prisoners escape; but, first, the anthers open, releasing the pollen that they contain, and the flies carry it to other plants.

And he showed them a more mature flower, where the hairs inside had indeed fallen.

Botanicus was an original being who had only recently come to live in Autonomie. He knew all the natural history by heart; at first sight, he could tell the name, family, genus, species, habitat, and flowering time, if it was a plant; the spawning time, it was an insect. He was a real walking dictionary.

But, apart from natural history, he was phenomenally naive. Clumsy with his fingers, he was incapable of any manual labor. When he wanted to help others in the colony, it was rare that some accident did not occur. If he wanted, for example, to help set the table, one was sure to see stacks of plates broken, or a bottle or two of milk spilled on the tablecloth.

In the beginning, the children had tried to make him understand that they were faster without him, but Botanicus, who insisted on making himself useful, persisted in wanting to help whenever work presented itself; so that the Autonomiens made up their minds to simply strive to prevent the accidents when they saw them about to occur.

Before coming to Autonomie, he had a job as a professor of plant physiology in a laboratory in Paris. If he had had the smallest shred of ambition, a bit of flexibility, was able to flatter the men in power, and possessed a bit more skill at bending the truths and comparisons that came out of his lessons, he would doubtless have attained a high position, with great honors and large salaries.

But, absorbed by his favorite passion, study, he concerned himself very little with these petty concerns. He was delighted when he was able to classify a

new species, or when he came to discover some unknown aspect of insect behavior.

More than once, during his lessons, he would issue new insights he derived from his studies and apply them to social life, which, most often, went against the theories that the men of power taught.

Botanicus was far from doing this is a spirit of opposition. To tell the truth, most often he expressed his most subversive ideas without suspecting that he made a critique against the society in which he lived; but they were only the more terrible for their scientific truth. So, places, honors and fat salaries went to less leaned, whose science was made up from lessons learned rather than individual studies, but who knew how to ingeniously dress up and disguise the truths, when the happened to be found in their lessons.

And one fine day, under the pretext of cutting costs, they cut Botanicus' chair, to rid themselves of the embarrassing professor.

Botanicus entered a school where they taught official science to the little offspring of those who call themselves the "Establishment;" but, one more, he could not hold his tongue, and as he had a very indulgent, character, could not speak any harsh words, let alone punish the horrible little brats, who trembled before their previous teacher, who overburdened them with homework, bad grades, a forbidding them from leaving, were not slow to make fun of the new one, to play the most terrible tricks on him, which served as a pretext for the administration to dismiss him, and put him on the street.

Solidaria, who knew him, had brought him to Autonomie, putting at his disposition plants, insects, instruments and everything that he would need for his studies, on the single condition that he teach others what he knew. Botanicus had accepted gladly; for there was no greater pleasure for him, when he had made a discovery, than to share it with everyone.

After living some time in Autonomie, he was not slow to realize how much his faculties had been distorted by limiting himself to a single study; that is why he had tried to get used to the ordinary things in life; but, with each mistake, he understood that it was too late. So, with a big, resigned smile, he said to the children:

"I am too old to change now. You must, my children, take me as I am. But let my example be a lesson for you. Don't let your preferences prevent you from being aware, even of the things that seem least important.

Such was the man. But let us return to our walk. Just now, I see Pat who advances with a plant that he has just dug up, and that he seems to examine with great interest.

"Mr. Botanicus, look at this funny plant. I think it is a fly trap!"

"Here," said Botanicus, securing his glasses, and raising the plant to the level of his eyes, "is the *Dionaea muscipula*, a sort of plant from the droseraceae family, with radical leaves, cut on the edges with deep indentations, of which the two halves — as you can see" — and they admired the plant — "are dyed a pretty

flesh-pink and snap back suddenly, like a bear trap, on the insect which, attracted by the brilliance of that color, is imprudent enough to settle there.

"But that plant does not only take prisoners, it eats them!"

And as the children opened their questioning eyes:

"Yes, they eat them! not like you eat an apple with the mouth and teeth. But leave it for some time with that fly that it has taken, the leaf that has closed will reopen, but there will no longer be a fly. It will have digested it!"

"Mr. Botanicus! Mr. Botanicus, said Mab, rushing up. Come see a black insect, which rolls a ball ten times as big as him.

"That," said Botanicus, when he had arrived, always armed with his glasses, near the insects, "is the *Scerabeus sacer*, a beetle distinguished by a rasped front, the prothorax of which is, on the sides, lined with little raised points, marked at the elytra with six slight longitudinal grooves. The hind legs are without points on their rear edge; it has a black fringe at the head, thorax and legs. The females have red-brown hind legs. A slightly shiny black coloration finishes the characterization of the sacred scarab. The Egyptians had a great veneration for them. They made them the symbol of life.

It will bury that ball that you see it rolling; inside, an egg is deposited. When the little one is hatched, it will only have its cradle to eat, made of the most delicate part of that ball that you see ground up by that band of scarabs of all sorts, which deserve the name of dung beetles that is given to them."

Botanicus had stopped to breath, while the children examined the very busy insects.

They indeed saw them moving in the sticky mass. They could witness the construction of the ball that has so intrigued the children.

A sacred scarab gathered under its belly, the parts that it had chosen, and gave them a first shape, then began to roll the plug with its legs, finished rounding it off by gradually adding material.

"If we had the time," said Botanicus who had recovered his breath, "we could follow this insect in his work. We would see some of them who make balls the size of an apple. There are some who make them the size of a fist. Then you could admire their ingenuity in rolling them up to the place where they have resolved to bury them, and also, how, sometimes, some of their fellow creatures are found who, under the pretext of helping them, rob them of fruit of their labor, just as it happens among human beings. — But that would take too much time. We must be on our way."

And, little by little, the group spread along the paths, through the shrubs, in search of some curiosity. They stopped from time to time to rally the stragglers.

Having already walked for a few hours, the children began to feel their appetites awaken, when they came to a large clearing, carpeted with a beautiful lawn of short, thick grass. At the center rose a magnificent cedar tree, under which they set their table.

Not far away, shaded by a huge willow, welled a fresh spring, where the went to supply themselves with water to mix with the excellent beverages made with the fruits that they harvested in Autonomie.

The provisions unpacked, they did them justice, for the hikers had built up an appetite. Then, when things calmed down a bit, the happy, exuberant children overwhelmed Solidaria, Botanicus, and Initiativa with questions and requests on all sorts of things.

Botanicus, for his part, had a lot to do to respond to all, with the name of a plant, its classification, the use of some of its organs, its properties, its special features.

For the insects, when they were well examined, they were given their freedom, from which the butterflies, especially, were hardly able to profit after so much handling, their delicate wings having been subjected to too much damage to be much use to them.

It was the great recommendation of Solidaria to only take those that were absolutely necessary, and to take the greatest care in catching them, in order not to crease their wings.

Finally, when everyone was rested, they set on their way. But they had had enough botanizing, Botanicus led the little band to a quarry where he could give them some basic notions of geology.

It was a sand pit, open to the sky, where they could descend to the bottom. Botanicus noted that the land mass was made up of several beds of different colors and material, explaining to them that this differentiation of the layers was due to the various causes that combined there; that they were deposits that were brought by the waters and slowly accumulated, each layer requiring thousands and tens of thousands of years.

Then, digging in the sand, they happened to find some of those flints carved by primitive peoples to serve as instruments, tools and weapons, and of which Botanicus had already spoken to them on other excursions.

This time, he showed them how to recognize a flint that had been intentially shaped, drawing the different shapes of those that they knew.

Having unearthed a kidney-shaped flint, and arming himself with a large, round stone, he tried to give them some notion of the way in which it is supposed that our ancestors struck in order to obtain this long blades, thin and sharp on the edges, that we suppose to have been knives; these others, wide, almost quadrangular, that we designate with the name of axes. But, despite all his attempts, he only managed to obtain some specimens that we very imperfect and very misshapen compared to those that they had discovered.

But, even so, it was enough to give the children an and idea of the mechanism of operation. The imperfection of the attempts, Botanicus explained to them, came from a lack of practice. The amenities of life in the present have so spoiled us, that if we had to return to the conditions existence of prehistoric peoples, we would have to display, to make what they hade with a rudimentary brain, an enormous amount of effort and intelligence.

Further along, stood a dolmen. Botanicus led his listeners to it. He pointed out the enormous weight of the large stones of which it was made. In France he added, we have long attributed their construction to the Gauls, claiming to recognize the altars on which they made their sacrifices; but if the Gauls were able to use them for that purpose, we now know that they existed long before them.

They were the funerary monuments of an unknown population that has left its traces across Europe and Africa. Some excavations carried out inside have allowed us to find some of the pottery and contemporary instruments of the men who carved the stone.

But as it was time to go, they hastily made a light snack on the leftovers from lunch, and went merrily on their way to Autonomie, keeping in groups.

X

THE ENCOUNTER

The group was returning very slowly, without hurrying, when Nono saw a splendid death's-head hawkmoth. He immediately decided to catch it. But when he tried to seize it, the insect, with an unexpected flap of its wings, escaped from the net and came fluttering, as if to taunt him, very close to the hunter who, carried away by the heat of the chase, soon found himself led far from his friends.

Finally, stopping near a large oak, the moth seemed within range, and Nono thought the moment favorable to capture it. He calculated the distance that separated him from the insect, grasped the handle of the net and swung it... right on the nose of a stout gentleman, pot-bellied, finely dressed, with coarse features and a flat nose; an enormous gold chain dangled over his paunch. Diamonds adorned his shirt-front, a big carbuncle shone at the knot of his cravat; his fingers were covered with rings. He leaned on a golden walking stick.

"Well, sonny, pay attention. A little more and you would have flattened my nose." — Nono thought to himself that it would have been hard to make it flatter. — "You didn't intend, did you, to take me in your net? It seems a little bit small for that.

And pleased with what he took to be a fine joke, the fat man laughed in loud bursts. But his laugh sounded false, and his face was far from inspiring sympathy, when you examined it up close.

But Nono was a little bit young to be a physiognomist. And if he was frightened, it was at the sudden appearance of the fat man, and at finding himself far from his comrades, recalling the recommendations of Solidaria.

However, as he heard, at intervals, the songs and the bursts of laughter of the little troop, he realized that they could not be very far off, which reassured him a bit.

However, it did not explain very well how he had found a fat man under his net when it was a moth that he had chased.

“Pardon me, sir; I didn’t see you. I was pursuing a moth that I wanted to catch when I struck you with my net. Did I hurt you?

“No, it is nothing. You caught me on the tip of the nose,” said the fat man, rubbing it. “But how is it that you are all alone, running after moths?”

“Oh! I am not alone, Nono quickly replied, still dominated by a vague fear. My friends are playing in the woods ... You hear them!” And he listened.

“Ah! And you came to walk here, with your schoolmasters?

“We have no masters,” Nono said proudly. “They are friends! They work with us, play with us, teach us what they know, but do not force us to do what we do not know or do not want to do.”

“Oh! Little man, don’t get all up in arms,” laughed the fat man. "That's what I meant. I can see that you're from Autonomie. And does it please you to never be with anyone but children of your own age, and to always see and to the same things?

“We do not always do the same thing. We change our work and play as we wish, whenever we please.

“Yes, but that doesn’t prevent it from always being the same existence. Yu always see the same country, and the same people. Wouldn’t you like to travel, to see new countries?

“In the country where I live,” continued the fat man, “we travel all the time. We go to the sea, and we go to the mountains. So, me, I have nothing to concern myself with but going for a stroll. It is enough to have a magic wand like I have — and he indicated his walked stick — in order to have all that one desires.

“So, here you are sweating from running around after an insect that you want, but you couldn’t catch. Me, without troubling myself, I will give you this silkmoth fluttery there, above that bush you see close to you.”

And, raising his wand in the direction that he indicated, he made a sign, and the silkmoth found itself in Nono’s hand.

The child took the insect fearfully and examined it attentively. It was a female of the order Lepidoptera. It seemed to him that the insect regarded him with a pleading look, while its legs shook with a convulsive trembling.

“Hey! Here is a pin to stick it in your collection,” said the man, holding out a thin, gold pin to Nono.”

But Nono opened his fingers, letting the insect escape. It flew away, whirring.

“You were wrong to do that,” said the fat man. “That was a very rare species. You could have got a good price for it, if you did not want if for your collection. Are you hungry? Thirsty? Sit, eat and drink. The table is set.”

He again extended his wand in the direction of the big oak. Nono, gaping, saw some tables set themselves, bearing a variety of dishes filled with meats, sauces, and pastries. Flasks containing drinks of all colors chilled in silver buckets full of ice.

"No, I am not hungry," said Nono. The fat man began to interest him and seemed to him less ugly.

"You have a very nice air about you, and I like you," said the fat man. "I would love to have a son like you. Will you follow me? I will show you lots of nice things you do not know about."

"Thank you, but I do not know you. I do not want to leave my friends from Autonomie. They would be too worried if they did not see me return."

"You see that I can do anything I want. I have a way to prevent that."

"No," replied the child, his apprehensions returning. "I want to return to Solidaria.

"Do you think I'm lying? That I am not capable of showing you what I promised? Here! My pig-headed little friend, take these opera glasses. Look at the spectacles you could join in every day!"

Saying this, he propped on his belly a case that hung by a strap at his side and took out a magnificent pair of binoculars that he handed to the child.

Nono raised it to his eyes. He first distinguished a large room where a multitude of children were assembled. All sorts of sweets were passed out to them.

Then, they put on magnificent clothes; they climbed into fine carriages pulled by pretty white horses, driven by little coachmen wearing powdered wigs, high riding boots, and clothes tasseled at all the seems.

Then, they were sent in sturdier carriages, across the plain and to the sea; then into the mountains, which they climbed on mules. And then parties, everywhere. He could see that they were only concerned with enjoying themselves.

However, Nono noticed that their faces, at times, had an air of strain and boredom, like he had not known since he came to Autonomie.

The scenes changed again. He saw again a large semicircular room, lined with large gold-fringed draperies. From the floor to the ceiling, that room was divided into compartments also lined with draperies and fringes of gold. In those compartments, gentlemen in shirts of blinding whiteness and black jackets, women in low-cut dresses covered with diamonds, children lavishly dressed.

At the back of the room, on the stage, another group of people, still more lavishly dressed, appeared to him, moved, danced to the sound of a music that was sometimes sweet and mysterious, sometimes brisk and lively.

Nono, dazzled by all that movement, by the countless lights that lit the room took the binoculars from his eyes, amazed.

"Well?" questioned the tempter, insidiously.

"Oh! That is beautiful!" And he asked himself if he would not follow the man.

Then, wanting to take one last look, he put the binoculars to his eyes again. But having inadvertently turned the glasses around, he saw a horrible spectacle.

He barely had the time to distinguish some filthy, labyrinthine streets, houses like barracks, squalid dwellings, inhabited by a miserable, ragged

population, with faces marked with suffering, occupied with tasks that he had no time to distinguish, but which seemed repugnant.

He only had time for a glimpse. The binoculars were violently torn from his hands by the fat man, who said to him, in a harsh voice:

"Do not look that way. It is not your affair, and it is not worth the trouble anyway."

Nono, taken aback, stared at the man with a frightened air!

But he had recovered his smooth demeanor, and it was in an oily voice that he continued:

"I have frightened you; but it is because I have been frightened myself. That item is one of a kind. I would not trade those opera glasses for anything, and I saw that you were about to drop them.

Nono wondered if he had actually seen, or if it was not an illusion. He calmed down a little, but his first fears had returned. He recoiled from the man, and in an altered voice, he cried, "Hans! Mab!"

"What a fool you are," said the man, trying to take his hand. "Decide, and I'll take you. But hurry, because I'm in a hurry!"

They heard the voices of Hans, Dick and Mab, who called to their absent comrade.

And Nono stepped by further from the man, calling his friends.

"Where are you hiding?" said the voice of Hans, who, this time, seemed very close.

"Over here, over here," called Nono.

He saw Hans appear from a thicket, then Dick, and then Mab from a nearby path.

"How you scared us," they said, all together. "We thought you were lost. We have searched for you for an hour." And they all hugged his neck.

The fat man had disappeared.

Nono was going to tell his friends about his adventure; but as at one time he had been close to letting himself be won over and following the man, he didn't dare admit to his friend that he had been at the point of forgetting and abandoning them; a false shame restrained him. He resolved to conceal his adventure, telling only what led to the pursuit of the moth that he had lost. Explaining his emotion by the fear he had felt at finding himself alone, isolated, fearing he wouldn't be able to rejoin his friends.

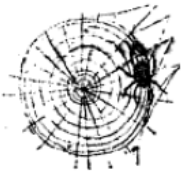
"Ah! There was no danger that we would forget you," said Hans; "we would have spent the night searching for you instead."

And as the other children called, they went towards the bulk of the column, responding to their calls.

Hans' last words were a cruel reproach for Nono who felt some ingratitude toward them, blaming himself for having wanted to leave them for the first unknown to come along.

He was more and more convinced that he should conceal his adventure, maintaining his silence in that regard.

In this he was still more wrong, for Solidaria would have warned him that the fat man was none other than Monnaïus, the eternal enemy of Solidaria and her children: that would have put him on his guard, and he would have avoided greater misfortunes thereafter. But it is rare that a first mistake does not lead to others, and that a first lack of trust is not followed by one or even several lies.



XI

THE AFTERMATH OF A FIRST MISTAKE

On returning to Autonomie, took little part in the conversation. He pondered what he had just seen.

A gamin of Paris, a child of workers for whom the greatest journey they could permit themselves was a walk in the woods of Clamart or Meudon, — it was an event when they could go as far as those of Verrières — he knew the sea only from the enthusiastic descriptions that he had found in books. Indeed, of mountains he only know the Chaumont and Montmartre heights; but in the same books, having read the descriptions, in grandiose scenes, of ascensions, he had always, since, dreamed of such voyages. So the suggestions of the fat gentleman had just stirred up his desires.

Then, without wishing to moralize, morality being too relative, changing with latitudes, climates, manners and education — something that my little readers will learn later, when, leaving the school or college where they have been taught a pile of falsities, they feel the need to rebuild their education themselves, to unclog their brains of the nonsense that they have been taught; — I repeat, without wishing to moralize, we must recognize that when we have done something that we should not have done, we are quite unsatisfied with ourselves. And that makes us sharp and very grumpy, because, instead of frankly admitted our faults, we prefer to vent our bad temper. That is what happened to Nono.

Tormented by his desires, by the reproaches of his conscience—which is not a voice put inside us by a god that we have never seen, as the priest claim, but rather an operation of our judgment which indicates to us that we have done something that is not just,—Nono remained taciturn until they arrived in Autonomie, only responding in monosyllables to the enthusiasm of his friends.

He was thus in a very charged state, when while setting the table, he bumped into one of the members of a group less chummy with his own. The stack of plates he held slipped from his hands and broke on the ground.

Although it was his fault, Nono, who had walked carelessly, the other having tried to step aside, it was too good an opportunity to vent his bad mood for Nono not to take advantage of it:

“Pay attention, animal!” he said and, furious, he threw a punch at him.

The poor child was so taken aback that he did not know what to reply, hardly expecting this outburst. Crying, he took refuge close to his usual comrades.

"Ho! The villain," said Mab, who was there with Hans, and who had witness the whole scene. "It was you who bumped into him. You were in the wrong, and you hit him."

"Well! Why did he get in my way?" said Nono, made even more furious, because he felt that the criticism was deserved."

Especially as, while throwing the punch, he had glimpsed Solidaria distancing herself from him, her eyes full of rebuke.

Labor who, in the midst of the other children, had for them a look as friendly and pleasant as was his wont, took on, on the contrary, when his eyes turned towards Nono, a hard, sour, and scowling expression, which paralyzed him.

"Well, Scowly," said Biquette, stepping in, "Will you go quickly and apologize to Riri, tell him that it was a moment of vivacity, and that it won't happen again?

"Nnnno!" said Nono, again obstinate, "No. It was his fault."

"Come on! But Riri can't come to ask forgiveness for the punch that he received?" said Hans, intervening in his turn, and seeking to turn the thing into a joke, in order to cheer up Nono, whom he saw settling more and more into his obstinacy.

"Heh," said Nono, bitterly, "I did not ask him for that. Let him remain what he is. Who asked him for anything?"

At that response, the faces of the children who surrounded Nono took on a severe expression.

They looked at him, completely astonished, understanding nothing in his attitude.

But as he deserved a lesson, they pretended to move away from him, and no longer speak to him.

However, before moving off, Mab made one last effort:

"So, it's decided! You do not want to apologize to Riri?"

Nono shook his head vigorously in denial.

"You are awful. I don't like you anymore." And she went off with the others.

Nono found himself alone, isolated at his table.

He tried to make the best of a bad situation, and attempted to taste an excellent wine grape which was in front of him, but his breathless chest refused to let pass the few bits he had bitten off. In the end, unable to hold on, some big sobs issued from his tightened throat, while a flood of bitter tears spring from his eyes. He leaned on the table, and wept freeley.

His crisis began to subside, when he felt two arms encircle his neck, when someone hugged him tightly.

And Mab, who had climbed on the back of his chair, said in his ear:

"You see what it is to be wicked."

“You make yourself miserable,” added Biquette who had jumped in his lap.

“Come on! Come find Riri; and let this be finished,” said Hans dragging him by the hand.

And half willingly, half by force, they dragged him to the table where Riri stood. The apologies made, the two children embraced, promising to be good friend in the future, and not to indulge in reckless, angry actions.

Nono took a fine top from him pocket which, turning, gave the illusion of a puppet, makings all sorts of leaps and somersaults. Riri, not wanting to be outdone in generosity, gave him a little box, the work of Labor, fitting in a pocket and containing an accordion which, between one’s fingers, became a great and beautiful instrument, on which one could make all kinds of tunes, not with the nasal sound of ordinary accordions, but as if a complete orchestra had been locked up in it; and without knowing the music. It was enough to desire the tune and press on the touches in order for it to be played immediately.

The reconciliation made, gaiety reappeared among everyone who had been saddened by the dispute, and the meal went on more gaily it had begun. Labor had never seemed so affable.

Solidaria seemed to smile at him, when Nono looked at her.

As everyone was tired, Amorata soon rose from the table, and gave them news of their families. And then they went to bed.

But, although his reconciliation with Riri had relieved him a bit, Nono was still dissatisfied at not having told the truth. He slept badly and had a nightmare.

Sometimes he was quarreling with his friends and they chased him in shame from Autonomie. Then, it was the death’s head moth which, in the guise of the fat man, came to rest on his chest, showing him a lot of beautiful things that slipped his fingers when he wanted to grasp them, and became so heavy, so very heavy, that Nono, suffocating, lost his breath, feeling himself flattened, with the sensation of no longer being anything but a sheet of paper.

And then, he was dragged into a garden full of that plant, snapdragon, commonly known as the wolf's mouth, whose flower has, indeed, some resemblance to the muzzle of a beast.

These flowers were twice as large as him, and from time to time, they would open as if they were going to swallow him. In the end, little goblins came out of them, who all had the face of the fat man. Taking his hand, they danced in a circle around Nono, seeking to lead him.

But he struggled, calling to his aid Solidaria, who rushed to deliver him, and the snapdragons disappeared, changing into nasturtiums, into monkshoods, whose flowers resemble helmets.

The goblins put on these helmets, made shields of the round leaves of the nasturtiums, and making themselves mounts of delphiniums which looked like a dolphin, they rushed at Nono, seeming to want to run him through with the long lances that they carried, assailing him from all sides, and with blows that multiplied so that Solidaria could no longer defend him.

XII

THE ABDUCTION

When Nono awakened the next day, he was shattered by fatigue and had a bad headache.

He got up, happy to escape the obsession with the nightmare, hoping that movement and the fresh morning air, and especially a good, cold shower, clear his migraine.

When he got out of the pool, his friends received him with open arms, and no allusion was made to the incident of the day before.

Everyone was outside, for it was a question of beginning a work which had occasioned long discussions in the colony.

It was a matter of a bridge to be built over a stream which crossed one of the woods near Autonomie. Some wanted to construct it opposite the road leading to the palace, the others wanted to raise it opposite a path leading behind the greenhouses.

We must add that they were not all fait in agreement about how to construct it; some wanted to do it in one way, and others in another.

The discussion had lasted since Nono had arrived at Autonomie. It was only the day before the promenade that Liberta had suggested a means of ending it.

Both opinions have their reasons for being. Both bridges could be useful in the places where they wanted to raise them. Why, instead of wasting their time in discussions, didn't the two camps listen to each other in order to each construct at the place that they desired, and according to the plan that suited them?

Once agreed on this, it would be easy to agree to mutually aid one another in the heavy work which demanded the cooperation of all.

Liberta's idea was received with enthusiasm, and it had been decided that each group would work on its project, and quite to help each other when the importance of the labors demanded it.

This was the morning that they should begin the leveling, do the first work necessitated by the installation of the caissons for the construction of the piles.

Nono worked for awhile, but his migraine not having quit, he told his friends that was going to rest for a bit, and headed towards a chestnut tree

which was found at some distance from where they worked, hoping to take a little nap there to refresh himself.

Stretched out under the chestnut tree, he reflected on his adventure of the day before, on his parents, on his dream in the night, when his attention was attracted by a movement which was produced a few steps from him.

It was the corpse of a mouse, which he had seen before lying down, which shook and moved. Nono, stretching out on his belly, raising himself on his elbows, stretching his head in that direction, and soon had the explanation for these bizarre movements.

Five insects, a little shorter than a may bug, but much less wide, black in color, dappled with tan bands, had slipped under the body of the mouse, and there, aiding themselves with their legs, pushing with their heads, sought to change the place of the body.

Nono recognized in these insects the beetle designated by the name of burying beetle [*Nicrophorus*], because of its habit of burying the cadavers of animals, on which their larvae feed.

At the place where they had lifted up the field mouse, Nono recognized that the earth had already been dug; but a large, flat rock blocked the bottom. It was the impossibility of making a dent in that rock and continuing the burrow which, no doubt, had convinced the burying beetles to move the field mouse.

They transported it in this way about thirty centimeters farther, knowing to go around the obstacles which could hinder them; then, arriving at a suitable spot, they spaced themselves around the corpse, and began to dig the ground with their strong legs, passing it behind them, forming in this way a bank which grew as the grave was deepened.

Greatly intrigued, Nono examined them, asking himself where they wanted to take it.

Little by little, he watched the body of the field mouse sink as if the earth gave way under it. After a while, it had completely disappeared from his view. Then the beetles left the pit, pushing the earth there to fill the hole they had made; at the end only a little bulge and the disturbed earth indicated the work that had just been accomplished.

The burying beetles left to seek another prey. Only one remained on the grave, washing itself, passing its legs over its elytra, over its antennae. One would have said it was very happy with itself, rubbing its hand with satisfaction.

And Nono, vaguely dozing, watching it, seeing it only as through a fog.

Then it seemed to him that the insect grew, and grew, that its belly expanded, that it took a human form.

“Well, have you thought since yesterday?”

Nono, suddenly drawn from his torpor, sat up, alarmed, on its backside.

It was the fat man from the day before who was standing before him, and spoke to him; for the shrewd Monnaïus had not abandoned this one that he already considered as his prey, and came, anew, to attempt his seductive temptations, at the risk of being discovered by Solidaria.

It is not that he had hostile feelings towards Nono, nor that Nono's abilities particularly determined his choice. Monnaïus just knew that if he let the population of Autonomie increase too much and become powerful, that population would expand, drawing closer to his States; that he could not always, no matter the number of his gendarmes and his customs officers, prevent his subjects from learning the sort of life that they led there, which would be a disagreeable example for his slaves, that force alone would no longer manage to maintain their obedience, when they learned that one could live happily, without having people who tell you what you have to do, and force you to it if necessary.

For, where Monnaïus lived, the population was divided into all sorts of classes of people, of which the three principal were: those who enjoyed all the pleasures and made nothing, those who worked and had no pleasure, and those who forced these latter to work for those who made nothing.

Whatever the number of those latter, it was very obvious that they would not succeed in making themselves obeyed for very long by those who saw themselves condemned to pass their existence by working continuously in the midst of privations, if the skill of Monnaïus and his ministers had not made up for it.

That skill had been used to make the people believe that if there were not some individuals charged with stuffing them in prison when they did not want to do a thing which did not please them, it would be impossible for them to be heard, and be free; that they would quarrel, fight among themselves, and finally die of hunger.

Then, there must also be another class who celebrated, squandered many things, so that those who are forced to produce them, have a great deal of work in order to have a little to eat.

The Argyrocratiens had taught this from father to son for thousands of years. And they had convinced themselves that it was impossible to live any other way.

Certainly, the gold want of Monnaïus had a lot of power, but that power was limited. There were some cases where it became useless in his hands.

Thus, he would not be able to prevent some notions of the life of Autonomie penetrating among his subjects. And, the histories of Argyrocratie recalled three or four terrible revolution, where the inhabitants, pushed by poverty, by a vague desire to better arrange things among themselves, had failed to rid themselves of their masters.

But those who had taken advantage of the ignorance of the crowd, and knew how to retake their place at the head of the nation, always under the pretext that there must be those who force the people to do the opposite of what they want in order for everything to go well.

Also, Monnaïus was always on a campaign to snatch the inhabitants of Autonomie, and transport them to his states.

You will say to me, perhaps, that there was a means, precisely, of introducing into his land the knowledge of the manners of Autonomie. But, as I

have told you, the power of Monnaïus was limited and, of two evils, he chose the lesser.

The Argyrocratiens were so convinced of the excellence of their way of life that, when one of the kidnapped Autonomiens recounted the life that they had led formerly, the crowd treated them as mad, as visionary and mocked them. They had never seen men live otherwise than with some obeying and the others commanding, and it was impossible that it could be otherwise.

It must also be said that, often, he found himself among the Autonomiens who found it most practical to come to terms with the way of life of the Argyrocratiens, they became flatters of those who made the others work, managed to slip in among them, and they were the first to deride those of the Autonomiens who missed and recalled the days of liberty.

Nono having happened into Monnaïus' path, having shown a weakness for letting himself be led astray, he returned to the task. But as that shrewd personage had seen that he must not hurt the child's feelings, it was in his most honeyed voice that he continued:

"You are astonished to see me here, aren't you? But Solidaria is my best friend; having come to see her today, she told me that I would find my excellent friend Labor here, and I have come to shake his hand. I recognized you in passing. She even gave me this vial for you. Your comrade Hans having told her that you have a headache. It is a liquor that she has blended, which will make your headache disappear."

Nono, unsuspecting, since the liquor was sent to him by Solidaria, swallowed the contents of the vial, and, indeed, his headache disappeared, giving way to a torpor that seemed to be the height of well-being.

But the liquor had been made by Monnaïus, and the supposed well-being which Nono enjoyed was only due to a numbing of the brain which prevented him from feeling and dimmed his reason.

Completely over his alarms, Nono began to talk with Monnaïus, as to a comrade.

"So, where you live, is it more beautiful than here?"

"Oh! More beautiful than here, that is not tout à fait the word. Mais enfin, c'est autre chose. It is worth seeing."

"How is it that Solidaria has never spoken about it to us?"

"It is, you see, that Solidaria finds nothing more lovely than Autonomie; in her opinion, there is nothing that can compete with her little kingdom; so, you understand, for her the rest does not exist."

"Ah! said Nono, who only felt, saw, and reasoned as if through a fog, and these fine things, where do they come from, if no one labors among you?"

"Heh. Well, you saw it yesterday, it is enough to have a golden wand like mine, and you have all you want."

"Good, and can everyone have these wands? If I followed you, I do not have one of them. Would I have these fine things all the same?"

“Heh! heh, said Monnaïus embarrassed, fearing that his liquor had not succeeded in completely clouding the reason of his victim, there are some few who do not have one, but they are given what they need; if they have the will and know how to get along, they can get one.”

Nono, whose reason falters more and more, did not notice how vague and ill at ease that response was. Wasn’t it that way, moreover, in Autonomie, where each worked to satisfy their needs, where they were full of consideration for one another?

“So, you, I like you, continued Monnaïus, and I want to do something for you. I’ll put you in a position to obtain one of these wands. You see that mine has, in places, buds like the branch of a tree. You detach these buds when they are big like that one there — and he showed him one. — And these buds grow and become wands in their turn. Hold on! I will remove that one, which is ripe, and give it to you.”

Saying this, he detached the bud with a very sharp knife and handed it to Nono.

That one gazed at him curiously, but with a blurry eye!

“Then, it will grow, like that, and I will have everything that I want with it?”

“Certainly, you have only to set it aside and it will soon become as large as the canne from which I have torn it.”

Nono put the precious bud in his pocket.

Monnaïus took him by the hand, saying:

“Well! It’s settled, you’ll come with me? Let’s go find Solidaria who will certainly give you permission.”

“I thought that you wanted to see Labor ? said Nono, who still retained some remnant of reasons.”

"While we talked, he left with your comrades, said Monnaïus, putting his gold wand between the field where Labor worked and the view of his victim."

Approaching a snail lolling in the grass, he touched it with his want, transforming it into a chariot lifted by two enormous bats of the species vampire; then he abruptly pushed Nono inside, got up beside him, and the bats flew away in the direction of Argyrocratie.

"Solidaria! Liberta!" Nono could not help calling, despite the somnolent state in which he found himself, feeling himself carried off.

But, however feeble, that instinctive call of her protégé had gone to strike painfully at the heart of Solidaria. Raising her eyes to the sky, she saw the char de Monnaïus.

"Quick! Quick!" she said to Électricia, we must wrest our protégé from the talons of Monnaïus; go, fly, and stop his chariot."

More rapid than thought, Électricia had taken the form of a thunderbolt which illuminated the whole sky and went to strike down in their flight the two horrible beasts which took Nono and his abductor away.

But, alas, as rapidly as it was done, the chariot had already left the limits of Autonomie, and Solidaria only had power there where she was known and respected.

Monnaïus, seeing himself close to his States, changed his chariot into a parachute which lowered him very gently to earth, while Nono clung instinctively to the rigging.

Both landed at the edge of a stream that cut the plain in two. Monnaïus had only to cross it to be in his own States.

Before they had reached the ground, Électricia, on behalf of Solidaria, had gone to find the naiad of the stream who consented to swell its waters in order to bar the route to the kidnapper.

The stream began to bubble up, to rise, overflowing its banks, expanding onto the plain, transforming it into a lake.

Without losing a moment, Monnaïus picked up half a cockleshell from the ground, threw it in the water, and, with a stroke of the wand, made it into a light bark, equipped with a triangular sail that could be easily handled.

"Quick," he said to Nono, "Let's set sail! Labor awaits us on the other side. And he indicated a man who closely resembled Labor, but a Labor with a hard, fierce, repellant and sordid look.

However, fooled by appearances, Nono leaped into the boat. Then Monnaïus callously ordered him to operate the sail, while he took the helm.

Nono, half-sobered by this change in tone, still did, however, as he was told, contemplating the face, more and more cruel, of the Labor who waited on the opposite bank. But he attributed that change in appearance to the discontent that he friend felt at seeing him leave Autonomie without letting him known, and promised himself to appease him by telling him everything that had happened.

They were close to reaching the shore, when the bark struck against an obstacle, breaking it in two, sinking it. But Monnaïus had quickly gained the shore.

That obstacle was Solidaria who had just provoked it, hoping, taking advantage of the shipwreck, to again take hold of her protégé.

And, in fact, swimming vigorously, she neared Nono, whom the naiad kept above the water. She was going to grasp him, when Monnaïus extended his wand, and Nono, attracted as by a powerful magnet, slid in the direction of the wand, escaping from the grasp of Solidaria who could not land in the States of Monnaïus.

One of the virtues of Monnaïus' wand, was to exert an attraction on the materials of which it was formed. Monnaïus, you will recall, had detached a bud from it which he had given to Nono, and which Nono had put in his pocket. And the wand of Monnaïus, exerting its irresistible attraction, had dragged the bud and its possessor.

Nono, sobered by the forced bath that he had just taken, enduring the attraction for which he could not account, saw the distressed face of Solidaria, who held out her arms to him, but darkening, slowly fading, in the mists of the restless lake.

He remained the prisoner of Monnaïus.

XIII

THE ENCHANTED ACCORDION

When he reached the shore, Nono, completely soaked, had to undress and spread his clothes in the sun to dry them.

Monnaïus, Solidaria, and Labor had all disappeared. He found himself alone in the middle of a great desolate plain. It was impossible for him to realize where to find Autonomie. Now that the numbness caused by the potion had dissipated, and his reason returned to him, he understood that he was a victim of Monnaïus, and his prisoner, since Solidaria could not reach him.

He knew that, from now on, alone, it would be impossible for him to return. He would only find the road to it when he had succeeded in uniting his efforts with those of others.

And that teaching of Solidaria, came back to his mind while he was drying out, bitterly regretting letting himself be carried off.

As far as he could see, it was rocks, pierced by some sparse heather. Here and there, some poor fields broke the uniformity of the plain.

Nono, once he felt his clothes were dry, dressed. Hunger began to claw at him. But it was no longer as it was in Autonomie, where he had only to extend his hand to gather some succulent fruit. Around him only the spiny gorse and broom rose up above the heather.

Nono began to march towards the side of the plain where he seemed to see, far, far all, some habitations.

The fields he passed near to were surrounded by hedges formed of thorny shrubs; moreover, nothing there to glean, the wheat only beginning to grow. The buds on the hedges were just beginning to open. This seemed to announce the beginning of spring.

Nono finally arrived at a road planted with some trees, whose foliage began to leaf out. But, had they been any more advanced, they would not have been of any more use to the hungry boy, who recognized some elms, some sycamores, some plane trees, some acacias, but no fruit trees.

Approaching the houses, he saw some trees in bloom, cherry trees, it seemed to him. Except, had they had fruit, in order to approach them he would have to climb some walls or hedges. But the walls were crowned with very sharp

shards of glass, the hedges bristled with thorns which removed any desire to try to climb them.

He so continued on his road to the houses, hoping to find something there to eat and drink.

When he arrived, a little girl was on the doorstep. Thinking that it was as in Autonomie, he approached to hug her and ask for something to eat, but the kid fled, shrieking like a guinea fowl.

And what a difference from Mab, Sacha, Biquette, and the other children of Autonomie! Dirty, badly combed, her face all smudged, her petticoat in rags, she reminded Nono of his little neighbors, when he was home with his parents.

So he continued on his way towards another cottage that he saw a bit farther along. But when he wanted to approach it, a dog darted towards him, barking furiously. Nono only just had time to get away.

He advanced towards a third, and addressing himself to a little boy he saw in the doorway, he asked for something to eat.

"Mama," said the child, turning to a young woman who washed linens in a small tub, in the middle of the room, "it's a little boy who says he's hungry."

"A beggar, again," said the woman, without coming out, "If we wanted to give to all, there would be no end to it. Tell him we can do nothing for him."

With a heavy heart, Nono went to sit on a big rock, his legs refusing to carry him farther, he started to bitterly contemplate the adventures which had happened to him, recalling the words of Solidaria, when she had introduced him to Autonomie:

"I will acquaint you with the situation. Whether it will bring good or ill for you will depend on how you act. So it is you who, in the end, will make your adventures, and decorate them by the way you behave."

And, in fact, if he had been more confident, and wiser, he would not have let himself be taken from Autonomie, nor drawn to such an unattractive country.

"Truly," he said to himself, "I have not taken the good road."

Fumbling mechanically in his pocket, his hand bumped into something square. It was the box that Riri had given him. Wanting to be sure that the water had not damaged, in penetrating there, his magical instrument, he took out the accordion and pressed on the keys. Immediately, the accordion grew, playing a lively waltz.

The boy from the house, who had followed him from afar, stood amazed to hear coming out of such a little box, music making as much noise as that of Monnaïus' soldiers when, by chance, they came through this little lost village.

Other children in the village, attracted by the music, had run, coming out of the houses, arriving from the road; it was like a brood of little rabbits. In it there were all sizes and all colors. They had soon made a semi-circle before Nono and his music. Nono, satisfied to see his instrument in a good state, stopped playing it and pretended to put it back in its box. The children would ask him to play them another tune.

But the musician eyed avidly a big slice of bread that one of the children held in their hand.

The first boy that he had approached, recalling Nono's question, said to him:

"Keep playing the music, and I will have the slice of bread."

"Isn't it true, Zidore", he said, turning to the proprietor of the slice of bread, "that you will give the bread to the boy if he will still play music for us?"

The boy scratched his head, but ended up handing his bread to Nono, who began to bite into it greedily.

And, working the accordion anew, he regaled his listeners with a new tune, taking the time to devour his bread.

When he judge that he had given them enough music for their bread, he wanted to rise, taking his box, for he saw that the sun was approaching the horizon.

But the children again demanded a tune. And he started his music again, saying that, to please them, he would play a bit more, but it was time that he was on his way again.

And when the tune was played, he put the box back in his pocket, in order to leave.

But that was not the count of his listeners, who asked him to play music again.

"No, really, I can't, for I must be on my," said Nono.

And as the children insisted.

"The night will come, and I do not know where I am. No, I cannot remain any longer. I must leave.

The face began to become aggressive.

"Heh! Go then, nasty!" said one of the boys.

"He acts like he thinks he's clever, with his music!" said another.

"If I wanted one, my papa would buy me a prettier one," added a little girl in rags.

And, picking up some little stones, they were going to do harm to Nono, when, happily for him, a woman come out of one of the houses, chased off the urchins, seizing one by the ear.

"What are you up to now, tyke!" she said.

"It wasn't me, mama," screamed the little rascal. It was the others who wanted to the boy to keep playing them music."

The woman let go of her imp's ear, and approached Nono, asking him who he was, where he came from, and where he was going.

Nono told her of his adventures, his life in Autonomie, his encounter with the fat gentleman, his abduction, his shipwreck, and his abandonment in this unknown country.

But the poor countrywoman had never hear of Autonomie. For her, the fat gentleman must be some Bohemian who kidnapped children to make little beggars of them.

“Alas, my poor child,” she said with pity, “I do not know the beautiful country of which you tell me. I have never heard of such things except in fairytales, and, if you truly come from such a magnificent country, I certainly pity you, for here it is very different from what you have told me.

We must work much to earn little. The country is poor, you have no chance of finding someone who will want to take you in. Your work will not pay for your food.

The best thing you can do, is to go to Monnaïa, the capital where our king Monnaïus lives. There they employ children of all ages, as servants, or in the factories. There, you would have some chance of earning a living.

“Wait for me. I will be back.”

And heading to her cottage, she returned with a big chunk of bread, a little cheese, and a cup of milk which she made the poor exile drink.

“Put this bread and cheese in your pocket,” continued the woman, “it will help you to continue on your way. You have only to follow this road, until you arrive at a much larger road, you will turn to the left and follow that new road for awhile. You will certainly meet some passersby to indicate when you need to change.”

Nono felt inclined to cry when he saw confirmed his fears of being transported to Argyrocratie, but blinking back his tears, he thanked the good woman and asked her if he would have to walk far in order to reach Monnaïa. He was quite distressed when she told him that he would only arrive there after long days of walking.

With a very heavy heart, he bid goodbye to the woman and started again on his way to Monnaïa.

XIV

ON THE ROAD

Nono had already been several days on the road, having lived on a few crusts of bread due to the pity that his youth aroused in some sympathetic countrywoman.

We walked since the morning, having eaten only a piece of bread that he had been given in the home of a peasant who, moved to pity at the sight of his young age, had allowed him to pass the night on the hay in his barn.

He was hungry, he was very tired and it was already almost dark when he reached a farm not far from the road that he followed.

At his approach, two dogs that were tied up, barked at him, making every effort to jump on him. Nono, fearful, not daring to advance, stood undecided at the door he didn't dare open.

A servant, busy packing manure in the yard, came toward him and asked him what he wanted.

The young traveler explained to him he was going to Monnaïa and asked if someone was willing to give him of a piece of bread for alms, and give him shelter for the night.

"Hem!" said the man, "the master is not giving, and I doubt very much if he will receive you. Wait there, all the same, and I will go ask him."

Nono, who, since he had been in Argyrocratie, had learned more than once, to the great disapproval of his appetite, that they did not give anything for nothing in the country of Monnaïus, added:

"Tell him that if he has children I will make music in the evening to amuse them."

And he took the accordion from its box and began to play at double time.

Since he had been walking, earned him a few spoonfuls of soup, a place in the barn. But it was only in isolated farms, in small villages far from any communication, where distractions are rare. In the towns of some importance, his music had little success, and he was forced, most often, to go to bed hungry, in some alcove, in the corner of a doorway.

"Good, I will tell the master," said the man, who disappeared.

"Enter," he said on returning, calming the dogs. And he led the traveler into a large, dark room, smoke-filled, furnished only with a large table in the middle; one bread-box in a corner, a longer sideboard, from the ceiling hung some slabs of bacon, some hams, some onions, some garlic and some nuts in the shell.

Some dried vines shown in a large fireplace at the back of the room. Near the fire, under the mantle of the fireplace, was an old man of at least eighty years. It was the father of the farmer.

Not far from the fireplace, the farmer smoked his pipe. His son, a fellow of around thirty, was occupied with repairing a wicker basket.

The farmer's wife, in some bowls line up in front of her, cut some bread for the soup which boiled in a cooking pot hung from a rack in the hearth. The daughter-in-law mended the family's linen.

Two children, — those of the son, — a little boy and a little girl, amused themselves by making some constructions with hemp stems.

"It is you," said the farmer in a big, gruff voice, "who wants somewhere to sleep?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Nono, a bit intimidated.

"And where is the music that you have promised to play us? I do not see it."

Nono took his box from his pocket, and drew out his accordion, which he played.

As a result, the children would abandon their hemp stems to come listen to that marvelous instrument.

The grown-ups, who should not have great distractions in that farm, which was somewhat isolated, seemed to take as much pleasure as the little one.

A big maid, who had just milked the cows, and returned with a pail full of milk, exclaimed:

"Matin! How good it is! It's like the musicians from home, when with their violin and cornet-a-piston, they make the young dance."

But the farmer, who came to dip the soup, shouted:

"To the table, children! After supper you will have time to listen to music."

A place, close to the hearth, was designated for Nono, and they handed him a bowl of soup, which he had to eat on his knees, while the inhabitants of the farm took their places around the table.

Nono, having finished his soup, held his bowl, embarrassed, not knowing where to put it, eyeing an appetizing dishful of cabbages and lard that the farmer drew from the cook pot, hoping that someone would offer him a little bit of it.

But when the farmer had made the round of the table, the plate was empty, and Nono, letting out a big sigh, understood that there was nothing more to hope for from the generosity of his hopes.

However, the daughter-in-law, seeing him follow with his eyes each morsel that they put in their mouths, came and brought him a bit of bread, and a cup of sour cider.

When the farmer was satisfied, he closed his knife, and everyone rose. The table was cleared, the dishes washed in the water that they had warmed in the cook pot from which they took the soup, lard and cabbages. The domestics went to the stables to make sure that the animals livestock had all they needed. Then, one by one, the returned to sit by the hearth, without saying anything, eyes lost in the dark.

The children demanding music, Nono regaled them with it.

Then the farmer, who seemed to be rendered a bit more amiable by digestion, questioned him, asking him, “Where do you come from? Where are you going?”

Nono had on more than one occasion remarked that in Argyrocratie they were absolutely keen to know who people were before coming to their aid.

So this was a new occasion for him to recount his adventures.

But the old farmer, who had not raised his eyebrows when Nono had told him the story of the talking birds, the bees transforming into pretty ladies, or the beetles coming to offer him strawberries, started into a fit of mad laughter which shook his belly, when the narrator came to his sojourn in Autonomie where each worked as they wished, rested when they pleased, where the fruits belonged to all, where everyone could take as much as they wanted in the harvest, where they were always full of consideration for each other.

The farmer laughed so heartily that he nearly choked himself, which caused a bout of coughing. When the fit was calmed a bit:

“Have you every heard of a country like that?” he said to his son.

“Of course not!”

“Heh, heh, wouldn’t that be fine, if there was no one to order around!”

“And if we had to wait for the neighbors to come to help us work, surely we would wait a very long time,” replied the son.

“While there would not lack a crowd for the harvest, if it must be that it was at the disposal of who wanted to do it.

“My opinion,” said the son, “is that all of this does not seem to me very honest. But the lad is much to young to know how to lie and make up stories. His brain must be a little cracked; then he says what come to him, without knowing.”

Nono sensed vaguely that if the farmer have been hard pressed to find hands to help cultivate his fields, it is precisely because he claimed to keep all the profit for himself. But, too young to sort out his own ideas and find the right expressions to reply, he remained silent, mortified that they might think him a little mad.

“Then, you say like that,” continued the farmer, “that there was no money in Autonomie, that each took what he wanted? But how to pay the archers to defend you from robbers?

"I have never seen archers, nor heard of robbers."

"You didn't have soldiers, no sentinels for the crops, nor archers on guard? You're telling us stories. You would battle constantly to have the best fruit."

"That never happened while I was there. — I only fought one time. It was not for fruit, but because I was in a bad mood. But I was so unhappy, that I promised not to do it again."

"And didn't it bother you to work? Go on, admit it: without the fear of Solidaria and Labor, you would well have rested more than once, instead of going to work with the others?

"Oh! no, I would, on the contrary, be very bored, if I had to stay and do nothing.

The farmer shook his head in disbelief, remarking how improbable it all was, children happy to work, unhappy to quarrel.

"If both of yours," he continued, "regretted having fought sometimes, that would not happen to them so often; as much more if there are only some pairs of slaps, if not to put them in agreement, at least to keep them quiet."

"It is a fact that if we were not there, they would both fight like two shrikes," said the son, "looking with a satisfied air t the two little ones who listened, opening eyes wide as carriage doors, while the mother drew them against her, hugging them.

"Me, too," said Nono, "at my parents' house, I was always fighting with my sister. That only stopped in Autonomie, no one had a desire to fight."

"All that, my boy," said the farmer, "they are crazy ideas. If no one was forced to work, everyone would want to rest. There must be reasonable people the make peace among those who are not reasonable. When you have lived here, among the people of Argyrocratie, when you are old enough to grasp things, you will understand that it can't be otherwise.

"It was otherwise in Autonomie," sighed Nono.

"Yet, our master," said one of the servants, "if we trust to our elders, who have it from their elders, who themselves have it from their own, it appears that the earth has not always belonged to the lords; there was an era when it belonged to all, that they divided its products. In these times, the people were not forced to labor for rapacious master. They could eat their fill.

"Nonsense, the rambling of the old," retorted the farmer. "Have you heard of that, father?" he said, raising his voice, turning to the old man who, beneath the hearth, remained always silent.

And as the old man shook his head in a sign of denial:

"At all times, there have been proprietors and farmers who have taken care of the land, making a living for those they employed. If it had been as you say, if the people had been so ingenious, they would remain as they were. All that, is the gossip of idlers, who want to live by doing nothing."

"Ah! me, I do not now," said the servant. "I repeat what I have heard."

"So you repeat foolishness. It has always been as it is, and it will always be like this."

“Go on,” he said, turning to Nono, “play us one more tune before we go to bed, that will be worth more than recounting balderdash.

Nono complied. Then everyone made preparations to go to bed. The servant took the musician to the barn, where he slept himself, and gave him a place in the fresh straw that was scattered in a corner, next to the bin of oats.

Nono, done in by fatigue, fell asleep immediately, dreaming of Autonomie.

XV

THE ARRIVAL AT MONNAÏA

When he awoke the next day, although a bit recovered from his fatigue, he still had worn-out limbs, and would have willingly stayed in the fresh straw. But he knew that to prolong his vagabondage on the roads, was to prolong the misery and fatigue. He was in a hurry to reach Monnaïa, to which he knew now he was very close, and where he hoped to find work.

So he left the stable and found himself in the courtyard. The men had left for the fields. Only the son's young wife remained, busy distributing some grain to the hens, ducks, geese, and turkeys who clucked around her, hurrying from all sides.

Nono wished her a good day.

"Ah! It is you, little one. You're on your way?"

She ran to the house, came back with two well-buttered slices of bread:

"Take them. The road is still long. Good luck, my little lad."

And once more, our poor friend found himself on the high road, very sad and lonely. But in the end he reconciled himself to his bad luck, and it was with a firm step that he set out again.

He had walked for several hours already, when be began to feel hungry. He went to take shelter under a big oak which stood not far from the road, and settled down to devour his two slices of bread. But, at the first mouthful, he felt thirst take him; he looked around him to see if he could see some stream to quench his thirst, and was not slow to hear the gurgling of a spring which fell from a steep rock, at the edge of the road, into a little basin that the water, in falling, had ended up carving in the stone.

When he had staunched his thirst a bit, he went to go back under his oak, when, a few steps from the fountain, he saw a mole, covered with blood, making every effort to reach its hole.

Moved with pity, seeing the sad situation of the poor beast, Nono took it and went to wash its wound at the fountain, ridding it of the blood and mud which covered its fur, which was so soft and so silky.

Very uncertain what to put on the wound, he chewed some bread crumbs, then stuck it on, with a small strip of cloth he tore from his handkerchief, and then carried it close to its hole, which it dove down as nimbly as it could.

A bit rested, having finished he second slice of bread, Nono set out again.

But, whatever haste he made, it was impossible for him to reach Monnaïa that day. The night caught him in open country, far from any village, or any farm where he could ask for shelter; he resolved to shelter under a hayrick which he saw in one of the fields which bordered the road.

Someone must have already slept there, for some sheaves had been displaces, leaving a void which allowed him to shelter himself from the chill of the night. Nono slipped into this improvised hiding place, and slept, exhausted, his belly empty, the two slices of bread from the morning having gone just as far as he.

The night was particularly cold. When Nono awoke in the morning, he was numb; hunger tore at his stomach. He tried to calm it by chewing some grains of wheat which he plucked from the stalks pulled from sheaves close to him. He put a few of them in his pocket to outwit his hunger on the road, and set out again towards the capital, the neighborhood of which he was not slow to recognize, travelers becoming less rare on the road.

The coaches also became more numerous. He saw them, loaded with goods, headed there, while others returned empty or loaded with furniture, machines, fabrics, with all sort of things which heralded an important traffic and a well developed industry.

The houses were more frequent along the road. Beginning to show themselves here and there, they finished by sticking to one another, only stopping a hundred meters from the walls of Monnaïa.

Arriving there, Nono found himself on a high plateau from which he could discover all the space in front of him.

Below, on an immense plain, the capital of Argyrocratie spread its houses, its suburbs; stood the domes of its palaces, the towers with which they were flanked, the bell towers, the needles, the shafts of its churches. It was a jumble of walls, roofs, skylights and windows which the eye had difficulty identifying.

Nono stopped to contemplate that city which frightened him in advance, not knowing to what unknown fait he would find him delivered. He remained thus some time absorbed in that contemplation. He cast a last look of regret behind him, on the road channeled, his thought going to Autonomie, to his friends, to his parents whom he would perhaps never see again, and started to descend toward the road which would lead him to the gates of the city.

A few moments later he was at the head of the drawbridge which gave access to the city surrounded by a crenellated wall, flanked by towers, square or round, those topped by pepper pot roofs.

Atop those towers floated the banner of Monnaïus, a large yellow flag strewn with red marks in the form of tears; at the center of which was embroidered in black, wings outspread, a bat, of the vampire species, like those which had spirited Nono away from Autonomie.

The wall was itself separated from the plain by a large moat full of water. The drawbridge on which Nono stepped onto was commanded by a large square toward, serving as a post for the men at arms who guarded the gate. A heavy iron portcullis, raised at that moment, was ready to be lowered in case of surprise.

Passing over the bridge, Nono saw a long line of carts loaded with food, and all kinds of materials, which were parked. A peasant woman who walked, to baskets in his arms, was accosted by two beings dressed in green. They had a human body, but that body was topped by the head of a weasel.[1]

If the truth be told, did that being have the head of a weasel? Did it have a human head? That is what Nono would have been very embarrassed to decide. It was one or the other, depending on the way he looked at it.

They searched in the baskets, which contained chickens, rabbits, and vegetables. After turning everything upside down, the two beings wrote something in a carnet, detaching half the page, giving it to the peasant woman who gave them a few bits of change that he had pulled from his handkerchief, and passed on.

After her, it was a traveler who arrived, suitcase in hand. The two beings with the faces of weasels made him open it, scattering its contents on the ground, mixing clean and dirty linen, then they made a mark on his suitcase, and passed to another.

Other beings, dressed the same, always with double physiognomy, visited the carts, letting them enter only after having verified the contents and collected some money from those who drove them.

Nono, who had no parcels, passed without them saying anything to him, put he was inspected from head to foot, to insure that he hid nothing under his clothes.

Some soldiers mounted guard duty at intervals. Those who awaited their turn to mount guard were before the door of the guardhouse, smoking, laughing, gambling. There were several sorts of them.

Among those who mounted the guard, some were armed with long pikes. A saber suspended from a baldric hung at their side. An iron cuirass protected their chests, a helmet topped with a plume shadowed their head. That must be the old troops, they had gray whiskers.

But, curiously, like those who searched the passersby, as Nono noticed it again, on all the types he encountered in the city, these soldiers had a double physiognomy: human and animal. At certain moments, when he looked at them,

[1] A bit of symbolism, and *fouine* means “stone marten,” “weasel” and “snoop.”

their faces made him think of the muzzle of the tiger that, occasionally, Nono had seen at the Botanical Gardens.

Some others, younger, were armed with crossbows, covered only with a tabard of buffalo, hoods of their heads, with a falcon's plume on the side. Their double physiognomy was less cruel. They reminded Nono of the bulldogs that he had, more than once, seen in the butcher's cart.

There were many other varieties, but he hurried to enter into the interior of the city, and it was with a deliberate step that he set out on the wide road that led him there.

XVI

A PROMENADE IN MONNAÏA

From afar, the city had seemed magnificent; but, now, to right, to left, he saw narrow, shadowy alleys, lined with wobbly shacks, oozing poverty and filth, which contrasted with the road he followed, beautiful, wide and planted with trees.

However, advancing, these miserable alleys gave way little by little to some wider streets, more airy, built with more proper houses. And finally he arrived at a way much wider still, which extended until it was lost to view. It was planted with several ranks of trees on each side. From place to place, he encountered roundabouts decorated with great basins, from the center of which rose magnificent jets of water. Around these basins baskets of flowers in various colors rested the vision, breaking its uniformity.

Some magnificent coaches, in which basked some fair ladies and fine gentlemen, paraded, driven by coachmen in dazzling livery, drawn by superb horses that stamped and held their heads up proudly.

If Nono had not, in crossing the country, seen so much misery, he would have believed in he realization of the promises of the fat gentleman. But he had paid to know what this fine spectacle hid.

Despite the rich costumes of fine gentlemen, despite the frills ladies, despite that at first view some seemed very pretty, the rapid vision that he had had of this resembled a bit the pigs that he had seen in the manure in the stables of his wet nurse.

Nono went down one of the paths admiring what went on around him. There, under the trees, seated on chairs, some fat women, chubby-cheeked, hair tied up in wide ribbons, enveloped in great coats, had around her some little children, richly dressed, playing with luxurious toys.

Several of these women bore in their arms babies too young to walk or play with the others, and at times, gave them to suck. Our stroller recognized that he had there, before him, the children of some of the personages who were in the coaches. The women who watched them, were only maids or wet nurses. He seemed to find in their features a vague resemblance with Mab's Blanchette, but they appeared much less gentle, for example.

In the cabins that rose in the midst of the thickets, they sold playthings, cakes and sweets of every sort. Nono, who had forgotten his hunger, immersed in what he saw, felt it awaken at the sight of the cakes. But he had learned that in Argyrocratie he had to have money to obtain something, and he had none.

He thought of his accordion and went and stood close to a group of children, ran through his liveliest bits. But no one paid attention to his bland music; he had to sadly return it to his pocket, and content himself with picking up a cookie that one of the little children had thrown away after biting into it.

Setting out again, he saw some other children who wanted to join in the games of the well dressed little children; but as their clothes were somewhat ruined, the others repulsed them contemptuously, while their maids let out some moos, scandalized to see that some little raggedy ones had the cheek to want to join with the flock that they guarded. And a soldier who strolled, dressed in black, with some red embroidery, a great sword at his side, coming and going, in the paths, raced to the little ragamuffins, threatening to take them to prison if they would not skedaddle from there.

Farther on Nono saw a woman in rags, dragging two kids behind her, a third of young age, in her arms, seemed to implore the pity of the fine gentlemen and lovely ladies who passed without looking at them, nor paying attention to their lamentations.

However, a beautiful lady, young, stopped to put something in her hand. But one of the soldiers in a black tunic, with a face looking like a man, a greyhound and a weasel, came to take the poor woman by the arm, saying to her brutally:

"I caught you, this time, begging. Come on, follow me to the provost-marshal and, from there, to prison."

And despite the cries of her little ones, despite their *baas* — looking at them, Nono saw a vague resemblance to the moutons that he had seen lea to the abattoir — he dragged them off.

Nono continued on his way.

He came to a large square, the center of which stood a monument the purpose of which it was impossible for him to account for. And he could not approach it, protected as it was by an enclosure of posts, connected between them by chains.

At the end of that square, he noticed a crenellated castle, surmounted by a great keep at the summit of which floated the standard of Argyrocratie. Nono understood that this was the royal palace. It was jam-packed with soldiers with the face of tigers, but more richly dressed, more formidably armed than those who guarded the city.

From that castle, protected by a large moat fitted with fences, it was forbidden from approach. Some sentries made the strollers move along.

Above the door an escutcheon sculpted in stone reproduced the coat of arms of Monnaïus, with his motto: "Argent prime Droit."

Nono turned to the left, and found himself in a street that went on narrowing. It did not take long to enter a quarter with narrow streets, blackened and decrepit houses, inhabited by a very miserable population.

Fatigue and hunger forced him to sit on a post.

There, as he let himself give way to despair, and, mechanically, fingered his pockets in the hope of finding some lost crust, he felt the golden branch that Monnaïus had given him to convince him to follow him, which he had totally forgotten.

He took it out and examined it, but, contrary to the promise of Monnaïus, the branch had not grown. It remained as he had received it, only rendered a bit shinier by the rubbing of his pocket.

But perhaps it still had the properties of a larger one?

And Nono wished for some gargantuan meals to satisfy his hunger, soft beds to rest his aching limbs, enchanted chariots to bring him home to his parents, to Autonomie, to take him from the country of sorrow and misery.

But he remained on the post, still as hard, without the least crust of bread to put in his mouth. Monnaïus had deceived him on all points, and, in his anger, he was at the point of throwing away his branch.

But raising his eyes he saw a little goldsmith's shop where objects of gold and silver hung on display. Since, in this country, they seemed to attach such a price to these metals, Nono thought that he could perhaps get some money for his bit of gold; he headed towards the goldsmith's shop.

He was at his workbench. He was a little old man, with a nose bent like the beak of a bird of prey; we has in the process of mending an earring. He raised his eyes to the visitor, but, judging well by his appearance that he did not present himself as a buyer, it was in a very gruff voice that he asked him what he wanted.

Nono presented him his golden branch, asking if he wanted to buy.

The goldsmith looked at it with a suspicious air, enquiring where he had got it.

Nono explained in what circumstances Monnaïus had given it to him. And, hoping to get a better price, he took care to emphasize that it was from the wand of that monarch that it had been detached, and to detail to him the marvelous properties that, according to his promise, should attach to it.

But the goldsmith assumed a scornful expression, weighing the branch in hi hand. He explained to Nono that some Argyrocratiens did indeed possess these marvelous want; but, but in order for these wands to posses the precious property of reproducing themselves, it was necessary that enslaved genies be attached to them. Without the genies, were worth no more than as gold, and had no other property than being able to be exchanged for other objects. If Nono wanted to leave him his branch, he would give him two big pieces of silve for it, and yet, he would gain nothing above that; it was only in pity for his youth; — that was false, he earned ten times the two pieces of silver; — but Nono, who had

no notion of the value, took the two pieces of silver with, and ran to the bakery to buy bread.

An old woman who sold apples passing, he bought some, and, a bit comforted, he thought that he should set out in search of a bed for a night.

So he trotted through the streets, seeking the sign of a hotel, when some cries attracted his attention. It was a little boy, five or six years old, who had rolled on the pavement, a carriage approached him at a gallop. The mother, paralyzed by the sight of the danger that raced toward her child, raised her arms to heaven, screaming with fright, without being able to take a step to aid him.

Nono, with a bound, was on him and had the time to snatch him, both rolling in the stream, but safe and sound, for the carriage had passed without reaching them.

When the picked themselves up, the mother was on them, overwhelming them with caresses, laughing and crying at the same time.

As the young rescuer had got dirty in the stream, the mother took him home. She lived in a little house, opposite, where they patched the clothes of the neighborhood.

The father, anxious, seeing them all upset, inquired what had happened.

Mother, still in tears, recounted the accident and presented the savior of their child.

The father thanked Nono summarily, then began to scold the child, calling him insufferable, being a bad imp, accusing him of not knowing how to keep quiet and always moving about, of knowing what to come up with to annoy his parents. And, finally, he sent him to sit in a corner with a pair of slaps as he broke away.

The mother made Nono undress to wash his clothes. While they dried, Nono had to recite, one more time, the tale of his misfortunes, and explain how it happened that he found himself in the streets of Monnaïa, in seek of a bed and a job.

The inhabitants of the shop went into extasies over the marvelous stories s he told of Autonomie, making him give a thousand explanations of the most intimate details.

The tailor told him that, sometimes, from transient workers, he had already heard of it; but that, to this day, it seemed so fabulous to him that he could see there only some stories good at best to distract the imagination.

And while he spoke, Nono examined him, him and his wife, finding again that sheep's physiognomy that he had already remarked among the ragamuffins led to the station.

Finally, having conferred, the man and woman proposed to Nono to stay with them. He would have food and shelter provided. He would help the tailor, who would teach him his trade. If he was diligent at the work, then they would give him a little pay.

Nono accepted with pleasure. He was worn out. The tailor saved a worker.

XVII

THE EDUCATION OF NONO CONTINUES

Nono was awakened early the next day by the tailor, to put him to work. Having him sit beside him at his workbench, he taught him to cross his legs to take up less space. Then he gave him two pieces of cloth to sew together, showing him how he must hold his piece, how he must stick and pull the needle.

To vary the wok, he sent him, during the day, to carry some clothes that he had just finished to the homes of the clients.

When night came, Nono did not stop for a minute, except to eat, which he did very quickly, before returning to work.

He was exhauster.

And the meals?

Farewell to the good fruits, the fine conversation of Autonomie. At night, a poor soup, made of vegetables parsimoniously measured, with a dollop of grease in it, a few slices of brown bread and that was all. At midday, some potatoes, to which were added a little bit of bacon or meat of inferior quality on feast days.

It was not that the tailor and his wife were bad people, it was that usual fare that Nono shared. Nor were they greedy, desirous of hoarding moeny. Foodstuffs were expensive in Monnaïa, the rents oppressive, and labor poorly paid. They had to wear themselves out with work and remain hungry in order to be able to make ends meet.

This was the existence of all those who were forced to work for others.

And yet, explained the tailor, he found himself relatively happy, his business allowing his to do business directly with the clientele.

But those who were forced to work in the factories — and he showed him some big, windowless buildings, lit only by a window placed in the roof, and dominated by some large chimneys, which were always smoking — those there, there trouble was even worse. Shut in all day, watched over by stewards, always spurred by fear of the owner, they must always produce, produce constantly, without raising their head for a minute, without being able to speak among themselves, for at the least infraction of the rules, a deduction from their wages was imposed on them.

These factories belonged to the individuals that Nono had seen pass in fine coaches. They were never seen at the factories. It was some kinds of stewards, chosen from among the workers, who were paid a bit more, who looked after their interests, and oversaw the work.

Nono, who would later have occasion to encounter one of these stewards, found their physiognomy part human, part wolf, and part sheepdog.

Those who did not possess factories were owners of fields, woods, and meadows in the country that they gave other to stewards to cultivate, who made the peasants work them. When those peasants had harvested, the owner's stewards came and took the better part of the crop, leaving them hardly enough to not die of hunger.

Others owned houses. — The one to whom belong that in which the tailor lived, owned by himself more than one hundred in Monnaïa. — And those who had no house were forced to pay what was asked of them to have the right to inhabit a little corner.

Others had no factories, fields or houses, but they bought some to sell to others, and levied a profit on each transaction. In the end they became enormously wealthy as well.

And Nono nodded, wondering if the enslaved genies who made the power of the gold wands, were not those who worked in the factory, in the fields, paying tithes for food, clothing, entertainment, and housing.

You may say that these are very deep reasoning for a little fellow of nine years. But Nono was beginning to have seen quite a lot of things, and experience matures even faster than years.

The days passed thus, talking and working.

Nono also became acquainted with the city, by going to take the work to the customers' homes, or seek goods from the suppliers.

Sometimes also, on Sundays, when the work is not too pressing, the tailor went out to walk his child, and Nono accompanied him. They took some walks in the finer districts, admiring the wealth piled up in stores.

And, over time, the young apprentice was making progress at his new trade, making himself useful to the household, and their everyday fare was improving gradually. One day when the tailor had been able to put aside a gold piece, he gave a coin to Nono. It seemed to him a great act of generosity that he had done, although the piece given to Nono was only a twentieth part of what he was saving him.

He was not a bad man, as we already know. But working Nono, it seemed natural to take advantage of him. Was that not the way it was done in Argyrocratie?

If labor continued to abound, he could take another apprentice, then some workers, and profiting from both, he would be enriched too, and would only have to choose between buying a house and choosing a factory. And when these thoughts tormented him, it seemed to Nono that the ovine part of his face gave way to that of a vulture.

In the course of one of these conversations, Nono explained to him the observation he had made during his arrival in Monnaïa: the double and triple physiognomies that had observed among its inhabitants.

The tailor explained that these diverse physiognomies began to appear when the individuals made the choice of a trade or employment. The children, for example, all looked alike.

For those who were soldiers, Monnaïus chose then from among the children of workers and peasants. Once dressed in uniforms, their faces began to resemble that of bulldogs.

Those who could not acquire that physiognomy were sent away, into unknown countries, from which they rarely returned. Others were soon to die, unable to get through the crisis that transformed their faces.

That was the first molting. They then easily took on the tiger's features that they would keep their whole life.

However, in the army, there were those who never completely took on that physiognomy. They took that of the weasel, the greyhound, the basset hound. So that made them employees in the police, *exempts*. There was a sort of exempts that did not wear a uniform, who had for mission to mix with the population in the streets, the workers in the workshop, in the cabaret, and to relate all that they heard to the ministers of Monnaïus. Those took on features part basset, part ferret; like the polecat, they gave off a pungent odor that they managed to hide only by means of precautions. But they had a great habit of distinguishing faces.

Moreover, all these differences in physiognomy ended up becoming imperceptible to the eye; habit made them elusive to the inhabitants of the country. There were very few of them who could even discern them. Nono, himself, when he had lived a bit longer in the country, could no longer recognize them.

Among the masters, these particularities made themselves felt a bit earlier, and it was always some ferocious animal that they ended up resembling: wolf, eagle, vulture, panther, serpent, etc.

Those who took on the features of wolves, tigers, and panthers became officers in the army of Monnaïus. Those whose appearance became that of vultures, hyenas, jackals, were appointed advisers to Parliament. They were responsible for ridding Monnaïus of his enemies, or those who did not comply with his orders; sending to prison those whom age and infirmity prevented from working, and whose presence on the roads would have jeopardized the tranquility of those who did nothing. There were those who took on the features of peacocks, or of turkeys; they adorned the court of Monnaïus.

Those that he had seen with the appearance of pigs were those who, devoting themselves to no task, were content to drink, eat, sleep and stroll.

There were many other varieties, but their number was so great that it was impossible for Nono to remember them all; these were the principal ones.

XVIII

NEW MISFORTUNES

Time passed, and Nono gradually became accustomed to his new way of life, always working so hard, deprived of all satisfactions, while wealth, joy and pleasures were an eternal provocation to those who had for themselves only work and misery.

The only good moments for our hero were those when a group of friends the tailor came to spend the evening with them. Among them, there were two or three with whom he sympathized more, and strangely enough, although Monnaïens, Nono did not find in their faces the sheepish features that so characterized his boss and the majority of Argyrocratiens.

When he told them the joys of Autonomie, the sweetness of Labor, and the thoughtfulness of Solidaria, all listened rapt, but more or less incredulous, or saying that that was good for Autonomy, but that that kind of life would be impossible for the Argyrocratiens, that the rich were necessary to make the poor work—work is what the rich Argyrocratiens did not trouble themselves to do—then the laws, men at arms, and prisons for those who so much as made a face.

Others went further.

"If there weren't exempts or archers on watch, someone would kill you in the street, to steal the little bit of money that you have!"

And Nono thought that these poor devils never had four red cents in their pockets.

Alone, the two or three that Nono had noticed protested, asking why it would not be possible to live like the Autonomiens, while they actually consented to work fourteen hours a day, for a pittance.

"Because we are forced to it," replied the others.

"You know well that there are some who are born tired," responded once the wit of the group.

And all burst out laughing.

Sometimes, Nono tried to answer, but most often, before the ignorance and stupidity of these people who thought to resolve a question by a witticism, he

was silent, judging useless the better reasons. He saved himself for his three favorites; then, there, there were conversations, discussions with no end, especially on days off.

Little by little, these discussions spread in the neighborhood. Inhabitants from other quarters came to hear the lovely stories of the country of Autonomie.

And all thought it was lovely, all would have liked to live in a country like that; but there were few of them who said: "We could live like this if we wanted." If one were to suggest all, almost all would agree to find them slightly "knock-knock," a monnaïenne phrase to express that a man does not have all his mental faculties.

However, these conversations at the home of the tailor were not without repercussions in the city. Sometimes they were the subject of discussions at the exit from the workshops, at the cabaret. This came to the ears of the provost-marshall, and one fine day—a dreadful morning, rather—the home of the tailor was invaded by the exempts of the provost-marshall,. Everything was upset, turned upside down.

The exempts seized some letters that the tailor had received from relatives who lived in the provinces, where he was given some news of the family, the cow and the pig. The leader of the exempts shook his head gravely while reading them, and assured that this must mean something, saying to the tailor he left him at liberty only thanks to the good reports he had received on his behalf.

Then, in the course of hs search, having found a half-dozen issues of the *Official Gazette* of Argyrocratie, he attached them to the dossier, shaking his head again, and determined that things had become serious, very serious! Then, when they had thoroughly ransacked the furniture of the poor tailor, the exempts withdrew, taking Nono, who was accused of desiring to disturb public order with stories of the nature to excite the people against each other, and tailor was warned that they left him free, but he should keep himself at the disposal of justice.

Covered with chains, Nono was led to the prison of the provost, locked up in a dungeon lit by a skylight that let light enter, but prevented him from seeing outside.

The prisoner, once alone, let himself fall on a large stone placed in a corner of his cell and began to seriously reflect on the events that happened to him in the manner of an avalanche of tiles. The thought of his parents, of his brothers and sisters, came more vividly at that moment, and bitter tears came to burn his eyes at the thought that he would perhaps never see them again.

During the day, a jailer brought him a pitcher of water and some dark bread, bitter and half moldy. Nono gripped by anxiety, feeling no hunger, did not touch it, however.

When night came, he threw himself on a pile of straw that had been thrown into a corner, and ended up going to sleep there very late, not without having cried again at he memory of all those he loved, and his stay in Autonomy, which he had lost by his own fault.

His sleep was troubled by horrible nightmares, which woke him, all trembling and soaked with sweat.

Sometimes, he was dragged before some horrible beasts, dressed in long black and red robes, wearing square hats. They opened their threatening maws, pretending to throw him in to devour him.

Sometimes, it was King Monnaïus who, in the guise of a Necrophorus came to dig the earth beneath him, as to bury him alive, or, in the guise of vampire bat from his coat of arms, came to suck his blood. Nono, paralyzed by an unknown force, felt the life slowly drain his veins, unable to offer any resistance.

He awoke the next day all stiff and aching.

In the course of the day, two armed guards with halberds came to take him from his cell, led him through many corridors, made him climb an incalculable number of stairs, and finally brought him into a large room where, around a table, were seated two persons. Nono, still believed in his dream, recognized in them his beasts of the night.

The one who appeared to be master had the head of a jackal. He exhaled a repulsive odor. The prisoner understood that he was before one of the councilors of the Parliament, appointed to conduct the investigation of his case.

The other had in front of him some paper, ink, and pens. He guessed he was the clerk. His face resembled that of those insects called dung beetles, whose name defines their sort of life.

They made the prisoner sit before the man with the jackal's head. And that one, with a pedantic voice, asked his first and last names.

"Since you have arrested me, you should know who I am," said Nono with candor.

"In your own interest, I urge you to be respectful of justice. Do you know why you have been arrested?"

"I wait for you to inform me of it."

"Don't pretend ignorance, you know well enough that you have urged disobedience of the laws, disrespect for our august monarch, and preached rebellion against our sacred institutions."

Nono asked himself for a moment is he was not a horrible criminal. He remained silent.

"You see, you don't dare respond. Go on, my child, make a good move, confess, and it will be taken into account," said the jackal in a hypocritical tone.

"Your august sovereign is a scoundrel who horribly misled me in order to spirit me away from Autonomie," Nono replied with conviction. His nerves were irritated by the falsetto voice of the jackal. "And I've always wanted to leave your filthy country to return to my dear Solidaria. "

The jackal raised to paws to the heavens.

"Guards!" he shouted, "Secure this criminal, and take him back to his cell. His case is clear now."

Some long days passed without Nono seeing anyone. Just once a person in a red robe, with a small bib under the chin, came to visit him, under the pretext of talking to him about what would happen to him after he died.

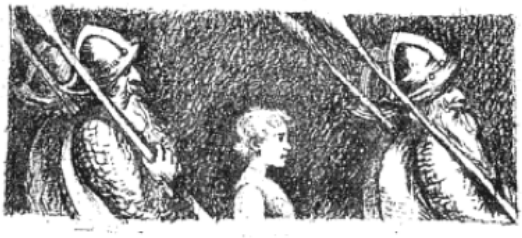
Nono, who suffered from isolation, immobility, incarceration, and was much more concerned with would happen to him in his lifetime, begged him to leave him alone. The features of that person, moreover, inspired antipathy, because in that face, there was a bit of the character of the riders in the coaches, but also of the palmetto bug and cockroach.

Each day his jailer brought him his bread and his pitcher of water, without saying a word. Nono thought he would go mad, so terrible was that isolation and silence. He regretted having shown the black man the door.

What were his father and mother doing? Did they know where he was? And his friends in Autonomie? What did they think of him? And his friend the tailor, had he been troubled because of him? Perhaps he had also been arrested, his family in poverty? All these questions remain unanswered, and kept coming back ask themselves in his tormented mind.

To chase them from his brain, the prisoner walked back and forth in his cell, counting the paving stones, but that did not prevent is thoughts from coming back to him in a mass.

Then soon exhausted by that exercise, he went to sit on his rock, head between his hand, always posing to himself the same questions. But impatience quickly brought him to his feet, to begin his caged-bear walk again.



XIX

THE JUDGMENT

Days and days passed yet. Then one morning four pikemen came to find him, made him cross an underground corridor, climbing stairs, through corridors and finally enterig a large room full of people.

Other soldiers with pikes, like those who had brought him, were spread in the four corners of the room.

The prisoner was ushered into a sort of compartment set up on one side of the room, in front of him, another compartment where twelve notables Monnaïens stood, presenting all sorts of types: peacock, hawk, vulture.

At the back, on a platform, a kind of counter, with a sort of rostrum on the right of the counter near the menagerie where the notable Monnaïens were confined.

At the back of the platform, well behind the counter, other Monnaïens belonging to the aristocracy. Varieties of types was so numerous that one moment, Nono thought of the Botanical Gardens.

The first half of the room was stocked with a variety of Monnaïens dressed in black robes; they resembled some magpies or parrots.

At the back of the room, separated by a balustrade, some Monnaïens belonging to poor classes. There, the dominant resemblance was to the sheep, the ox and the ass.

At another sort of rostrum close to Nono, stood another being of the species that he had seen with the jackal who had conducted his interrogation.

When Nono was placed in his corner, a being with the features of a crow, fulfilling the function of bailiff, shrieked with a rattling voice: The Court!

And immediately, on the platform, appeared three four gentlemen, three of whom were dressed in black robes, the fourth in a red robe, wearing square hats, with wide gold braids.

The one dressed in red, who resembled a vulture, took his place at the small rostrum near the notables. The three in black, one of whom resembled a sparrowhawk, another a **falcon**, and the third a buzzard, went to sit behind what Nono had taken for a counter.

The being with the features of a dung beetle who was found in the tribune close to the accused, rose with a handful of papers in its hand, and began to read what was written there. It was the bill of indictment against Nono.

Then, when that was done, the one who was in the middle of the proceeded to the interrogation of the accused, threatening him with severe punishment if he showed himself as disrespectful as he had at the preliminary hearing.

Nono was dumbfounded. How was he being disrespectful, when he had only responded according to what he thought?

After the reporting of his civil state, the president asked him:

"Do you admit having spoken to several Argyrocratiens about a country called Autonomie, where, according to you, the fruits of the earth would be common to all, where there would be no laws, no marshals, no knights on watch, and where everyone would be free to act as he wishes?"

"Certainly, since that is where I was when I was abducted by that lying Monnaïus to take me in his dirty country where I have only had bad luck and misery."

"Worthy gentlemen, you hear with what cynicism the accused confesses his crime," the red man yelped, smacking his beak. "And, moreover, he is guilty of the crime of lèse-majesté."

"Do you admit," continued the chief examiner, "having incited your audience excited to revolt by enlisting them to agree to do without masters who give them a living, laws that protect them?"

"I do not know if their masters provide them a living or whether their laws protect them, but what I do know is that we did not have all that in Autonomie and we were much happier. I have indeed said it, because it was the truth."

The red man continued to smack his lips, which stretched into a raptor's beak.

"That's fine, you can sit down," said the President. "By your own confession, your crime is flagrant, and we could stop there; but as we represent justice, we do not want any doubts to remain in the minds of worthy gentlemen, and we're going to hear some witnesses who will give evidence of what they have heard."

The first called was one of Nono's three favorites, who showed courage, trying to defend him, pleading Nono's good faith, which merely told what he had seen. And after all, it was not so criminal sigh after a better life. Sometimes existence was hard for the workers of Argyrocratie.

Then the red man rose, addressing the worthies:

"You see, gentlemen, the harmful influence of the speech of the malefactor you have to judge. You see how it was time to stop his seditious intrigues, which threaten to pervert the good sense of our people, so quiet until now. He has dared to repeat such blasphemies even in the sacred shrine of justice. I demand a severe sentence against the witness who, in order to save the accused, is not afraid to break his oath by altering the truth. Moreover, some notes provided to

me by the Provost Marshal show this man to be a very dangerous and bold propagator of lies that threaten to disturb our admirable social order.

Nono's friend was immediately condemned to five years in prison.

The tailor was called next. Questioned on the circumstances where he had collected Nono, he told how he had known him.

"Did not the accused hold, in your home, some subversive sentiments, contrary to good public order and respect for our institutions?" asked the examiner. In this regard, I would point out how guilty you have been towards the august majesty of our sublime sovereign, by tolerating such notions in your home, and receiving this snake who thought only of creating disorder. Also, in your own interest, I urge you to be honest and say all that you know against the wretch who awaits the punishment he deserves. Your duty as a good citizen and a good patriot was to immediately warn the Provost Marshal.

The tailor seemed to hesitate a moment, and his gaze fell, despite himself, on Nono, but he quickly looked away, and it was in a hesitant voice that he declared that, in gratitude to Nono for saving his child he had taken him in; even that he had nothing to complain about regarding his work. That, indeed, the accused had often told tall tales about Autonomie but that, deceived by his innocent look, he did not believe at first in the criminality of his intentions. He asked forgiveness from the court, promising to be more discerning in the future.

And he stepped down without daring to look at Nono.

Those who were called next were several of those who had attended the conversations, and it under the fear of sharing the fate of the accused, they testified as the examiner dictated to them.

When the testimony of the witnesses was closed, the red man rose and took the floor.

He spoke at length about the magnificent order that presided over the destinies of the people subject to Monnaïus; he spoke of the charity of those whom fortune had showered with its gifts; of their concern for the poor, their ingenuity at providing work for those whose only resource was their arms.

He praised the just laws that sheltered property from the depredations of those animated by the evil instincts of greed, sloth and envy; extolled the virtues of patience and selflessness in the workers, their sobriety, thrift and their devotion to their sovereign and to their different masters.

Then he then spoke against those immoral vagabonds who want to disturb the good order of things, those wretches without hearth or home, coming from who knows where, who would revel in all the orgies without producing anything; who, not feeling the courage to work or save, dream only of seizing the property of those who, by dint of patience, work, order and economy—or having inherited them from their ancestors—manage to make a place among those rewarded by good fortune and work.

Then, finally, addressing what concerned Nono, he showed that this enchanting picture of so-called country of Autonomie was only a violent satire against the eminently just, sound institutions of Argyrocratie, and had only one

goal, to convince workers that they could do without masters—an enormous absurdity that refuted itself—against which they could not be too severe—in that it tended to make workers believe that they were deprived of the fruit of their labor, thus inciting them against those who gave them a living and without whom there would only be misery and barbarism.

Then he ended by showing that the accused, instead of trying to earn the indulgence of the court, had instead pushed cynicism to its very height, by speaking disrespectful words against the august monarch. He sat down again, demanding the death penalty against the accused.

One of the persons dressed in black, with a parrot's head and seated at a table in front of Nono, rose in his turn.

He also proclaimed the greatness of the country of Argyrocratie, the austerity and the justice of its laws, the legitimacy of the goods of those who possesed them, the patience and the strength of the working classes who contributed so much to the general prosperity.

In truth, Nono's stories, through their excessive boldness, could become a threat against the established order by troubling some weak minds. But, his client seemed not to have grasped the full significance of what he said. "I do not believe him fully responsible," he said. "In addition, I pray the gentlemen of the Court, and the worthy gentlemen, to take pity on his age. I beg your indulgence."

And he sat down in the midst of cheers from the room, which had also energetically applauded the speech of the red man.

The worthies withdrew to deliberate. A moment later, they returned bearing a verdict of guilty, mitigated by extenuating circumstances.

The three men at the counter consulted one another. Nono was sentenced to forced labor in perpetuity.

Dismayed, he was brought back to his cell, where he succumbed to despondency. He sat down on the stone and remained pinned there by anguish. Burning tears flowed from his eyes. Night came without him noticing.

At the end, despair gripped him so tightly that he resolved to die. Jumping up, he wanted to break his head against the wall. But a ray of moonlight that shone through the window struck him in the face and stopped him its tracks. On this ray he saw sliding a young woman with a radiant face, wrapped in a soft light that brought out the green of her dress.

"I am Hope," she said, "and I have been sent to you by Solidaria, who cannot venture into the States of Monnaïus, so long as the inhabitants do not desire it with all their hearts.

But she told him not to lose courage. His friends from Autonomie thought about him, and about the means of setting him free. Three of them had already left for Argyrocratie in the hope of being useful.

So courage and hope!

And having kissed his forehead, she gently closed his eyes, singing him to sleep with her caressing voice, laying him on his bed of straw. Then, clinging to

the ray of light that had brought her there, she disappeared, leaving a vague brightness in the dungeon.

XX

THE DEPARTURE OF THE CONSPIRATORS

Let's leave our unhappy prisoner to the starry dreams that the fairy Hope had blown him in his sleep, and return a bit to Autonomie, to see what has become of our other characters, and how they accepted the loss of their comrade.

At the same time that Solidaria was warned by the cry of distress from the kidnapped child, Labor was surround by his whole crew. He had been warned by the beetle that Nono had delivered from the titmouse .

He had witness his interview the day before with Monnaïus, had realized the danger to the child, and was stationed not far from him to warn him. But an enemy giving chase, he had to flee and hide to escape the pursuit; it was going to Autonomy that he had witnessed the kidnapping, and he raced to warn Labor.

The fury of the children was great against Monnaïus. They would certainly have torn him to piece,s if they had fallen into the hands. But Monnaïus was now behind the wall of a castle, sheltered from their anger.

Nono's lack of trust was generally blamed, but as he was the first victim and in distress, recriminations were set aside in order to decide what could be done to pull him from the clutches of the king of Argyrocratie.

Solidaria, who had returned from her useless pursuit, presided over the discussion, which began by being tumultuous, each bringing their own plan, volunteering their most spontaneous ideas; the most postive not always being the most practical.

Hans, Mab, Biquette, Sacha and Riri were inconsolable. Hans especially, hopping up and down with impatience, and spoke of nothing less that marching en masse on Argyrocratie.

But it was not difficult to show him that the colony was too weak to tackle the formidable forces of the Argyrocratiens, as long as someone had not gathered some intelligence among them.

In desperation, Hans proposed to go alone to Argyrocratie, to search for Nono, and then, once he had found him, they would see what could be done to return him to Autonomie.

Solidaria agreed that there would be some chance of success. If she was powerless in the land of Monnaïus, she could however, in an indirect way, help the efforts of those who had confidence in her. His only fear was that Hans might fail in his enterprise, be discovered by the agents of Monnaïus, and they would have to deplore the loss of two members of the colony, instead of one.

But Hans declared that the colony owed it to itself to work for the deliverance of one of its members. Whatever happened, he was resolved to sacrifice everything to come to the aid of his friend.

Mab added that she herself had decided to accompany Hans in his enterprise, two wills being more effective than. So there was nothing to do but to look for ways to facilitate the task of the two bold volunteers.

After an exhausting discussion in which a variety of projects were proposed and rejected, they arrived at this decision. Hans and Mab would disguise themselves as traveling musicians. There were many who roamed the villages of Argyrocratie, earning their living by playing their instruments.

Hans and Mab would be more likely to go unnoticed, to slip among the common people among whom Nono must have been abandoned, and more opportunities to learn about his fate.

Hans was fitted with a clarinet, Mab and a tambourine. In case Nono was held captive somewhere, Labor gave them a small file that they could easily hide, but which was able to saw the strongest chains, and the thickest bars. Electricia also gave them a talisman allowing them to communicate with Autonomie, to send and receive news. Solidaria breathed their strength into them. But knowing how strong gold is among the Argyrocratiens, she handed them a purse that could provide them with all the money they would need without it ever being exhausted.

Now that everything was decided, it was time to act. To detect spies Monnaïus, if there were in the area, it was decided that the two volunteers would only leave when everything was ready, under the pretext of a botanical expedition. They would meet up with Solidaria, at a point on the border that she designated. There, she was responsible for smuggling them into Argyrocratie without their having any fear of being discovered.

On the appointed day, Hans and Mab awakened early. Equipped with everything the foresight of their friends could think of providing them with, without loading them up too much, they said their goodbyes to everyone and descended the steps of the palace.

But at the moment they were leaving the esplanade, a jolly little pig, all pink, raced with all the speed of his little legs, waving his corkscrew tail, uttering little grunts that seemed to be reproaches.

This little piggy was the favorite of the group that Nono was part of; he himself had a great partiality towards it, having taught it to dance and do some turns.

Mab kissed its pretty pink snout, saying:

"We had forgotten you, my poor Penmoch. We were going to leave without saying goodbye."

Penmoch kept shaking his corkscrew and grunting.

Hans patted him, saying:

"There, there, that's good. You're a fine pig think about your friends, but we must go. We are in a hurry. And the travelers resumed their journey after a last caress. Penmoch fell into step behind them.

"But you're in our way; we can not take you," Hans repeated, when he saw him trotting behind them. And he wanted to send him back.

Penmoch protested by grunting more loudly, and continued to follow the two emigrants.

"But we cannot take it with us," said Hans.

Mab reflected.

"But what has he got," she said, suddenly stooping, and she pulled out a small package that hung from his neck.

She opened it, and it was a small apron and a little tasseled tricorne that Nono put on him when he made him do tricks.

"I think he knows where we're going," she said seriously. "Let's take him. He could be useful."

And the pig seeing himself accepted, gamboled joyously beside them.

After leaving the gardens of Autonomie, Hans, Mab and Penmoch advanced into the woods where a few days before they had traveled so merrily, and where Nono had his unfortunate encounter with Monnaïus.

When they had gone a part of the way, feeling tired, they stopped in a clearing, sat in the shade of a mulberry tree, drew some provisions from their wallet, and sat down to have lunch with appetite. On the way they had stocked up on acorns for Penmoch.

To complete his lunch, chestnuts were abundant on the ground.

While they ate, they chatted; and of what would they speak, if not of what concerned them the most: their dear Nono and the means of finding him.

In the branches of the mulberry tree, a colony of silkworms, which they had not seen, listened carefully.

This colony was the offspring of the moth which Nono had made fly: a female ready to deliver. To her little one, whom she would never see, she passed the instinct to weave a cocoon, and she shared her gratitude towards her deliverer, with the charge of acquitting it for her.

So, when they understood that it was a question of the one whom they were charged with thanking, they took counsel to think what they could do to help with his rescue. They soon discovered it, and began work immediately.

Hans, who was lying on his back waiting to set out again, eyes lost in the air, staring at, without seeing, the leaves of the mulberry tree that covered him with its shadow, thinking of his friend, when suddenly, from one of the branches, he saw a slender thread descend, and after this thread, sliding, one behind the other, endless silkworms, which he recognized by their white bodies and their ringed shapes. And, slightly puzzled, he watched them descend to earth, form a column, and head towards him.

Not knowing what that meant, he turned on his belly, pointing out the worms to Mab, who moved closer to him.

When they were close, one of the worms separated from the others, came almost under the noses of two observers, and there, raising up half of his body, he made them hear this:

"Don't worry. We are friends. We have a debt of gratitude to pay to the one you want to free from the hands of Monnaïus."

With our strongest and lightest silk, we have woven a sphere that you only have to unfold, so it inflates itself and takes you into the air, bringing you here.

And at a sign from him, twelve big worms brought a piece of rolled silk, about as big as a cigar.

But she was so fine, so very fine, that Hans, at the invitation of the worm, having unrolled it, it was like a big tent. But as it began to inflate, at the direction of the worm, he hurried to roll it up again and put it in his pocket.

Hans thanked the silk worms for their gift, promising to inform their friend of their assistance, if he was fortunate enough to rejoin him.

And separating, the worms climbed back up their mulberry tree. Hans, Mab and Penmoch set out again.

It was not until the evening that they approached the border. On each peak of each hill stood strong crenellated castles defending the entry to Argyrocratie. On the road posts with soldiers watched those who passed. They could not consider entering there.

But Solidaria knew a cave carved into one of the steep mountains that separated Autonomie from Argyrocratie. It was in this cave, which was reached by a barely marked path in the woods, that she had made their appointment, and where our three travelers found her, waiting for them.

Solidaria told them the secret of opening an underground passage that she alone knew, which, from this cave, led into the country of Argyrocratie, behind the line of forts and military posts.

But as it was night, she made them promise to wait until tomorrow to enter. Hans and Mab thanked Solidaria, who urged them to think once more. Once on the other side, the cave would close on them, and the sphere of silkworms, would only bring them back if they had made all their efforts and managed to find their comrade.

And as they remained steadfast, she wished them good luck and kissed them before leaving them. Then they made a meal of their remaining provisions,

without forgetting Penmoch, contrived a bed of dry leaves and moss, and finally fell asleep, a little anxious, thinking of the next day.

XXI

IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE

The next day, when they awoke, it was broad daylight. Saying a final goodbye to the country of Autonomie, Hans pressed the spring that Solidaria had indicated to him, then, bravely, they all three started down the passageway that opened before them, a sort of dark burrow that blew a cool, damp wind in their face. Behind them, the stone that closed it had repositioned itself, denying them any hope of return.

With the aid of the talisman from Electricia, which could also provide light, they lit their way. But nothing came to hindert them; after two hours of walking, they came out in the ravine that Solidaria. had indicated Looking back again to see the tunnel, the entrance had disappeared. Nothing betrayed a trace of it.

Climbing a gentle slope, our three travelers found themselves on the road. They were in the land of their enemy.

They walked straight ahead, and were not slow to see the roofs of the first houses of the village pointing.

They quickened their pace. Noon approached. The village was still far away, their morning breakfast had been most brief, and their provisions were exhausted.

They finally reached it. It was a miserable hamlet, consisting only of a little more than a dozen houses that lined the road.

To stay in their role as traveling musicians, before thinking of restoring themselves, they stopped in the middle of the road, and began to play one of the tunes that are played in Argyrocratie, and that Solidaria had taught them before leaving, Hans blowing his clarinet, Mab shaking her tambourine and dancing.

At the sound of music, Penmoch stood gravely on his hind legs, holding, with his two front legs, an imaginary dress, and began to dance too.

Although they had already seen him dance and that their thoughts were not precisely turned towards gaeity, Mab and Hans could not help laughing. Mab stopped to put on his apron, to crown him with his hat.

Then Hans began to blow his clarinet again, Mab resumed her dance, and Penmoch imitated her, letting out a small grunt of satisfaction.

The music had attracted some kids who were amused by the serious air and the dance of Penmoch, but that was all; just two or three heads of women did they see in the half-open doors.

To attract the attention of Nono in case he was there, Hans played one of the favorite tunes of Autonomie, framing it in a tune from Argyrocratie in order not to give himself away too much.

But their questioning glances saw nothing in particular. While Hans went on playing the clarinet and Penmoch danced and bowed to the little Argyrocratiens who were amazed to see a dancing pig, Mab went to the quest doors, holding out her tambourine, but she returned without having gathered anything.

Our two artists, clawed by hunger, addressed themselves to an old Argyrocratien woman, asking her to sell them some bread. But she asked to see their money first.

In order not to arouse suspicion, they drew their purse only some small coin, which they put into her hand. The old woman cut Hans and Mab a piece of bread. Hans asked for some for Penmoch.—The old woman seemed shocked, but as she had not given them enough for half of their money, she reluctantly cut them another piece and closed the door in their faces.

The three travelers departed the village munching their bread, intending to complete their lunch later.

They walked for some time and, encountering some rare passersby on the road, sometimes seeing some isolated farm, far away, in the middle of fields.

In the end they decided to turn from their road to go ask one of the farmers if they were willing to sell them something to eat.

One gave them bread, milk and butter. They asked that he was willing to cook some potatoes for Penmoch. The farmer asked them what they were thinking dragging along behind them a pig that would be an encumbrance, and proposed to buy him.

But Hans said that Penmoch was not an ordinary pig, and he would not get rid of him for anything in the world.

And turning towards Penmoch.

“Show the gentleman what a well-mannered little pig your are.”

And Penmoch stood up and bowed to the farmer.

“Now dance a waltz for him.”

And Penmoch spun, in a manner that could not have been more comic.

Le fermier rit de bon cœur, and in consideration of Penmoch’s talents would accept nothing for his food.

Hans asked if it was far to some city or village.

He responded that, following the road, the nearest village was still a few hours of walking, and they are hardly arrive before nightfall. But on the other hand, there was hope that they could collect some money there. Its inhabitants

were mostly large farmers who employed the poorest inhabitants of the surrounding villages. Their remoteness from the major centers making distractions rare, they welcomed generously enough singers, jugglers and strolling players of all kinds who passed there.

Hans and Mab also asked the farmer if he had seen a boy dressed in such and such a manner, and they detailed to him the means by which Nono might be recognized—but the farmer did not recall seeing anyone who fit the description. And Hans, Mab and Penmoch resumed their journey, very concerned to know how they would find traces of their unfortunate comrade. Maybe they have some news in the village where they were going?

But their hope was to be betrayed, as thus was not the route followed by Nono, and they still had quite a distance to go before catching the right track.

It was, indeed, only a little before nightfall when they reached the village in question. Arriving at a great square where the inhabitants, in greater numbers, seemed to walk by preference, they began, under a huge beech which shaded the square, to tune their instruments—when not dancing, Mab had a guitar—and for a prelude they played the opening bars of the Argyrocratien anthem.

This anthem, which had the gift of exciting the Argyrocratiens to dementia, extolled the virtues of Argyrocratie, sang the praises of Argyrocratie, exalted the strength and courage of the Argyrocratiens, insulting and threatening to kill not only the enemies of Argyrocratie, but all of Argyrocratie's neighbors.

The strollers had no sooner heard the first notes than they immediately came to make a circle around the singers, demanding with fierce cries that they begin again, and accompanying the musicians in their most discordant voices.

And when Mab passed the tamborine, she reaped a rich harvest of coins. Then, to continue their role Mab cleaned up Penmoch and then, taking her tambourine, she danced with him, while Hans played the clarinet.

Penmoch had even more success than the anthem, when he passed the hat himself.

While playing and dancing, Hans and Mab looked to see if among the crowd, they could perceive the features of their friend, but there was nothing but uninteresting faces. In the last song they played, they inserted one of the songs of Autonomy, the most likely to attract the attention of their friend. But the concert finished, they slowly packed up their instruments, without anything revealing that their appeal had been heard.

However one of the inhabitants, who with his afluent appearance could be recognized as one of the rich owners of the place, came to them and promised them a piece of gold if they would come home with him. He was treating friends that night, and he wanted to reserve for his guests this entertainment that had emerged unexpectedly.

The artists accepted, although they would have preferred to wander the village. But to refuse to earn a gold coin could raise suspicions. They had to do their job conscientiously. They followed the owner who promised them a good

supper on the way, in order to not let them go, lest a competitor came to carry them off by offering them more.

Arriving at his home, the man took them to the kitchen and served them food. A large bowl of bran and potatoes was put in a corner for Penmoch, for Hans and Mab did not want their friend to be taken to the stable.

Then the proprietor's guests having arrived, a servant led the artists into a large room in the middle of which stood a table covered with crystals and silver, waiting the diners.

The domestic installed the on a stage, sheltered by a curtain. They should, during the meal, play their various tunes for the amusement of the owner and his guests.

They soon got to see them enter. The proprietor's wife led the way, giving her arm to one of the guests, whom the children, in the course of the evening, heard called Mr. Bailiff. The other guests then came in procession, two by two, with the owner bringing up the rear. And each stood in the place indicated to them by the mistress of the place.

These people had such a grotesque air about them and, at the same time, took themselves so seriously, that our two artists, hidden by the curtain, were not embarrassed to giggle looking at them. Penmoch himself wagged his corkscrew, letting out some small grunts, which were fortunately covered by the music.

It was far from the liberty and fine camaraderie of Autonomie! They sensed that frankness was absent from it!

The food was served. Our two Autonomiens could not believe the amount of food they saw absorbed in various forms, besides the multitude of servants who were employed to serve it.

And conversation! After a bunch of platitudes, they talked about their friends, their neighbors. And how they spoke! Oh! They did not speak wickedness, but it was with smiles, clipped phrases, and innuendo. The two artists thought if they had before them the cream of the village, the others must well be curious folks.

When the meal, which lasted a long time, was over, the guests went into a large living room, and two artists there were led in to show off the talents of Penmoch.

As they listened with all their ears, in the hope of hearing something that would put them on the track of their friend, they were soon taught about the politeness of which the Argyrocratiens had boasted so much at the table.

Other persons had arrived. In some, whose names were spoken, Hans and Mab recognized many of those spoken about at the table. Those who had made the most smiles or innuendos about them were not the least attentive towards them, nor the last to heap the greatest flattery on them.

Mab and Penmoch danced their prettiest steps. Penmoch made faces and bows. Then the lady of the house, who remembered donkeys and trained dogs,

asked Hans if Penmooh would be able to designate the most amiable person in the company, secretly hoping that, out of deference, it would be her.

"Mr. Penmoch," said Hans, "you hear the high opinion tha they have of you. Show that you are worthy of it, and tell us as right away the most amiable person in this company."

The pig stood on two legs, walked around the room, sniffing each person, and then returned, saying: "rrouan ... rrouan ..."

"Well! M. Penmoch, didn't you understand me?" said Hans.

Penmoch shook his head up and down, signaling the affirmative.

"Well, then, why don't you shown me the most amiable people in the group?"

The pig shook his head "no."

"You don't want to work any more?" said Hans, who understood well enough that Penmoch had not found any amiable people, but would prefer not to translated the response.

The guests pretended to marvel at the kindness of the artist on all fours, but their laughter was forced, the mistress of the house above all. And three artists took their leave in the midst of a frost.

When they were on their way to the inn that had been indicated, Hans turned to his pig, and said:

"It is fortunate, Mr. Penmoch, that our friend Solidaria lined our purse for us before leaving; otherwise your intransigence would very likely make us starve."

Penmoch said: "rrouan, rrouan," and began to dance a cavalier alone in the middle of the road, as if satisfied with having told the truth to the Argyrocratiens.

XXII

FRUITLESS SEARCHES

Awakened early the next morning, artists decended under the pretense of taking the air, and making the tour of the village, but in reality to questions some domestics and servants of the inn, having thought of saying that a member of their troupe had become separated from them, which allowed them to question and give his description, by inquiring if they had seen him.

But the village was placed on a road with little traffic, and although it was easier, because of their rarity, to notice travelers who passed through, nobody could give them any information.

Having been served breakfast, and Penmoch as well, they made their preparations for departure, without anyone trying to retain them. The interest they had excited had passed. Each regretted not having had the idea of the big rich man, but they did not care to hear them after him.

Carrying their instruments, Penmoch trotting behind them, they set out again.

In the first village, they had no success, and did not reap a farthing. This, however, concerned them very little; but there was also no clue that would put on the trail of the one they were looking for.

At the next, the village children chased them with stones, because they tore from their hands an unfortunate wounded swallow, that they wanted to pluck alive. Given the number of kids, they would have been very abused, and the flight would not have been easy, if Solidaria, who protected them from afar, had not passed into their legs the whole strength of the community, which gave them such a velocity that, in no time, they were at such a great distance that they no longer heard the shouts of of the little Argyrocratiens. They turned around: the wicked kids appeared to them on the road like no more than a bunch of ants.

Hans and Mab, surprised, guessed that it was their friend Solidaria who had come to their rescue. In their heart, they sent her a warm thank you. Penmoch, beside them, happily wagging his tail, which skirted from left to right and right

to left. In his snout, he held a wide piece of cloth torn from the bottom of the pants of one of the little bandits.

A stream made its joyful gurgling in a meadow at the edge of the road; they headed there. It was a question of bandaging the unfortunate creature they had wrested from the cruelty of the small Argyrocratiens and that Hans held panting in his hand.

"Poor little thing!" said Mab, washing the wounds of the beast. Then taking from their wallet a little box of a wonderful ointment that Solidaria had given them, they anointed the wounds of the injured bird.

The swallow, cured as if by magic, escaped from the hands of Mab, making a joyful chirping, remaining to flutter around her saviors, who, urged by appetite and the charm of the place, had begun breakfast, having taken the precaution of filling their wallet before leaving the village where they had spent the night. And when they resumed their journey, the swallow followed them.

And so they walked together, the swallowing made the acquaintance of Penmoch, whom she sometimes teased.

They walked thus for days without finding any sign of their friend.

One morning, as they had breakfast near a spring, they saw two archers on horseback coming up the road, leading, chained, a young boy of their age.

The two soldiers, having seen the spring, directed their horses there to let them drink, after letting the little boy slake his thirst.

Then, having seen our three travelers, one of them, in a surly tone, asked them who they were, what they were doing, where were they going, and where had they stolen the pig that they dragged along with them?

But Solidaria had warned them about that. Hans took from his pocket a paper which gave them, in the name of Monnaïus, the right to travel on the roads, and then he remarked to the archer that the pig was his friend, he was not stolen.

"Isn't that so, my old Penmoch?" he said, stroking him. "Show Mr. Archer that we are two good friends."

Penmoch sank against the legs of Hans, and uttered a furious *rrouan! ... rrouan!* at the archer, showing his teeth in a terrible manner.

That made the two archers laugh, and they became more sociable.

Mab took the moment to ask the little boy what he had done to be led thus in chains like a criminal.

While crying, the unfortunate boy told them that his parents being dead, no one wanted to take him in. So he had run from village to village, working when someone wanted to employ him, living on alms, and a bit of pilfering, living under the stars, when his services were refused. The archers had just arrested him because he could not identify any home.

They were taking him to the provost of the next town, who would probably send him to prison.

Moved with pity, and Hans Mab asked permission to give this poor boy the rest of their provisions. Both archers grumbled a bit, but they granted the

permission requested and set out again, taking their prisoner. Penmoch, going stealthily them, biting the horse's leg of one of them, avoiding the kick of the animal, which failed to throw the rider on the road.

The archer, turning to see what had happened to his horse, saw only Penmoch, ten steps behind, quietly nibbling a tuft of grass.

Another day, it was a poor old man that they saw led in this way. He told them that he had worked as much as he could, but he earned little and stoppages and diseases, moreover, allowed him just to live and raise a family; he had grown old, living from day to day.

Now, he was too weak to work; his wife was dead of exhaustion, his daughter had disappeared one fine day, his son conscripted as one of Monnaïus' soldiers. He was without resources, and they led him to prison.

Crying, sorry for not being able to do anything to deliver the poor man, which would not have been a great help anyway, Hans and Mab gave him a few coins, very few, so as not to arouse the suspicion of the archers, and, conversiing about the sad fate of the poor and the cruelty of Argyrocratiens, they continued their journey.

But in the midst of these incidents, there was never any news of their friend.

One evening, at the edge of a woods they had just passed through, their attention was attracted by the sight of a young man who, lying on the ground, seemed exhausted, unable to walk.

They approached him. Hans drew a vial from his wallet. He made the unknown drink a few drops of the liquid it contained. It revived him and he could tell them that, hunted by archers, he had hidden himself in the wood; being unable to find food for two days, he had wanted to try to gain the next village, but he had fallen there exhausted.

Our travelers soon emptied their bag on their knees, and, while eating, he told them that they had wanted to make hims one of Monnaïus' soldiers, that he had not wanted to leave to enlist, and that he had left his village, looking for work on the road. Three days ago he arrived in this country, exhausted by fatigue, and, no one wanting to hire him, he entered a house whose owner was at the table in front of a delicious dinner.

He had asked him for a bit of bread, but the other had responded that it was shameful at his age to be asking for alms, that he had better look for work, and had shut the door in his face.

Enraged by the injustice of this wicked rich man, he had beat him, taking what he could pick up of the food on the table, and came to hide in the woods, which he had not dared to leave, having seen the archers who were looking for him.

Hans gave him a handful of money to enable him to get to a place where he would not be known. Then, as everywhere he went, he asked him if he had not met Nono, whose description he gave him. But the other had not met anyone like him.

And our four travellers (they were four now that the swallow followed them), started out again sadly.

A day later, as the approached a village, close to a palisade they saw a gathering that had formed..

They approached, curious to see what was the cause of it, and at the foot of a tree they saw extended, the body of a child about a dozen years old. The face, white like wax, the sightless eyes wide open, and a bloody wound on the side of the head indicated that he was dead and what was the cause of death.

An archer questioned a large peasant whose ruddy countenance announced the thriving health and a certain ease. The rustic aristocrat explained that, furious to see his pear tree plundered, from which the finest fruits disappeared gradually as they matured, he had lain in wait to catch the thieves. He saw the boy climb, but when he tried to run after him, the boy had run away, so he had reached for a large stone that had knocked him to the ground.

He finished his story when a disheveled woman, in tears, pushed through the crowd and fell to her knees before the little body, which she embraced wildly.

Mad with grief, the father followed her and when he saw the murderer of his child, he wanted to rush over and strike him, but other archers who came to join the first seized him, telling him to keep quiet if he did not want to aggravate his case. The farmer, they said, was within his rights, defending his property, and they took him to the provost, saying he would have to answer for the damage caused by his son in the orchard .

Filled with horror, Hans, Mab and Penmoch crossed the village without stopping there. The swallow itself made a long detour to avoid passing there.

XXIII

FIRST TRACES

However the journey lasted for some time, and our friends were desolated at having discovered nothing, making the saddest conjectures about the fate of their friend. They were heading towards the capital, all they were told that it was there that the foreigners went.

Finally one day they arrived at the village where Nono had made his debut as a musician.

When, according to their custom, they had given their concert, mixing in tunes from Autonomy, the good woman who had been helpful to Nono, and recognized one of the tunes from the wonderful accordion, inquired if Hans, too, did not come Autonomy?

Hans, who did not know for what purpose she asked the question, asked her why she would have thought that?

The woman explained that some time past, a child of their age had passed through, playing tunes like those they had just played, tunes that they don't hear elsewhere.

And in the description that she gave them the boy, Mab and Hans recognized their friend. Their hearts beat with joy, since they finally had a clue. And the woman having said that she had encouraged the young traveler to visit Monnaïa, they resumed their journey immediately.

In the villages, along the road, the music of their friend had left some memories, so they could follow his tracks without too much difficulty.

One afternoon, towards evening, they arrived at the farm where Nono, through his music, had found hospitality. To stay in their role, our artists would propose their music and the favors of Penmoch in exchange for a bit of bread, and a place in the straw.

But the farmer, busy repairing a chicken coop in his court, and never very sensitive, especially at seeing three bowls of soup to give, demanded to be paid, hoping to get the music over and above the deal.

Hans went some small change from his purse and gave it to the farmer who is contented in, and brought them into the common room, where they settled in a corner with Penmoch.

Hans took some small change from his purse and gave it to the farmer, who was content with it, and brought them into the common room, where they settled in a corner with Penmoch.

The fat maid took care of preparing the soup, the old grandfather was always under the mantle of the fireplace, the son and his family were occupied with various sorts of work outside, and one of the farm servants was mending the handle of a spade.

The manservant and the maid chatted, without worrying about musicians, or the grandfather, whom age had rendered deaf. The servant complained about the hardness of the masters overwhelmed with work and refused to grant him a slight increase.

"Well, to be fair, said the maid, "the master has some costs. Think about the fact that he already gives you thirty crowns a year. At that price, he would not lack farmhands. Every day there pas some who ask that nothing better than to hire themselves out, even for less."

"Yes, but would they do the job that I do for him?"

"Oh! for what it is, you do not sleep on the job, and you are not troubled by any kind of farm work. That is why the master holds onto you.—But two crowns more, it is a sum, you know?

"Two crowns, what it is for him! But he is stingy. He prefers his pile of gold coins, not to mention the field he has just taken from that poor devil Jean Bidou, who could not repay for the pistols he had lent him, and cost him double. And meadow adjacent to his rose garden, is that not my work in whose value he gained?

"Yes, you're back to the nonsense that's been running through your head since that naïf who claimed to come from a country with such a baroque name, that one cannot even know it, passed through here.

Hans and Mab pricked up their ears. Penmoch let out a soft grunt.

"Naïf! Naïf!" replied the servant, "not so naive in my opinion. There was truth in what he said. I received no instruction, you see, I do not know how to read"—and Mab looked at Hans, seeming to ask how it was possible that a man could not read—"but I have my savvy that tells that if the master had no poor devils like you and me to do his work, if he was alone with his family, he could not cultivate all the land he has. All the money that earns him more land is the work of you, me, Pierre, Claude, and all those he hires when he needs it. And there you have it!"

"Hem! hem! my poor friend, the master explained it to you; if the land was shared between everyone, there who would not do anything and sell them, and it would be like it is now. So you see that you're wrong to have such ideas, since it is not possible."

“Yes, all that, it’s all well, it is the masters who say it. But I slave away good and hard for our master; why I would not work as well for myself? No, you see, Jeanne, there is something there that tells me that all is not as it should be.”

And I very much regret not having asked the little one where to find this beautiful country of which he told us. I think that it exists, and I would go there.

At the moment, despite his caution, Hans intervened in the conversation, affirming the existence of autonomy, and requesting more information about the traveler in question, whom he and his wife knew and they were eager to find.

The maid and the manservant could not give very little guidance. All they knew was that the young traveler had talked of making his way into the city, and that he had taken that road.

Then the manservant questioned Hans about the country of Autonomie. Where was it located?

But the two Autonomiens could not, without betraying themselves, indicate their road—which had, moreover, closed behind them—they could only give very vague indications and imprecise information.

And these incomplete details left the valet still as puzzled.

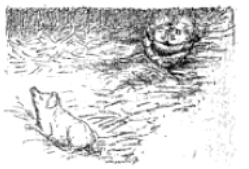
The maid saw the farmer coming, and made the children promise not to talk of the country of Autonomie. She had noticed that when they talked about the country and its customs it put the farmer in a very bad mood.

He entered grumbling that the work did not progress. And he went to smoke his pipe by the fire.

Little by little, the inhabitants of the farm arrived one after the other. Then the stepdaughter, who was in the village, arrived with her two children, who were soon acquainted with Penmoch.

They sat down at the table. The two Autonomiens, for their money, had a bowlful of soup with a slice of bread.

Then, the meal finished, and when all was tidy, the two artists made some music to please both children children. Mab danced with Penmoch and when bedtime came, the three artists were led to the barn where they huddled in the straw, glad to see they had not lost the track of the one who was the object of their solicitude.



XXIV

SAD NEWS

Before taking leave of the farmer's family, knowing that they would still have a long way to go before reaching the city, Hans filled his bag with food he paid for, and the three artists, with the swallow who was waiting at the door of the farm, resumed their journey.

They walked with a light-hearted step, hoping this time it would not be long before they met their comrade again.

However, after traveling a long way, having worked up an appetite by walking, they stopped near a spring for lunch. And, while having lunch, they talked of their hopes, when, suddenly, from a burrow they had not seen, came a little black beast, with silky hair, who, blinking, told them:

“The one you're talking about saved my life. I think I can be helpful in your search. Although my disability prevents me from seeing clearly in daylight, I see well in the dark. Take me with you. Just promise not to leave me in the city.

Hans and Mab, filled with wonder, but not surprised—they had already had so many adventures—confered while Penmoch sniffed this little beast whose head ended in a kind of snout like his.

“This is an ally created for us by Solidaria,” stated Mab. “Let's take him, we shall find it good for us.” And Hans making a place for mole in his bag, they all set out again on the road to Monnaïa. They reached it the next morning.

According to an old custom according to which any musician, any juggler who entered the city, played a piece of their repertoire and made his trained animals dance, Hans had to play the Monnaïan anthem for the weasels and tigers at the gate through which they entered, while Mab and Penmoch danced and bowed, to loud bursts of laughter from the garrison who had hurried to see.

But it was not enough to have reached the capital; our young friends were not out of the woods. When they arrived at the end of the day, having traveled

countless streets, they had to admit that it would not be easy to find traces of their friend.

However, they were fortunate to have chosen the costume they wore; it allowed them to go, everywhere, to enter public establishments, even in the courtyards of the houses, and see the crowds gather around them .

When evening came, they rented a garret in a remote area, in a house where many street musicians, buskers, jugglers and tumblers of all kinds lived.

In their running they had the opportunity to see what terrible misery reigned in the capital of Argyrocratie; but in the house where they lived, next to a nameless misery, they could find facts of cruelty that shook their heart more.

Some unfortunate children like them, but even younger, were under the control of a master who had several in his service. They were required to bring him a certain amount each night, which he fixed for them, in exchange for which he measured out to them parsimoniously an inadequate pittance.

When they had the misfortune to return without the complete sum, he abused and beat them, and made them go to bed without supper.

Women hired out very young children, up to two, three, including one in swaddling clothes, and thus they traveled the city, might and day, to implore the pity of passersby, slyly pinching the children in order to gain more pity by their cries.

Hans and Mab, in their little room, spoke of these horrors only in shivers, and comparing this with the life they led in Autonomie, they could not conceive how Argyrocratiens could be stupid enough to live in such a state.

Their conversations were sometimes interrupted by their friend the swallow who, being lodged on the roof, next to their garret, had just tapped the pane, providing them with the news that she had been able to gather, asking them what they had been able to gather.

The mole, seated on the table, listened gravely.

One evening, all excited, the swallow came to tell them that passing through a populous district her attention had been drawn by a child holding an accordion playing only the tunes she had often heard them play.

Our two friends remembered the accordion that Riri had given to Nono. From the description given by the swallow, they do not recognize their comrade. Perhaps their friend had been there? That could only be his toy.

They worked out the location of the street, kissing the swallow for her good news, promising to go the next day to visit the neighborhood that the sweet messenger had designated.

In the beginning, they had well thought that in order to double their chances they would wander the city separately. But Mab was scared to walk alone on the streets of an ugly country and asked Hans to not leave her. He, in turn, felt more confident when he was with Mab, and they resolved not to leave each other for a single moment.

So the next day they set out to begin their investigation, led by the swallow.

But that day, either that the child musician had not come out, or he was not outside at the moment when they passed and passed again. They returned in the evening, exhausted, without being able to find anything.

It was only on the fifth day, always guided by the swallow, that they ended up finding the child, on the doorstep of our old acquaintance the tailor, in the midst of five or six urchins of his own age, regaling them with music.

Not knowing how to question the tailor, Hans thought to tear a seam of his coat and enter to get it mended. And while the tailor stitched, Hans turned the conversation to the wonderful accordion, saying he knew the country where such things are manufactured.

The tailor said he had been left to him by one of his workers, but seemed to want to turn the conversation whenever Mab and Hans asked him about the box or its owner.

An individual who was in the tailor's shop, and had said nothing, got up and left, wishing them good night.

Whatever their insistence, Hans and Mab could not get anything out of the tailor and left him, promising themselves to return.

But they had barely turned the corner when the man they had found in the tailor's shop joined them, and approached them in these terms:

"I see that you are friends of the young Nono, whose musical instrument you recognized the hands of the tailor's child. But you're wasting your time questioning him; he is too afraid of Monnaïus' exempts, and in your own interest, you would do well not to go back.

The individual was one of Nono's three friends. He told a dismayed Hans and Mab of the arrest of their friend, his conviction, how the tailor had spoken against him, and all that had followed.

For some time he had himself been watched as a suspect.

The children asked him if, since he had some news of Nono, he knew where he was locked up.

The man, by chance, had a cousin who was jailer, and that despite his reluctance because of his duties, he would see from time to time. Just after his conviction, Nono was transferred to a dungeon contained in the royal palace of Monnaïus and his cousin was on duty. So he could have news from time to time. His cousin had even been kind enough, once, to give him a letter from the prisoner, who was doing well, and took his misfortune patiently.

Then, having promised to return to see his cousin to try to get some news, he left, having made an appointment with them for a few days later, but recommending the greatest circumspection, and absolute discretion.

Immediately on returning, Hans, Mab, the Swallow, Penmoch and the Mole took counsel. They were very heavy-hearted to know that their friend was a prisoner, but they knew where he was, and had some hope to send him their news. There was nothing of which they were not capable in order to save him.

Hans has settled on this means: it was to profit from the the greed that drove every Argyrocratien, to go find the cousin of their new friend and give

him enough gold—their purse was inexhaustible—to decide to let his prisoner escape .

Mab agreed that the plan was not to be despised, but could they bind themselves to the jailer? Wouldn't he betray them after having drawn everything he could from them, the bad faith of the Argyrocratiens being at least as great as their avarice? Similarly, was it possible for him to let a prisoner escape? They were able to see how the Argyrocratiens distrusted each other, always having three spies to monitor a fourth. By risking their own freedom they also risked that of their friend. They had to act with caution and according to circumstances. The important thing now was to establish a connection with the prisoner. They they would see.

The Swallow proposed herself as messenger.

The Mole fortified himself to dig to Nono. No one doubted their success.

XXV

THE VISIT TO THE PRISON

The day of the rendezvous arrived, and the two artists, leaving Penmoch and the Mole at the house, went to the place where they should find the jailer's cousin.

He awaited them, full of joy. He had spoken to his cousin of two strangers whom he had met who wanted to visit a prison. The jailers were permitted, when on duty, to receive their family, because then they could not leave for a whole month.

For two pieces of gold, his cousin agreed to let them pose as his nephew and niece, and to walk them through the parts of the prison where he was allowed to circulate. The next day, Sunday, was exactly a good day.

Rebellion—this was the name of their new friend—would come to get them at their abode.

And, as agreed, the next day he came to fetch them at the appointed time.

Just like to go into the prison, are not entered by the door of honor palace, but by the gate of one of the towers.

As usual, to enter the prison, they did not enter by the main gate of the palace, but by a postern in one of the towers.

Arriving at that postern, a sentry asked them where they were going. When the responded that they wanted to see the turnkey, Torment, the sentry called for a soldier who took them to the one they asked for.

The turnkey embraced them as if he really was the uncle that he pretended to be, shook the hand of his cousin, asking him news of their relatives and friends, then had them sit, offering them something to drink. His service having just finished, he had three free hours before him.

This jailer, despite the repugnant trade he practiced, was more an ignorant than a wicked man. His double physiognomy took more from a guard dog than a ferocious beast.

At twenty, he had been conscripted among the soldiers of Monnaïus. There, he had become accustomed to obey and live without worrying about anything. At his parents' home he saw how hard the life of the worker was, overworked at times, but constantly haunted by the fear of unemployment and poverty. So, his

time finished, he had sought this position, which his good behavior had secured for him immediately.

And that without accounting for the sad idea that he gave of his character as he recounted it, with pride even.

Mab asked him if it didn't make him sad to see the prisoners. He must have, in prison, some terrible despairs, some crises of tears and sobs!

The jailer shrugged his shoulders. Those who were put in prison were not very interesting They had only to do like everyone else, obey and work. The masters could only give just orders. And he obeyed his masters.

With an indifferent air, Hans asked him if there was at that moment, in the dungeons of the palace, some interesting prisoner, and if they could see them?

And the jailer, who was talkative, detailed the lives of prisoners for them. Nono was in his service, and he took care not to forget him in his account, his case having made, in its time, plenty of noise. He promised his visitors to let them see through a small peephole drilled into the door of each cell.

Then, rising, he took up a bunch of keys and told them to follow him, if they wanted to visit the prison.

He led them first into some unoccupied cells, then through different rooms, each one gloomier than the last, until they arrive on one that was furnished with cabinets.

"It is in there," he said, indicating the cabinets, "that we keep the instruments of torture.

"What? Torture?" said Rebellion. "But it was abolished."

"A hundred years before, in fact, the Argyrocratiens had made a revolution where they had abolished torture.

But the jailer told them that the ingenuity of the councilors in Parliament did not take long to invent new instruments which made the prisoner suffer, with the advantage of not leaving any trace of injury.

Opening a cabinet, he first showed them the detention which removed the accused from his family, his community and that, complicated by the solitary confinement, made his go through all the phases of anxiety and worry.

Then there was the secret hearing, the false depositions, and countless other instruments with which the cabinets were furnished. There was talk of preventing the judges from using secret hearing, but they had an embarassment of choices to lay low the most robust prisoner, and he opened the cupboards one after the other, showing their an infinity of small instruments, keen and sharp like the claws of birds of prey.

Hans asked how the prisoners passed their time.

They were forced to work on behalf of contractors who, making gifts to the directors and managers, bought the exclusive right to make prisoners work at a price that suited, them well below what they would be forced to pay a free worker. This allowed them to make large profits and live like great lords.

Hans asked how it was that Monnaïus tolerated these injustices.

But the jailer told them that there was nothing wrong with that. It was up to the prisoners not to set themselves apart from honest people. They were in prison for their punishment.

Hans and Mab thought that those who were responsible for putting others in jail were worth much less than those they imprisoned. But they were content to share their thoughts with a glance.

The jailer continued:

"Of what the prisoner earns, the administration takes half if it is the first time they have been sentenced, and three- or four-fifths in other cases.

Of what remains, the prisoners can spend another half, and the remainder is returned to them on their exit from prison.

What the prisoners buy, they are forced to buy in prison, at an authorized purveyor, usually the one that makes them work; another source for them of very great profits.

The inspection of the room ended, and his tale as well, he took them through a long, dark corridor; then stopping at a door, he signaled his visitors to come look through a hole drilled in it.

It was a cell. In one corner, a prisoner, an old man, was seated with an overwhelmed expression.

Mab having asked if Nono was in this corridor, the jailer indicated a door. The hearts of our friends beat very hard at the thought of finally seeing the one that they had search for so long.

The dejection had passed. With his little resolute expression, Nono paced in his cell, a bit like a bear in a cage, for his chains would not allow him to go far. But the friends had to tear themselves from the door, the jailer urging them to move along.

And he led them into the gardens that were reserved for the dignitaries of the provost's court, where there were cultivated for them, by the prisoners, some flowers and vegetables.

Then he led them into a court that the loopholes of the cells opened onto, and showed the visitors a narrow space where the prisoners were allowed to come for one hour per day, to take the air.

Hans asked a few questions in order to know which of the cells had loopholes that opened on that court, because the detours in the prison had disoriented him. And he had the satisfaction, arriving at the foot of a large square tower that dominated the other buildings, to see a grated window, a few feet off the ground, that the jailer showed him, saying it was that of the cell of the young prisoner.

And Hans noticed with joy that it was located on the ground floor. He made himself well aware of its location, engraving in his memory every detail, making note of signs that could guide him, making sure the yard where they were was separated from the outside by a walled enclosure, topped with sentries, it is true, but that did not matter...

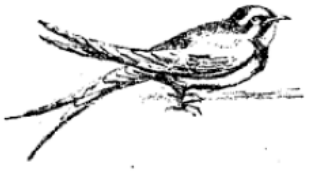
Climbing to the platform of the tower, the jailer wanting to show them the panorama of the city, he noticed with joy that the court that the cell opened onto itself opened on a tree-lined esplanade, which Hans knew, and which was usually deserted.

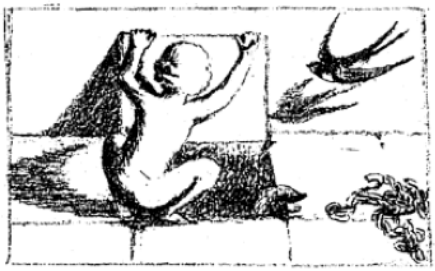
The hearts of the friends overflowed with joy, because all three, without having said anything, because the jailer, had made the same observations; they were eager now to leave and share their impressions.

There was nothing more left to visit. The hour for the jailer to resume his duties approached. The two young foreigners thanked their pseudo-relative, and it is with a sense of relief that they were left the prison.

They were quick to make their decision. To be open with the jailer was very risky. They did not know how he would take their proposition.

Since the Mole had the ability to dig, perhaps he could dig an opening big enough to allow the prisoner to get out. They would confer with him on returning, and if the thing was possible, they would send the Swallow to warn Nono, with a file to cut his irons, and they would attempt the thing that very night.





XXVI

THE AWAKENING

The hearts beat very hard in our friends when, accompanied by Penmoch, they descended from their garret, quite late in the evening. They should find Rebellion close to the esplanade.

They had to find the Crossfire near the esplanade.

Consulted, the Mole had worked very hard to dig in just a few hours a tunnel large enough to facilitate the escape of the prisoner. So, they did not hesitate to act on their plans. The Swallow followed them, fluttering .

It was nearly midnight when they arrived close to the esplanade where Rebellion awaited them. It was a clear night with a magnificent moon. This bothered our conspirators some, but it allowed Hans to distinguish the window of Nono's cell, climbing in a high eucalyptus, and indicate it to the Swallow, giving her the file she had to bear there with a word of warning .

But the window was closed. She tried to attract the attention of the prisoner, to give him the idea of opening it; it was above his head, in the wall where he was chained. Hans and Mab had the inspiration of singing an improvisation on one of his favorite tunes.

As a precaution, they always came out with their instruments, pushing self-consciousness, in coming, to the point of going to play in a few establishments on their way.

Muffling their voices, tuning their instruments in a minor key, for their song should go to the ears of Nono without attracting too attention from the sentinels, reaching them only as a distant echo, they started into their favorite tune, adapting these improvised words:

A l'horizon le soleil fuit, (At the horizon the sun flees)
La nuit paraît ; (Night appears)
Tout est calme ; plus aucun bruit ; (All is calm; no more noise)
L'oiseau se tait. (The birds are hushed)
Dans les grands bois, tout repose. (In the tall trees)
Le cœur transi, (The heart transfixed)

Désespéré, seul, je n'ose (Desperate, alone, I do not dare)
Dormir aussi. (To sleep as well.)

At the first notes, Nono, who dozed, dreaming of all those he loved, was immediately standing. Panting, delighted, ecstatic, he listened trembling, believing he recognized the voices of the singers.

And Hope, gently carried by that music that seemed to float in the air, came to him, comforting him with gentle words, while by a mysterious effect of her magical power, she made the wall transparent, so that the moon illuminated the group of his friends, under a tree.

Nono sent them kisses, but when their voices were silent, Hope had disappeared, and the wall had become dark again.

Anxious, the prisoner put his hand to his heart, which beat violently, listening, in the hope of hearing more.

And the voices of the singers resumed, softer and more serious:

Insensible à mes larmes, (Insensible to my tears)
Un faux ami, (A false friend)
Se riant de mes alarmes (Laughing at my fears)
Un jour s'enfuit ; (Fled one day)
Et cependant l'Espérance (And yet Hope)
Me dit tout bas (Said to me softly)
Qu'il a gardé souvenance (That he recollects)
Et reviendra. (And will return.)

When the singers were silent, the eyes of the captive were bathed in tears. He understood that his friends were near him, looking for him. Recklessly, he was going to shout, call, make himself known to them, when a slight knocking on the window pane caught his attention. With the use of both feet and hands, he reached the window and opened the frame that closed it.

A swallow entered, carrying in its beak a small package that she handed to him. It was the file enveloped in a letter, in which Hans told him to file his irons and pay attention to what happens around him, listening to the ground, and to raise, with his file, the slab under which he heard a knocking, not to be afraid, and to enter without fear the tunnel that was offered to him.

The file cut so well that it was nothing for Nono to rid himself of his irons.

Then, after a wait that seemed interminable, three discrete blows were struck on a slab. He was quick to lift it, being driven by an unknown force, and he discovered a dark burrow, large enough however to give him passage on all fours. Moments later, he was in the arms of his friends, laughing and crying at the same time. Even Penmoch who, no more than the Mole, was forgotten in the hugs, had something like a tear in his mischievous eye.

But Hans was in a hurry to flee. Taking from his pocket the balloon given to him by the silkworms, he unrolled it and the light fabric sphere, swelling

immediately, presented to our friends an opening through which they entered inside it. Rebellion, who wanted to follow them, went up with them, after having previously lifted up the Mole and Penmoch. The Swallow had her wings.

And the globe lifted them joyfully into the air.

But so many emotions had so shattered Nono, that once in the shelter he fainted dead away. It seemed to him that the fabric gave way beneath them, that he rolled in the void.

The fabric, which its color "atmosphere of the times" rendered invisible, did not prevent them from seeing around them, and that is what gave Nono that sensation.

Very close floated the royal banner, waved by the wind. Nono thought he saw the vampire that served as the emblem of Monnaïus take flight and fall upon him.

He let out a terrible cry and trembling, dripping with sweat... he awoke in the arms of his mother, who tried to console him, asking him what had troubled his sleep.

For our pseudo-voyageur, who had gone to sleep with his head stuff with his stories, you have doubtless already guessed it, had simply dreamed the adventures of which you have read.

Still breathless, Nono recounted the principal phases of his dream.

"Big idiot," said his mother, "you know that there are no fairies or witches, and no talking animals except parrots and magpies, which are only repeating the few words they learn.

"You have broken your head with your reading, and that is what has given you the nightmare.

"Go on! Big ninny, go back to sleep, and think no more of these follies." And at the same time, she hugged him and gave him big kisses.

But the father, who had appeared and had listened to the story of the dream with an attentive air, answered and said to his son:

"You mother is right. There are no fairies, nothing ever happens that we cannot explain the causes of by natural reasons. But you know that in those books of stories that you read, beneath the tales of marvelous events, a truth is often hidden, — or that we believe is such — a lesson.

"And your dream, for being a little boy of your age, seems to me to contain a great number that perhaps escape your understanding.

"If you still recall it tomorrow, I will be sure to write it down for you, you will read it later and mediate on it. And, doubtless, it will help you to known many injustices, may errors, that you would perhaps not perceive otherwise."