

L'ASSOMMOIR.

A FRENCH OF

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GERVAISE.

CHAPTER IV.

AMBITIOUS DREAMS.

The Boche couple, on the first of April, moved also, and took the loge of the great house, in la Rue de la Goutte d'Or. Things had turned out very nicely for Gervaise who, having always got on very comfortably with the Concierge in the house in Rue Neuve, dreaded lest she should fall into the power of some tyrant who would quarrel over every drop of water that was spilled, and a thousand other trifles like that. But with Madame Boche, all would go smoothly.

The day the lease was to be signed, and Gervaise stood in her new home, her heart swelled with joy. She was finally to live in that house, like a small town, with its intersecting corridors, instead of streets.

She felt a strange timidity—a dread of failure—when she found herself face to face with her enterprise. The struggle for bread was a terrible and an increasing one, and it seemed to her for a moment that she had been guilty of a wild, foolhardy act—like throwing herself into the jaws of a machine; for the planes in the cabinet-maker's shop and the hammers in the locksmith's were dimly grasped by her as a part of a great whole.

The water that ran past the door that day from the dyer's was pale green. She smiled as she stepped over it, accepting this color as a happy augury. She, with her husband, entered the loge, where Madame Boche and the owner of the building, Monsieur Marescot, were talking on business.

Gervaise, with a thrill of pain, heard Boche advise the landlord to turn out the dress-maker on the third floor, who was behind-hand with her rent. She wondered again at the attitude assumed by these Boche people, who did not seem to have ever seen her before. They had eyes and ears only for the landlord, who shook hands with his new tenants; but when they spoke of repairs, professed to be in such haste that morning, that it would be necessary to postpone the discussion. They reminded him of certain verbal promises he had made, and finally he consented to examine the premises.

The shop stood with its four bare walls and blackened ceiling. The tenant who had been there had taken away his own counters and cases. A furious discussion took place. Monsieur Marescot said it was for them to embellish the shop.

"That may be," said Gervaise gently; "but surely you cannot call putting on a fresh paper, instead of this that hangs in strips, an embellishment. Whiteness he curbing, too, comes under the head of necessary repairs." She only required these two things.

Finally Marescot, with a desperate air, plunged his hands deep in his pockets, shrugged his shoulders, and gave his consent to the repairs on the ceiling, and to the paper, on condition that she would pay for half the paper—and then he hurried away.

When he had departed, Boche clasped Coupeau on the shoulder. "You may thank me for that!" he cried, and then went on to say that he was the real master of the house—that he settled the whole business of the establishment, and it was a nod and look from him that had influenced Monsieur Marescot. That evening, Gervaise, considering themselves in debt to Boche, sent him some wine.

In four days the shop should have been ready for them; but the repairs hung on for three weeks. At first they intended simply to have the paint scrubbed; but it was so shabby and worn, that Gervaise repainted at her own expense. Coupeau went every morning, not to work, but to inspect operations; and Boche dropped the vest or pantaloons on which he was working, and gave the benefit of his advice, and the two men spent the whole day smoking and spitting, and arguing over each stroke of the brush. Some days the painters did not appear at all; on others they came and walked off in an hour's time, not to return again.

Poor Gervaise wrung her hands in despair. But finally, after two days of energetic labor, the whole thing was done, and the men walked off with their ladders, singing lustily.

Then came the moving, and finally Gervaise called herself settled in her new home, and was pleased as a child.

As she came up the street she could see her sign afar off.

CLEAR STARCHER.

LACES AND EMBROIDERIES
DONE UP WITH ESPECIAL CARE.

The two first words were painted in large yellow letters on a pale blue ground.

In the recessed window, shut in at the back by muslin curtains, lay men's shirts, delicate handkerchiefs and cuffs—all these were on blue paper, and Gervaise was charmed. When she entered the door all was blue there; the paper presented a golden trelis and blue morning glories. In the center was a huge table draped with blue bordered cretonne, to hide the trestles.

Gervaise seated herself and looked round, happy in the cleanliness of all about her. Her first glance, however, was directed to her stove, a sort of furnace whereon ten irons could be heated at once. It was a source of constant anxiety lest her little apprentice should fill it too full of coal, and so injure it.

Behind the stove was her bed-room and

kitchen, from which a door opened into the court. Nana's bed stood in a little room at the right, and Etienne was compelled to share his with the baskets of soiled clothes. It was all very well except that the place was very damp, and that it was dark by three o'clock in the afternoon in winter.

The new shop created a great excitement in the neighborhood. Some people declared that the Coupeaus were on the road to ruin, they had in fact spent the whole five hundred, and were penniless contrary to their intentions. The morning that Gervaise first took down her shutter, she had only six francs in the world, but she was not troubled, and at the end of a week she told her husband after two hours of abstruse calculations, that they had taken in enough to cover their expenses.

The Lorilleux were in a state of rage, and one morning when the apprentice was emptying on the sly, a bowl of starch which she had burned in making, just as Madame Lorilleux was passing, she rushed in and accused her sister-in-law of insulting her. After this all friendly relations were at an end.

"It all looks very strange to me," sniffed Madame Lorilleux; "I can't tell where the money comes from, but I have my suspicions," and she went on to intimate that Gervaise and Goujet were altogether too intimate. This was the groundwork of many fables; she said Wooden Legs were so mild and sweet that she had deceived to the extent that she had consented to become Nana's god mother, which had been no small expense; but now things were very different. If Gervaise were dying and asked for a glass of water she would not give it. She could not stand such people. As to Nana it was different; they would always receive her; the child, of course, was not responsible for her mother's crime. Coupeau should take a more decided stand, and not put up with his wife's vile conduct.

Boche and his wife sat in judgment on the quarrel, and gave as their opinion that the Lorilleux were very much to blame. They were good tenants, of course. They paid regularly. "But," added Madame Boche, "I never could abide jealousy. They are mean people and were never known to offer a glass of wine to a friend."

Mother Coupeau visited her son and daughter successive days, listened to the tales of each, and said never a word in reply.

Gervaise lived a busy life and took no notice of all this foolish gossip and strife. She greeted her friends with a smile from the door of her shop, where she went for a breath of fresh air. All the people in the neighborhood liked her, and would have called her a great beauty but for her lameness. She was twenty-eight and had grown plump. She moved more slowly, and when she took a chair to wait for her irons to heat, she rose with reluctance. She was growing fond of good living, that she herself admitted, but she did not regard it as a fault. She worked hard and had a right to good food. Why should she live on potato-parings. Sometimes she worked all night when she had a great deal of work on hand.

She did the washing for the whole house; and for some Parisian ladies, and had several apprentices, besides two laundresses. She was making money hand over fist, and her good luck would have turned a wiser head than her own. But hers was not turned; she was gentle and sweet, and hated no one except her sister-in-law. She judged everybody kindly, particularly after she had eaten a good breakfast. When people called her good she laughed. Why should she be not good? She had seen all her dreams realized. She remembered what she once said—that she wanted to work hard, have plenty to eat—a home to herself, where she could bring up her children—not be beaten, and die in her bed! As to dying in her bed, she added—she wanted that still, but she would put it off as long as possible, "if you please!" It was to Coupeau himself that Gervaise was especially sweet. Never a cross nor an impatient word had he heard from her lips, and no one had ever known her complain of him behind his back. He had finally resumed his trade, and the shop where he worked was at the other end of Paris, she gave him every morning forty sous for his breakfast, his wine and tobacco. Two days out of six, however, Coupeau would meet a friend, drink up his forty sous, and return to breakfast. Once, indeed, he sent a note, saying that his account at the cabaret exceeded his forty sous—he was in pledge, as it were—would his wife send the money? She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. Where was the harm in her husband's amusing himself a little? A woman must give a man a long rope if she wished to live in peace and comfort. It was not far from words to blows—she knew that very well.

The hot weather had come. One afternoon in June the ten irons were heating on the stove, the door was open into the street, but not a breath of air came in.

"What a melting day," said Gervaise, who was stooping over a great bowl of starch. She had rolled up her sleeves and taken off her apron, and stood in her chemise and white skirt; the soft hair in her neck was curling on her white throat. She dipped each cuff in the starch, the fronts of the shirts and the whole of the skirts. Then she rolled up the pieces tightly and placed them neatly in a square basket, after having sprinkled

with water all those portions that were not starched.

"This basket is for you, Madame Putois," she said; "and you will have to hurry, for they dry so fast in this weather."

Madame Putois was a thin little woman, who looked cool and comfortable in her tightly buttoned dress. She had taken her cap off, but stood at the table moving her irons to and fro with the regularity of an automaton. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"Put on your sacque, Clemence; there are three men looking in, and I don't like such things."

Clemence grumbled and growled. What did she care what she liked? She could not and would not roast to suit anybody.

"Clemence, put on your sacque," said Gervaise; "Madame Putois is right—it is not proper."

Clemence muttered, but obeyed, and consoled herself by giving the apprentice, who was ironing hose and towels by her side, a little push. Gervaise had a cap belonging to Madame Boche in her hand, and was ironing the crown with a round ball, when a tall bony woman came in. She was a laundress.

"You have come too soon, Madame Bijard!" cried Gervaise; "I said to-night. It is very inconvenient for me to attend to you at this hour." At the same time, however, Gervaise amiably laid down her work and went for the dirty clothes, which she piled up in the back shop. It took the two women nearly an hour to sort them and mark them with a stitch of colored cotton.

At this moment Coupeau entered. "By Jove!" he said; "the sun beats down on one's head like a hammer." He caught at the table to sustain himself; he had been drinking—a spider's web had caught in his dark hair, where many a white thread was apparent. His under jaw dropped a little, and his smile was good-natured but silly.

Gervaise asked her husband if he had seen the Lorilleux, in rather a severe tone; when he said no, she smiled at him without a word of reproach.

"You had best go and lie down," she said pleasantly; "we are very busy and you are in our way. Did I say thirty-two handkerchiefs, Madame Bijard? Here are two more, that makes thirty-four."

But Coupeau was not sleepy and he preferred to remain where he was. Gervaise called Clemence and bade her to count the linen while she made out the list. She glanced at each piece as she wrote. She knew many of them by the color. That pillow-slip belonged to Madame Boche because it was stained with the pomade she always used, and so on through the whole. Gervaise was seated with these piles of soiled linen about her. Augustine, whose great delight was to fill up the stove had done so now, and it was red hot. Coupeau leaned toward Gervaise.

"Kiss me," he said. "You are a good woman."

As he spoke he gave a sudden lurch and fell among the skirts.

"Do take care," said Gervaise impatiently; "you will get them all mixed again," and she gave him a little push with her foot whereat all the other women cried out.

"He is not like most men," said Madame Putois; "they generally wish to beat you when they come in like this."

Gervaise already regretted her momentary vexation and assisted her husband to his feet, and then turned her cheek to him with a smile, but he put his arm round her and kissed her neck. She pushed him aside with a laugh.

"You ought to be ashamed!" she said, but yielded to his embrace, and the long kiss they exchanged before these people, amid the sickening odor of the soiled linen, and the alcoholic fumes of his breath, was the first downward step in the slow descent of their degradation.

Madame Bijard tied up the linen and staggered off under their weight while Gervaise turned back to finish her cap. Alas! the stove and the irons were alike red hot; she must wait a quarter of an hour before she could touch the irons, and Gervaise covered the fire with a couple of shovelfuls of cinders. She then hung a sheet before the window to keep out the sun. Coupeau took a place in the corner, refusing to budge an inch, and his wife and all her assistants went to work on each side of the square table. Each woman had at her right a flat brick on which to set her iron. In the center of the table was a dish of water with a rag and brush in it, and also a bunch of tall white lilies in a broken jar.

Madame Putois had attacked the basket of linen prepared by Gervaise, and Augustine was ironing her towels, with her nose in the air, deeply interested in a fly that was buzzing about. As to Clemence she was polishing off her thirty-fifth shirt; as she boasted of this great feat, Coupeau staggered toward her.

"Madame," she called, "please keep him away, he will bother me and I shall scorch my hit."

"Let her be," said Gervaise, without any special energy, "we are in a great hurry to-day."

Well! that was not his fault, he did not mean to touch the girl, he only wanted to see what she was about.

"Really," said his wife, looking up from her fluting iron. "I think you had best go to bed."

He began to talk again.

"You need not make such a fuss, Clemence, it is only because these women are here, and—"

But he could say no more, Gervaise quietly laid one hand on his mouth and the other on his shoulder and pushed him toward his room. He struggled a little, and with a silly laugh asked if Clemence was not coming too.

Gervaise undressed her husband and tucked him up in bed as if he had been a child, and then returned to her fluting iron in time to still a grand dispute that was going on about an iron that had not been properly cleaned.

In the profound silence that followed her appearance, she could hear her husband's thick voice.

"What a silly wife I've got! The idea of putting me to bed in broad daylight!"

Suddenly he began to snore, and Gervaise uttered a sigh of relief. She used her fluting iron for a minute, and then said quietly:

"There is no need of being offended by anything a man does when he is in this state. He is not an accountable being. He did not intend to insult you. Clem-

ence, you know what a tipsy man he is—he respects neither father nor mother."

She uttered these words in an indifferent, matter-of-fact way, not in the least disturbed that he had forgotten the respect due to her and to her roof, and really seeing no harm in his conduct.

The work now went steadily on, and Gervaise calculated they would have finished by eleven o'clock. The heat was intense—the smell of charcoal deadened the air; while the branch of white lilies slowly faded, and filled the room with their sweetness.

The day after all this, Coupeau had a frightful headache, and did not rise until late—too late to go to his work. About noon he began to feel better, and toward evening was quite himself. His wife gave him some silver, and told him to go out and take the air, which meant with him, taking some wine.

One glass washed down another, but he came home as gay as a lark, and quite disgusted with the men he had seen who were drinking themselves to death.

"Where is your lover?" he said to his wife, as he entered the shop. This was his favorite joke. "I never see him nowadays, and must hunt him up."

He meant Goujet, who came but rarely, lest the gossip in the neighborhood should take it upon themselves to gabble. Once in about ten days he made his appearance in a corner in the back shop, with his pipe. He rarely spoke, but laughed at all Gervaise said.

On Saturday evenings the establishment was kept open half the night. A lamp hung from the ceiling, with the light thrown down by a shade. The shutters were put up at the usual time, but as the nights were very warm, the door was left open; and as the hours wore on, the women pulled their jackets open a little more at the throat, and he sat in his corner and looked on as if he were at a theatre.

The silence of the street was broken by a passing carriage. Two o'clock struck—no longer a sound from outside. At half-past two a man hurried past the door, carrying with him a vision of flying arms, piles of white linen, and a glow of yellow light.

Goujet, wishing to save Etienne from Coupeau's rough treatment, had taken him to the place where he was employed, to blow the bellows, with the prospect of becoming an apprentice as soon as he was old enough; and Etienne thus became another tie between the clear starcher and the blacksmith.

All their little world laughed, and told Gervaise that her friend worshipped the very ground she trod upon. She colored and looked like a girl of sixteen.

"Dear boy," she said to herself, "I know he loves me; but never has he said, or will he say, a word of the kind to me!" And she was proud of being loved in this way. When she was disturbed about anything, her first thought was to go to him. When by chance they were left alone together, they were never disturbed by wondering if their friendship verged on love. There was no harm in such affection.

Nana was now six years old and a most troublesome little sprite. Her mother took her every morning to a school in la Rue Polonceau, to a certain Mademoiselle Josse. Here she did all manner of mischief. She put ashes into the teacher's snuff box, pinned the skirts of her companions together. Twice the young lady was sent home in disgrace, and then taken back again for the sake of the six francs each month. As soon as the school hours were over, Nana revenged herself for the hours of enforced quiet she had passed, by making the most frightful din in the courtyard and the shop.

She found able allies in Pauline and Victor Boche. The whole great house resounded with the most extraordinary noises. The thumps of children falling down stairs, little feet tearing up one stair-case and down another, and bursting out on the sidewalk like a band of pillaging, impudent sparrows.

Madame Gaudron alone had nine—dirty, unwashed and unkempt—their stockings hanging over their shoes and the slits in their garments showing the white skin beneath. Another woman on the fifth floor had seven, and they came out in twos and threes from all the rooms. Nana reigned over this band, among which there were some half-grown and others mere infants. Her prime ministers were Pauline and Victor; to them she delegated a little of her authority, while she played mamma—undressed the youngest only to dress them again—cuffed them and punished them at her own sweet will, and with the most fantastic disposition. The band pranced and waded through the gutter that ran from the dyer's-house and emerged with blue or green legs. Nana decorated herself and the others with shavings from the cabinet makers, which they stole from under the very noses of the workmen.

The courtyard belonged to all these children apparently, and resounded with the clatter of their heels. Sometimes this courtyard, however, was not enough for them, and they spread in every direction to the infinite disgust of Madame Boche, who grumbled all in vain. Boche declared that the children of the poor were as plentiful as mushrooms on a dunghill, and his wife threatened them with her broom.

One day there was a terrible scene. Nana had invented a beautiful game. She had stolen a wooden shoe belonging to Madame Boche; she bored a hole in it and put it in a string, by which she could draw it like a cart. Victor filled it with apple-parings, and they started forth in a procession, Nana drawing the shoe in front, followed by the whole flock, little and big, an imp about the height of a cigar box at the end. They all sang a melancholy ditty full of "ah's" and "oh's." Nana declared this to be always the custom at funerals.

"What on earth are they doing now?" murmured Madame Boche suspiciously, and then she came to the door and peered out.

"Good heavens!" she cried; "it is my own shoe they have got!"

She slapped Nana, cuffed Pauline and shook Victor. Gervaise was filling a bucket at the fountain, and when she saw Nana with her nose bleeding, she rushed toward the Concierge, and asked how she dared strike her child.

The Concierge replied that any one who had a child like that, had best keep her under lock and key. The end of this

was, of course, a complete break between the old friends.

But, in fact, the quarrel had been growing for a month. Gervaise, generous by nature, and knowing the tastes of the Boche people, was in the habit of making them constant presents—orange, a little hot soup, a cake, or something of the kind. One evening, knowing that the Concierge would sell her soul for a good salad, she took her the remains of a dish of beets and chicory. The next day she was dumfounded at hearing from Mademoiselle Remanjon, how

Madame Boche had thrown the salad away, saying she was not reduced to eating the leftovers of other people! From that day forth, Gervaise sent her nothing more. The Boches had learned to look on her little offerings as their right, and they now felt themselves being robbed by the Coupeaus.

It was not long before Gervaise realized that she had made a mistake; for when she was one day late with her October rent, Madame Boche complained to the proprietor, who came blustering to her shop with his hat on. Of course, too, the Lorilleux extended the right hand of fellowship at once to the Boche people.

There came a day, however, when Gervaise found it necessary to call upon the Lorilleux. It was on Mamma Coupeau's account, who was sixty-seven years old, nearly blind and helpless. They must all unite in doing something for her now. Gervaise thought it a burning shame that a woman of her age, with three well-to-do children, should be allowed for a moment to regard herself as friendless and forsaken. And as her husband refused to speak to his sister, Gervaise said she would.

She entered the room like a whirlwind, without knocking. Everything was just the same as it was on that night when she had been received by them in a fashion which she had never forgotten nor forgiven. "I have come," cried Gervaise, "and I dare say you wish to know why, particularly as we are at daggers-drawn. Well! then, I have come on Mamma Coupeau's account. I have come to ask if we are to allow her to beg from door to door."

"Indeed!" said Madame Lorilleux, with a sneer, and she turned away.

But Lorilleux lifted his pale face.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and as he had understood perfectly, he went on.

"What is this cry of poverty about? The old lady ate her dinner with us yesterday. We do all we can for her, I am sure. We have not the mines of Peru within our reach, but if she thinks she is to run to and fro between our houses, she is much mistaken. I, for one have no liking for spies." He then added, as he took up his microscope, "When the rest of you agree to give five francs per month toward her support, we will do the same."

Gervaise was calmer now—these people always chilled the very marrow in her bones—and she went on to explain her views. Five francs were not enough for each of the old lady's children to pay. She could not live on fifteen francs per month.

"And why not?" cried Lorilleux, "she ought to do so. She can see well enough to find the best bits in a dish before her, and she can do something toward her own maintenance." If he had the means to indulge such laziness he should not consider it his duty to do so, he added.

Then Gervaise grew angry again. She looked at her sister-in-law, and saw her face set in vindictive firmness.

"Keep your money," she cried. "I will take care of your mother. I found a starving cat in the street the other night and took it in. I can take in your mother too. She shall want for nothing. Good heavens, what people!"

Madame Lorilleux snatched up a saucapan.

"Clear out," she said, hoarsely. "I will never give one sou—no, not one sou toward her keep. I understand you! You will make my mother work for you like a slave, and put my five franc in your pocket! Not if I know it, Madame! And if she goes to live under your roof I will never see her again. Be off with you, I say!"

"What a monster!" cried Gervaise, as she shut the door with a bang.

On the very next day, Madame Coupeau came to her. A large bed was put in the room where Nana slept. The moving did not take long, for the old lady had only this bed, a wardrobe, table, and two chairs. The table was sold, and the chairs now seated; and the old lady the evening of her arrival washed the dishes and swept up the room, glad to make herself useful. Madame Lerat had amused herself by quarrelling with her sister, to whom she had expressed her admiration of the generosity evinced by Gervaise; and when she saw that Madame Lorilleux was intensely exasperated, she declared she had never seen such eyes in anybody's head as those of the clear-starcher. She really believed one might light paper at them. This declaration naturally led to bitter words, and the sisters parted, swearing they would never see each other again; and since that Madame Lerat had spent most of her evenings at her brother's.

Three years passed away. There were reconciliations and new quarrels. Gervaise continued to be liked by her neighbors; she paid her bills regularly, and was a good customer. When she went out she received cordial greetings on all sides, and she was more fond of going out in these days than of yore. She liked to loiter with her arms full of bundles at a neighbor's window and hear a little gossip.

CHAPTER VI.

GOUJET AT HIS FORGE.

One autumnal afternoon Gervaise, who had been to carry a basket of clothes home to a customer who lived a good way off, found herself in La Rue des Poissonniers just as it was growing dark. It had rained in the morning, and the air was close and warm. She was tired from her walk, and felt a great desire for something good to eat. Just then she lifted her eyes and seeing the name of the street, she took it into her head that she would call on Goujet at his forge.

But she would ask for Etienne, she said to herself. She did not know the number, but she could find it, she thought. She wandered along and stood bewildered, looking toward Montmartre; all at once she heard the measured click of hammers—and concluded that she had stumbled on the place at last. She did not know where the entrance to the

building was, but she caught a gleam of a red light in the distance, she walked toward it and was met by a workman.

"Is it here, eh?" she said, "Oh, yes, that my child—a little boy, that is to say—works? A little boy by the name of Etienne?"

"Etienne! Etienne!" repeated the man, swaying from side to side. The wind brought from him to her an intolerable smell of brandy, which caused Gervaise to draw back, and say timidly:

"Is it here that Monsieur Goujet works?"

"Ah! Goujet, yes. If it is Goujet you wish to see, go to the left."

Gervaise obeyed his instructions and found herself in a large room, with the forge at the further end. She spoke to the first man she saw, when suddenly the whole room was one blaze of light. The bellows had sent up leaping flames which lighted every crevice and corner of the dusty old building, and Gervaise recognized Goujet before the forge, with two other men. She went toward him.

"Madame Gervaise!" he exclaimed in surprise, his face radiant with joy, and then seeing his companions laugh and wink, he pushed Etienne toward his mother. "You came to see your boy," he said; "he does his duty like a hero."

"I am glad of it," she answered; "but what an awful place this is to get at!"

And she described her journey as she called it, and then asked why no one seemed to know Etienne there.

"Because," said the blacksmith, "he is called Zou Zou here, as his hair is cut as short as a Zouave's."

The visit paid by Gervaise to the Forge was only the first of many others. She often went on Saturdays when she carried the clean linen to Madame Goujet, who still resided in the same house as before. The first year Gervaise had paid them twenty francs each month, or rather the difference between the amount of their washing, seven or eight francs, and the twenty which she agreed upon. In this way she had paid half the money she had borrowed, when one quarter-day, not knowing to whom to turn, as she had not been able to collect her bills punctually, she ran to the Goujets and borrowed the amount of her rent from them. Twice since she had asked a similar favor, so that the amount of her indebtedness now stood at four hundred and twenty-five francs.

Now she no longer paid any cash, but did their washing. It was not that she worked less nor that her business was falling off. Quite the contrary; but money had a way of melting away in her hands, and she was content now-days if she could only make both ends meet. What was the use of fussing, she thought? If she could manage to live that was all that was necessary. She was growing quite stout withal.

Madame Goujet was always kind to Gervaise; not because of any fear of losing her money, but because she really loved her, and was afraid of her going wrong in any way.

The Saturday after the first visit paid by Gervaise to the Forge was also the first of the month. When she reached Madame Goujet's her basket was so heavy that she panted two minutes before she could speak. Every one knows how heavy shirts and such things are.

"Have you brought everything?" asked Madame Goujet, who was very exacting on this point. She insisted on every piece being returned each week. Another thing she exacted was that the clothes should be brought back always on the same day and hour.

"Everything is here," answered Gervaise with a smile, "you know I never leave anything behind."

"That is true," replied the elder woman. "You have many faults my dear, but not that one yet."

And while the laundress emptied her basket, laying the linen on the bed, Madame Goujet paid her many compliments. She never burned her clothes, nor ironed off the buttons, nor tore them; but she did use a trifle too much blueing and made her shirts too stiff.

"Feel," she said, "it is like paste-board. My son never complains, but I know he does not like them so."

"And they shall not be so again," said Gervaise. "No one ever touches any of your things but myself, and I would do them over ten times rather than see you dissatisfied."

She colored as she spoke.

"I have no intention of disparaging your work," answered Madame Goujet. "I never saw any one who did up laces and embroideries as you do, and the finishing is simply perfect; the only trouble is a little too much starch, my dear. Goujet does not care to look like a fine gentleman."

She