Gustave Flaubert

BOUVARD AND PÉCUCHET

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

A. J. KRAILSHEIMER

PENGUIN BOOKS

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I

WITH the temperature up in the nineties, the Boulevard Bourdon was absolutely deserted.

Further on, the Canal Saint-Martin, enclosed by the two locks, spread out the straight line of its inky water. In the middle lay a boat loaded with timber, and on the bank two rows of barrels.

Beyond the canal, between the houses separated by various builders' yards, the wide cloudless sky was broken up into bright blue pieces, and, as the sun beat down, the white façades, the slate roofs, the granite quays were dazzling in the glare. A confused murmur rose in the distance into the sultry atmosphere, and everything seemed to hang heavy with sabbath calm and the melancholy of summer days.

Two men appeared.

One came from the Bastille, the other from the Jardin des Plantes. The taller of the two, in a linen costume, walked with his hat pushed back, waistcoat undone and cravat in hand. The smaller one, whose body was enveloped in a brown frock-coat, had a peaked cap on his bent head.

When they came to the middle of the boulevard they both sat down at the same moment on the same seat.

Each took off his hat to mop his brow and put it beside him; and the smaller man noticed, written inside his neighbour's hat, *Bouvard*; while the latter easily made out the word *Pécuchet*, in the cap belonging to the individual in the frock-coat.

'Well, well,' he said, 'we both had the same idea, writing our names inside our headgear.'

'My word, yes! Someone might take mine at the office.'

'The same with me, I work in an office too.'

Then they studied each other.

Bouvard's likeable appearance charmed Pécuchet at once.

His bluish eyes, always half-closed, twinkled in his florid face. His trousers had a broad front flap and fell baggily onto beaver-fur shoes, outlining his stomach, and made his shirt billow out at the

waist; and his fair hair, growing naturally in gentle curls, gave him a somewhat childish look.

His lips were pursed in a kind of continuous whistle.

Pécuchet's serious appearance struck Bouvard.

It looked as though he were wearing a wig, so flat and black were the locks adorning his lofty cranium. His whole face looked like a profile, because of the nose which came very far down. His legs, encased in narrow trousers of lasting, were out of proportion with the length of his torso; and he had a loud, booming voice.

He let out the exclamation: 'How good it would be to be in the country!'

But the suburbs, according to Bouvard, were made quite intolerable by the noise from the cheap open-air cafés. Pécuchet thought the same. Nevertheless he was beginning to grow tired of the capital. So was Bouvard.

And their eyes roamed over piles of building stones, the hideous water, with a bale of straw floating in it, the factory chimney rising on the horizon; sewers gave out their stench. They turned to the other side. Then they had facing them the walls of the public storehouse.

Definitely (to Pécuchet's surprise) it was hotter in the street than at home.

Bouvard urged him to take his coat off. He did not care what people might say!

Suddenly a drunkard staggered across the pavement, and speaking of workmen, they began a political discussion. Their views were the same, though Bouvard was possibly the more liberal.

Clattering over the cobbles in a cloud of dust came three hired carriages, going off towards Bercy, carrying a bride with her bouquet, solid citizens in white ties, ladies with petticoats up to their armpits, two or three little girls, a schoolboy. The sight of this wedding led Bouvard and Pécuchet to talk about women, whom they declared to be frivolous, shrewish and obstinate. Despite that, they were often better than men; at other times they were worse. In short it was better to live without them; so Pécuchet had remained a bachelor.

'I am a widower myself,' said Bouvard, 'with no children.'

'Perhaps that is your good luck.' But in the long run it was not much fun to be alone.

Then on the edge of the quay appeared a prostitute with a soldier. Pale, dark-haired and pock-marked, she was leaning on the soldier's arm, slopping along swaying her hips.

When she had moved on, Bouvard allowed himself an obscene comment. Pécuchet went very red, and, no doubt to avoid making any reply, drew his attention to a priest who was approaching.

The ecclesiastic made his way slowly down the avenue of scraggy elms planted regularly along the pavement, and Bouvard, once the tricorn hat was out of sight, expressed his relief, for he execrated the Jesuits. Pécuchet, without absolving them, showed some deference for religion.

Meanwhile darkness was falling, and the shutters opposite had been raised. More people were passing by. It struck seven.

Their words flowed on inexhaustibly, remarks following anecdotes, philosophical insights following individual considerations. They ran down the highways department, the tobacco monopoly, trade, the theatres, our navy and all the human race, like men who have had much to put up with. Each as he listened to the other rediscovered forgotten parts of himself. Though they were no longer at the age of naïve emotions, they felt a novel pleasure, a sort of opening out, the charm of affection in its initial stages.

A score of times they had stood up, sat down again, or walked the length of the boulevard from the lock upstream to the lock downstream, each time intending to go, but incapable of doing so, held back by a certain fascination.

They were however at last saying goodbye, already shaking hands, when Bouvard suddenly said: 'My word, why don't we have dinner together?'

'I had thought of it,' replied Pécuchet, 'but I didn't like to suggest it to you.'

So he let himself be taken to a little restaurant, opposite the Hôtel de Ville, said to be quite good.

Bouvard ordered the meal.

Pécuchet was afraid of spices because they might inflame his body. This was the subject of a medical discussion. They went on

to extol the advantages of science: so many things to know, so much research . . . if only one had the time! Alas, earning a living took it all up; and raising their arms in amazement, they all but embraced over the table on discovering that they were both copy-clerks, Bouvard in a business concern, Pécuchet at the Admiralty; which did not stop him devoting a few moments every evening to study. He had noted mistakes in Monsieur Thiers's work, and spoke in terms of the greatest respect about a certain Dumouchel, a teacher.

Bouvard excelled in other directions. His watch-chain of woven hair and the way he beat the remolade sauce revealed an experienced old dog, and as he ate, with the corner of his napkin tucked in under his armpit, he said things that made Pécuchet laugh, on one very low note, always the same, uttered at long intervals. Bouvard's laugh was continuous, resounding, made him show all his teeth and shake his shoulders, so that the customers sitting by the door turned round.

After the meal they went on for coffee somewhere else. As Pécuchet looked at the gas jets he groaned at such extravagant luxury, then, with a scornful gesture, pushed the newspapers away. Bouvard took a more indulgent view of them. He liked all writers in general and when he was young had felt some inclination to go on the stage.

He tried to do balancing tricks with a billiard cue and two ivory balls, like Barberou, a friend of his. Invariably they fell off, rolled over the floor between people's legs and got lost in some remote corner. The waiter, who got up every time and had to crawl under the seats to look for them, finally protested. Pécuchet had a row with him, the proprietor came up, he did not listen to his apologies and even quibbled about their drinks.

Then he suggested finishing the evening quietly at his house, quite near at hand in the Rue Saint-Martin.

As soon as he was inside he put on a kind of cotton print smock and did the honours of his flat.

A pinewood desk, right in the middle of the room, was awkwardly placed because of its corners; all round, on shelves, on the three chairs, on the ancient armchair and in the corners, were heaped pell-mell several volumes of Roret's *Encyclopaedia*, *The*

Magnetist's Manual, a Fénelon, other books, piles of papers, two coconuts, various medals, a Turkish bonnet and seashells brought back from Le Havre by Dumouchel. A layer of dust coated the walls, which had once been painted yellow. The shoe brush was lying around on the edge of the bed, from which the sheets were trailing. On the ceiling could be seen a large black stain produced by smoke from the lamp.

Bouvard, no doubt because of the smell, asked permission to open the window.

'My papers would blow away,' cried Pécuchet, and he was also afraid of draughts.

However, he was gasping in this small room, heated up since the morning by the roof tiles.

Bouvard said to him: 'If I were you I would take off my flannel waistcoat.'

'What!' cried Pécuchet, with downcast head, terrified at the idea of going without his health waistcoat.

'See me home,' Bouvard went on, 'the fresh air will refresh you.'

Finally Pécuchet put on his boots again, grumbling. 'You are bewitching me, upon my word!' Despite the distance he accompanied him all the way home, on the corner of the Rue de Béthune, opposite the Pont de la Tournelle.

Bouvard's room was well-polished, the curtains were percale and the furniture mahogany, and it had the advantage of a balcony looking onto the river. The two principal ornaments were a liqueur-stand in the middle of the chest of drawers and, along the mirror, daguerrotypes of friends; an oil painting occupied the alcove.

'My uncle,' said Bouvard, and the torch he was holding lit up a gentleman.

Red side-whiskers made his face broad, and he wore a toupet wavy at the crown. His high cravat, with the triple collars of shirt, velvet waistcoat and black jacket, squeezed him in their grip. Diamonds were depicted on the stock. His eyes wrinkled at the edges, his smile was rather sly.

Pécuchet could not help saying: 'He looks more like your father!'

'He is my godfather,' Bouvard replied casually, adding that he had been christened François, Denys, Bartholomée. Pécuchet's

names were Juste, Romain, Cyrille – and they were the same age: forty-seven. They were pleased by this coincidence, but surprised, for each had thought the other much younger. Then they marvelled at Providence, whose ways are sometimes wonderful.

'After all, if we had not gone out for a walk earlier on we might have died without meeting each other!'

And after exchanging the addresses of their employers they bade each other good night.

'Don't go off to the ladies!' Bouvard called down the stairs.

Pécuchet went down without answering the quip.

Next day, in the courtyard of Messieurs Descambos Brothers: Alsace Cloth, 92 Rue Hautefeuille, a voice called: 'Bouvard! Monsieur Bouvard!'

Bouvard stuck his head out of the window and recognized Pécuchet, who declared even louder:

'I am not ill! I left it off!'

'What do you mean?'

'It!' said Pécuchet, pointing to his chest.

Everything they had talked about during the day, together with the temperature in the flat and difficulties of digestion, had prevented him sleeping with the result that, at the end of his tether, he had thrown off his flannel waistcoat. In the morning he remembered his action, fortunately without ill effects, and he had come to report it to Bouvard, who thus rose to dizzy heights in his esteem.

He was the son of a small tradesman, and had never known his mother, who died very young. When he was fifteen he was taken away from school, where he boarded out, and put to work with a legal official. The police came on the scene and his employer was sent to the galleys: a frightful tale that still made him shudder. Then he had tried several occupations: apprentice pharmacist, usher in a school, purser on one of the boats on the upper Seine. Finally a departmental head, delighted by his handwriting, had taken him on as a copy-clerk; his educational deficiencies made him self-conscious and caused intellectual frustration, so that he was very touchy: he lived completely alone, without parents, without a mistress. His relaxation was to go on Sundays to inspect public works.

Bouvard's oldest memories took him back to the banks of the Loire, to a farmyard. A man, who was his uncle, had taken him to

Paris to teach him business. When he came of age he was paid about 1,000 francs. Then he married and opened a confectioner's shop. Six months later his wife disappeared with the contents of the till. Friends, good living, and above all indolence had promptly brought about his ruin. But he was inspired to make use of his beautiful handwriting, and for twelve years had been in the same job, with Messieurs Descambos Brothers, Cloths, 92 Rue Hautefeuille. As for his uncle, who had once sent him the famous portrait as a souvenir, Bouvard did not even know where he lived and expected nothing more from him. An income of 1,500 francs and his wages as a copyist enabled him to go every evening and doze in some modest tavern.

Thus their meeting was important enough to be an adventure. They had at once become attached to each other by secret fibres. Besides, how can sympathies be explained? Why does some peculiarity, some imperfection, which would be indifferent or odious in one, seem enchanting in another? What is called the thunderbolt of love at first sight is true for all the passions. Before the end of the week they were on Christian name terms.

They often went to collect each other at the office. As soon as one appeared, the other closed his desk, and they went off together through the streets. Bouvard walked with long strides, while Pécuchet, with short, quick step, his frock-coat catching on his heels, seemed to glide on castors. Similarly their personal tastes were in harmony. Bouvard smoked a pipe, liked cheese, regularly took his cup of black coffee. Pécuchet took snuff, ate nothing but preserves for dessert and dipped a lump of sugar in his coffee. One was confident, thoughtless, generous; the other discreet, thoughtful, thrifty.

To give Pécuchet pleasure Bouvard decided to introduce him to Barberou. He had been a commercial traveller, and was now on the Stock Exchange, a very genial soul, patriotic, fond of women, who affected a vulgar way of speaking. Pécuchet did not like him, and took Bouvard to meet Dumouchel. This author (for he had published a little book on memory training) taught literature in a boarding-school for young ladies, had orthodox opinions and a serious demeanour. He bored Bouvard.

Neither concealed his opinion from the other. Each recognized

that it was well-founded. Their habits changed, and giving up their usual boarding-house meals, they finished by dining together every day.

They made observations on the plays that were being talked about, on the government, high food prices, dishonest trading. From time to time the story of the Diamond Necklace[1] or the Fualdes trial[2] came up in their discussions; then they looked for the causes of the Revolution.

They strolled along past curiosity shops. They visited the Conservatory of Arts and Crafts, Saint-Denis, the Gobelins, the Invalides and all the public collections.

When asked for their passports they pretended to have lost them, making out that they were foreigners, English.

In the galleries of the Natural History Museum they passed by the stuffed quadrupeds with astonishment, the butterflies with pleasure, the metals with indifference; fossils made them dreamy, seashells bored them. They examined the hothouses through the glass, and trembled at the thought that all that foliage was distilling poisons. What they found remarkable about the cedar was the fact that it had been brought back in someone's hat.

At the Louvre they tried to be enthusiastic about Raphael. At the National Library they would have liked to know the exact number of volumes.

Once they went into a lecture on Arabic at the Collège de France, and the professor was astonished to see these two strangers trying to take notes. Thanks to Barberou they went behind the scenes in a small theatre. Dumouchel got them tickets for a session of the Academy. They found out about discoveries, read prospectuses and through such curiosity developed their intelligence. Far away on a horizon which receded further every day they perceived things that were both confused and wonderful.

As they admired some old piece of furniture they felt sorry that they had not lived in the period when it was used, though they knew absolutely nothing about the period in question. From the

1. The scandal of the Diamond Necklace, involving Cardinal de Rohan and Marie-Antoinette, raged in 1785–6.

2. The murder in 1817 of the magistrate J-B. Fualdes provoked a famous trial.

sound of certain names, they conjured up visions of lands all the more beautiful for being totally imprecise. Works whose titles they could not understand seemed to contain some mystery.

The more ideas they had the more they suffered. When a mail-coach passed them in the street they felt a need to go away in it. The flower market by the river made them yearn for the country.

One Sunday they started walking in the morning and by way of Meudon, Bellevue, Suresnes, Auteuil, roamed about all day in vineyards, picked poppies from the edge of the fields, slept on the grass, drank milk, ate beneath the acacias of little inns, and came back very late, dusty, exhausted, delighted. They often repeated such excursions. They found the next day so dull that they finally gave them up.

The monotony of the office became odious. Constantly scraping, then making good, the paper, the same inkwell, the same pens and the same companions! They found them stupid and talked to them less and less. They were teased for this. Every day they arrived late, and were rebuked.

They had previously been almost happy, but as their consideration for each other grew, they found their job irritating, and each increased the other's disgust. They stimulated and spoilt each other. Pécuchet contracted Bouvard's brusqueness, Bouvard took on some of Pécuchet's morosity.

'I would like to be a street acrobat!' said one.

'Might as well be a rag-picker!' cried the other.

What an appalling situation! No way out! No hope even!

One afternoon (it was 20th January 1839), Bouvard was at his office when he received a letter, brought by the postman.

His arms went up, his head slowly fell back and he collapsed on the floor in a faint.

The clerks rushed up, someone took off his tie, they sent for the doctor. He opened his eyes; then to his questioners: 'Ah! The fact is . . . the fact is . . . a bit of air will make me better. No! Leave me alone! Please!'

Then, despite his bulk, he ran without stopping for breath all the way to the Admiralty, wiping his brow, thinking he was going mad, trying to calm down.

He asked for Pécuchet.

Pécuchet appeared.

'My uncle is dead! I am his heir!'

'Impossible!'

Bouvard showed the following lines:

Office of Maître Tardivel, Notary. Savigny-en-Septaine, 14th January 39

Sir – Would you kindly come to my office to acquaint yourself with the will of your natural father, Monsieur François Denys Bartholomée Bouvard, sometime merchant in the town of Nantes, deceased in this commune on the 10th instant. This will contains a most important provision in your favour.

I remain, Sir, yours faithfully,
Tardivel, notary.

Pécuchet was obliged to sit down on a bollard in the courtyard. Then he handed back the paper, saying slowly:

'As long as ... it is not ... someone joking!'

'You think it is a joke!' replied Bouvard in a strangled voice, like a death rattle.

But the postal stamp, the printed heading of the notary's office, the notary's signature, all proved the authenticity of the news; – and they looked at each other with quivering lips and tears rolling from their staring eyes.

They needed space. They went as far as the Arc de Triomphe, came back along the river, past Notre-Dame. Bouvard was very red. He punched Pécuchet on the back, and for five minutes on end talked absolute nonsense.

They made fun of it despite themselves. This inheritance must, of course, amount to ... 'Oh, that would be too good to be true! Let's say no more about it!'

They did say more about it. There was nothing to stop one asking for explanations straight away. Bouvard wrote to the lawyer.

The lawyer sent a copy of the will, which ended thus: 'Consequently I give to François Denys Bartholomée Bouvard, acknowledged as my natural son, the portion of my estate disposable by law.'

The old chap had had this son in his youth, but had carefully kept him out of the way, passing him off as a nephew; and the

nephew had always called him uncle, although he was well aware of the facts. When he was about forty, Monsieur Bouvard had married, but was then widowed. His two legitimate sons having turned out contrary to his views, he had been seized by remorse over the way he had abandoned his other child for so many years. He would even have brought him into his house but for the influence of his cook. She left him, thanks to the manoeuvres of the family, and in his isolation, approaching his end, he decided to repair the wrong he had done and leave as much of his fortune as he could to the fruit of his first love. It amounted to half a million francs, which left 250,000 francs for the copy-clerk. The elder brother, Monsieur Étienne, had announced that he would respect the will.

Bouvard fell into a kind of stupor. He repeated in a low voice, smiling the placid smile of the drunk: '15,000 francs a year!' – and Pécuchet, though he was more level-headed, could not get over it.

They were rudely shaken by a letter from Tardivel. The other son, Monsieur Alexandre, declared his intention of going to court and even altering the bequest if he could, and as a preliminary demanded seals, inventories, appointment of a sequestrator, etc. This gave Bouvard a bilious attack. No sooner was he convalescent than he set off for Savigny, whence he returned with no conclusions of any kind and bemoaning his travelling expenses.

Then came bouts of insomnia, alternating moods of rage and hope, elation and dejection. Finally, after six months, Monsieur Alexandre calmed down, and Bouvard took possession of the inheritance.

His first cry had been: 'We'll retire to the country!' and Pécuchet had found it perfectly natural that in saying this he should link his friend with his good fortune, for the union of these two men was absolute and profound.

However, as he did not want to be a charge on Bouvard, he would not move until he retired. Another two years; no matter! He remained inflexible and so it was decided.

To resolve the question of where to settle they reviewed the provinces in turn. The North was fertile but too cold; the South was delightful as regards climate, but the mosquitoes made it unsuitable; the Centre was frankly dull. Brittany would have suited

them but for the excessive piety of the people. As for the East, because of the Germanic patois, the idea was not to be entertained. There were however other regions. What for instance was Forez, or Bugey, or Roumois like? Maps were uninformative. Besides, whether their home was in this place or that, the important thing was to have one.

They already saw themselves in shirt sleeves, beside a flowerbed, pruning roses, and digging, hoeing, handling the soil, transplanting things. They would awake to the sound of the lark and follow the plough, they would go with a basket to pick apples, they would watch butter-making, grain-threshing, sheep-shearing, bee-keeping, and would revel in the lowing of the cattle and the smell of new-mown hay. No more copying! No more boss! No more rent even! For they would own their own home! And they would eat chickens from their own poultry-run, vegetables from their own garden – and would sit down to dinner with their clogs on! 'We'll do whatever we please! We'll grow beards!'

They bought gardening implements, then a lot of things 'that might come in useful', like a tool-box (every house needs one), scales, a surveyor's chain, a bath-tub in case they fell ill, a thermometer and even a barometer 'Gay-Lussac type' for experiments in physics, should the fancy take them. It would not be a bad idea either (for one cannot always work outside) to have a few good works of literature – and they looked for some – sometimes hard put to it to know whether a given book 'was really a library book'. Bouvard settled the question.

'Well, we won't need a library.'

'Besides, I've always got mine,' said Pécuchet.

They organized themselves in advance. Bouvard would bring his furniture, Pécuchet his big black table; they would use the curtains and with a few pots and pans that would be quite sufficient.

They had sworn to keep quiet about all this, but their faces shone. So their colleagues found them rather odd. Bouvard, who wrote spread out over his desk with his elbows stuck out so that he could more easily round out his copperplate, made a kind of whistling noise and at the same time blinked his heavy eyelids in a sly expression. Pécuchet, perched on a large straw-bottomed stool, still took care over the loops of his spindly writing – but kept

puffing out his nostrils, pinching his lips, as if he were afraid of letting out his secret.

After searching for eighteen months they had still found nothing. They travelled everywhere in the vicinity of Paris, from Amiens to Evreux, from Fontainebleau to Le Havre. They wanted country that was really country, without exactly insisting on a picturesque site, but a limited horizon depressed them.

They wanted to be away from other houses and yet were afraid of solitude.

Sometimes they made up their minds, then, fearing that they would regret it later, changed them again, when the place had seemed unhealthy, or too exposed to winds from the sea, or too near some factory or too inaccessible.

Barberou saved them.

He knew about their dream, and one fine day came to tell them that he had heard of an estate, at Chavignolles, between Caen and Falaise. It consisted of a farm of thirty-eight hectares, with a sort of manor house and a garden in full production.

They took themselves off to Calvados and were fired with enthusiasm. Only for the farm and house together (one would not be sold without the other) they were asking 143,000 francs. Bouvard would only give 120,000.

Pécuchet struggled against his obstinacy, begged him to yield, finally declared that he would make up the balance. It was the whole of his fortune, derived from his mother's patrimony and his own savings. He had never breathed a word of it, reserving this capital for a great occasion.

Everything had been paid towards the end of 1840, six months before he retired.

Bouvard was no longer a copy-clerk. At first he had continued his functions out of distrust for the future, but had given them up once the inheritance was certain. However, he went back quite happily to Messieurs Descambos and the day before his departure gave a punch-party to everyone at the office.

Pécuchet on the other hand was sulky with his colleagues and on his last day slammed the door brutally behind him as he left.

He had to supervise the packing, run a lot of errands, buy still more things and take leave of Dumouchel!

The teacher proposed that they should keep up correspondence so that he would keep Pécuchet up to date with the world of literature, and after renewed congratulations he wished him good health.

Barberou showed rather more emotion as Bouvard bade him farewell. He left a game of dominoes specially, promised to come and visit him in the country, ordered two anisettes and embraced him.

Bouvard returned home, stood on his balcony, took a deep breath of air, and said to himself: 'At last.' The lights on the quays shimmered over the water, the distant rumbling of the omnibuses grew quiet. He recalled happy days spent in the great city, picnic meals in restaurants, evenings at the theatre, the gossip retailed by his concierge, all his habits; and he felt a discouragement, a sadness that he did not dare confess.

Pécuchet kept walking round his room until 2 a.m. He would never come back there; so much the better! All the same, to leave something of himself, he traced his name on the plaster of the mantelpiece.

The bulk of the baggage had gone off the previous day. The gardening implements, the bedding, the mattresses, tables, chairs, a stove, the bath-tub and three barrels of Burgundy were to go down the Seine, as far as Le Havre, and would thence be forwarded to Caen, where Bouvard would be waiting and would have them sent on to Chavignolles. But his father's portrait, the armchairs, the liqueur-stand, the books, the clock, all the valuable articles were loaded on to a removal van which would travel via Nonancourt, Verneuil and Falaise. Pécuchet decided to accompany it.

He installed himself beside the driver, on the front seat, and, wrapped in his oldest coat, with a muffler, mittens and the foot-warmer from his office, on Sunday, 20th March, at first light, he left the capital.

The movement and novelty of the journey occupied him during the first few hours. Then the horses slowed down, which led to arguments with the driver and the carter. They chose execrable inns, and though they answered for everything, Pécuchet with excessive caution shared their sleeping quarters. The following day they set off at dawn; and the road, endlessly the same, stretched out

uphill to the edge of the horizon. The stones continued yard after yard, the ditches were full of water. The countryside spread out in great expanses of cold, monotonous green, clouds chased across the sky, from time to time rain fell. On the third day squalls blew up. The canvas cover of the wagon was badly fixed and flapped in the wind like the sail of a ship. Pécuchet bowed his head under his cap, and every time he opened his snuff-box had to turn completely round to protect his eyes. During the bumps he heard all his baggage shaking about behind him and issued a stream of suggestions. Seeing that this had no effect, he changed his tactics; he was all good-natured kindness; on the harder climbs he put his shoulder to the wheel with the men; he went so far as to pay for a tot with their coffee after the meal. From then on the pace was more brisk, so much so that near Gauburge the axle broke and the wagon keeled over. Pécuchet at once inspected the inside; the china cups lay in splinters. He threw up his arms, ground his teeth, cursed the two idiots; the following day was lost because the carter got drunk; but he did not have the strength to complain, the cup of bitterness was running over.

Bouvard had only left Paris two days later so as to have one more dinner with Barberou. He arrived at the last moment in the court-yard, then woke up in front of Rouen Cathedral; he had taken the wrong coach. That evening all the seats for Caen had been taken; not knowing what to do he went to the Arts Theatre and smiled at his neighbours, saying that he had retired from business and had recently acquired an estate in the neighbourhood. When he arrived at Caen on the Friday his packages were not there. He received them on the Sunday and sent them off on a cart, warning the farmer that he would be following in a few hours.

At Falaise, on the ninth day of his journey, Pécuchet took on an extra horse, and until sunset progress was good. Beyond Bretteville, leaving the main road, he took a side road, expecting at any moment to see the gable of Chavignolles. However, the ruts grew fainter, then disappeared, and they found themselves in the middle of ploughed fields. Night was falling. What was to be done? In the end Pécuchet abandoned the wagon, and wallowing in the mire went forward to see what he could find. When he approached

farms, dogs barked. He cried out with all his might to ask for directions. No one answered. He was afraid and went back into the open country. Suddenly two lanterns shone out. He saw a gig, and ran to meet it. Bouvard was inside.

But wherever could the removal van be? For a good hour they hailed it in the darkness. At last it turned up and they arrived at Chavignolles.

A great fire of brushwood and pine cones blazed in the main room. Two places were laid at the table. The furniture brought by the cart filled the vestibule. Nothing was missing. They sat down to talk.

The dinner prepared for them consisted of onion soup, a chicken, bacon and hard-boiled eggs. The old woman who did the cooking came from time to time to enquire how they found everything. They answered: 'Oh, very good, very good!' and the coarse bread, too hard to cut, the cream, the nuts, everything filled them with delight. There were holes in the flooring, the walls were sticky with damp. Yet they looked around them with a satisfied eye as they ate at the little table on which a candle burned. Their faces were flushed from the open air. They filled their bellies, leaned back on the backs of their chairs, making them crack, and kept saying to each other: 'Well, here we are! Aren't we lucky! It feels like a dream!'

Although it was midnight Pécuchet had the idea of strolling round the garden. Bouvard did not object. They took the candle, and shielding it with an old newspaper, walked along the beds. They enjoyed saying the names of the vegetables out loud: 'Look, carrots! Ah, cabbages!'

Then they inspected the espaliers. Pécuchet tried to discover buds. Sometimes a spider fled suddenly across the wall, and the shadows of their two bodies were thrown onto it, reflecting their gestures in enlargement. The grass dripped with dew. The night was pitch black, and all was still, utterly silent and sweet. In the distance a cock crowed.

Their two bedrooms had a small connecting door disguised by the wallpaper. Someone had banged a chest of drawers into it and made the nails come out. They found it wide open. This was a surprise.

Undressed and in bed they chatted for a while, then fell asleep. Bouvard on his back, mouth open, head bare; Pécuchet on his right side, knees drawn up to his stomach, topped with a cotton nightcap, and both of them snored beneath the moonlight streaming through the windows.