

Three Months Under the Snow



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Chapter 1

November 22, 18—

Since it is the will of God that I should be shut up in this chalet¹ with my grandfather, I am about to write down, daily, whatever may happen to us in this prison; so that if we should perish in it, our relations and friends may know how we passed the latter days of our life; and that, if we are delivered by God's mercy, this journal may preserve the remembrance of our dangers and sufferings. It is my grandfather's wish that I should undertake this work in order to shorten a little those hours which would otherwise seem tedious and for which it would be difficult to find employment. I shall begin by relating what happened to us yesterday.

We had expected my father at the village for several weeks. October 9, the day the martyrdom of St. Denis is remembered,

1. a simple shepherd's hut, in this instance

was passed, and all the flocks had descended from the mountain with their shepherds. My father alone did not return, and we all asked ourselves what could have detained him. My uncles and my aunts assured us that we need not be uneasy; that perhaps there still remained some grass to be eaten, which was probably the reason why my father kept the herds some time longer upon the mountain.

My grandfather at length became alarmed at the delay; he said, "I will go myself and see what detains François; I shall not be sorry to pay another visit to the chalet. Who knows if I shall be permitted to do so next year? Will you come with me?" added he, looking at me.

I was just going to ask his leave to accompany him, for we were seldom apart from one another.

We were soon ready to start. We ascended slowly, sometimes threading the narrow passes, at others going along the side of deep precipices. At about a quarter of a league² from the chalet, I had the curiosity to approach a steep declivity, and my grandfather, who had already told me that this made him uneasy, approached rapidly to take me by the hand; a stone which slipped under his foot caused a sprain, which gave him acute pain, but after some minutes he was able to walk, and we hoped that it would go off. By the help of his holly staff and leaning upon my shoulder, he dragged himself hither.

My father was much surprised to see us. He was busy preparing for his departure; so that if we had remained quiet at the village for one day longer, he would have arrived himself to put an end to our trouble.

"You, father!" said he, advancing to support him, "did you think that we had met with an accident?"

2. a league is 3 miles, or roughly 5 km

“Yes; we came to see what had detained you, when all our neighbors were returned.”

“Some of our cows were ill; but they are now recovered. I shall send Pierre this evening with the remainder of the cheeses, and I intend to go down tomorrow with the herds.”

“Are you very tired, Louis?” said my grandfather to me.

The tone in which he put this question showed me that he had some secret design, and I answered not very clearly.

“I was thinking,” added my grandfather, “that it would be most prudent to send the boy with Pierre; the wind has changed within this half hour, and we shall, perhaps, have bad weather tonight.”

My father expressed the same fear, and recommended me to follow this advice.

“If you wish it,” said my grandfather, “I will go down with you; a short rest is all I require.”

“I had rather wait for you,” said I to my father, embracing him. “A whole night’s rest is needful for grandpapa, who has hurt his foot through my disobedience.” I then related what had happened a short distance from the chalet; and it was agreed that we should all go down the next day, which was yesterday.

There was a pot upon the fire, which my father observed that I regarded with some degree of impatience. He served us from it with a soup made of the flour of maize cooked with milk, in a tureen³, which we all ate, like soldiers, out of the same bowl; after which I went to bed. I fell asleep without paying much attention to the conversation of my grandfather and my father, who talked in a low voice for a long time after supper.

The next day, I was much surprised to perceive that the mountain was quite white. The snow was still falling in great abundance, and driven by a strong wind. This would rather

3. a covered dish for serving soup

have amused me if I had not observed the uneasiness which it caused my relations. I began to be uneasy myself when I saw my grandfather attempt to walk a few steps, and drag himself along with great difficulty, by leaning on the furniture and against the walls. The accident of the preceding day had caused his foot to swell, and he was in great pain.

“Go, go,” said he; “take away this child before the snow gets deeper. You see that it is impossible for me to follow you.”

“And do you suppose, father, that I can leave you here?”

“Place your son and the herds in safety first, and then you may think about me. You can return with a litter to take me away.”

“Let me carry you on my shoulders, father, and let us set out without delay, I beg of you.”

“My son, how are you to guide the flock and take care of this boy when so heavily laden?”

We thus passed a great part of the day without deciding upon anything. We were in hopes that someone would come from home to assist us. I said at length that I was big enough to do without a guide, and to help my father drive the herds. These representations were useless; my grandfather persisted in his resolution. He would not expose us to danger by encumbering us with his person.

My father pressed him eagerly and almost angrily. I wept. At length the dispute ceased, and I may say that it was chiefly by my interposition.

I said to my father, “Leave me also in the chalet. You will arrive the sooner at home, and you will return with assistance to take us away; grandfather will require someone to wait upon him and keep him company; and it will be an opportunity for me to testify my gratitude for all his kindness. We will take care of one another, and God will take care of us both.”

“The boy is right,” said my grandfather; “the snow is already so deep, and the wind so violent, that I foresee more danger in his going with you than in his remaining with me. Here, François,

take this staff; it is very strong, and armed with an iron point; it will help you to descend, as it assisted me in coming up. Bring the cows out of the stable; leave us the goat and the provisions which remain. I am more uneasy about you than ourselves.”

For a moment my father hung his head: looking up suddenly he caught me in his arms, and I felt his tears upon my cheeks. “I will not reproach you, my dear Louis, but you see the consequences of your disobedience: promise me not to be guilty of the same again. God has ordained what we see; and I must confess that neither your grandfather nor I foresaw the great embarrassment in which we are placed. If we had supposed last night that our situation would have been so sad today, we would have profited by the assistance of Pierre to take away grandfather.”

When I saw my father ready to set out, I presented him with a pretty bottle covered with straw, in which there remained a small quantity of wine, with which I had provided myself the day before.

“Take this,” said I to him, “you will want it more than we shall today. You know that my poor mother gave me this bottle the first time that I came to pay you a visit in the mountain; I am glad that it is of use at a time of so much importance both for you and for us.”

“Marie!” cried my father, with emotion, “she is at rest!”

And he pressed me again in his arms in memory of one who was no longer able to caress me.

We brought out the herds, which seemed much astonished at finding the earth covered with snow. Some of the cows got away, and ran round the chalet. At length they were set forward on the way; and in a few moments my father disappeared in the thick clouds of snow with the flock.

Though they were no longer visible, my grandfather seemed still to follow them with his eyes. He leaned upon the window without speaking, but his lips seemed to move, his hands were clasped, and his eyes lifted up to heaven. His attitude recalled

me to a sense of my duty; I joined in his sentiments, and recommended my father to God. We had remained some time in this manner when the wind began to blow with greater violence; thick clouds enveloped us, and the night fell almost suddenly. However, our wooden clock had scarcely struck three—

“Great God have mercy on him!” said my grandfather; “but he must have passed the forest some time, and he is not exposed to this whirlwind. He will be sadly uneasy on our account.”

Our minds had been so occupied all day that we had never thought of taking any food, and I was very hungry. At this moment I called my grandfather’s attention to the bleatings of the goat.

“Poor Blanchette!” said he; “her milk is troublesome, and she is calling us. Light the lamp; we will go and milk her, and then have our supper.”

“And our breakfast, too, grandpapa!”

This made him smile, and I could perceive, by the light of the lamp, that he became more tranquil, which gave me a little courage. However, the wind roared violently. It rushed among the shingles, which shook with its force, so that we had some fear that the roof of the chalet would have been carried away. I lifted up my head several times.

“Fear nothing!” said my grandfather; “this house has sustained many similar assaults. The shingles are loaded with large stones; and the roof, being nearly flat, gives very little hold to the wind.”

He then made me a sign to go before him, and we entered the stable.

When the goat saw us, she redoubled her bleatings. She seemed ready to break her halter by the efforts she made to get to us. How greedily she ate the handful of salt that I gave her! Her tongue licked my hand over and over again, that she might not lose a grain. She gave us a good pailful of milk. I was in great want of it. My grandfather said to me when we returned to the kitchen, “We must be very careful not to forget Blanchette

again; we must milk her punctually morning and evening; our lives depend on hers.”

“Do you think, then,” I replied, “that we shall remain here a long time?”

“Perhaps so; but there is no knowing. We must always hope the best, and take precautions as if the worst were sure to happen.”

After supper, I went and filled our nurse’s crib, and gave her fresh litter. I caressed her, I must confess, more lovingly than usual; she seemed also more glad to see me. Goats are always fond of company, and she is now, poor thing, alone in the stable. When she saw me return to the kitchen, she began to bleat in the most plaintive manner.

We remained some minutes longer by the fireside; but we were far from being as well off here as in our house on the plain. The fireplace is as large as an ordinary room; it goes narrowing upwards, but the opening on the roof is so wide that the snow which entered it, driven by the wind, was very troublesome to us. It made a disagreeable noise, as it melted in the fire, and we were continually obliged to shake off the flakes with which our clothes were covered.

“You see, my boy,” said my grandfather, “we shall get no warmth this evening, except in our bed. Let us go and take refuge there; the snow will not reach us in that shelter; tomorrow we will try and secure ourselves from it in the chimney corner. Let us pray to God, and seek His protection through our Lord and Savior; He is present everywhere, on the mountain as well as in the plain. Were the snow which covers us a hundred times deeper than it is, we should not be concealed from His sight; He sees our lifted hands, He hears our feeble sighs. Yea, Lord, Thou art with us; we will rest without fear under the shadow of Thy wings.”

I was much affected, and never prayed with greater confidence than I did last night.

This morning, when I awoke, I found myself in complete darkness, and at first supposed that my sleep had quitted me at an earlier hour than usual. However, I heard my grandfather feeling his way about, and I rubbed my eyes but did not see a bit better.

“Grandfather,” said I, “you are up before daylight.”

“My dear boy,” he answered, “if we were to wait for the light of day, we should remain long enough in bed. I fear the snow is above the window.”

At this I uttered a cry of horror and leaped out of bed. I soon lighted our lamp, and we were then able to perceive that my grandfather’s conjecture was well-founded.

“But the window is low,” he added; “besides, it may be that the snow has been heaped up in this part; perhaps we should not see it above two feet deep at some paces from the wall.”

“Then they will come to rescue us.”

“I hope so; however, next to God, let us depend in the first place on ourselves. Suppose it were His will to keep us shut up here for some time; let us see what resources we have, and when we have ascertained them, we will regulate the use we should make of them.”

“There is no doubt that the day is come; the cuckoo clock⁴ points to seven; it is fortunate that I did not forget to wind it up last night; this is a precaution we should be careful to observe. It is always pleasant to know how the time goes; and we must always be punctual with Blanchette.”

Thus we began the day, which seemed sad and wearisome. I can no longer hold my pen. Grandfather thinks I had better put off the remainder of my journal till tomorrow.

4. Wooden clocks are fabricated in great numbers and at a low price in the mountains of Switzerland, and keep very regular time.

November 23rd

If this continues, I shall scarcely be able to write each evening the history of the day. When I was at school, I was often praised for the facility with which I executed the little compositions given as exercises to the higher classes; but I am far from being able to express, especially in writing, all I think and feel. I will, however, do my best. If these pages should ever be read by strangers, they must not forget that they were found in a chalet, and that they are the work of a schoolboy.

Yesterday morning, when we discovered that we were closer prisoners than on the former day, we were very sad; however, we did not forget our breakfast or the goat. While my grandfather was milking her, I watched him closely and with great attention.

“You do well,” said he; “you must learn to supply my place. You can see that I have some difficulty in stooping to this work. Come and try if you can milk her yourself.”

After a short trial I succeeded in squeezing out a few drops of milk, but I believe I hurt our good nurse, for she started back and nearly overturned the milk pail; I have, since that, both yesterday and this morning, made two other trials, and have succeeded better.

After breakfast we examined what the chalet contained that might be useful to us. I will give an account of it another day, for I fear I should be obliged to stop as I did yesterday.

When we had ascertained what we possessed in goods and utensils, we were anxious to know the state of the weather. I placed myself under the chimney and looked through the only aperture which remained free in the chalet. After some moments the sun shone out suddenly upon the snow, which now rose to a considerable height above the opening. I remarked this circumstance to my grandfather. We could easily distinguish the thickness of the layer of snow, because the opening has no chimney

pot above the roof. It is a mere hole like that of a hay-loft.

“If we had a ladder,” said my grandfather, “you could get up and unfasten a trap that your father has lately placed there, as he told me, to defend himself from the cold and rain till the chimney is repaired, which was in a bad condition when it was blown down.”

“If the chimney were narrower,” I replied, “I should not want a ladder, I could climb up like a chimney sweeper.”

We remained some moments in thought; suddenly my grandfather recollected that he had seen in the cow-house a long pole of fir, and reminded me of it. I clapped my hands with joy.

“That is all we want,” I cried; “I have climbed many trees whose stem was no bigger. The pole has the bark on it still, which will make it the easier.”

But we had to introduce it into the flue, and that occasioned some difficulty. Fortunately, however, the entrance to it was wide and very high, and we succeeded in our undertaking, being assisted by the flexibility of the wood.

I then set to work, having tied a string round my waist so as to hoist up a shovel when I was mounted. I succeeded by using my feet and hands, and leaning against the wall in getting upon the roof. I began by making room for myself by shoveling away the snow, and I then found it to be about three feet deep; round the chalet it seemed to me to be much more. The wind, indeed, had heaped it up, as they earth up vegetables to nourish them and prevent them from getting dry; but, nevertheless, an enormous quantity of snow had fallen in a very short time.

All the space that can be seen round the chalet is nothing but a white carpet; the forest of pines which surrounds it towards the valley, and which bounds the prospect, is white like the rest, except the trunks of the trees, which seem quite black. Several of these trees have been broken by the weight of the snow; I saw large branches and even stems broken into splinters.

At this moment a cold icy wind blew from the north; the

dark clouds which it drove before it opened at intervals and let the sunshine pass through them, and this dazzling light flitted over the snow with the swiftness of an arrow.

I was quite benumbed with the cold when I wished to explain to grandfather what I saw. He perceived that my teeth chattered; he told me then to make haste and clear the trap by shoveling away as much snow as I could round the chimney. This labor took up much time, and gave me a great deal of trouble, but at the same time it warmed me. After having followed according to my grandfather's directions in everything, I replaced the cord in a pulley, so that the trap might be opened by pulling it down, and shut again by its own weight when the cord was loosened; this cord passed out of the flue and through the floor by means of holes made on purpose. After making two or three trials to assure ourselves of the complete success of the experiment, I descended much more easily than I had climbed up.

My clothes were quite wet, and I had no others. We lighted a bright fire with branches and cones of fir; then lowering the trap, and leaving only space enough for the smoke to escape, we passed a great part of the day in the chimney corner without any other light than the fire, for our provision of oil was very small, and it seems that we shall not very soon leave our prison. We only lighted the lamp when it was time to milk the goat.

It was a new and sad affair to linger out the day in this manner. I believe, however, that the hours would not have seemed so long had it not been for our prolonged hope of deliverance. I was always thinking that someone would come to our aid; I got up again upon the roof to see if there was anybody coming, and never ceased questioning grandfather. He said that he hoped my father had got home in safety, but that perhaps the roads were rendered impassable, or the passes stopped up by the snow.

At length, after having quite closed the opening of the chimney, we went to bed yesterday, in the hope that someone would come to our aid today. Alas! we found out this morning

that for the present the thing is almost impossible. It seems that it never ceased snowing all night. We had great difficulty in opening the trap; I succeeded at last, and we were able to light the fire. I discovered that the snow was two feet deeper than before. Grandfather wishes me not to entertain any hopes of leaving this tomb before the spring. My own captivity is not that which saddens me the most; the dangers that my father has encountered, and, if he has escaped, his alarm on our account, trouble me much more.

Last spring I came here to pass some days with him, and I had brought pens, ink, and paper with me, because he does not wish me to be quite idle when I cannot go to school. When I left him, I wished to take away all that remained of these articles; but he said, "Leave all that in this cupboard, you will find it next year in good condition." This is the paper and pens which I am now using, very differently from what I expected.

Chapter 2

November 24th

I still tremble with horror when I think of the misfortune that nearly happened to us. Can it be believed that, buried as we are under the snow, we have narrowly escaped being consumed by fire? This is another danger which we have to guard against. We were sitting before the fire, and in order to pass away the time, my grandfather was making me work some sums. I had spread the ashes on the hearth, as they do with sand in some schools, to trace the figures upon. While I was finishing my little sum, we felt an unusual degree of heat behind us; it proceeded from a truss of straw which we were making use of for plaiting various articles, and which I had placed too near the fireplace. It was already on fire at one end. I wished to throw myself upon it to extinguish the fire, but I only burned my hands. Grandpapa, though he never can rise from his seat without pain, rushed to the truss and carried it off without a moment's delay, all flaming as it was, to the chimney.

“Remove,” said he, “everything that can take fire.”

I removed all the seats, the provision of wood, and everything that was near the fireplace. We stood then for a moment aghast. The flames continued to increase; we held the truss close against the wall of the chimney with the aid of a fork and a fire shovel. We had not a drop of water to spare. The chalet was lighted up with the red glare; the smoke could not escape and nearly suffocated us. Still, if we did not hold on, the truss would have fallen out, and we should have been lost. Bits of lighted straw flew about on all sides; they might have fallen upon the bed in the corner of the room, or have set on fire the rafters over our heads, or else the partition which separated us from the cow-house. A truss of straw ought not to take long in burning out, and yet I thought I should never see the end of it. At length, however, the flames subsided.

“Tread quickly,” said my grandfather, “on what is still burning, and extinguish the least spark.” He even set me the example himself. In a short time we were again plunged in total darkness, but we still continued in some degree of alarm till we had ascertained that the fire had not caught any part around us. The smoke, in its turn, gradually dispersed, we lighted the lamp and found ourselves as black as two coal heavers, but, thanks be to God, we were safe, both ourselves and our chalet having sustained no injury beyond having slightly burned our hands and feet.

We shook off the ashes and dust with which we were covered, and my grandfather, attributing the accident to his own negligence, said to me, “We can never be too quick in repairing our faults. If we had had a tub of water at hand we should have escaped this danger. We have a large empty cask in the dairy, we must take out one end of it and place it on the other near the fireplace. We will fill it with snow, which will soon melt, and we shall have a provision of water in case of accident. Let us, in particular, be more careful and attentive. I need not tell you that the burning of the chalet would be our death; we have no means

of escape. Such an accident is as terrible for us as it would be for sailors on the wide ocean.”

We set to work immediately. We opened the door of the chalet and filled the cask, after having placed it in a convenient situation. We shall be in no want of snow! I felt my heart sink within me when I beheld, on opening the door, that white wall which separates us from the whole world.

November 25th

It is God’s will that we should put our whole trust in Him.⁵ The snow continues to fall abundantly. I have again had much trouble in clearing the trap which was loaded with it. We thought it prudent to clear the roof also from a part of the weight which was pressing upon it. I was employed for a long time at this work today. I left under my feet a layer of snow sufficiently thick to protect us from the cold, and I threw down the rest.

It is some relief to me to be for a short time out of our dungeon, and yet all I see around me looks very melancholy. One can scarcely now distinguish the unevenness of the ground round the house; the cistern, which I could perceive plainly yesterday, has now entirely disappeared; nothing can be more dismal than the landscape—the earth is white, the sky is black. I have read, at school, the account of voyages to the frozen ocean and polar regions; it seems to me as if we had been transported there. And since the wretched travelers who have suffered so much from the cold, and have encountered such great dangers, have sometimes returned to their country, I trust that we may also be permitted to see my father and our village again.

We are not altogether unprovided with necessaries in our sequestered abode. We have found more hay and straw than will

5. Proverbs 3:5-6

be required for Blanchette for a whole year. If she continues to give us milk, we have a most precious treasure in her. But an unlucky circumstance might deprive us of her, and we have been very fortunate in finding a small provision of potatoes in a corner of the cow-house, which we must husband. We have begun by covering them with straw to protect them from the frost. In the cow-house also my father had secured his stock of wood, but there is hardly enough remaining to warm us during a long winter. It is fortunate then that we thought of closing the trap at those times when we have no very urgent want of a fire; when there is a fear of being without fuel, we require other means of keeping out the cold. Happily, the snow, by which we are imprisoned, serves to shelter us at the same time. I am surprised how little we feel the cold, buried as we are. "It is thus," said my grandfather, "that the corn is preserved so well under the snow." We shall do the same; we shall keep ourselves concealed all the winter, and, in the spring, we shall put our heads out at the window, but till then, it will be very tedious work, and God grant that it may all end well!

To supply the deficiency of wood, we have a heap of fir cones, of which I had collected a great part myself to burn at home. Happily, they had not been carried down to the village. If the worst comes to the worst, we can but burn the racks and mangers that are in the cow-house. In a case of life and death, we do not look very narrowly into these things; it is only acting like sailors in a storm who throw their merchandise into the sea.

The chalet had been in great part unfurnished. What we regret least is the large cauldron for making the cheese. They have left us some of the most needful cooking utensils, and moreover an axe, but all notched, and a saw which will scarcely cut at all. We have, each of us, a pocketknife. Scanty as our furniture is, we shall get on nevertheless. We regret most our provisions, for what we have are very miserable. What a pity it is that we could not find more than three of those loaves that are kept a whole year in the mountain, and at length, broken in pieces with an axe.

They were in an old oak tool chest, which my father brought up here some years ago, because it took up too much room in the house; we have also found some salt, a little ground coffee, and a small provision of hog's lard.

"This is good," said I, when I found this last.

"Very much so," said grandfather, "but we must not apply it to the uses of our kitchen, it will serve for the lamp if the oil should fail us, and we have but little of it. Should you not prefer a poorer diet so as to have light?"

"Certainly," I replied. "How could we endure without it such nights as these, which set in at daybreak?"

We have but one bed, but we sleep comfortably in it, according to the practice of the mountains; it is large enough to contain five or six persons. It is placed in a corner of the only room in the house, which is at the same time the kitchen and the cheese manufactory. Only one blanket has been left us; if that is not sufficient, we have hay and straw, no sheets, no mattress, only a coarse straw one. I wish we had a more comfortable one for dear grandfather; a good bed makes an old man forget many other privations. For myself, who could sleep upon the bare ground and have often passed the night in a hayloft, I have nothing to regret on this account. "I only wish," I said, "that I had the instinct of the dormice and could sleep till the return of the fine season."

My grandfather immediately pointed out to me the folly and ingratitude of which I was guilty in expressing such a wish. He said to me, "Let us leave the brutes to enjoy such long sleeps; we have a better part to play. True, it is God's will that we should suffer, but He has condescended to make Himself known to us. Here is a splendid recompense for all our afflictions; accept it, my son, with gratitude, and fulfill the duties which it imposes on you. 'Watch,' He has said: 'for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.'"⁶

6. Matthew 24:42

November 26th

I could add to our inventory many articles which may be useful to us, but I shall not stop to enumerate them, for I hasten to relate a discovery which I have made, and which has occasioned to the two poor captives the greatest joy.

In examining into the state of our movables and provisions, I searched even the smallest nooks in the hope of finding some books. I knew that my father never went up the mountain without taking with him several religious works in order to supply to the servants the place of Divine worship, which they were prevented from attending by the distance, by reading to them. But it seems that he had sent his little library back to the village.

We regretted much that, in our solitary confinement, we were deprived of this means of supporting and consoling ourselves during the tedious hours. Today, perceiving at the back of our oak chest a plank which had lodged there, I drew it out, thinking that it might be of some use, and at the same time there fell out a book covered with dust, which had doubtless been mislaid for several years. It was *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*.

In recognizing this work, my grandfather cried out, "Here is a friend indeed come to visit us in our solitude! My child, *The Imitation* is a book written expressly for the afflicted; or rather, it is a book which proves to us, in the most touching manner, that there is but one evil in the world, which is to forget God, and but one good, which is to love Him. You see, dear Louis, if we are thus separated from the world, we are not forsaken; we have already found the means of sustaining the life of the body. We now possess that which will nourish the soul; nothing now remains but to know how to make a good use of it.

"But observe, my boy, by what a succession of events we are led, first to feel the urgent want of the Divine assistance, and then to discover this help which had become so needful to us.

Your father overstayed his time some days; we were uneasy, and wished to learn the cause of his delay. Had we waited one day longer, he would have returned, but we set out. You remember the accident which happened to me in the way, and which made it impossible for me to return the next day. The snow fell, and we are prisoners. This was the point to which the Lord designed to lead us, in order to draw us nearer to Himself. After having vainly searched for that of which we stood in such great need, a religious work, you have lighted by chance upon that which we despaired of finding. This is one example among a thousand of what are properly called the ways of Providence. Indeed, it has so disposed all the affairs of this world, that one seems to spring out of another; that we are sometimes visited by joy, sometimes by grief, and always exercised by trial. For by these vicissitudes of life, in this succession of fortunate and unfortunate events, the character becomes formed: we are enabled to acquire those virtues which give dignity to the Christian; we approach gradually nearer to our model; we imitate Jesus Christ.”⁷

I answered, “I need not tell you how deeply I am touched by these reflections; you can perceive it yourself. Since we have been here, all you have said to me on the subject of my duty to God strikes me in a new light. Till now, I have prayed that I might be able to follow your advice, and I yielded to it for the sake of pleasing you. Now I experience a new feeling within me; I love the Lord most truly; my heart, at the thought of God, becomes softened, as it does when I think of you or of my father. Only, since this is a feeling to which I am not yet accustomed, and doubtless also because the idea of God is grand and awful, my love for Him is blended with a deep sense of fear, which, although it troubles me, I rejoice in feeling. It is to you, grandfather, that I owe these happy dispositions, and I dare no longer regret the

7. Ephesians 5:1, 1 Peter 2:21

accident which has detained me here.”

After having discoursed some time longer in this manner, we embraced one another and remained silent a long time. I had never felt before so sweet and lively a sense of joy. Thus God changed evil into good: we derive happiness from affliction, and the afflicted are comforted.

Lord! Thou hast drawn me to Thyself by suffering; let me never forget Thee, when the day of suffering is passed. As Thou at this moment teachest me resignation, so inspire me then with gratitude!

November 27th

Always snow! It is seldom that so large a quantity falls at this season, even upon the mountains. Notwithstanding this, I did not cease to wonder why my father did not come to our aid, and I continued to express my surprise. Hitherto my grandfather would not allow himself to let me perceive his uneasiness; our conversation today has informed me that he is not less alarmed than myself.

“This snow,” said I, “has not come upon us at once; I should have thought that they could have opened a road here, either the first, second, or even the third day.”

“I am very sure,” said my grandfather, “that François has done all he could for us; it may be that he has not been able to impress his fears upon our friends and neighbors, and he alone could not deliver us.”

“Do you think then, that, having the power to take us hence, they would leave us here, with the risk of finding us dead in the spring? Have our friends and neighbors less humanity than those people of whom we read sometimes in the newspapers, and who expose themselves to the greatest labor, and even risk their lives, to rescue unfortunate beings who are buried in a mine, or a well, or under the rubbish fallen in an excavation?”

“I agree with you that we are in a sad plight, dear Louis, but

yet they know that we have a shelter and some provisions.”

“But they know also that these may fail; that you are old and infirm, and that I have not yet the strength of a man. They ought to have some compassion on us.”

“Perhaps they have made some attempts and found it too difficult to proceed.”

“However, if they want to open the high road when it is blocked up with snow and form in its whole length a way large enough for carriages, they contrive to manage it, and that happens almost every winter.”

“But this is ordered by the government for the public service, and is only done at great expense.”

“What then? Will they not do that to save two unhappy beings who are in danger of their life, which they can do for the mere convenience of travelers? This seems very cruel.”

“The government has doubtless no knowledge that we are here.”

“My father would not have failed to make it known and to summon everybody to our aid.”

Having said this, and finding that my grandfather remained silent, I added, taking both his hands, “Hide nothing from me, I beg of you. Is it not true that you entertain the same apprehensions as myself? Speak freely to me. Since I now know how to resign myself to the will of God, I am not unworthy of your confidence; tell me your fears, and do not let me remain longer a prey to my own. I had rather see my misfortune clearly and know what you really think upon the subject.”

“Well, dear Louis, I must own to you that I fear some accident has happened to your father. I must tell it to you; besides, you have divined my thoughts. I am still much embarrassed about it, for besides your father, there are others who ought to have thought of us.”

At this I began to weep and sob. My grandfather left me some time to indulge my grief. We sat before the fire, which went out. We remained thus in darkness till it grew late; my

grandfather held one of my hands in his and pressed it from time to time.

“I have told you my fears,” he said, at length. “Will you not let me tell you my hopes? We cannot foresee everything. God’s power surpasses all understanding. Be not cast down, but preserve yourself for the sake of your father and grandfather.”

November 28th

We have made as exact a calculation as we could of how much oil or grease our lamp burns in a day, and we have found that if it remains burning for twelve hours a day, our provision will be exhausted in a month. We have resolved, therefore, to limit ourselves to three hours of lamp light. The fire light will supply its place sometimes, but we can only allow ourselves this indulgence with economy, and yet it is a pity, for the fir wood produces a brilliant light, the blaze and sparkling of which please me much. While the lamp is not burning we converse. My grandfather always has something interesting to say to me, and I shall leave this place, that is, if our captivity lasts much longer, much more learned than I was. He has been for several years unable to work, and has passed all that time in reading good books, which a rich neighbor has lent him; I am now profiting by what he has read. He also gives me some lessons. One of these, which shortens the time most, is working arithmetic by the head. He proposes little questions, and we try who can answer them the soonest. When either of us is ready to give the solution, he tells the other, and we make use of this as a check. In this way an hour or two passes quickly. There is also emulation mixed with it. At first my grandfather had the advantage of me; so much so, that in order not to discourage me, he let me believe that he was puzzling at the solution, when he had already managed it. After a few experiments my attention improved, but he assures me that this is nothing to what I may yet acquire.

