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Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
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Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
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Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht  
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz  
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
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# **Gerfaut –Volume 1**

Charles de Bernard

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# GERFAUT

By  
CHARLES DE BERNARD

With a Preface by JULES CLARETIE, of the French Academy



## CHARLES DE BERNARD

PIERRE-MARIE-CHARLES DE BERNARD DU GRAIL DE LA VILLETTE, better known by the name of Charles de Bernard, was born in Besancon, February 24, 1804. He came from a very ancient family of the Vivarais, was educated at the college of his native city, and studied for the law in Dijon and at Paris. He was awarded a prize by the 'Jeux floraux' for his dithyrambics, 'Une fete de Neron' in 1829. This first success in literature did not prevent him aspiring to the Magistrature, when the Revolution of 1830 broke out and induced him to enter politics. He became one of the founders of the 'Gazette de Franche-Comte' and an article in the pages of this journal about 'Peau de chagrin' earned him the thanks and the friendship of Balzac.

The latter induced him to take up his domicile in Paris and initiated him into the art of novel-writing. Bernard had published a volume of odes: 'Plus Deuil que Joie' (1838), which was not much noticed, but a series of stories in the same year gained him the reputation of a genial 'conteur'. They were collected under the title 'Le Noeud Gordien', and one of the tales, 'Une Aventure du Magistrat', was adapted by Sardou for his comedy 'Pommes du voisin'. 'Gerfaut', his greatest work, crowned by the Academy, appeared also in 1838, then followed 'Le Paravent', another collection of novels (1839); 'Les Ailes d'Icare' (1840); 'La Peau du Lion and La Chasse aux Amants' (1841); 'L'Ecueil' (1842); 'Un Beau-pere' (1845); and finally 'Le Gentilhomme campagnard,' in 1847. Bernard died, only forty-eight years old, March 6, 1850.

Charles de Bernard was a realist, a pupil of Balzac. He surpasses his master, nevertheless, in energy and limpidity of composition. His style is elegant and cultured. His genius is most fully represented in a score or so of delightful tales rarely exceeding some sixty or seventy pages in length, but perfect in proportion, full of invention and originality, and saturated with the purest and pleasantest essence of the spirit which for six centuries in tableaux, farces, tales in prose and verse, comedies and correspondence, made French litera-

ture the delight and recreation of Europe. 'Gerfaut' is considered De Bernard's greatest work. The plot turns on an attachment between a married woman and the hero of the story. The book has nothing that can justly offend, the incomparable sketches of Marillac and Mademoiselle de Corandeuil are admirable; Gerfaut and Bergenheim possess pronounced originality, and the author is, so to speak, incarnated with the hero of his romance.

The most uncritical reader can not fail to notice the success with which Charles de Bernard introduces people of rank and breeding into his stories. Whether or not he drew from nature, his portraits of this kind are exquisitely natural and easy. It is sufficient to say that he is the literary Sir Joshua Reynolds of the post-revolution vicomtes and marquises. We can see that his portraits are faithful; we must feel that they are at the same time charming. Bernard is an amiable and spirited 'conteur' who excels in producing an animated spectacle for a refined and selected public, whether he paints the ridiculousness or the misery of humanity.

The works of Charles de Bernard in wit and urbanity, and in the peculiar charm that wit and urbanity give, are of the best French type. To any elevation save a lofty place in fiction they have no claim; but in that phase of literature their worth is undisputed, and from many testimonies it would seem that those whom they most amuse are those who are best worth amusing.

These novels, well enough as they are known to professed students of French literature, have, by the mere fact of their age, rather slipped out of the list of books known to the general reader. The general reader who reads for amusement can not possibly do better than proceed to transform his ignorance of them into knowledge.

JULES CLARETIE de l'Academie Francaise.

# GERFAUT

## BOOK 1.

### CHAPTER I

#### THE TRAVELLER

During the first days of the month of September, 1832, a young man about thirty years of age was walking through one of the valleys in Lorraine originating in the Vosges mountains. A little river which, after a few leagues of its course, flows into the Moselle, watered this wild basin shut in between two parallel lines of mountains. The hills in the south became gradually lower and finally dwindled away into the plain. Alongside the plateau, arranged in amphitheatres, large square fields stripped of their harvest lay here and there in the primitive forest; in other places, innumerable oaks and elms had been dethroned to give place to plantations of cherry-trees, whose symmetrical rows promised an abundant harvest.

This contest of nature with industry is everywhere, but is more pronounced in hilly countries. The scene changed, however, as one penetrated farther, and little by little the influence of the soil gained ascendancy. As the hills grew nearer together, enclosing the valley in a closer embrace, the clearings gave way to the natural obduracy of the soil. A little farther on they disappeared entirely. At the foot of one of the bluffs which bordered with its granite bands the highest plateau of the mountain, the forest rolled victoriously down to the banks of the river.

Now came patches of forest, like solid battalions of infantry; sometimes solitary trees appeared, as if distributed by chance upon the grassy slopes, or scaling the summit of the steepest rocks like a body of bold sharpshooters. A little, unfrequented road, if one can judge from the scarcity of tracks, ran alongside the banks of the stream, climbing up and down hills; overcoming every obstacle, it

stretched out in almost a straight line. One might compare it to those strong characters who mark out a course in life and imper- turbably follow it. The river, on the contrary, like those docile and compliant minds that bend to agreeable emergencies, described graceful curves, obeying thus the caprices of the soil which served as its bed.

At a first glance, the young man who was walking alone in the midst of this picturesque country seemed to have nothing remarkable in his dress; a straw hat, a blue blouse and linen trousers composed his costume. It would have been very natural to take him for an Alsatian peasant returning to his village through the Vosges's rough pathways; but a more attentive glance quickly dispelled this conjecture. There is something in the way in which a person wears the plainest costume which betrays the real man, no matter how he may be clothed. Thus, nothing could be more modest than this traveller's blouse, but the absence on collar and sleeves of the arabesques in white or red thread, the pride of all village dandies, was sufficient for one to realize that this was not a fancy costume.

His expressive, but not handsome face was dark, it is true, but it did not look as if wind or sun had contributed to its complexion; it seemed rather to have lost by a sedentary life something of the southern carnation, which had ended by blending these warmer tints into a dead uniform pallor. Finally, if, as one may suppose after different diagnoses, this person had the slightest desire to play the role of Tyrcis or Amintas, his white hand, as carefully cared for as a pretty woman's, would have been sufficient to betray him. It was evident that the man was above his costume; a rare thing! The lion's ears pierced the ass's skin this time.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the sky, which had been overcast all the morning, had assumed, within a few moments, a more sombre aspect; large clouds were rapidly moving from south to north, rolled one over another by an ominous wind. So the traveller, who had just entered the wildest part of the valley, seemed very little disposed to admire its fine vegetation and romantic sites. Impatient to reach the end of his journey, or fearing the approaching storm, he quickened his steps; but this pace was not kept long. At the end of a few moments, having crossed a small clearing, he

found himself at the entrance of a lawn where the road divided in two directions, one continuing to skirt the river banks, the other, broader and better built, turning to the left into a winding ravine.

Which of these two roads should he follow? He did not know. The profound solitude of the place made him fear that he might not meet any one who could direct him, when the sound of a psalm vigorously chanted reached his ears from the distance. Soon it became more distinct, and he recognized the words, 'In exitu Israel de Egypto', sung at the top of the lungs by a voice so shrill that it would have irritated the larynx of any of the sopranos at the Opera. Its vibrating but sharp tones resounded so clearly in the dead silence of the forest that a number of stanzas were finished before the pious musician came in sight. At last a drove of cattle appeared through the trees which bordered the road on the left, walking with a slow, grave step; they were driven by a little shepherd about nine or ten years of age, who interrupted his song from time to time to reassemble the members of his flock with heavy blows from his whip, thus uniting temporal cares with those of a spiritual nature with a coolness which the most important personages might have envied him.

"Which of these roads leads to Bergenheim?" called out the traveler when they were near enough to speak to each other.

"Bergenheim!" repeated the child, taking off his cotton cap, which was striped like a rainbow, and adding a few words in an unintelligible Gallo-Germanic patois.

"You are not French, then?" asked the stranger, in a disappointed tone.

The shepherd raised his head proudly and replied:

"I am Alsatian, not French!"

The young man smiled at this trait of local patriotism so common then in the beautiful province by the Rhine; then he thought that pantomime might be necessary, so he pointed with his finger first at one road, then at the other:

"There or there, Bergenheim?" asked he.

The child, in his turn, pointed silently with the tip of his whip to the banks of the river, designating, at some distance on the other side, a thicket of woods behind which a slight column of smoke was rising.

"The deuce!" murmured the stranger, "it seems that I have gone astray; if the chateau is on the other side, where can I establish my ambuscade?"

The shepherd seemed to understand the traveller's embarrassment. Gazing at him with his intelligent blue eyes, he traced, with the tip of his toe in the middle of the road, a furrow across which he rounded his whip like the arch of a bridge; then he pointed a second time up the river.

"You are an honor to your country, young fellow," exclaimed the stranger; "there is the material in you to make one of Cooper's red-skins." As he said these words he threw a piece of money into the child's cap and walked rapidly away in the direction indicated.

The Alsatian stood motionless for a few moments with one hand in his blond hair and his eyes fastened upon the piece of silver which shone like a star in the bottom of his cap; when the one whom he considered as a model of extraordinary generosity had disappeared behind the trees, he gave vent to his joy by heavy blows from his whip upon the backs of the cattle, then he resumed his way, singing in a still more triumphant tone: 'Mantes exultaverunt ut arites', and jumping higher himself than all the hills and rams in the Bible.

The young man had not walked more than five minutes before he recognized the correctness of the directions he had received. The ground which he had passed over was a field covered with clumps of low trees; it was easy to see by its disc-like shape that it had been formed by successive alluvia, at the expense of the other shore, which had been incessantly worn away by the stream. This sort of flat, level peninsula was crossed in a straight line by the road, which deviated from the river at the point where the two roads came together again, like the cross and string of a bow at its extremity. The trees, becoming thinner, revealed a perspective all the more wonderful as it was unexpected. While the eye followed the widening stream, which disappeared in the depths of a mountainous gorge, a

new prospect suddenly presented itself on the right upon the other shore.

A second valley, smaller than the first and in measure its vassal, formed an amphitheatre the crest of which was bordered by a fringe of perpendicular rocks as white as dried bones. Under this crown, which rendered it almost inaccessible, the little valley was resplendent in its wealth of evergreen trees, oaks with their knotty branches, and its fresh green turf.

Taken as a whole, it was a foundation worthy of the picturesque edifice which met one's eye in the foreground, and at which the traveller gazed with extreme interest.

At the junction of the two valleys stood an enormous building, half manorial, half monastic in appearance. The shore formed, at this point, for an extent of several hundred feet, a bluff whose edge plunged vertically into the river. The chateau and its outbuildings rested upon this solid base. The principal house was a large parallelogram of very old construction, but which had evidently been almost entirely rebuilt at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The stones, of grayish granite which abounds in the Vosges, were streaked with blue and violet veins, and gave the facade a sombre aspect, increased by the scarcity of windows, some of which were 'a la Palladio', others almost as narrow as loop-holes. An immense roof of red tile, darkened by rain, projected several feet over the whole front, as is still to be seen in old cities in the North. Thanks to this projecting weather-board, the apartments upon the upper floor were shaded from the sun's rays, like those persons who have weak eyes and who protect them from a strong light by wearing a green shade.

The view which this melancholy dwelling presented from the place where the traveller had first seen it, was one which made it appear to the best advantage; it seemed, from this point, to come immediately out of the river, built as it was upon the very curb of the bluffs, at this place at least thirty feet high. This elevation, added to that of the building, effaced the lack of proportion of the roof and gave to the whole a most imposing appearance; it seemed as if the rocks were a part of the building to which it served as foundation, for the stones had ended by assuming the same color, and it would

have been difficult to discover the junction of man's work and that of nature, had it not been outlined by a massive iron balcony running across the entire length of the first story, whence one could enjoy the pleasure of line-fishing. Two round towers with pointed roofs stood at each corner of the facade and seemed to gaze with proud satisfaction at their own reflection in the water.

A long line of sycamore-trees skirted the banks of the river, beginning from the foot of the chateau, and forming the edge of a park which extended to the back of the double valley. A little wooden bridge connected this sort of avenue with the road the traveller had just passed over; but the latter did not seem disposed to profit by this silent invitation to which large raindrops gave more emphasis. He was so absorbed in his meditation that, to arouse him, it needed the sound of a gruff voice behind him uttering these words:

"That is what I call an ugly castle! It is hardly as good as our common country houses around Marseilles."

The stranger turned quickly around and found himself face to face with a man wearing a gray cap and carrying his coat upon his shoulder, as workmen do in the South. He held in his hand a knotty stick which had been recently cut. The newcomer had a swarthy complexion, harsh features, and deep-set eyes which gave his face an ugly, false expression.

"I said an ugly castle," continued he. "However, the cage is made for the bird."

"It seems, then, that you do not like its master?" said the traveller.

"The master!" repeated the workman, seizing hold of his stick with a threatening air, "Monsieur le Baron de Bergenheim, as they say! He is rich and a nobleman, and I am only a poor carpenter. Well, then, if you stay here a few days, you will witness a comical ceremony; I shall make this brigand repent."

"Brigand!" exclaimed the stranger, in a surprised tone. "What has he done to you?"

"Yes, brigand! you may tell him so from me. But, by the way," continued the workman, surveying his companion from head to foot with a searching, defiant air, "do you happen to be the carpen-

ter who is coming from Strasbourg? In that case, I have a few words to say to you. Lambernier does not allow any one to take the bread out of his mouth in that way; do you understand?"

The young man seemed very little moved by this declaration.

"I am not a carpenter," said he, smiling, "and I have no wish for your work."

"Truly, you do not look as if you had pushed a plane very often. It seems that in your business one does not spoil one's hands. You are a workman about as much as I am pope."

This remark made the one to whom it was addressed feel in as bad a humor as an author does when he finds a grammatical error in one of his books.

"So you work at the chateau, then," said he, finally, to change the conversation.

"For six months I have worked in that shanty," replied the workman; "I am the one who carved the new woodwork, and I will say it is well done. Well, this great wild boar of a Bergenheim turned me out of the house yesterday as if I had been one of his dogs."

"He doubtless had his reasons."

"I tell you, I will crush him—reasons! Damn it! They told him I talked too often with his wife's maid and quarrelled with the servants, a pack of idlers! Did he not forbid my putting my foot upon his land? I am upon his land now; let him come and chase me off; let him come, he will see how I shall receive him. Do you see this stick? I have just cut it in his own woods to use it on himself!"

The young man no longer listened to the workman; his eyes were turned toward the castle, whose slightest details he studied, as if he hoped that in the end the stone would turn into glass and let him see the interior. If this curiosity had any other object than the architecture and form of the building it was not gratified. No human figure came to enliven this sad, lonely dwelling. All the windows were closed, as if the house were uninhabited. The baying of dogs, probably imprisoned in their kennel, was the only sound which came to break the strange silence, and the distant thunder, with its

dull rumbling, repeated by the echoes, responded plaintively, and gave a lugubrious character to the scene.

"When one speaks of the devil he appears," said the workman, suddenly, with an emotion which gave the lie to his recent bravado; "if you wish to see this devil incarnate of a Bergenheim, just turn your head. Good-by."

At these words he leaped a ditch at the left of the road and disappeared in the bushes. The stranger also seemed to feel an impression very like that of Lambernier's as he saw a man on horseback advancing on a gallop. Instead of waiting for him, he darted into the field which descended to the river, and hid behind a group of trees.

The Baron, who was not more than thirty-three years of age, had one of those energetic, handsome faces whose type seems to belong particularly to old military families. His bright, blond hair and clear, blue eyes contrasted strongly with his ruddy complexion; his aspect was severe, but noble and imposing, in spite of his negligent dress, which showed that indifference to matters of personal attire which becomes habitual with country lords. His tall figure was beginning to grow stout, and that increased his athletic appearance. He sat very erect in his saddle, and from the way in which he straightened out his long legs against the sides of his beast, one suspected that he could, if necessary, repeat the Marshal de Saxe's feats of skill. He stopped his horse suddenly at the very spot which the two men had just vacated and called out in a voice which would startle a regiment of cuirassiers:

"Here, Lambernier!"

The carpenter hesitated a moment, at this imperative call, between the fear which he could not overcome and shame at fleeing from a single man in the presence of a witness; finally this last feeling triumphed. He returned to the edge of the road without saying a word, and stationed himself in an insolent way face to face with the Baron, with his hat drawn down over his ears, and grasped through precaution the knotty stick which served him as a weapon.

"Lambernier," said the master of the castle, in a severe tone, "your account was settled yesterday; was it not paid in full? Is anything due you?"

"I ask nothing of you," replied the workman, brusquely.

"In that case, why are you wandering about my place when I forbade you?"

"I am upon the highway, nobody can prevent me from passing there."

"You are upon my land, and you came out of my woods," replied the Baron, emphasizing his words with the firmness of a man who would permit no violation of his rights as a landowner.

"The ground upon which I walk is mine," said the workman, in his turn, as he struck the end of his stick upon the ground as if to take possession. This gesture attracted Bergenheim's attention, and his eyes flashed with a sudden light at the sight of the stick which Lambernier held.

"You scoundrel!" he exclaimed, "you probably regard my trees also as your own. Where did you cut that stick?"

"Go and find out," said the workman, accompanying his reply with a flourish of the stick.

The Baron coolly dismounted, threw the bridle over his horse's neck, walked up to the workman, who had taken the position of a practised pugilist to receive him, and, without giving him time to strike, he disarmed him with one hand by a blow which would have been sufficient to uproot the beech rod before it was metamorphosed into a club; with the other hand he seized the man by the collar and gave him a shaking that it was as impossible to struggle against as if it had been caused by a steam-engine. Obeying this irresistible force, in spite of his kicking, Lambernier described a dozen circles around his adversary, while the latter set these off with some of the hardest blows from green wood that ever chastised an insolent fellow. This gymnastic exercise ended by a sleight-of-hand trick, which, after making the carpenter pirouette for the last time, sent him rolling head-first into a ditch, the bottom of which, fortunately for him, was provided with a bed of soft mud. When the punishment was over, Bergenheim remounted his horse as tranquilly as he had dismounted it, and continued his way toward the chateau.

The young man, in the midst of the thicket where he was concealed, had lost no detail of this rural scene. He could not help having a feeling of admiration for this energetic representative of the feudal ages who, with no fear of any court of justice or other bourgeois inventions, had thus exerted over his own domains the summary justice in force in Eastern countries.

"France has thrashed Gaul," said he, smiling to himself; "if all our men had this Bergenheim's iron fist many things determined upon to-day might be called in question. If I ever have the slightest difficulty with this Milo de Crotona, he may be sure I shall not choose pugilism as my mode of discussion."

The storm now burst forth in all its fury. A dark curtain covered the whole valley, and the rain fell in torrents. The Baron put spurs to his horse, crossed the bridge and, entering the sycamore avenue, was soon out of sight. Without paying any attention to Lambernier, who was uttering imprecations at the bottom of the ditch, into which he was sinking deeper and deeper, the stranger went to seek a less illusive shelter than the trees under which he had taken his position; but at this moment his attention was attracted to one side of the castle. A window, or rather a glass door, just then opened upon the balcony, and a young woman in a rose-colored negligee appeared upon the dark facade. It would be impossible to imagine anything more fresh or charming than this apparition at such a moment. Leaning upon the balustrade, the young woman rested her face upon a hand which was as white as a lily, and her finger smoothed with a mechanical caress the ringlets of chestnut hair that lay upon her forehead, while her large brown eyes gazed into the depths of the clouds from which the lightning was flashing, and with which they vied in brilliancy. A poet would have said it was Miranda evoked by the tempest.

The stranger parted the branches before him to get a better view; at the same instant he was blinded by a terrible flash which lighted the whole valley and was immediately followed by a terrific crash. When he opened his eyes the chateau which he believed to be at the bottom of the river stood still upright, solemn, and firm as before; but the lady in the rose-colored gown had disappeared.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CASTLE OF BERGENHEIM

The appearance of the room into which the lady had precipitately entered, when startled by the thunder, corresponded with the edifice to which it belonged. It was a very large room, longer than it was wide, and lighted by three windows, the middle one of which opened from top to bottom like a door and led out upon the balcony. The woodwork and ceiling were in chestnut, which time had polished and a skilful hand had ornamented with a profusion of allegorical figures. The beauty of this work of art was almost entirely concealed by a very remarkable decoration which covered every side of the room, consisting of one of the most glorious collections of family portraits which a country chateau of the nineteenth century could offer.

The first of these portraits hung opposite the windows at the right of the entrance door and was that of a chevalier in full armor, whose teeth gleamed from under his long moustache like those of an untamed tiger. Beginning with this formidable figure, which bore the date 1247, forty others of about the same dimensions were placed in order according to their dates. It seemed as if each period had left its mark upon those of the personages it had seen live and die, and had left something of its own character there.

There were more gallant cavaliers cut after the same pattern as the first. Their stern, harsh faces, red beards, and broad, square military shoulders told that by swordthrusts and broken lances they had founded the nobility of their race. An heroic preface to this family biography! A rough and warlike page of the Middle Ages! After these proud men-of-arms came several figures of a less ferocious aspect, but not so imposing. In these portraits of the fifteenth century beards had disappeared with the sword. In those wearing caps and velvet toques, silk robes and heavy gold chains supporting a badge of the same metal, one recognized lords in full and tranquil possession of the fiefs won by their fathers, landowners who had

degenerated a little and preferred mountain life in a manor to the chances of a more hazardous existence. These pacific gentlemen were, for the most part, painted with the left hand gloved and resting upon the hip; the right one was bare, a sort of token of disarmament which one might take for a painter's epigram. Some of them had allowed their favorite dogs to share the honors of the picture. All in this group indicated that this branch of the family had many points of resemblance with the more illustrious faces. It was the period of idle kings.

A half dozen solemn personages with gold-braided hats and long red robes bordered with ermine, and wearing starched ruffles, occupied one corner of the parlor near the windows. These worthy advisers of the Dukes of Lorraine explained the way in which the masters of the chateau had awakened from the torpor in which they had been plunged for several generations, in order to participate in the affairs of their country and enter a more active sphere.

Here the portraits assumed the proportions of history. Did not this branch, descended from warlike stock, seem like a fragment taken from the European annals? Was it not a symbolical image of the progress of civilization, of regular legislation struggling against barbaric customs? Thanks to these respectable counsellors and judges, one might reverse the motto: 'Non solum toga', in favor of their race. But it did not seem as if these bearded ancestors looked with much gratitude upon this parliamentary flower added to their feudal crest. They appeared to look down from the height of their worm-eaten frames upon their enrobed descendants with that disdainful smile with which the peers of France used to greet men of law the first time they were called to sit by their side, after being for so long a time at their feet.

In the space between the windows and upon the remaining woodwork was a crowd of military men, with here and there an Abbe with cross and mitre, a Commander of Malta, and a solemn Canon, sterile branches of this genealogical tree. Several among the military ones wore sashes and plumes of the colors of Lorraine; others, even before the union of this province to France, had served the latter country; there were lieutenant-colonels of infantry and cavalry; some dressed in blue coats lined with buff serge and little