

"Do you know, Father," she said one morning, "I think it would be a good plan to make a few beds for vegetables by the side of the fence."

"Vegetable-beds?"

"Yes; we can sow onions, carrots, haricot beans, potatoes, and cabbages."

The Father was astonished. To him that seemed quite beyond their powers. Vegetable-beds in Saraceni!

For a few days his head was full of vegetable-beds, of potatoes, cabbages, and haricot beans; and a few days after that, the ground was already dug up and the beds were ready. Not a day passed on which the priest and his wife did not go about ten times to the beds to see if the seeds were growing. Great was the joy one day. The priest had risen very early.

"Wife, get up!"

"What's the matter?"

"They have sprouted."

The priest and his wife and all the children spent the whole day squatting by the beds. The more seeds they saw appear above the ground, the happier they were.

And again the villagers passed by the priest's house and looked through the thorns at the priest's vegetable-beds, and they said once more, "The priest is one of the devil's own men!"

"Listen, wife," said the priest. "wouldn't it be a good plan to sow maize along the fence and round the beds?"

"Indeed it would! I like fresh maize!"

"So do I, especially when it's roasted on the embers!"

Here was a new task! The priest surrounded himself with maize. He laughed with pleasure when he thought how pretty it would be when the maize grew up all round and shut out the briars on the fence which had begun to offend his eyes. But there is the old proverb, "Much wants more." At the back of the house was another strip of ground, about four times the size of the bit they had cultivated. The priest could not get it out of his head. Why should this land lie fallow? Couldn't he plant maize at the back of the house too? In the fields opposite, men were ploughing and sowing, the ground was untouched still in the village because it was the village.

Marcu Flori Cucu, the priest's neighbour, had a plough; it was rather dilapidated, but it was a plough, and Mitru Catamush, Marcu's neighbour, had two feeble oxen and a foundered horse. The priest, Marcu, Mitru, the oxen and the horse, worked all one day from morn till eve. The ground was ploughed up and sown with maize. From thenceforward, the priest was happier when he was at the back of the house.

It was a wonderful and beautiful bit of work--what furrows! And here and there among the furrows a blade of maize peeped out. In spite of this, the priest scratched himself once or twice, and then fairly often, behind the ear. It seemed as though something still weighed upon his mind. It was a difficult matter, which he hardly dare take in hand: the glebe lands. Up to now, they had been neglected; at present, he did not know what to do with them. He would have liked to work them himself. He would have liked to see his own men sowing them; he would have liked to take his wife there in the autumn. It was very tempting. He talked a great deal to his wife about the matter. They would need horses, a cart, a plough, a labourer, stables--they would want a quantity of things. Moreover, the priest did not understand agriculture.