

However, the vegetable-beds were growing green, the maize was springing up. The priest made up his mind; he took the residue of his wife's dowry and set to work. Marcu's plough was good enough to start with. The priest bought one horse from Mitru; a man in the Răpitză Valley had another one; Stan Schiopu had a cart with three wheels. The priest bought it as he got a wheel from Mitru, to make up for the horse being foundered.

Cozonac, the bell-ringer, engaged himself as labourer to the priest, for his house was only a stone's throw away. The priest drove four posts into the ground at one end of the house, two long ones and two short, and he made three sides of plaited osiers and a roof of rushes, and there was the stable all ready.

During these days, Father Trandafir had aged by about ten years; but he grew young again when he placed his wife and children in the cart, whipped up the horses, and drove off to see their ploughed land.

The villagers saw him, and shook their heads, and said once more: "The priest is the devil's own man."

The priest's wife had her own feminine worries. She had a beautiful Icon which had been given to her by the son of the priest at Vezura. At present the Icon was lying at the bottom of a box wrapped up in paper. For a long time she had wished to place it between the windows, to put flowers and sweet basil round it, and look at it often; because this Icon represented the Holy Virgin, and the priest's daughter was called Mary. But the walls were dirty and the Icon had no case. There was another thing that annoyed the priest's wife: one window was filled in with a pig's bladder, and in the other were three broken panes mended with paper. The house was rather dark.

Easter drew near. There were only five days to Holy Week. If the priest wanted to spend Easter with his wife, he had still three important things to get: whitewash for the walls, windows for the house, and a case for the Icon of the most Blessed Virgin--all objects that could be found only in a town.

To the market, then!

The priest had horses and a cart. He was vexed about the osier baskets for the maize; only the backs and sides of them still remained. He was ashamed that a priest like himself should have to go to the market without any maize-baskets. He could not borrow any, seeing he was at Saraceni, where even the priest had no proper maize-baskets.

They say "Necessity is the best teacher." The Father sent Cozonac down the valley to fetch osiers, planted two stakes in the ground with thinner sticks set between them about a hand's breadth apart, and then the priest and his wife and children, and Cozonac too, began to plait the osiers in. Before long the baskets were ready. The work was not very remarkable, but for all that they were the best baskets in Saraceni, and so good that Cozonac could not refrain from saying, "The priest is one of the devil's own men!"

To the market-place and from the market-place home the Father went proudly with his baskets; other people had some, but he found people could buy worse baskets than those he had made himself.

"What is the priest making?"

"Baskets for the maize."

"But he has got some."

"He is making them for those who have not got any."

After Easter, Cozonac began to clear the pools of osiers which the priest wove into baskets. The longer the work continued, the better was it done; the last basket was always the best.