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## Hector Malot, *En Famille* (Nobody's Girl)

Hector Malot was born in La Bouille, near Roen, in 1830. He died in Fontenay-sous-Bois in 1907. He was an author of children's books: *Romain Kalbris*, *Sans Famille* (Nobody's Boy), *En Famille* (Nobody's Girl), and *Le Mousse* (Apprentice Sailor). He wrote fifty-five novels for adults in which he described the society of his era.

In *En Famille* (Nobody's Girl), he dramatized the great textile industry, and demonstrated the necessity of factory owners taking social action on behalf of their workers



*Flixecourt  
Le village a grande de la pierre  
Village propre, maisons peintes, une  
chambre d'ouvriers 100f par an.*

## Hector Malot and the Nièvre Valley

Hector Malot drew his inspiration for *En Famille* from the Nièvre Valley. As was usual for Malot when he was doing background research, the author arrived on site in July of 1892. Arriving in Picquigny by train, he hiked around the peat marshes, soaking up the atmosphere. He visited the Saint Freres factory in order to document the manner and conditions in which the laborers worked.

The novel is set in Flixecourt and its outlying towns: L'Etoile, Ville-le-Marcllet, Saint-Ouen. It opens on life in the marshes: the young heroine, Perrine, has come to join her grandfather Vulfran Paindavoine and stay for awhile before continuing on to the family castle.



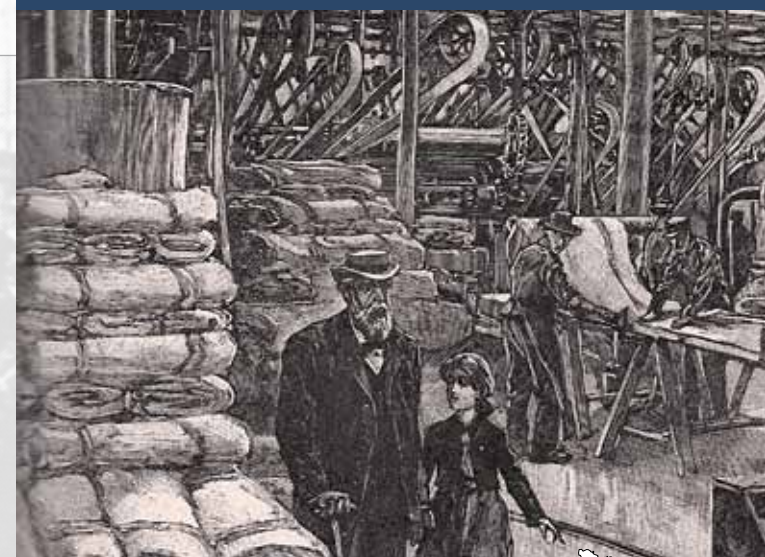
Photos : couverture haut, 2, 3, 5 : B. Fournier / Région Picardie - Inventaire général, 2003.  
couverture bas, 1 et 4e couverture : Répro A.M. Collez, extrait de *En Famille*, édition illustrée Calmann, 1893.



We have so many stories to share



## Flixecourt Literary Walk In the footsteps of Perrine



A DISCOVERY  $\approx$  PICARDIE



The Nièvre Valley < Grand-Amiénois < Somme < Picardie



## The railway ◀ ①

A railway, constructed by the Saint Frères company, was put into service in 1868 to connect the factories to the Paris-Boulogne line. Hector Malot writes of it in the novel. It also serves as a clue that helps identify the location.

*"The first village, with red tiles, where she arrived, she recognized as well, it was Saint-Pipy\*, where the weaving and rope-making for the Maraucourt factories were found", and before reaching them, she went over a railway crossing that, after stringing together various villages: Hercheux\*\*\*, Bacourt, Flexelles, Saint-Pipoy and Maraucourt, the manufacturing centers of Vulfran Paindavoine, went on to be connected to the great Boulogne line [...]"*

(H. Malot, *En famille*, Paris:Ed. Flammarion 1895, pg. 147)

\*name given to Saint-Ouen in the novel.

\*\*name given to Flixecourt

\*\*\*Hercheux most likely represented Harondel, which was where the jute was sorted and stored. The other sites are more difficult to identify.

## The factories ◀ ②

Hector Malot was guided in his approach to the Saint-Frères factories by the engineer Monflier. He reports his visit in the valley in several pages of notes in which he mentions the history of the company, its location, its supply sources, the number of workers, their salaries, etc. It is from these notes that he composed his description of the Maraucourt factory.

(Perrine observes the industrial complex on the evening of her arrival, at the top of the hill across the way.)

*"For a long time she remained lost in the maze of streets, from the powerful chimneys, tall and wide, to the lightning rods bristling from the roofs, to the poles for electricity, to the railway cars, to the coal deposits, trying to imagine what this small town, so dead at the moment, would be like once all of that was heating up, smoking, running, turning, snoring [...]"*

(H. Malot, *En famille*, 1895, p. 175)

*"[The buildings] that were the newest, most beautiful, greatest, greater than necessary, trimmed with polychrome decorations, had nothing to do with their miserable older brothers, old before their time with their slabs of mortar or clay, or their iron wives with their pink or white, glazed brick facades [...]"*

(H. Malot, *En famille*, 1895, p. 175)

## The castle ◀ ③

The Vulfran Paindavoine castle is without contest based on that of Madame Saint-Zambaux, the widow of Jean-Baptiste Saint, which was built from 1882 to 1886. This is the first building that Perrine discovers the evening of her arrival at Maraucourt. She is accompanied by Rosalie, a young worker

that she has met on route. She appears to be impressed, as was the novelist during his visit.

*"Then, upon arriving to where the willows had been pollarded, the castle rose up, imposing, with its three main buildings with white stone and red brick facades, its tall rooftops and slender chimneys in the middle of a vast lawn planted with bouquets of trees, which ran down all the way to the meadow, where they stretched out into the distance, dotting the landscape, following the line of rolling hills"*

(H. Malot, *En famille*, 1895, p. 160-161)

## A village street ◀ ④

In the novel, Hector Malot emphasizes the brutal transformation of this rural town upended by rapid industrialization

*"Elsewhere, they [Perrine and Rosalie] reached the first scattered houses in courtyards planted with sickly apple trees and Perrine's attention was drawn to what she saw around her [...]"*

*-What a bunch of drunks!*

*-It could be worse. Wait until the Sunday after payday [...]"*

*The characteristic of most of the houses that she passed had was that nearly all of them - so old, so worn out, so badly built, thrown together out of earth or clay - affected an air of coquettishness, at least in the painting on the doors and windows, attracting the eye like a sign. [...] in these houses, rooms were rented out to workers and this paint offered a promise of cleanliness that one look inside belied quite quickly."*

(H. Malot, *En famille*, 1895, p. 158)

## The workers' houses ◀ ⑤

Thirteen months after Perrine's arrival at Maraucourt, the village is transformed. The hovels are replaced by a new town. The industrialist, enlightened by his grand daughter, implements a policy of paternalism.

*"On these lots scattered around, could be seen other roofs in new tiles, all of these small, and with their cleanliness and red shine, they contrasted with the old roofs covered with sedum: these were the workers' houses that had begun to be built recently, and which each were or would be set in the middle of a small garden, in which could be harvested vegetables necessary for the feeding of a family who, for a hundred francs per year's rent, would have material well-being and the dignity of a home."*

(H. Malot, *En famille*, 1895, p. 275)

The description that Hector Malot gives of the workers' houses does not correspond with those that he would have been able to observe. He preferred lined-up facades laid out in flats much like those adopted by the Dollfus company in Mulhouse. The town that he imagined was inspired by various models, notably that of Noisel built by the chocolate maker Menier.

The novel by Hector Malot is currently available in French from Encreage, and in English (*Nobody's Girl*) from FQ Books.

