

LE CHEMINEAU

Music by Xavier Leroux

Libretto by Jean Richepin

First Performance: l'Opéra-Comique, Paris, November 6, 1907

Act I. In the first act Le Chemineau, the best farm-hand of Pierre, a well-to-do farmer in France, and one who is always cheerful and ready for a joke, is introduced. Toinette, who is also Pierre's employ, is deeply in love with him, and he with her. But Le Chemineau is even more fond of a roving life, and hates to assume steady responsibilities. Hence he makes up his mind to resume his wanderings and tells Toinette. She attempts to restrain him, and François, likewise in love with Toinette, mingles in the conversation, belittle Le Chemineau, and pleads with her. Pierre, the farmer encourages Toinette to stay, while she wishes to join her sweetheart in his roving life. Le Chemineau cuts short the discussion by striding off, and while Toinette falls in a swoon and confesses that she has been his mistress, Le Chemineau's song of departure is heard from a distance.

Act II. Twenty years have gone, and François has really married Toinette. But François is now an invalid, and both he and his wife worry because their only son, Toinet, is always sad. Aline, old Pierre's daughter, is fond of Toinet, but her father is opposed to marriage with him. Pierre even says that sooner than see her the wife of Toinet, he would have her dead. He finally drives Toinette and François from his farm, and threatens to betray the fact that Toinet is really an illegitimate son of Le Chemineau. François, enraged, ruses at Pierre, but feebly totters and falls prone to the floor, upbraiding his wife for hiding for so many years the fact from him that Toinet is not his own son at all.

Act III. In Act III two farm hands, former coworkers with Le Chemineau and François, are discussing Toinet's hard lot, when the latter, wearied from long walking, enters the wayside inn where the discussion takes place. Catherine, the hostess, sends Toinet to the barn for a rest, while Le Chemineau, still very much his old self, drops in, singing and jolly. He has been all this time moving about from place to place. The farm hands recognize him, but he does not know them. From their talk he learns what became of Toinette, his former sweetheart, and feels sorry for her. While he is still seated, Toinette comes to look for her vanished son, and she is taken to his couch. Chemineau remains, realizing with difficulty that Toinet is his own son. He also goes to the barn and there he meets Toinette, who accuses him of being the author of all her present misfortunes. He begs forgiveness, which she grants.

Act IV. The last act shows Toinette's house on Christmas eve. Aline and Toinet are now married and prepare to go to midnight mass. Le Chemineau is also there, and he offers to stay with the invalid François if Toinette will join the young couple in their walk to church. Toinette accedes and hopes that her former lover, Le Chemineau, will never leave them. Old Pierre comes in and tells Le Chemineau that if only he will marry Toinette after François has died, he will make him comfortable for the rest of his life. Le Chemineau declines. François has heard all and thanks Le Chemineau. The latter goes away, resuming his wandering existence, while the bells are heard announcing the end of the mass.