

A kindly sun was shedding its warmth across their backs. They were so
130 absorbed that they no longer heard, or thought, or paid the least attention to
the outside world. What did anything matter now? They were fishing!

But suddenly, the bank beneath them shook with a dull rumble which
seemed to come from underground.

The distant cannon were starting to fire again.

Morissot turned his head, and above the bank, over to the left, he saw the
great bulk of Mont Valérien. On the mountainside was a white plume of
smoke, showing where the gunpowder had just bellowed out.

Almost immediately another jet of smoke spurted from the fort on the
summit, and a few seconds later the rumble of another detonation reached
140 their ears.

Other cannon shots followed, and every now and then the mountain spat
out its deadly breath, exhaled its clouds of milky vapor, which rose slowly into
the calm sky above. **F**

“There they go again!” said Monsieur Sauvage with a shrug of his shoulders.

Morissot, who was anxiously watching the feather on his float as it bobbed
up and down, was suddenly filled with the anger of a peace-loving man for
these maniacs who indulge in fighting.

“They’ve got to be really stupid,” he growled, “to go on killing each other
like that!”

150 “They’re worse than animals,” said Monsieur Sauvage.

Morissot, who had just caught another fish, called out:

“And it’ll never be any different so long as we have governments!”

“Oh, no,” disagreed Monsieur Sauvage. “The Republic⁷ would never have
declared war . . .”

“Look!” interrupted Morissot. “Under kings you have war against other
countries. Under republican governments you have civil war.”

And they began to argue, in a calm and friendly way, sorting out all the world’s
great political problems with the commonsense approach of mild and reasonable
men. On one point they were in absolute agreement: mankind would never be
160 free. And as they talked, Mont Valérien went thundering on without respite,
demolishing French homes with its cannonades,⁸ pounding lives to dust, crushing
human beings to pulp, putting an end to so many dreams, to so many long-awaited
joys, so much long-expected happiness, tearing into the hearts of all those wives
and daughters and mothers with pain and suffering that would never be eased.

“Such is life,” said Monsieur Sauvage.

“Better to call it death,” laughed Morissot. **G**

But at that moment they both gave a start, scared by the feeling that
somebody had been walking just behind them. They looked round and saw
standing above them four men, four tall, bearded men, armed to the teeth,

F SETTING

Compare and contrast
this fishing trip with
earlier ones described in
the story. How has the
setting changed?

G MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 157–166.
Why is the argument
between Morissot and
Sauvage **ironic**?

7. **the Republic:** the Second Republic of France (1848–1852), which was France’s first truly
representative government.

8. **cannonades:** numerous firings of cannons.