THE HISTORY OF A CRIME THE TESTIMONY OF AN EYE-WITNESS BY VICTOR HUGO THE FIRST DAY—

THE AMBUSH. CHAPTER I. "SECURITY" On December 1, 1851, Charras shrugged his shoulder and unloaded his pistols. In truth, the belief in the possibility of a coup d'état had become humiliating. The supposition of such illegal violence on the part of M. Louis Bonaparte vanished upon serious consideration. The great question of the day was manifestly the Devincq election; it was clear that the Government was only thinking of that matter. As to a conspiracy against the Republic and against the People, how could any one premeditate such a plot? Where was the man capable of entertaining such a dream? For a tragedy there must be an actor, and here assuredly the actor was wanting. To outrage Right, to suppress the Assembly, to abolish the Constitution, to strangle the Republic, to overthrow the Nation, to sully the Flag, to dishonor the Army, to suborn the Clergy and the Magistracy, to succeed, to triumph, to govern, to administer, to exile, to banish, to transport, to ruin, to assassinate, to reign, with such complicities that the law at last resembles a foul bed of corruption. What! All these enormities were to be committed! And by whom? By a

Colossus? No, by a dwarf. People laughed at the notion. They no longer said "What a crime!" but "What a farce!" For after all they reflected; heinous crimes require stature. Certain crimes are too lofty for certain hands. A man who would achieve an 18th Brumaire must have Arcola in his past and Austerlitz in his future. The art of becoming a great scoundrel is not accorded to the first comer. People said to themselves, Who is this son of Hortense? He has Strasbourg behind him instead of Arcola, and Boulogne in place of Austerlitz. He is a Frenchman, born a Dutchman, and naturalized a Swiss; he is a Bonaparte crossed with a Verhuell; he is only celebrated for the ludicrousness of his imperial attitude, and he who would pluck a feather from his eagle would risk finding a goose's quill in his hand. This Bonaparte does not pass currency in the array, he is a counterfeit image less of gold than of lead, and assuredly French soldiers will not give us the change for this false Napoleon in rebellion, in atrocities, in massacres, in outrages, in treason. If he should attempt roguery it would miscarry. Not a regiment would stir. Besides, why should he make such an

attempt? Doubtless he has his suspicious side, but why suppose him an absolute villain? Such extreme outrages are beyond him; he is incapable of them physically, why judge him capable of them morally? Has he not pledged honor? Has he not said, "No one in Europe doubts my word?" Let us fear nothing. To this could be answered, Crimes are committed either on a grand or on a mean scale. In the first category there is Caesar; in the second there is Mandrin. Caesar passes the Rubicon, Mandrin bestrides the gutter. But wise men interposed, "Are we not prejudiced by offensive conjectures? This man has been exiled and unfortunate. Exile enlightens, misfortune corrects." For his part Louis Bonaparte protested energetically. Facts abounded in his favor. Why should he not act in good faith? He had made remarkable promises. Towards the end of October, 1848, then a candidate for the Presidency, he was calling at No. 37, Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, on a certain personage, to whom he remarked, "I wish to have an explanation with you. They slander me. Do I give you the impression of a madman? They think that I wish to revivify Napoleon. There are two men

whom a great ambition can take for its models, Napoleon and Washington. The one is a man of Genius, the other is a man of Virtue. It is ridiculous to say, 'I will be a man of Genius;' it is honest to say, 'I will be a man of Virtue.' Which of these depends upon ourselves? Which can we accomplish by our will? To be Genius? No. To be Probity? Yes. The attainment of Genius is not possible; the attainment of Probity is a possibility. And what could I revive of Napoleon? One sole thing—a crime. Truly a worthy ambition! Why should I be considered man? The Republic being established, I am not a great man, I shall not copy Napoleon; but I am an honest man. I shall imitate Washington. My name, the name of Bonaparte, will be inscribed on two pages of the history of France: on the first there will be crime and glory, on the second probity and honor. And the second will perhaps be worth the first. Why? Because if Napoleon is the greater, Washington is the better man. Between the guilty hero and the good citizen I choose the good citizen. Such is my ambition." From 1848 to 1851 three years elapsed. People had long suspected Louis Bonaparte; but long-

continued suspicion blunts the intellect and wears itself out by fruitless alarms. Louis Bonaparte had had dissimulating ministers such as Magne and Rouher; but he had also had straightforward ministers such as Léon Faucher and Odilon Barrot; and these last had affirmed that he was upright and sincere. He had been seen to beat his breast before the doors of Ham; his foster sister, Madame Hortense Cornu, wrote to Mieroslawsky, "I am a good Republican, and I can answer for him." His friend of Ham, Peauger, a loyal man, declared, "Louis Bonaparte is incapable of treason." Had not Louis Bonaparte written the work entitled "Pauperism"? In the intimate circles of the Elysée Count Potocki was a Republican and Count d'Orsay was a Liberal; Louis Bonaparte said to Potocki, "I am a man of the Democracy," and to D'Orsay, "I am a man of Liberty." The Marquis du Hallays opposed the coup d'état, while the Marquise du Hallays was in its favor. Louis Bonaparte said to the Marquis, "Fear nothing" (it is true that he whispered to the Marquise, "Make your mind easy"). The Assembly, after having shown here and there some symptoms of uneasiness,

had grown calm. There was General Neumayer, "who was to be depended upon," and who from his position at Lyons would at need march upon Paris. Changarnier exclaimed, "Representatives of the people, deliberate in peace." Even Louis Bonaparte himself had pronounced these famous words, "I should see an enemy of my country in any one who would change by force that which has been established by law," and, moreover, the Army was "force," and the Army possessed leaders, leaders who were beloved and victorious. Lamoricière, Changarnier, Cavaignac, Leflô, Bedeau, Charras; how could any one imagine the Army of Africa arresting the Generals of Africa? On Friday, November 28, 1851, Louis Bonaparte said to Michel de Bourges, "If I wanted to do wrong, I could not. Yesterday, Thursday, I invited to my table five Colonels of the garrison of Paris, and the whim seized me to question each one by himself. All five declared to me that the Army would never lend itself to a coup de force, nor attack the inviolability of the Assembly. You can tell your friends this."—"He smiled," said Michel de Bourges, reassured, "and I also smiled." After this,

Michel de Bourges declared in the Tribune, "this is the man for me." In that same month of November a satirical journal, charged with calumniating the President of the Republic, was sentenced to fine and imprisonment for a caricature depicting a shooting-gallery and Louis Bonaparte using the Constitution as a target. Morigny, Minister of the Interior, declared in the Council before the President "that a Guardian of Public Power ought never to violate the law as otherwise he would be—" "a dishonest man," interposed the President. All these words and all these facts were notorious. The material and moral impossibility of the coup d'état was manifest to all. To outrage the National Assembly! To arrest the Representatives! What madness! As we have seen, Charras, who had long remained on his guard, unloaded his pistols. The feeling of security was complete and unanimous. Nevertheless there were some of us in the Assembly who still retained a few doubts, and who occasionally shook our heads, but we were looked upon as fools. CHAPTER II. PARIS SLEEPS—THE BELL RINGS On the 2d December, 1851, Representative Versigny, of the Haute-Saône,

who resided at Paris, at No. 4, Rue Léonie, was asleep. He slept soundly; he had been working till late at night. Versigny was a young man of thirty-two, soft-featured and faircomplexioned, of a courageous spirit, and a mind tending towards social and economical studies. He had passed the first hours of the night in the perusal of a book by Bastiat, in which he was making marginal notes, and, leaving the book open on the table, he had fallen asleep. Suddenly he awoke with a start at the sound of a sharp ring at the bell. He sprang up in surprise. It was dawn. It was about seven o'clock in the morning. Never dreaming what could be the motive for so early a visit, and thinking that someone had mistaken the door, he again lay down, and was about to resume his slumber, when a second ring at the bell, still louder than the first, completely aroused him. He got up in his night-shirt and opened the door. Michel de Bourges and Théodore Bac entered. Michel de Bourges was the neighbor of Versigny; he lived at No. 16, Rue de Milan. Théodore Bac and Michel were pale, and appeared greatly agitated. "Versigny," said Michel, "dress yourself at once—Baune has just been

arrested." "Bah!" exclaimed Versigny. "Is the Mauguin business beginning again?" "It is more than that," replied Michel. "Baune's wife and daughter came to me half-anhour ago. They awoke me. Baune was arrested in bed at six o'clock this morning." "What does that mean?" asked Versigny. The bell rang again. "This will probably tell us," answered Michel de Bourges. Versigny opened the door. It was the Representative Pierre Lefranc. He brought, in truth, the solution of the enigma. "Do you know what is happening?" said he. "Yes," answered Michel. "Baune is in prison." "It is the Republic who is a prisoner," said Pierre Lefranc. "Have you read the placards?" "No." Pierre Lefranc explained to them that the walls at that moment were covered with placards which the curious crowd were thronging to read, that he had glanced over one of them at the corner of his street, and that the blow had fallen. "The blow!" exclaimed Michel. "Say rather the crime." Pierre Lefranc added that there were three placards—one decree and two proclamations—all three on white paper, and pasted close together. The decree was printed in large letters. The ex-

Constituent Laissac, who lodged, like Michel de Bourges, in the neighborhood (No. 4, Cité Gaillard), then came in. He brought the same news, and announced further arrests which had been made during the night. There was not a minute to lose. They went to impart the news to Yvan, the Secretary of the Assembly, who had been appointed by the Left, and who lived in the Rue de Boursault. An immediate meeting was necessary. Those Republican Representatives who were still at liberty must be warned and brought together without delay. Versigny said, "I will go and find Victor Hugo." It was eight o'clock in the morning. I was awake and was working in bed. My servant entered and said, with an air of alarm,— "A Representative of the people is outside who wishes to speak to you, sir." "Who is it?" "Monsieur Versigny:" "Show him in." Versigny entered, and told me the state of affairs. I sprang out of bed. He told me of the "rendezvous" at the rooms of the ex-Constituent Laissac. "Go at once and inform the other Representatives," said I. He left me.

CHAPTER III. WHAT HAD HAPPENED DURING THE NIGHT

Previous to the fatal days of June, 1848, the esplanade of the Invalides was divided into eight huge grass plots, surrounded by wooden railings and enclosed between two groves of trees, separated by a street running perpendicularly to the front of the Invalides. This street was traversed by three streets running parallel to the Seine. There were large lawns upon which children were wont to play. The centre of the eight grass plots was marred by a pedestal which under the Empire had borne the bronze lion of St. Mark, which had been brought from Venice; under the Restoration a white marble statue of Louis XVIII.; and under Louis Philippe a plaster bust of Lafayette. Owing to the Palace of the Constituent Assembly having been nearly seized by a crowd of insurgents on the 22d of June, 1848, and there being no barracks in the neighborhood, General Cavaignac had constructed at three hundred paces from the Legislative Palace, on the grass plots of the Invalides, several rows of long huts, under which the grass was hidden. These huts, where three or four thousand men could be

accommodated, lodged the troops specially appointed to keep watch over the National Assembly. On the 1st December, 1851, the two regiments hutted on the Esplanade were the 6th and the 42d Regiments of the Line, the 6th commanded by Colonel Garderens de Boisse, who was famous before the Second of December, the 42d by Colonel Espinasse, who became famous since that date. The ordinary night-guard of the Palace of the Assembly was composed of a battalion of Infantry and of thirty artillerymen, with a captain. The Minister of War, in addition, sent several troopers for orderly service. Two mortars and six pieces of cannon, with their ammunition wagons, were ranged in a little square courtyard situated on the right of the Cour d'Honneur, and which was called the Cour des Canons. The Major, the military commandant of the Palace, was placed under the immediate control of the Questors. At nightfall the gratings and the doors were secured, sentinels were posted, instructions were issued to the sentries, and the Palace was closed like a fortress. The password was the same as in the Place de Paris. The special instructions drawn up by the

Questors prohibited the entrance of any armed force other than the regiment on duty. On the night of the 1st and 2d of December the Legislative Palace was guarded by a battalion of the 42d. The sitting of the 1st of December, which was exceedingly peaceable, and had been devoted to a discussion on the municipal law, had finished late, and was terminated by a Tribunal vote. At the moment when M. Baze, one of the Questors, ascended the Tribune to deposit his vote, a Representative, belonging to what was called "Les Bancs Elyséens" approached him, and said in a low tone, "To-night you will be carried off." Such warnings as these were received every day, and, as we have already explained, people had ended by paying no heed to them. Nevertheless, immediately after the sitting the Questors sent for the Special Commissary of Police of the Assembly, President Dupin being present. When interrogated, the Commissary declared that the reports of his agents indicated "dead calm"—such was his expression—and that assuredly there was no danger to be apprehended for that night. When the Questors pressed him further, President

Dupin, exclaiming "Bah!" left the room. On that same day, the 1st December, about three o'clock in the afternoon, as General Leflô's father-in-law crossed the boulevard in front of Tortoni's, some one rapidly passed by him and whispered in his ear these significant words, "Eleven o'clock— midnight." This incident excited but little attention at the Questure, and several even laughed at it. It had become customary with them. Nevertheless General Leflô would not go to bed until the hour mentioned had passed by, and remained in the Offices of the Questure until nearly one o'clock in the morning. The shorthand department of the Assembly was done out of doors by four messengers attached to the Moniteur, who were employed to carry the copy of the shorthand writers to the printing-office, and to bring back the proof-sheets to the Palace of the Assembly, where M. Hippolyte Prévost corrected them. M. Hippolyte Prévost was chief of the stenographic staff, and in that capacity had apartments in the Legislative Palace. He was at the same time editor of the musical feuilleton of the Moniteur. On the 1st December he had gone to the Opéra

Comique for the first representation of a new piece, and did not return till after midnight. The fourth messenger from the Moniteur was waiting for him with a proof of the last slip of the sitting; M. Prévost corrected the proof, and the messenger was sent off. It was then a little after one o'clock, profound quiet reigned around, and, with the exception of the guard, all in the Palace slept. Towards this hour of the night, a singular incident occurred. The Captain-AdjutantMajor of the Guard of the Assembly came to the Major and said, "The Colonel has sent for me," and he added according to military etiquette, "Will you permit me to go?" The Commandant was astonished. "Go," he said with some sharpness, "but the Colonel is wrong to disturb an officer on duty." One of the soldiers on guard, without understanding the meaning of the words, heard the Commandant pacing up and down, and muttering several times, "What the deuce can he want?" Half an hour afterwards the Adjutant-Major returned. "Well," asked the Commandant, "what did the Colonel want with you?" "Nothing," answered the Adjutant, "he wished to give me the orders for to-morrow's

duties." The night became further advanced. Towards four o'clock the Adjutant-Major came again to the Major. "Major," he said, "the Colonel has asked for me." "Again!" exclaimed the Commandant. "This is becoming strange; nevertheless, go." The Adjutant-Major had amongst other duties that of giving out the instructions to the sentries, and consequently had the power of rescinding them. As soon as the Adjutant-Major had gone out, the Major, becoming uneasy, thought that it was his duty to communicate with the Military Commandant of the Palace. He went upstairs to the apartment of the Commandant—Lieutenant Colonel Niols. Colonel Niols had gone to bed and the attendants had retired to their rooms in the attics. The Major, new to the Palace, groped about the corridors, and, knowing little about the various rooms, rang at a door which seemed to him that of the Military Commandant. Nobody answered, the door was not opened, and the Major returned downstairs, without having been able to speak to anybody. On his part the Adjutant-Major re-entered the Palace, but the Major did not see him again. The Adjutant remained near the grated door of

the Place Bourgogne, shrouded in his cloak, and walking up and down the courtyard as though expecting some one. At the instant that five o'clock sounded from the great clock of the dome, the soldiers who slept in the hut-camp before the Invalides were suddenly awakened. Orders were given in a low voice in the huts to take up arms, in silence. Shortly afterwards two regiments, knapsack on back were marching upon the Palace of the Assembly; they were the 6th and the 42d. At this same stroke of five, simultaneously in all the quarters of Paris, infantry soldiers filed out noiselessly from every barrack, with their colonels at their head. The aides-decamp and orderly officers of Louis Bonaparte, who had been distributed in all the barracks, superintended this taking up of arms. The cavalry were not set in motion until three-quarters of an hour after the infantry, for fear that the ring of the horses' hoofs on the stones should wake slumbering Paris too soon. M. de Persigny, who had brought from the Elysée to the camp of the Invalides the order to take up arms, marched at the head of the 42d, by the side of Colonel Espinasse. A story is current in the army, for

at the present day, wearied as people are with dishonorable incidents, these occurrences are yet told with a species of gloomy indifference—the story is current that at the moment of setting out with his regiment one of the colonels who could be named hesitated, and that the emissary from the Elysée, taking a sealed packet from his pocket, said to him, "Colonel, I admit that we are running a great risk. Here in this envelope, which I have been charged to hand to you, are a hundred thousand francs in banknotes for contingencies." The envelope was accepted, and the regiment set out. On the evening of the 2d of December the colonel said to a lady, "This morning I earned a hundred thousand francs and my General's epaulets." The lady showed him the door. Xavier Durrieu, who tells us this story, had the curiosity later on to see this lady. She confirmed the story. Yes, certainly! she had shut the door in the face of this wretch; a soldier, a traitor to his flag who dared visit her! She receive such a man? No! she could not do that, "and," states Xavier Durrieu, she added, "And yet I have no character to lose." Another mystery was in progress at the Prefecture of

Police. Those belated inhabitants of the Cité who may have returned home at a late hour of the night might have noticed a large number of street cabs loitering in scattered groups at different points round about the Rue de Jerusalem. From eleven o'clock in the evening, under pretext of the arrivals of refugees at Paris from Genoa and London, the Brigade of Surety and the eight hundred sergents de ville had been retained in the Prefecture. At three o'clock in the morning a summons had been sent to the forty-eight Commissaries of Paris and of the suburbs, and also to the peace officers. An hour afterwards all of them arrived. They were ushered into a separate chamber, and isolated from each other as much as possible. At five o'clock a bell was sounded in the Prefect's cabinet. The Prefect Maupas called the Commissaries of Police one after another into his cabinet, revealed the plot to them, and allotted to each his portion of the crime. None refused; many thanked him. It was a question of arresting at their own homes seventy-eight Democrats who were influential in their districts, and dreaded by the Elysée as possible chieftains of barricades. It was