And yet, frightful though this spot may be, it is looked upon as a kind of paradise by the men whose days are numbered; it is so rare for them to leave the Lions' Den for any other place than the barrier Saint-Jacques, the galleys! or solitary confinement.

In the court which we have attempted to describe, and from which a damp vapor was rising, a young man with his hands in his pockets, who had excited much curiosity among the inhabitants of the 'Den,' might be seen walking. The cut of his clothes would have made him pass for an elegant man, if those clothes had not been torn to shreds; still they did not show signs of wear, and the fine cloth, beneath the careful hands of the prisoner, soon recovered its gloss in the parts which were still perfect, for the wearer tried his best to make it assume the appearance of a new coat. He bestowed the same attention upon the cambric front of a shirt, which had considerably changed in colour since his entrance into the prison, and he polished his varnished boots with the corner of a handkerchief embroidered with initials surmounted by a coronet.

Some of the inmates of the 'Lions' Den' were watching the operations of the prisoner's toilet with considerable interest.

'See, the prince is pluming himself,' said one of the thieves.

'He's a fine looking fellow,' said another; 'if he had only a comb and hair-grease, he'd take the shine off the gentlemen in white kids.'

'His coat looks nearly new, and his boots are brilliant. It is pleasant to have such well-dressed brethren; and those gendarmes behaved shamefully. What jealousy; to tear such clothes!'

'He looks like a big-bug,' said another; 'dresses in fine style. And, then, to be here so young! Oh, what larks!'

Meanwhile the object of this hideous admiration approached the wicket, against which one of the keepers was leaning.

'Come, sir,' he said, 'lend me twenty francs; you will soon be paid; you run no risks with me. Remember, I have relations who possess more millions than you have deniers. Come, I beseech you, lend me twenty francs, so that I may buy a dressing-gown; it is intolerable always to be in a coat and boots! And what a coat, sir, for a prince of the Cavalcanti!'

The keeper turned his back, and shrugged his shoulders; he did not even laugh at what would have caused anyone else to do so; he had heard so many utter the same things,—indeed, he heard nothing else.

'Come,' said Andrea, 'you are a man void of compassion; I'll have you turned out.'

This made the keeper turn around, and he burst into a loud laugh. The prisoners then approached and formed a circle.

'I tell you that with that wretched sum,' continued Andrea, 'I could obtain a coat, and a room in which to receive the illustrious visitor I am daily expecting.'

'Of course—of course,' said the prisoners;—'anyone can see he's a gentleman!'

'Well, then, lend him the twenty francs,' said the keeper, leaning on the other shoulder; 'surely you will not refuse a comrade!'

'I am no comrade of these people,' said the young man, proudly, 'you have no right to insult me thus.'

The thieves looked at one another with low murmurs, and a storm gathered over the head of the aristocratic prisoner, raised less by his own words than by the manner of the keeper. The latter, sure of quelling the tempest when the waves became too violent, allowed them to rise to a certain pitch that he might be revenged on the importunate Andrea, and besides it would afford him some recreation during the long day.

The thieves had already approached Andrea, some screaming, *'La savate—La savate!'*[1] a cruel operation, which consists in cuffing a comrade who may have fallen into disgrace, not with an old shoe, but with an iron-heeled one. Others proposed the *anguille*, another kind of recreation, in which a handkerchief is filled with sand, pebbles, and two-sous pieces, when they have them, which the wretches beat like a flail over the head and shoulders of the unhappy sufferer.

'Let us horsewhip the fine gentleman!' said others.

But Andrea, turning towards them, winked his eyes, rolled his tongue around his cheeks, and smacked his lips in a manner equivalent to a hundred words among the bandits when forced to be silent. It was a Masonic sign Caderousse had taught him. He was immediately recognized as one of them; the handkerchief was thrown down, and the iron-heeled shoe replaced on the foot of the wretch to whom it belonged.

[1] *Savate*: an old shoe.

Some voices were heard to say that the gentleman was right; that he intended to be civil, in his way, and that they would set the example of liberty of conscience,—and the mob retired. The keeper was so stupefied at this scene that he took Andrea by the hands and began examining his person, attributing the sudden submission of the inmates of the Lions' Den to something more substantial than mere fascination.

Andrea made no resistance, although he protested against it. Suddenly a voice was heard at the wicket.

'Benedetto!' exclaimed an inspector. The keeper relaxed his hold.

'I am called,' said Andrea.

'To the visitors' room!' said the same voice.

'You see someone pays me a visit. Ah, my dear sir, you will see whether a Cavalcanti is to be treated like a common person!'

And Andrea, gliding through the court like a black shadow, rushed out through the wicket, leaving his comrades, and even the keeper, lost in wonder. Certainly a call to the visitors' room had scarcely astonished Andrea less than themselves, for the wily youth, instead of making use of his privilege of waiting to be claimed on his entry into La Force, had maintained a rigid silence. 'Everything,' he said, 'proves me to be under the protection of some powerful person,—this sudden fortune, the facility with which I have overcome all obstacles, an unexpected family and an illustrious name awarded to me, gold showered down upon me, and the most splendid alliances about to be entered into. An unhappy lapse of fortune and the absence of my protector have cast me down, certainly, but not forever. The hand which has retreated for a while will be again stretched forth to save me at the very moment when I shall think myself sinking into the abyss. Why should I risk an imprudent step? It might alienate my protector. He has two means of extricating me from this dilemma,—the one by a mysterious escape, managed through bribery; the other by buying off my judges with gold. I will say and do nothing until I am convinced that he has quite abandoned me, and then— '

Andrea had formed a plan which was tolerably clever. The unfortunate youth was intrepid in the attack, and rude in the defence. He had borne with the public prison, and with privations of all sorts; still, by degrees nature, or rather custom, had prevailed, and he suffered from being naked, dirty, and hungry. It was at this moment of discomfort that the inspector's

Chapter CVII

The Lions' Den

One division of La Force, in which the most dangerous and desperate prisoners are confined, is called the court of Saint-Bernard. The prisoners, in their expressive language, have named it the 'Lions' Den,' probably because the captives possess teeth which frequently gnaw the bars, and sometimes the keepers also. It is a prison within a prison; the walls are double the thickness of the rest. The gratings are every day carefully examined by jailers, whose herculean proportions and cold pitiless expression prove them to have been chosen to reign over their subjects for their superior activity and intelligence.

The courtyard of this quarter is enclosed by enormous walls, over which the sun glances obliquely, when it deigns to penetrate into this gulf of moral and physical deformity. On this paved yard are to be seen,—pacing to and fro from morning till night, pale, careworn, and haggard, like so many shadows,—the men whom justice holds beneath the steel she is sharpening. There, crouched against the side of the wall which attracts and retains the most heat, they may be seen sometimes talking to one another, but more frequently alone, watching the door, which sometimes opens to call forth one from the gloomy assemblage, or to throw in another outcast from society.

The court of Saint-Bernard has its own particular apartment for the reception of guests; it is a long rectangle, divided by two upright gratings placed at a distance of three feet from one another to prevent a visitor from shaking hands with or passing anything to the prisoners. It is a wretched, damp, nay, even horrible spot, more especially when we consider the agonizing conferences which have taken place between those iron bars.

voice called him to the visiting-room. Andrea felt his heart leap with joy. It was too soon for a visit from the examining magistrate, and too late for one from the director of the prison, or the doctor; it must, then, be the visitor he hoped for. Behind the grating of the room into which Andrea had been led, he saw, while his eyes dilated with surprise, the dark and intelligent face of M. Bertuccio, who was also gazing with sad astonishment upon the iron bars, the bolted doors, and the shadow which moved behind the other grating.

'Ah,' said Andrea, deeply affected.

'Good morning, Benedetto,' said Bertuccio, with his deep, hollow voice.

'You—you?' said the young man, looking fearfully around him.

'Do you not recognize me, unhappy child?'

'Silence,—be silent!' said Andrea, who knew the delicate sense of hearing possessed by the walls; 'for Heaven's sake, do not speak so loud!'

'You wish to speak with me alone, do you not?' said Bertuccio.

'Oh, yes.'

'That is well.'

And Bertuccio, feeling in his pocket, signed to a keeper whom he saw through the window of the wicket.

'Read?' he said.

'What is that?' asked Andrea.

'An order to conduct you to a room, and to leave you there to talk to me.'

'Oh,' cried Andrea, leaping with joy. Then he mentally added,—'Still my unknown protector! I am not forgotten. They wish for secrecy, since we are to converse in a private room. I understand, Bertuccio has been sent by my protector.'

The keeper spoke for a moment with an official, then opened the iron gates and conducted Andrea to a room on the first floor. The room was whitewashed, as is the custom in prisons, but it looked quite brilliant to a prisoner, though a stove, a bed, a chair, and a table formed the whole of its sumptuous furniture. Bertuccio sat down upon the chair, Andrea threw himself upon the bed; the keeper retired.

'Now,' said the steward, 'what have you to tell me?'

'And you?' said Andrea.

'You speak first.'

'Oh, no. You must have much to tell me, since you have come to seek me.'

'Well, be it so. You have continued your course of villany; you have robbed—you have assassinated.'

'Well, I should say! If you had me taken to a private room only to tell me this, you might have saved yourself the trouble. I know all these things. But there are some with which, on the contrary, I am not acquainted. Let us talk of those, if you please. Who sent you?'

'Come, come, you are going on quickly, M. Benedetto!'

'Yes, and to the point. Let us dispense with useless words. Who sends you?'

'No one.'

'How did you know I was in prison?'

'I recognized you, some time since, as the insolent dandy who so gracefully mounted his horse in the Champs-Élysées.'

'Oh, the Champs-Élysées? Ah, yes; we burn, as they say at the game of pincette. The Champs-Élysées? Come, let us talk a little about my father.'

'Who, then, am I?'

'You, sir?—you are my adopted father. But it was not you, I presume, who placed at my disposal 100,000 francs, which I spent in four or five months; it was not you who manufactured an Italian gentleman for my father; it was not you who introduced me into the world, and had me invited to a certain dinner at Auteuil, which I fancy I am eating at this moment, in company with the most distinguished people in Paris—amongst the rest with a certain procureur, whose acquaintance I did very wrong not to cultivate, for he would have been very useful to me just now;—it was not you, in fact, who bailed me for one or two millions, when the fatal discovery of my little secret took place. Come, speak, my worthy Corsican, speak!'

'What do you wish me to say?'

'I will help you. You were speaking of the Champs-Élysées just now, worthy foster-father.'

'Well?'

'Well, in the Champs-Élysées there resides a very rich gentleman.'

'At whose house you robbed and murdered, did you not?'

a few deniers. This parallel disturbed his usual politeness, the philosophy he witnessed appalled him, he muttered a few words of general civility and ran downstairs.

That day the minister's clerks and the subordinates had a great deal to put up with from his ill-humor. But that same night, he found himself the possessor of a fine house, situated on the Boulevard de la Madeleine, and an income of 50,000 livres.

The next day, just as Debray was signing the deed, that is about five o'clock in the afternoon, Madame de Morcerf, after having affectionately embraced her son, entered the *coupé* of the diligence, which closed upon her.

A man was hidden in Lafitte's banking-house, behind one of the little arched windows which are placed above each desk; he saw Mercédès enter the diligence, and he also saw Albert withdraw. Then he passed his hand across his forehead, which was clouded with doubt.

'Alas,' he exclaimed, 'how can I restore the happiness I have taken away from these poor innocent creatures? God help me!'

'I shall stay here for a few days longer; we must accustom ourselves to parting. I want recommendations and some information relative to Africa. I will join you again at Marseilles.'

'Well, be it so—let us part,' said Mercédès, folding around her shoulders the only shawl she had taken away, and which accidentally happened to be a valuable black cashmere. Albert gathered up his papers hastily, rang the bell to pay the thirty francs he owed to the landlord, and offering his arm to his mother, they descended the stairs.

Someone was walking down before them, and this person, hearing the rustling of a silk dress, turned around. 'Debray!' muttered Albert.

'You, Morcerf?' replied the secretary, resting on the stairs. Curiosity had vanquished the desire of preserving his *incognito*, and he was recognized. It was, indeed, strange in this unknown spot to find the young man whose misfortunes had made so much noise in Paris.

'Morcerf!' repeated Debray. Then noticing in the dim light the still youthful and veiled figure of Madame de Morcerf:

'Pardon me,' he added with a smile, 'I leave you, Albert.' Albert understood his thoughts.

'Mother,' he said, turning towards Mercédès, 'this is M. Debray, secretary of the Minister for the Interior, once a friend of mine.'

'How once?' stammered Debray; 'what do you mean?'

'I say so, M. Debray, because I have no friends now, and I ought not to have any. I thank you for having recognized me, sir.' Debray stepped forward, and cordially pressed the hand of his interlocutor.

'Believe me, dear Albert,' he said, with all the emotion he was capable of feeling,—'believe me, I feel deeply for your misfortunes, and if in any way I can serve you, I am yours.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Albert, smiling. 'In the midst of our misfortunes, we are still rich enough not to require assistance from anyone. We are leaving Paris, and when our journey is paid, we shall have 5,000 francs left.'

The blood mounted to the temples of Debray, who held a million in his pocket-book, and unimaginative as he was he could not help reflecting that the same house had contained two women, one of whom, justly dishonored, had left it poor with 1,500,000 francs under her cloak, while the other, unjustly stricken, but sublime in her misfortune, was yet rich with

'I believe I did.'

'The Count of Monte Cristo?'

''Tis you who have named him, as M. Racine says. Well, am I to rush into his arms, and strain him to my heart, crying, "My father, my father!" like Monsieur Pixérécourt.'[2]

'Do not let us jest,' gravely replied Bertuccio, 'and dare not to utter that name again as you have pronounced it.'

'Bah,' said Andrea, a little overcome, by the solemnity of Bertuccio's manner, 'why not?'

'Because the person who bears it is too highly favoured by Heaven to be the father of such a wretch as you.'

'Oh, these are fine words.'

'And there will be fine doings, if you do not take care.'

'Menaces—I do not fear them. I will say— '

'Do you think you are engaged with a pygmy like yourself?' said Bertuccio, in so calm a tone, and with so steadfast a look, that Andrea was moved to the very soul. 'Do you think you have to do with galley-slaves, or novices in the world? Benedetto, you are fallen into terrible hands; they are ready to open for you—make use of them. Do not play with the thunderbolt they have laid aside for a moment, but which they can take up again instantly, if you attempt to intercept their movements.'

'My father—I will know who my father is,' said the obstinate youth; 'I will perish if I must, but I *will* know it. What does scandal signify to me? What possessions, what reputation, what "pull," as Beauchamp says,—have I? You great people always lose something by scandal, notwithstanding your millions. Come, who is my father?'

'I came to tell you.'

'Ah,' cried Benedetto, his eyes sparkling with joy. Just then the door opened, and the jailer, addressing himself to Bertuccio, said:

'Excuse me, sir, but the examining magistrate is waiting for the prisoner.'

'And so closes our interview,' said Andrea to the worthy steward; 'I wish the troublesome fellow were at the devil!'

'I will return tomorrow,' said Bertuccio.

[2]Guilbert de Pixérécourt, French dramatist (1773-1844).

'Good! Gendarmes, I am at your service. Ah, sir, do leave a few crowns for me at the gate that I may have some things I am in need of!'

'It shall be done,' replied Bertuccio.

Andrea extended his hand; Bertuccio kept his own in his pocket, and merely jingled a few pieces of money.

'That's what I mean,' said Andrea, endeavouring to smile, quite overcome by the strange tranquillity of Bertuccio.

'Can I be deceived?' he murmured, as he stepped into the oblong and grated vehicle which they call 'the salad basket.'

'Never mind, we shall see! Tomorrow, then!' he added, turning towards Bertuccio.

'Tomorrow!' replied the steward.

These words were uttered in so mournful a tone that their real meaning did not escape Albert; he felt his heart beat, and taking his mother's hand within his own he said, tenderly:

'Yes, you will live!'

'I shall live!—then you will not leave me, Albert?'

'Mother, I must go,' said Albert in a firm, calm voice; 'you love me too well to wish me to remain useless and idle with you; besides, I have signed.'

'You will obey your own wish and the will of Heaven!'

'Not my own wish, mother, but reason—necessity. Are we not two despairing creatures? What is life to you?—Nothing. What is life to me?—Very little without you, mother; for believe me, but for you I should have ceased to live on the day I doubted my father and renounced his name. Well, I will live, if you promise me still to hope; and if you grant me the care of your future prospects, you will redouble my strength. Then I will go to the governor of Algeria; he has a royal heart, and is essentially a soldier; I will tell him my gloomy story. I will beg him to turn his eyes now and then towards me, and if he keep his word and interest himself for me, in six months I shall be an officer, or dead. If I am an officer, your fortune is certain, for I shall have money enough for both, and, moreover, a name we shall both be proud of, since it will be our own. If I am killed—well then mother, you can also die, and there will be an end of our misfortunes.'

'It is well,' replied Mercédès, with her eloquent glance; 'you are right, my love; let us prove to those who are watching our actions that we are worthy of compassion.'

'But let us not yield to gloomy apprehensions,' said the young man; 'I assure you we are, or rather we shall be, very happy. You are a woman at once full of spirit and resignation; I have become simple in my tastes, and am without passion, I hope. Once in service, I shall be rich—once in M. Dantès' house, you will be at rest. Let us strive, I beseech you,—let us strive to be cheerful.'

'Yes, let us strive, for you ought to live, and to be happy, Albert.'

'And so our division is made, mother,' said the young man, affecting ease of mind. 'We can now part; come, I shall engage your passage.'

'And you, my dear boy?'

'Have we come to any?'

'Yes; it is decided that you are to live at Marseilles, and that I am to leave for Africa, where I will earn for myself the right to use the name I now bear, instead of the one I have thrown aside.' Mercédès sighed. 'Well, mother, I yesterday engaged myself as substitute in the Spahis,'[1] added the young man, lowering his eyes with a certain feeling of shame, for even he was unconscious of the sublimity of his self-abasement. 'I thought my body was my own, and that I might sell it. I yesterday took the place of another. I sold myself for more than I thought I was worth,' he added, attempting to smile; 'I fetched 2,000 francs.'

'Then these 1,000 francs— ' said Mercédès, shuddering.

'Are the half of the sum, mother; the other will be paid in a year.'

Mercédès raised her eyes to heaven with an expression it would be impossible to describe, and tears, which had hitherto been restrained, now yielded to her emotion, and ran down her cheeks.

'The price of his blood!' she murmured.

'Yes, if I am killed,' said Albert, laughing. 'But I assure you, mother, I have a strong intention of defending my person, and I never felt half so strong an inclination to live as I do now.'

'Merciful Heavens!'

'Besides, mother, why should you make up your mind that I am to be killed? Has Lamoricière, that Ney of the South, been killed? Has Changarnier been killed? Has Bedeau been killed? Has Morrel, whom we know, been killed? Think of your joy, mother, when you see me return with an embroidered uniform! I declare, I expect to look magnificent in it, and chose that regiment only from vanity.'

Mercédès sighed while endeavouring to smile; the devoted mother felt that she ought not to allow the whole weight of the sacrifice to fall upon her son.

'Well, now you understand, mother!' continued Albert; 'here are more than 4,000 francs settled on you; upon these you can live at least two years.'

'Do you think so?' said Mercédès.

[1]The Spahis are French cavalry reserved for service in Africa.

Chapter CVIII

The Judge

We remember that the Abbé Busoni remained alone with Noirtier in the chamber of death, and that the old man and the priest were the sole guardians of the young girl's body. Perhaps it was the Christian exhortations of the abbé, perhaps his kind charity, perhaps his persuasive words, which had restored the courage of Noirtier, for ever since he had conversed with the priest his violent despair had yielded to a calm resignation which surprised all who knew his excessive affection for Valentine.

M. de Villefort had not seen his father since the morning of the death. The whole establishment had been changed; another valet was engaged for himself, a new servant for Noirtier, two women had entered Madame de Villefort's service,—in fact, everywhere, to the concierge and coachmen, new faces were presented to the different masters of the house, thus widening the division which had always existed between the members of the same family. The assizes, also, were about to begin, and Villefort, shut up in his room, exerted himself with feverish anxiety in drawing up the case against the murderer of Caderousse. This affair, like all those in which the Count of Monte Cristo had interfered, caused a great sensation in Paris. The proofs were certainly not convincing, since they rested upon a few words written by an escaped galley-slave on his death-bed, and who might have been actuated by hatred or revenge in accusing his companion. But the mind of the procureur was made up; he felt assured that Benedetto was guilty, and he hoped by his skill in conducting this aggravated case to flatter his self-love, which was about the only vulnerable point left in his frozen heart.

The case was therefore prepared owing to the incessant labour of Villefort, who wished it to be the first on the list in the coming assizes. He had been obliged to seclude himself more than ever, to evade the enormous number of applications presented to him for the purpose of obtaining tickets of admission to the court on the day of trial. And then so short a time had elapsed since the death of poor Valentine, and the gloom which overshadowed the house was so recent, that no one wondered to see the father so absorbed in his professional duties, which were the only means he had of dissipating his grief.

Once only had Villefort seen his father; it was the day after that upon which Bertuccio had paid his second visit to Benedetto, when the latter was to learn his father's name. The magistrate, harassed and fatigued, had descended to the garden of his house, and in a gloomy mood, similar to that in which Tarquin lopped off the tallest poppies, he began knocking off with his cane the long and dying branches of the rose-trees, which, placed along the avenue, seemed like the spectres of the brilliant flowers which had bloomed in the past season.

More than once he had reached that part of the garden where the famous boarded gate stood overlooking the deserted enclosure, always returning by the same path, to begin his walk again, at the same pace and with the same gesture, when he accidentally turned his eyes towards the house, whence he heard the noisy play of his son, who had returned from school to spend the Sunday and Monday with his mother.

While doing so, he observed M. Noirtier at one of the open windows, where the old man had been placed that he might enjoy the last rays of the sun which yet yielded some heat, and was now shining upon the dying flowers and red leaves of the creeper which twined around the balcony.

The eye of the old man was riveted upon a spot which Villefort could scarcely distinguish. His glance was so full of hate, of ferocity, and savage impatience, that Villefort turned out of the path he had been pursuing, to see upon what person this dark look was directed.

Then he saw beneath a thick clump of linden-trees, which were nearly divested of foliage, Madame de Villefort sitting with a book in her hand, the perusal of which she frequently interrupted to smile upon her son, or to throw back his elastic ball, which he obstinately threw from the drawing-room into the garden.

'Let us put down 120,' added Albert, smiling. 'You see I am generous, am I not, mother?'

'But you, my poor child?'

'I? do you not see that I reserve eighty francs for myself? A young man does not require luxuries; besides, I know what travelling is.'

'With a post-chaise and valet de chambre?'

'Any way, mother.'

'Well, be it so. But these 200 francs?'

'Here they are, and 200 more besides. See, I have sold my watch for 100 francs, and the guard and seals for 300. How fortunate that the ornaments were worth more than the watch. Still the same story of superfluities! Now I think we are rich, since instead of the 114 francs we require for the journey we find ourselves in possession of 250.'

'But we owe something in this house?'

'Thirty francs; but I pay that out of my 150 francs,—that is understood,—and as I require only eighty francs for my journey, you see I am overwhelmed with luxury. But that is not all. What do you say to this, mother?'

And Albert took out of a little pocket-book with golden clasps, a remnant of his old fancies, or perhaps a tender souvenir from one of the mysterious and veiled ladies who used to knock at his little door,—Albert took out of this pocket-book a note of 1,000 francs.

'What is this?' asked Mercédès.

'A thousand francs.'

'But whence have you obtained them?'

'Listen to me, mother, and do not yield too much to agitation.' And Albert, rising, kissed his mother on both cheeks, then stood looking at her. 'You cannot imagine, mother, how beautiful I think you!' said the young man, impressed with a profound feeling of filial love. 'You are, indeed, the most beautiful and most noble woman I ever saw!'

'Dear child!' said Mercédès, endeavouring in vain to restrain a tear which glistened in the corner of her eye. 'Indeed, you only wanted misfortune to change my love for you to admiration. I am not unhappy while I possess my son!'

'Ah, just so,' said Albert; 'here begins the trial. Do you know the decision we have come to, mother?'